

Baltimore Archdiocese completes 20-year solar energy deal with Constellation

By Paul McMullen

pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org

Twitter: @ReviewMcMullen

The Archdiocese of Baltimore and Constellation, a subsidiary of Exelon Corporation, announced a 20-year power purchase agreement of solar energy Dec. 10.

A news release stated that the agreement is expected to generate “approximately 20 percent of the archdiocese’s energy needs.”

According to the release, the 5.4 megawatt (DC) project will utilize approximately 17,700 photovoltaic panels in Perryman Station in Harford County, near Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Installation of the panels began in late August, but the project’s inspiration goes back several years, when Archbishop William E. Lori surveyed the massive Constellation solar farm at Mount St. Mary’s University and Seminary in Emmitsburg, where he studied and is chancellor of the seminary.

“That was the inspiration,” said Nolan McCoy, director of facilities and real estate for the archdiocese. “Archbishop Lori came home from a visit and said ‘I really want to do this.’ This is a manifestation of Laudato Si’.”

“Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home” is the June 2015 encyclical from Pope Francis that called for greater care of the environment.



Some of the photovoltaic panels built at Perryman Station in Harford County as part of a solar energy agreement between the Archdiocese of Baltimore and energy supplier Constellation are shown during a Nov. 19 tour of the site. (Paul McMullen/CR Staff)

“Pope Francis has invited the church and all of us to take steps to responsibly care for our common home,” Archbishop Lori stated in the news release. “This new solar power system will allow us to not only to better manage our energy costs and devote more funding to the many important programs and ministries we have in place to support our community, but also to educate our parishioners about sustainable initiatives.”

The project is expected to generate 7.2 million kilowatt hours of electricity in its first year. The Constellation news release, citing U.S. EPA data, noted that “Generating the same amount of electricity using nonrenewable sources would result in the release of approximately 5,000 tons of carbon dioxide, or the emissions from 1,045 passenger vehicles annually.”

McCoy said the project should also result in substantial savings for the archdiocese, as the \$13.5 million it will pay Constellation over the life of the agreement could amount to a saving of approximately \$7.5 million, when compared to a similar purchase of nonrenewable energy.

“We believe this will produce a 30 percent reduction in the cost of electricity to the locations,” McCoy said. “Under the metering law, we don’t get charged the transmission and distribution fee (for solar energy).”

McCoy added that the project will generate enough electricity to “to run three high schools, five elementary schools, the Basilica (of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore), the Cathedral (of Mary Our Queen in Homeland) and the Catholic Center.”

According to the news release, the project required no upfront capital from the archdiocese.



An aerial view shows some of the 17,700 photovoltaic panels built at Perryman Station in Harford County as part of a solar energy agreement between the Archdiocese and energy supplier Constellation. (Courtesy Constellation)

Also see:

Archbishop Lori joins local Catholic leaders in welcoming encyclical on ecology

‘Every day is Earth Day’: New lighting, solar energy and land sustainability highlighted at Seton Keough