

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Green Committee

Semi-annual Report - July 2016 – January 8, 2017

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

Membership: We welcome new members to join us in this effort for the common good. 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 Volume II started in December after Walt completed Volume I with 100 issues. This is an informative current environmental news digest written in Walt's unique pithy style that goes to about twenty recipients in our parish and the Diocese. 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/2017/1/Environmental%20Newsletters%201%20to%204%20Volume%202.pdf>

2. Requested the Director of Liturgy for Care for Creation Prayers of the Faithful to be included regularly at all the Masses.

Faithful Citizens - Advocacy and Education:

3. On October 4, 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

4. Continue to mentor other parishes that want to know about installing solar panels.

5. We continue the bulletin's Green Corners with environmental information and advocacy opportunities for the parishioners.

6. On November 15 attended the Bay Area Air Quality Management District workshop on two 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.

7. 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).

8. 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.

Energy Conservation:

9. This summer the *Nest* thermostat we had proposed was installed at the SAG Hospitality Center to help control the temperature and natural gas use in that multi-user location.

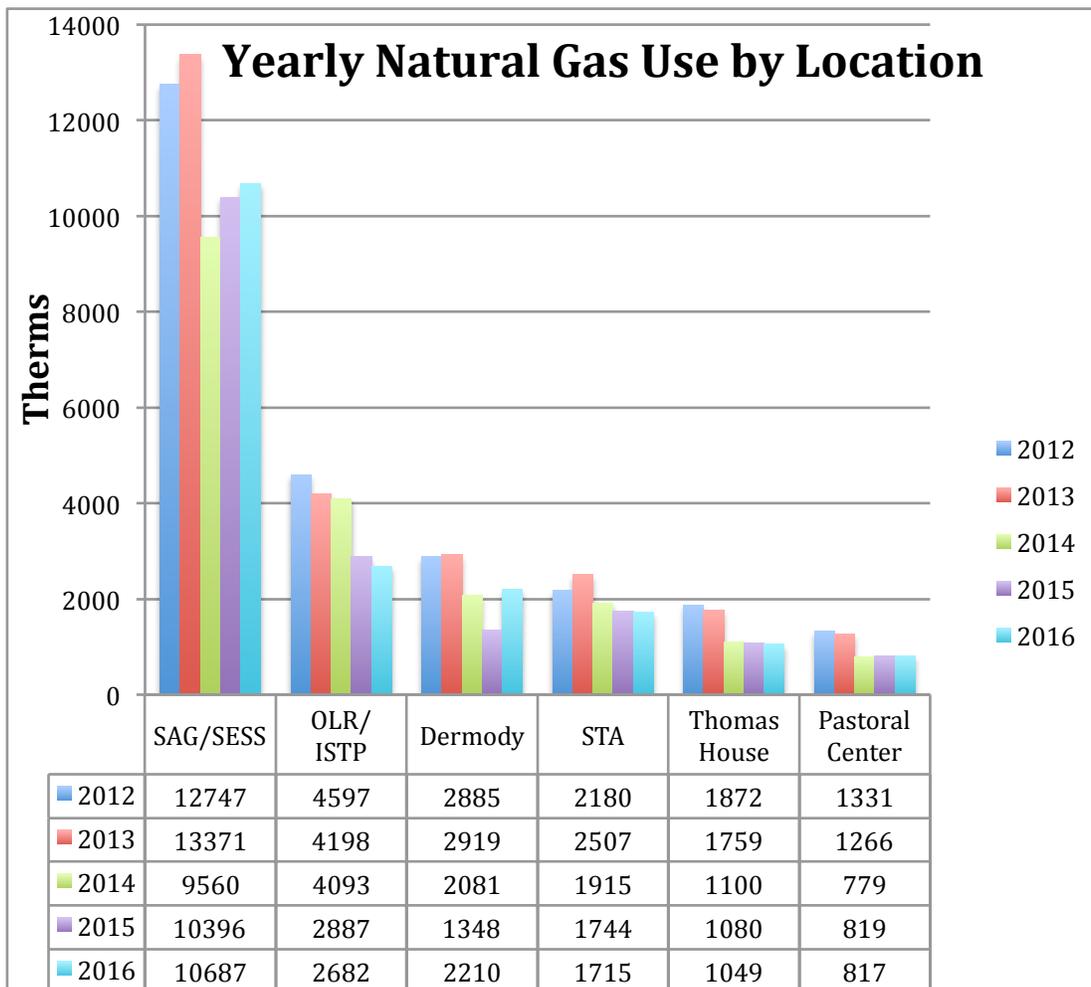
10. Ted Baer, Chuck Tully, and I met with Evelyn Rosa, SESS Principal, in September, and one of the topics was energy conservation and specifically, the thermostats management. Evelyn thought the school gym would be a good candidate for a Nest thermostat. She has one at her apartment and really likes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

11. 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.

12. The 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.



13. This summer we investigated with two representatives of the Palo Alto Utilities the potential use of a heat pump water heater for the Pastoral Center as the one at that location was installed in 1990 and is at least double the capacity needed. We learned that the location was perfect for one, but that the cost of the permit process would have been prohibitive. In the spirit of not giving up, I appealed to the PA Chief Sustainability Officer after a meeting at City Hall and he interceded for us.

We could get a rebate for \$1,200 for the heat pump water heater. The estimated installation cost is about \$2,500 for a 50 gallon one.

At the Building and Equipment Maintenance Committee we discussed this new development. The idea of possibly using a tank-less water heater, which is less expensive, came up. However, there is no rebate for tank-less water heaters and we need to determine if it will fulfill the requirements for the site. The current water heater gas cost is \$21.06 per month, and with heat pump the electricity would cost \$17.17 in summer and \$11.11 in winter. The cost of gas is increasing, however. This is an on-going project.

14. Through the CPAU representatives we learned about another rebate incentive that launched this January. 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.

15. 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. Continue advocating for veggie burgers at the parish picnic with a poster showing the environmental impacts of meat.

17. Jim McLaughlin had wanted to keep the eyeglasses collection as a continuing service in our parish, so we did not end the program after our last collection drive. 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:

18. The California Interfaith Power & Light held its tenth annual awards ceremony on November 15. 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 tremendous and continuing support from the Building and Equipment Maintenance Committee in reducing our parish carbon footprint.

Katia Reeves and the Green Committee