

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Green Committee

Annual Report - July 2016 – June 2017

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

Membership: New members please contact Katia Reeves at katia.reeves@sbcglobal.net

Mission Statement: The Green Committee of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, on behalf of the parish community, works to advocate for Catholic principles and priorities in environmental issues and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable. The committee works to inspire the parish community to discern and act in ways that reflect our duty to care for God's Creation.

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."

Response to *Laudato Si*:

1. Walt Lundin's eNewsletter: Completed Volume II with 100 postings as of Sep. 5, 2017. This is an informative current environmental news digest written in Walt's unique pithy style that goes to about thirty-four recipients in our parish, the Diocese, PA Commons and other concerned citizens. If you would like to subscribe, please let us know. It is a quick way to be informed about the great challenges our Earth is facing. The letters are placed on the web site: [http://www.paloaltocatholic.net/documents/2017/8/Environmental Newsletters 82 - 92 vol. 2 -1.pdf](http://www.paloaltocatholic.net/documents/2017/8/Environmental%20Newsletters%2082-92%20vol.%202-1.pdf)

2. We are grateful to the Director of Liturgy for the care for creation prayers of the faithful that are included regularly at the Masses.

Faithful Citizens - Advocacy and Education:

3. On October 4, 2016, Feast of St. Francis, for Spirituality Tuesday we hosted Ballot Measures: Aligning Environmental Values with Action. It was a conversation with Melissa Hippard, of the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club. A little over 20 people attended.

This was in response to: "Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional, and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment." *Laudato Si* #179

After elections update: We celebrated the ban on single use plastic bags was upheld.

4. On November 28, attended the City Council meeting where the Sustainability/Climate Action Plan was discussed and unanimously approved. By the way, Pope Francis was quoted

again. The goal of the framework is for Palo Alto to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2030 (less than 15 years from now).

5. On December 13th, along with the Citizens' Climate Lobby, we held a screening at OLR Hall of an episode of the National Geographic series "Years of Living Dangerously" which illustrated the difficulty of dealing with Congress on trying to put a price on carbon. We invited the interfaith community to join us. About 50 people attended.

6. Walt Lundin and Committee wrote an article published in *The Valley Catholic* on Jan. 17, 2017 titled "Declutter, De-Consume, Decelerate = Delightful". It was inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical and an article by Susan Eishen in the *Our Sunday Visitor*.

7. On January 26th held a screening at the OLR Hall of the movie *Before the Flood* which presents an account of the dramatic changes now occurring around the world due to climate change. We invited the interfaith community to join us. The presentation was well received by the 65 people who attended. We offered to lend the DVD to those attending for them to show the movie to their groups. Several signed up for this and showed the film at classes at Notre Dame Du Namur University among other places.

We also had petitions for the Disclose Act AB14 circulating for signatures. We collected 37 signatures. The bill requires ballot measure ads and candidate ads to clearly display their 3 largest funders on the ads themselves. It has rules to identify the original donors so ads display their true names instead of misleading political committee names.

8. Wrote a letter published on Jan 26, 2017 in the San Jose Mercury News about the CDC (Centers for the Disease Control) abruptly canceling their climate talks. This generated more letters published in the paper. Fortunately, a few days later, there was an article informing that Al Gore was sponsoring the convention of scientists to address preparation for the impacts of climate change on human health.

9. On February 7 attended the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Open House on updates to draft regulations dealing with petroleum refining emission limits and reduction of risk from air toxic emissions. These are long-term regulations that have significant environmental justice implications. Provided feedback and concerns to what they presented.

10. Teamed with the STA Site and the Thomas Merton Center Spiritual Education Committees to screen on April 8 *Before the Flood* followed by a discussion about climate change, its impacts and what can we do about it.

11. On April 18th, at the OLR Hall, co-sponsored with the Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action group, a presentation by Dr. Andrew Gunther titled: "Climate Disruption: A Scientific Call to Action." Dr. Gunther serves on the Board of Directors of the Union of Concerned Scientists and addressed about 70 people. An inspiring discussion followed. The Valley Catholic published on May 23rd an article we submitted about this event.

12. Collaborated with Ruth Chippendale and the WILPF* Peninsula Palo Alto, to show *Before the Flood* on Earth Day (April 22) at the Mitchell Park Library. The room was filled to capacity

with 65 people attending. An active discussion followed the screening and obtained more signatures to the Disclose Act Petition. *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Energy Conservation:

13. In the 2016 summer, the proposed *Nest* thermostat was installed at the SAG Hospitality Center to help control the temperature and natural gas use in that multi-user location.

14. Ted Baer, Chuck Tully, and I met with Evelyn Rosa, SESS Principal, in September and one of the topics was energy conservation and specifically, the thermostats management. Evelyn thought the school gym would be a good candidate for a *Nest* thermostat. She has one at her apartment and really likes it.

We also talked about the Zero Waste training that Palo Alto offers to staff and children at schools. Evelyn had been wanting to refresh the training done a few years earlier. Provided her the contact information for the utilities representative that handles that program.

15. We continue to implement the *Zero Waste Is Possible* program by reducing plastic and eliminating styrofoam at parish events by using compostable utensils. The recyclables, compostables, and landfill waste bins at all the sites are now the norm.

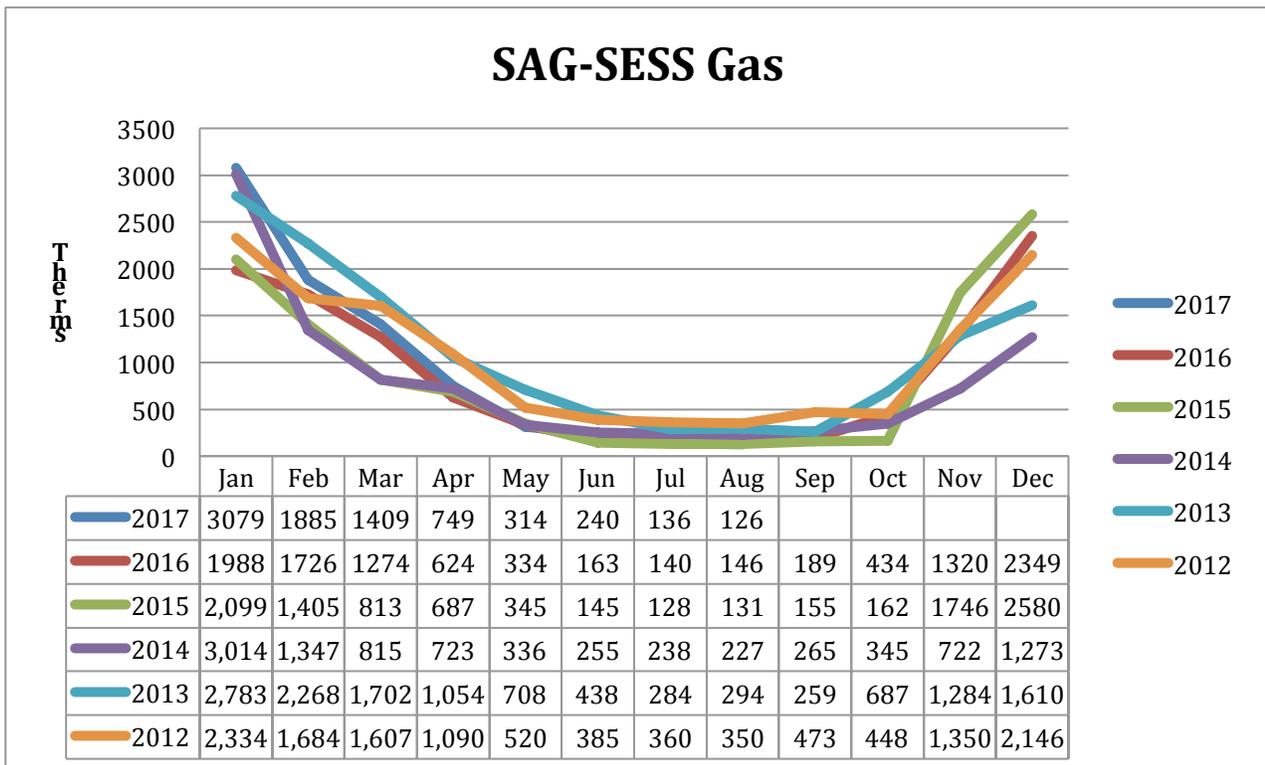
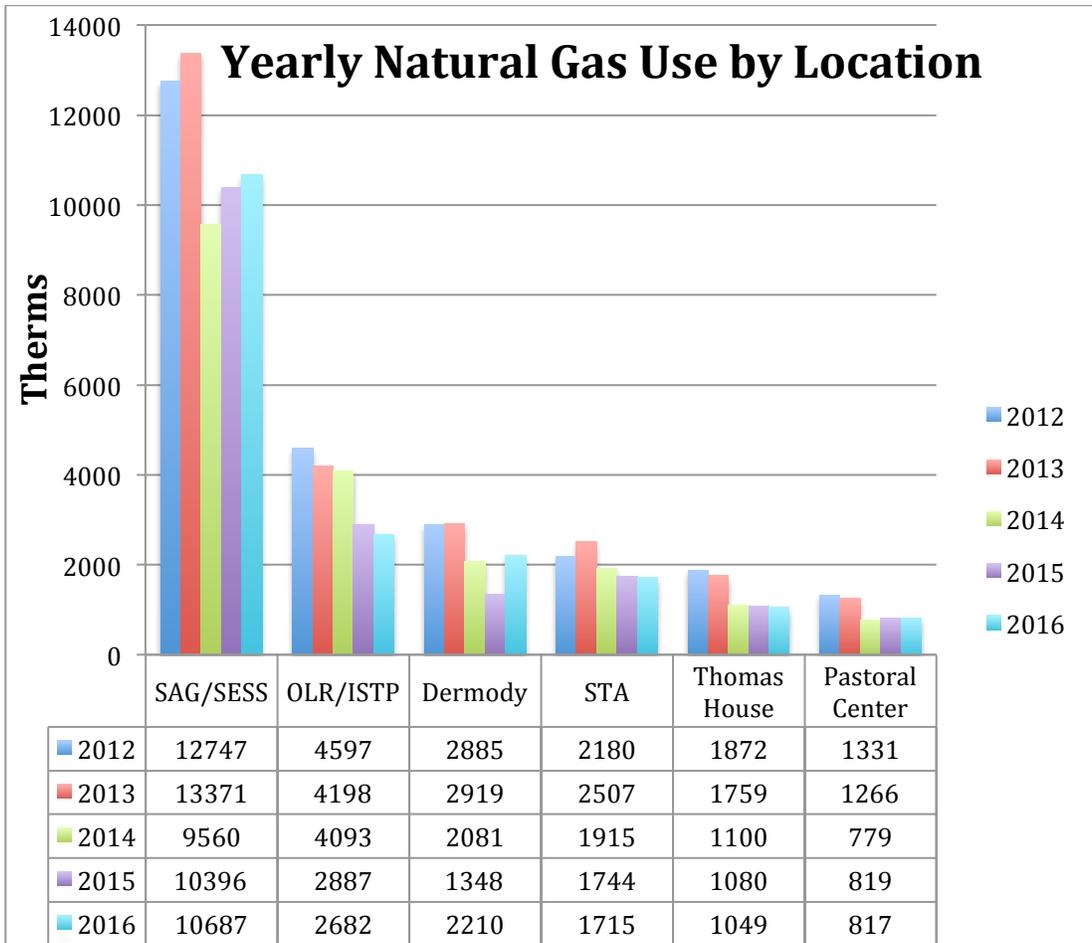
16. We learned about a new rebate incentive. It is a program to install EV (Electrical Vehicle) charging stations at locations such as our church sites. In summary, the rebate is up to \$3,000 per charger with up to \$10,000 per site. The cost of installation is \$500 to \$2,000 depending on location. We discussed at the Green and the B&EM Committees the pros and cons and decided that at this time we would not pursue this project.

17. The first graph shows the results of our parish's natural gas conservation efforts. It shows the need to focus on the SAG/SESS site. With the natural gas rate going up by 8% in fiscal year 2017 (started Jul 1, 2016) and the projected increase by 9% in FY2018, the stewardship of the environment is also good stewardship of the treasure.

A big THANK YOU to everyone who has helped keeping the doors closed and the thermostats down or off when not needed throughout the parish.

A 2017 semiannual survey of the parish natural gas usage indicates the SAG/SESS site is still a challenge. A second graph, focusing on SAG/SESS is shown below with the monthly breakdowns.

The second graph table has the actual number of therms used each month for easy comparison for each year since 2012. For example, January 2017 had the most natural gas consumption than any month since 2012.



18. 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. Also, we continue advocating for veggie burgers at the parish picnic with a poster showing the environmental impacts of meat.

19. We continue receiving eyeglasses at the three sites thanks to our compassionate parishioners. The head of the local Lions International is our new contact for picking up the eyeglasses for their Sight Program to help people in developing countries.

Recognition:

20. The California Interfaith Power & Light held its tenth annual awards ceremony on November 15, 2016. St. Thomas Aquinas won an award for Green Building from among competitors throughout California. We especially thank all the donors and helpers for the two solar projects for this recognition.

The story in *The Valley Catholic* (page 9, December 13, 2016) can be found here:

<http://tvc.dsj.org/2016/12/13/interfaith-celebration-highlights-solidarity-and-sustainability/>

“Saint Thomas Aquinas especially was noted for its leadership within the Diocese of San Jose. In the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and Creation protection, this parish has implemented many energy- and water-saving measures, including installing two solar systems totaling 62 kilowatts of clean power; and employing energy-efficient lighting and drought-tolerant landscaping. Saint Thomas Aquinas has an active Green Committee, which has hosted presentations on Pope Francis’ encyclical on ecology, advocated for clean air policies to local regulatory agencies, and held Earth Day celebrations that provide resources on actions their parishioners can take.”

We would like to thank and acknowledge the support from the Building and Equipment Maintenance Committee in reducing our parish carbon footprint. Additionally, a heartfelt “Thank you” to all the parishioners who care for creation and our common home.

Katia Reeves and the Green Committee