

**Orientation is everything! On one of our first visits to what is now our monastery in northern Vermont, I took out a compass and discovered that the entire building, which is now Green Mountain Monastery was designed to be in perfect relationship with the sun. This means it is absolutely south facing.**

**It is as if the body of the building has taken on the yogic position of the Sun Salutation and this has its effects on those of us who abide within. The eyes of the building in the form of skylights and windows orient us and help us feel, in a bodily way, our immediate relationship and deep connection to the sun.**

**Our solar panels, like receptors in the brain, take in sun messages in the form of energy and convert solar language into electricity for the monastery.**

**Our dark roof and cement floors act like skin by absorbing and storing radiant heat and then releasing it back into the building. On sunny days, even in the winter, the generosity of the sun offers warmth and comfort.**

**We have a small sign over the light switch in our chapel which reads, "Each second, the sun is transforming four million tons of itself into light." What better place than in the chapel to open to a new understanding of the cosmological meaning of sacrifice and generosity. The sun's extravagant bestowal of energy reminds us of the underlying impulse of self gift which pervades the entire universe.**

**Last year the state of Vermont in an effort to encourage the sun's free gift of energy, offered a rebate of up to \$12,500 toward the purchase and installation of solar panels to anyone interested in moving away from fossil fuel dependence and beginning a new relationship with the sun.**

**We applied for and were granted the full rebate. Then, with the help of our "Companions" who did an extraordinary job fundraising as well as a grant from the Loretto Special Needs Committee, we were able to purchase 16 solar panels which now supply our electrical needs. Our monastery has become a mini-generator! When we are making more energy than we are using, our meter spins backwards. When we are using more energy than we are making, our meter spins forward.**

**The solar panels have given us a practical orientation to the sun and the opportunity to learn its language. We call it 'Solar Lingo 101' or 'How the Sun's Energy is Converted into Turning on the Toaster Oven, Coffee Maker or Ink Jet Printer!' This new language takes as much concentration as if we were in a beginner's class of French or Russian!**

Here are some basics:

Electric power is measured in watts. A kilowatt(kW) is a thousand watts of electrical power. Power used over time is measured in kilowatt hours(kWh) or 1000 watts used over one hour. Electric companies charge by the kilowatt hour.

Here are some average watt hour loads:

Microwave- 1000 watts

Electric clothes dryer- 5500 watts

Vacuum cleaner- 900 watts

Laptop computer- 25 watts

Computer- 55 watts

Hair dryer- 1500 watts

Iron- 1200 watts

TV- 170 watts

If you add up all the loads you use or pull out your electric bill it will be shown in kWh or kilowatt hours. For example, a microwave using a load of 1000 watts is calculated at 1 (kWh)...an electric clothes dryer at 5500 watts would be tallied at 5.5 (kWh).

An average sized household that uses 15-20kWh would be considered energy efficient. The daily average usage in the United States is around 30-40kWh.

Because we have all Energy Star Appliances in the monastery as well as compact fluorescent light bulbs and no phantom loads (appliances that are off but are still drawing energy such as TV's) our kWh usage is very low.

Each day our Solar Vocabulary increases with new words and concepts such as megawatts, photovoltaic array, solar constant, solar noon, thick cells .....

But beyond all the technical language, we are still captivated by the poetry of relationship as we ponder the intimacy and bondedness between the sun and Earth and the fact that there is no event in our lives that is not a solar event.

It seems fitting then to end this reflection with the words of the poet Mary Oliver in her poem entitled *SUN*,

*Have you ever felt for anything such wild love- do you think there is anywhere, in any language, a word billowing enough for the pleasure that fills you, as the sun reaches out, as it warms you.....*

