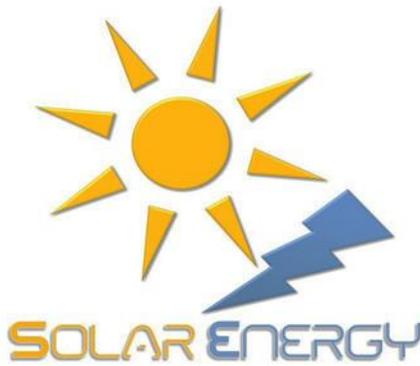


# All We Need is the Air That We Breathe, and...

Aleks Kinclara, Member, Unity Church Unitarian and Twin Cities UU Solar Coalition 2/20/2016



## We have come to a fork in the road and we are taking it.

More than sixty Unity households attended Unity's Community Solar Garden presentations in January. More than 80% of attendees have already moved forward with the sign-up process. It's a happening thing...and a happy thing.

Coal itself can be beautiful but turns killer when we burn it. In his August 12, 2015 [article](#) in The Atlantic, Robinson Meyer echoes and updates [Coal Blooded](#), the 2013 NAACP-IEP-LVEJO study detailing the impact of continuing to burn coal: devastation for our health, wallets, air, land, and economy – and the loss of any reasonable likelihood of a just or pleasant future.

Fortunately, we are not stuck with coal or natural gas to produce our electricity. We can choose clean energy – solar, wind or geothermal.

## Unity's Community Solar Garden may be different (better) than you think.

Some of you may, quite reasonably, assume that subscribing to our Community Solar Garden lets renters and homeowners purchase clean solar energy in place of mostly dirty energy from Xcel. Those of you who attend our introductory meetings gradually realize that a solar garden subscription is NOT about switching your household usage to clean solar electricity. Subscribers continue purchasing the same electricity from Xcel that everyone gets.

Instead, Community Solar subscribers sponsor additional solar energy production for the grid. Our solar garden panels generate kilowatts that replaces fossil fuel-based energy within the energy mix used by all Xcel customers, including ourselves. Our sponsorship of additional solar energy production benefits our entire community and the world.

This is not about you getting exclusive access to clean solar electricity for your household. It's not about lucrative but implausible savings that certain solar developers have irresponsibly injected into the public conversation, appealing to greed or need. It's also not about averaging enough earnings for one additional small or medium pizza each month – though you may.

## What Community Solar is really about...

- It's about the air you breathe.
- It's about reducing Sulphur dioxide and fine particulates – the soot implicated in cardiovascular disease, lung cancers, and respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis or asthma.

Asthma makes it difficult for an individual to breathe. Difficult to get enough air. The incidence of this illness is significantly higher for lower-income Americans, often female headed and/or minority households who live in inner cities or near industrial areas and power plants.

*"An African American child is more than twice as likely to be hospitalized from asthma. A Latino child is 40 percent more likely to die from asthma. So if you care about low-income, minority communities, start protecting the air that they breathe." - President Barack Obama*

- It's about phasing out the biggest sources of mercury and arsenic emissions – toxins that damage the brains of individuals who rely heavily on our polluted rivers for their food, or cause fetal blindness and impaired development.
- It's about slowing the warming that prolongs pollen seasons for people red and bleary with uncomfortable allergies, or that challenges individuals with heart failure, or that increases the northward range of ticks, mosquitos and other vectors of devastating diseases.
- It's about bringing down high per capita emissions in the United States, knowing that we otherwise continue to export suffering to indigenous peoples and poorer nations with low emissions.



- It's about saying goodbye to centuries of burning noxious fossil fuels, taunting runaway climate disruption. We have been releasing CO2 into the air in volumes and at rates that match greenhouse gas emissions recorded in deep geologic time during episodes of immense lava flows. Emissions that caused global fevers sufficient to melt ice sheets, raise the seas, still the winds, and stop ocean circulation – a process that eventually made heavy, corrosive, poisonous hydrogen sulfide gas rise out of the dead oceans into the air and seep across continents. Killing nearly everything.
- It's about replacing outdated, dangerous fossil fuels with smart energy, helping to build a clean energy industry with clean energy jobs – the kind that can lift people up without making them sick.

## Is Community Solar manageable for you?

Community Solar subscriptions are an unfamiliar kind of transaction, and not very intuitive – as everyone who has taken the time to attend our meetings soon realizes. Remember, what gets you in trouble is what you know for sure that just ain't so.

Subscribers enjoy a small net financial benefit over the course of the year while they put up with (or enjoy) how the seasonal cycles of the earth impact their monthly cash flow in an uneven but somewhat predictable way. Subscribers also take on a financial risk, since in later years their production credits may or may not fully cover subscription costs. Each subscriber's share of the solar production responsibility is small, so the financial risk to each subscriber is small.

For individuals with a very tight budget, the question of manageability merits somewhat closer attention. In meetings we are careful to disclose how a subscription works month to month and through the years using conservative projections. Some individuals experiencing ongoing financial stress may conclude that sponsoring solar production is inappropriate for their situation, and may reasonably hope (insist) that people with more flexible budgets will step forward. It benefits all.

We have watched your faces and heard many thoughtful questions as you assess “Does this make sense?” and “Is this safe for me financially?” As indicated by your decisions to proceed, most of you have decided yes, I can do this. I want to do this.

## What does it take to make Community Solar successful?

Humanity's big shift to clean energy also requires inventors and entrepreneurs and financiers willing to take risks on uncertain business terrains involving new technologies such as electric or hybrid vehicles (like a Prius), or Community Solar gardens, or something else. Like many of us, those people also assess “Is this safe for me financially?”

The key is to attract enough capital and enough committed subscribers to give the solar garden a chance to remain viable over the long run.

To attract construction money, a subscriber's FICO credit score needs to be good (680 or above). Individuals with good or excellent FICO scores comprise 60% of the general population. On average, these individuals experience significantly lower default rates compared with individuals in the next lower bracket.

Individuals with good credit tend to be those who can more easily tolerate temporary negative solar garden cash flow in the colder months each year when the sun is low on the horizon. They may also feel more comfortable about handling potential transfer or termination fees, and won't be troubled if the modest early savings turn into modest extra costs in later years.

## Does your participation matter?

Your decision to sponsor solar for the grid may seem like an insignificant symbolic vote for a better world – just a gesture. But you are already not alone in taking action. Your decision to sponsor solar encourages others to join in. Our combined actions add up to a significant collective impact. With most of us participating, our five churches will demonstrate what other faith communities can accomplish. Success in Minnesota will provide a model for other states. As we participate and let others know about it, Community Solar will grow and help speed the nation's transition to a healthier, safer world.

Every journey begins with one small step. This journey begins with five minutes at [www.mncommunitysolar.com/unity](http://www.mncommunitysolar.com/unity).

## What else you can do to help.

Maybe you know a group or organization that would like to host a Community Solar meeting. If so, send contact information to Paul Densmore at [unitysolargarden@gmail.com](mailto:unitysolargarden@gmail.com). We have an eager team of knowledgeable speakers. Visit us at our table in the Parish Hall and pick up some brochures. Visit our Solar page at [www.unityunitarian.org/solar](http://www.unityunitarian.org/solar).

**All we need is the air that we breathe...and to love each other.**



**IF YOU CARE ABOUT LOW-INCOME,  
MINORITY COMMUNITIES, START  
PROTECTING THE AIR THAT THEY BREATHE.**

**President Barack Obama**