

Green Committee Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013

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.

Members: Ann Akey, Paul Chestnut, Laura Chiu, Eleanor Hansen, Laisz Lam, Gerard McGuire, and Katia Reeves.

Meetings: Fourth (4th) Monday of the month, 7:30 pm, at the Pastoral Center.

Membership: We welcome new members to join us in this effort for the common good. Please contact Laura Chiu at lauraleechiu@gmail.com or Katia Reeves at katia.reeves@sbcglobal.net

Background:

From Bishop Patrick McGrath on the Catholic Green Initiative:

"God created human beings in His own image as stewards and recipients of His wonderful handiwork. As a people of faith, we are today called to celebrate the splendor of God's creation, to be good stewards of the Earth and to safeguard the integrity of all creation. Catholics around the world have already initiated many innovative ecological projects that have highlighted the need for all of us to live more sustainably and to leave a lighter 'ecological footprint'.

"In response to this call to environment stewardship, I [Bishop McGrath] have formed [2009] The Catholic Green Initiative of Santa Clara County. This local initiative is a joint project of the Diocese of San Jose, Catholic Charities, Santa Clara University, and the Presentation Retreat and Conference Center. Several committees within this initiative are creating educational programs and action initiatives to encourage and assist the San Jose [Diocese] Catholic community to live and operate more simply and sustainably."

Our committee was formed and continues working in support of this stewardship of the environment initiative which is also part of the National Catholic Coalition on Climate Change.

Accomplishments (July 2012 - June 2013) listed in the St. Francis Pledge action format:

Pray:

1. Occasionally, through out the year, requested inclusion in the Prayers of the Faithful prayers for the protection of the environment and those impacted by climate change.

Learn:

2. Have liaison to Diocese Catholic Green Initiative of Santa Clara County.

3. Assisted with the arrangements and publicity for the Sept. 14, 2012 Climate Reality Project "Climate Crisis and Solutions" presentation by Gary Latshaw, PhD at Seton Auditorium. Acterra, Sierra Club, Barron Park Green Team, and Palo Alto Zero Waste also participated.
4. Assisted with arrangements and publicity for the Oct. 9, 2012 presentation by the League of Women Voters covering initiatives for the elections some of which had environmental impact.
5. Set up an energy audit by Palo Alto Utilities along with Chuck Tully that was conducted on Oct. 3, 2012 at SESS, Hospitality Ctr, and Rectory boiler room. Received good suggestions which I reported to the Building and Equip Maint. committee. Overall, the utilities representative thought we are doing pretty well.
6. Hosted Tony Strawa, PhD, of the Diocese Catholic Green Initiative, to be the speaker at the Nov. 27, 2012 Spirituality Tuesday. The topic was the Catholic Position on Climate change and how to motivate parishioners into action and be more active to advocate politicians.

Assess:

7. Continue working with the Diocese to evaluate potential use of solar panels for parish buildings.

Act:

8. Organized the first free cycle event at the Parish picnic. This was very well received with useful donations in good condition and plenty of users to provide good homes for the items donated. Additionally, had an origami pot construction and seed planting table.
9. Invited Acterra representatives to the picnic who brought energy efficiency information and invited people to sign up for home energy audits.
10. With the assistance of the Building and Maintenance Committee successfully replaced the energy hog gas stove from the OLR Hall with a more energy efficient one with an estimated savings of at least \$1,000 a year of gas that is no longer wasted.
11. Held the Bike / Walk to Mass campaign on May 5 as part of the national bike to work week to encourage more bikers and walkers to Mass.
12. Worked with Building and Maintenance Committee to continue identifying energy use reductions. Example: remove freezers that are not needed and replace more energy efficient appliances as required. Provided rebate information as needed.
13. Continued monitoring thermostats and requesting parishioners to keep sanctuary doors closed when the heaters are ON.
14. Began the Tree Planting Project planning to assist the Building and Equipment

Maintenance committee in choosing trees and locations to replace trees that have had to be removed for one reason or another. We are also looking where and what type of palms to plant for use on Palm Sundays. So far, we are looking at the OLR site which has had a lot of tree losses.

15. Online support of bills or proposals for legislature green initiatives.

Advocate:

16. Had a Green table at the picnic with environmental handouts such as the Monterrey Aquarium Seafood Choices cards, membership recruitment poster, and St. Francis Pledge cards.

17. One of our members wrote the *Environmentalists - God's New Prophets* article for the Valley Catholic as part of the Diocese Catholic Green Initiative.

18. Our Committee activities came to the attention of a PhD candidate from the University of Michigan who is doing research on faith-based sustainability including efforts to respond to climate change as well as social justice projects and conservation activities. Most previous research on religion and environment has focused on theology and environmental ethics but we do not know very much about why and how some people of faith are able to develop successful sustainability efforts while others are unable to manage more than an annual Earth Day liturgy. She visited parishes, (including our own) where people are successfully integrating sustainability into their faith communities to learn about *how* they have put their faith into action. Her hope is that these success stories will provide inspiration and guidance for other faith communities with similar objectives.

She followed this up with a long phone interview later as she is using us as a case study.

19. In April, included a flyer in the Bulletin with information about events to celebrate Earth Day.

20. Continue periodic postings of relevant information on the bulletins' Green Corner.