

# **St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Green Committee**

## **Semi-Annual Report - September 9, 2015 to May 5, 2016**

**Members:** Ann Akey, Paul Chestnut, Laura Chiu, Ann Fillin, Laisz Lam, Walt Lundin, and Katia Reeves

Pope Francis writes in ***Laudato Si***,

# 25: "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods."

#13: "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change."

### **Accomplishments written in chronological order**

#### **1. Vote to reduce our carbon pollution level**

At the October 14 meeting, the PSC voted for our parish to endorse the Paris Pledge to reduce our carbon pollution by 50% by the year 2030, and to become carbon neutral by 2050. This pledge joined those of other Catholic and interfaith institutions and individuals across the United States and was submitted to the UN climate negotiators at the COP21 (Conference of Parties) climate conference in Paris.

#### **2. Panel discussion related to Pope Francis address**

Helped to organize and participated in a local panel discussion on September 24, 2015, concurrent with the address to the Joint Congress by Pope Francis. Arranged for Dan Misleh, Executive Director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, to join the panel via Skype to describe the event in Washington DC that day. The event was video recorded and appears on cable periodically.

#### **3. Spirituality Tuesday presentation**

Three of us presented "Making Laudato Si' a Part of Your Life" at Spirituality Tuesday, Oct 27. About 21 people attended. Provided handouts with ideas of actions people can take.

#### **4. Climate Conference**

Attended the Climate Conference "Our Future on a Shared Planet" in November at Santa Clara University. Cardinal Peter Turkson celebrated Mass at the Mission Church. Bishop McGrath and other clergy were also at the Mass.

#### **5. Paris UN Conference on Climate Change**

Attended a discussion: "Can the 2015 Paris UN Conference on Climate Change Save the Planet?" led by two scientist members of the UN IPCC who were at the conference. Short summary: while the agreements reached are encouraging, they are not enough to prevent irreversible consequences. Global emissions need to be reduced by 3% per year. Only 8% of the US population are climate change deniers.

## **6. Carbon Fee and Dividend presentation**

We organized and hosted an information presentation about “Carbon Fee and Dividend” by a member of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby. We invited the Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action group also. About 35 people attended, and the information was well received. We wrote an article about the event and published it in the Valley Catholic. The theme of the presentation was a response to: “There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced.” *Laudato Si* #26

## **7. Solar Panels II**

Held the second successful drive to install solar panels in our parish. Thanks to our wonderful and generous parishioners, the SAG installation was completed on January 4, 2016. It passed the three inspections with flying colors the first time. This installation will save at least \$7,500 per year. It adds to the \$6,000 per year already being saved by the OLR installation. As electricity costs go up, our savings will increase. (By the way, the Archdiocese of San Francisco allows only solar installations paid by the parishes and does not allow the lease options.) Wrote an article about our solar projects which was published in the Valley Catholic.

## **8. Resource for other parishes**

Continue to mentor local and out-of-state parishes that find us through our Green Committee web page. We have found that our web page is used as a resource in a number of parishes and the San Francisco Archdiocese.

## **9. Diocese of San Jose Catholic Green Initiative**

A group from the Green Committee has been working within the DSJ Catholic Green Initiative to revive the program and respond to the encyclical at the diocese level. We produced one of the workshops, Care for Our Common Home, at the Social Justice Day of Reflection, which was held at St. Elizabeth Seton on February 20. We aim to bring the Laudato Si’ program to parishes starting with our Deanery 2. Fr. Matt gave us time on the agenda at the last Deanery 2 quarterly meeting to present our proposal.

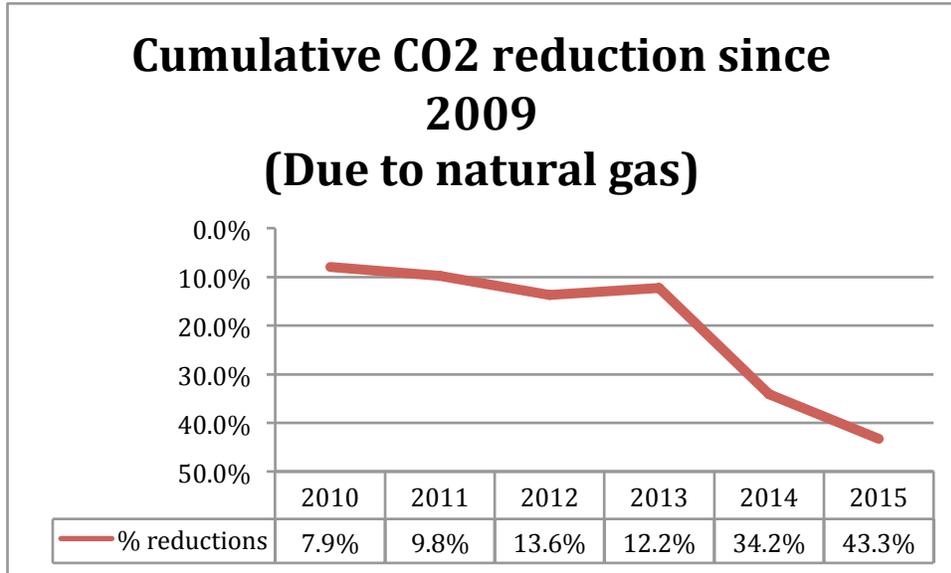
## **10. Green Corners**

We continue the Green Corners and bulletin inserts with the Encyclical teachings and other environmental information.

## **11. Our Carbon Footprint**

Through a number of measures, we reduced the carbon footprint from natural gas consumption at our parish facilities by 43% from 2009 through 2015 [see graph]. The side benefit is the energy cost savings. In 2009 we emitted 156.9 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) due to natural gas, and in 2015 it went down to 89 metric tons. One metric ton = 2,205 lbs. We can still reduce more emissions and achieve cost savings on utility bills. With the gas winter rate of \$1 per therm, we can achieve significant savings during the cold months. One such step is to use occupancy

sensing thermostats in facilities prone to being heated when not in use. Along with the Building and Equipment Maintenance Committee, we hope to pilot at least one this fall.



### **12. Zero Waste Is Possible program**

Continue to implement the *Zero Waste Is Possible* program by reducing plastic and eliminating styrofoam at parish events by using compostable utensils. Continue using the bins for recyclables, compostables, and landfill waste at all the sites. Assisted at the St. Patrick's dinner where individual water bottles and soda cans were eliminated; we served Guinness on tap.

### **13. New digital timer at OLR**

The new digital timer to control the boiler and pump at OLR was installed in June, 2015. We made this change after our recommendation to move daily Mass to Dermody Chapel during cold weather was not accepted. The reason: the boiler and pump had to run for a minimum of 4 to 5 hours starting at around 4:30 am to heat the church, resulting in a waste of energy. Calculated that 1,630 lbs of CO2 emissions are released during the 6 cold months the boiler operates for heating the OLR Church for daily Mass.

**Update:** This measure was very effective. The gas consumption at OLR for the months of September 2015 through February 2016 was significantly less than the same months since 2012. The number of therms used over these months for this year was less than the average number for the three previous years by 1148.7 therms, which is equivalent to about \$1149.

### **14. Tree Planting Plan**

The remaining trees of the Tree Planting Plan were planted this fall, replacing the many trees lost to pests around the OLR back parking lot.

### **15. Free-cycle event**

Held the annual and popular free-cycle event at the parish picnic. This fits the "re-use" side of the "reduce, re-use, recycle" triangle.

### **16. Veggie burgers at the parish picnic**

Continue advocating for veggie burgers at the parish picnic with a poster showing the environmental impacts of meat. As always, they all were consumed.

### **17. Participation in the Palo Alto Utilities benchmark pilot program**

Completed our participation in the Palo Alto Utilities benchmark pilot program for the SAG site. This resulted in a smoother application process for the rebate for the solar installation.

### **18. California IP&L Post-Cop 21 NorCal gathering in San Francisco.**

Attended in January the California Interfaith Power & Light's Post-Cop 21 NorCal gathering in San Francisco. Our work at St. Thomas Aquinas parish was recognized.

### **19. 2016 Lenten Caring for Creation**

Prepared and distributed the STA 2016 Lenten Caring for Creation – Mercy for our Fragile Earth handout with weekly ideas for caring for creation.

### **20. PA City Council goal for greenhouse gas emissions**

Attended the Palo Alto City Council meeting on April 18 when the council adopted the goal to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2030. Two of the citizen speakers prior to the vote quoted Pope Francis and the Encyclical.

### **21. Our Sunday Visitor submission**

In mid-April, provided a report of our accomplishments to a reporter for an article in *Our Sunday Visitor* (a national newsweekly) about what parishes and dioceses are doing to respond to Laudato Si'. He found us through our website and he considered our submitted material very helpful.

### **22. Collection of Eyeglasses**

Thanks to our compassionate parishioners, we collected 108 used eyeglasses, 1 pair of contacts and \$11 at the three STA sites for up-cycling through the Lions International Sight Program to help people in developing countries.

### **23. San Francisco presentation**

I was invited by the Archdiocese of San Francisco to be one of the presenters at their 2016 Laudato Si' "On Care for Our Common Home, a Parish Response" on April 23. Archbishop Cordileone contributed the opening remarks. More than 100 people attended from the Archdiocese and two adjacent dioceses. My presentation was about our STA Green Committee's accomplishments and experiences. An article about the event went national:

<http://www.catholic-sf.org/ns.php?newsid=22&id=64340>

**24. “This Changes Everything” film**

Hosted the screening of “This Changes Everything,” a film based on the Naomi Klein book on environmental justice. Invited the interfaith group to join us. About 45 people attended.

**25. Voter registration drive**

Organized a voter registration drive at all the sites. We found this to be a good community service event.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the tremendous and continuing support from the Building and Equipment Maintenance Committee in helping to reduce our parish carbon footprint.

Joy and peace,  
Katia Reeves