



First Pres Palo Alto Cool Planet Working Group Chronology

Our group was organized as a response to the growing threat of global climate change. In October 2006 our church screened Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" and several of us were moved to organize to take action on the issues raised in the film. First Presbyterian Church had already taken steps to be good stewards of creation. We use real coffee mugs rather than styrofoam cups and have recycling and composting containers at all church functions. We no longer use plastic water bottles at church meals and retreats and have replaced conventional light bulbs in our facility with CFLs and now with LEDs. For many years there had been an "Earth and Spirit" study group at 1st Pres.

In November 2006 our group met for the first time to brainstorm what more we could do: as individuals, as a church community and as part of larger communities. Our first activity was in December 2006, when we partnered with California Interfaith Power and Light to sell Advent kits of CFLs, which also contained an educational packet and Advent suggestions for families.

Other activities since then have included:

2007:

January: Started posting a monthly column in the First Pres newsletter and on micahscall.org entitled "One Habit at a Time: Tips for gradually changing to a more sustainable lifestyle." This is a short article which presents information about a single topic and then suggests actions. Topics have included Plastic Water Bottles, Cloth Shopping Bags, Bicycling, Eating Local Foods...

April: Led an Earth Day Sunday service which was paperless (announcements were verbal, order of worship, hymns, responses were announced). Hosted a fair where we encouraged bike-riding and car-pooling to church. Participated in a Social Justice fair where we sold cloth grocery bags.

March, April: Scheduled and completed an energy audit with Palo Alto Utilities.

July: Wrote a letter to session and worked with the worship committee to extend the paperless service concept and to encourage the publishing of an online version of the Press.

October: Arranged ride-sharing to the church retreat and started working with Deacons to encourage ride-sharing to church.

September, October: Produced a 5-week Adult Education series: "Cleaning Up Eden: The Challenge of Climate Change". Speakers and topics were:

1. Will Travis, BCDC: The effect of climate change on the SF Bay Area.
2. Mathis Wachernagel: The concept of a Global Ecological Footprint
3. Jennifer Martin: Carbon offsets, carbon taxes, cap and trade.
4. Audrey de Coursey, Interfaith Power and Light: What the church as an institution can do to effect change.
5. Michael Closson, Acterra: Local Issues, What will we do now?

Fall: Participated in a panel at the Mid-Peninsula Interfaith Convocation on Climate Action.

December: CIPL nominated our congregation for a 2007 Energy Oscar. We hosted a Holiday Fair where we sold holiday fabrics as an alternative to wrapping paper and also had information on LED holiday lights.

2008:

January, February: Partnered with Acterra to offer a 4-session "Low Carbon Diet" workshop.

February: Hosted the organizational meeting of the Peninsula Chapter of CIPL (California Interfaith Power and Light).

Spring: Pursued certification by Santa Clara County as a Green Business and explained this process to Session and to the congregation. This involved energy audits and working with the staff and Facilities Ministry. Obtained free bike racks from the VTA and tried various placements around the campus.

February, March: Produced a second series of Adult Ed classes entitled "The Challenge of Climate Change: What We Can Do". Topics and speakers (mainly from our church) were:

1. Climate Change and Our Local Government, Palo Alto Vice Mayor, Peter Drekmeier.
2. The Spiritual Implications of Climate Change: Thinking about the Problem in the Context of Our Faith, the Rev. Nan Swanson
3. Greening First Pres: Setting Priorities and Pursuing Green Business Certification, Margaret Rosenbloom and Tom Wagner
4. The Outlook for Alternative Energy Technologies, Don Hildenbrand
5. Transportation Ideas for Energy Efficient Transportation, Kathy Durham and Margaret Okuzumi.
6. What We Eat: Buying and Preparing Locally Grown Foods, Laura Stec, Acterra.

March: Worked with the Social Justice Ministry to co-sponsor a lecture called "Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free: It Can Be Done!" and to determine donation priorities.

April: Led another paperless Earth Day Sunday service which included several youth participants. Hosted a fair after the service where we encouraged signing up for Green Power options, had

information on city and county rebates, encouraged alternative transportation and sold cloth grocery bags and other “green” products.

May, June: Offered a 3-session series of classes on urban bicycle safety and maintenance.

June: Attended the biennial meeting of Presbyterians for Restoring Creation at the 2008 General Assembly in San Jose. Hosted the Mid-Peninsula CIPL political action sub-section.

July: Hosted the monthly meeting of Palo Alto’s CEAP (Community Environmental Action Partnership) and exchanged ideas with others in its Faith sector.

Summer: Worked with the Facilities ministry to replace lawn with drought-tolerant plants and to take advantage of City and County rebate programs for doing so. We met the initial round of requirements for County Green Business certification and await final signoff by City officials for matters pertaining to water use and waste disposal.

August: Susan introduced the monthly CEAP meeting with a history of our Cool Planet group.

September: Created Cool Planet pages on the new 1st Pres website and posted the One Habit at a Time articles there.

October: Partnered with Acterra to kick off a congregation-wide 6-month Cool Campaign (World Communion Sunday through Earth Day) starting with a “100-mile Luncheon”, where most of the ingredients were grown within 100 miles of Palo Alto. October’s challenge: Things You Plug In.

November: Cool Campaign challenge: Reduce Your Consumer Footprint.

December: Cool Campaign challenge: Green Your Holidays. Hosted a table for 3 Sundays to promote Green Holiday ideas and sell reusable sandwich bags and holiday fabric for gift wrap.

2009:

January: Cool Campaign challenge: Winter Heating. Hosted a letter writing table to urge the new administration to make Climate Changes issues a top priority. Partnered with Acterra to host a screening and discussion of the new film “Consume This Movie”.

February, March: Cool Campaign challenges: Hot Water and Transportation.

April: Cool Campaign wrap-up in the Earth Day Sunday worship service, which we led. This was followed by another “Locavore Lunch”, this time featuring local spring produce.

Summer: We decided to take a fallow season and regroup in the fall!

December: Led a session with the youth group on simpler, more sustainable Christmas traditions. Several of our members shared memories and we helped them sew sandwich wraps and other

gifts. Participated in the Alternative Christmas fair with a display on “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Regift” and various ideas for simple holiday gifts and wrappings.

2010:

February: Led a Valentine writing campaign to our Senators and Representatives to urge them to love the earth by passing strong climate change legislation this year.

April: On Earth Day we led the worship service, participated in the Social Justice fair and the Lincoln native garden was on the county-wide Native Garden Tour. We also started a six-week Adult Education Series entitled: Creation Care: Responding to Climate Change.

1. Biological Science that Shows the Urgency of Action. Dr. Ellie Cohen, director of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and Conservation Science Center
2. Climate Economics and Stewardship: Our Actions as Consumers and Investors. A panel including Michael Closson, Director of Acterra, Jeff Chow, investment advisor, and a representative of California Interfaith Power and Light
3. Faith Traditions: Words that Teach and Inspire Creation Care. Evan Hughes
4. Actions as Citizens: Showing Faith Through Works. Former Mayor Peter Drekmeier
5. Technology: Creation Care and Human Creativity. Don Hildenbrand, Evan Hughes and Leo Lotter explain and discuss various types of energy and fuels
6. Climate Science: From “having dominion” over the Earth to “managing” the Earth’s atmosphere. Stephen Schneider, renowned Climatologist at Stanford University.

May: On the last day of the Adult Study series, we hosted a vegetarian Locavore lunch.

September/October: We partnered with the Union for Concerned Scientists to host a No On 23 party. We watched a new informational film, heard from organizers of the campaign and signed up to help. On 10/10/10, we partnered with 350.org to hold a work party. We met for the Early Church service, and then handed out No On 23 literature at local farmers’ markets.

December: We participated in the Alternative Christmas fair with various ideas from previous years, plus mesh produce bags and more ideas for simple wrapping. We presented a proposal to Session to hold worship in Fellowship Hall in the winter to save energy – maybe next year! We attended a Palo Alto City Council Meeting to encourage them to oppose the Cargill salt pond development project.

2011:

January, February: At our monthly meetings, Peter Drekmeier spoke to us about the proposed Anaerobic Digester project in Palo Alto and Jess Chamberlain told us about her Sunset Magazine article on “The Zero Waste House”.

Spring: We conducted an Earthcare Congregation Audit, prepared by the National Presbyterian Environmental Ministries, which looked at our practices in the areas of Worship, Facilities, Education, and Outreach. We asked Session to sponsor our application to become an Earthcare Congregation and were awarded that honor in April. We met with our own confirmation class and the Progressive Christian Community at Stanford.

April: We conducted the Earth Day service, which was paperless, had beautiful music, and featured a short skit called "God Bless Our Grass" read by three of our youth. We set up an account and encouraged our congregation to join GoGoVerde.com/fprespa, an online community that allows us to share resources and information. We hosted letter writing tables with information from Save the Bay to prevent the Cargill salt pond development project.

May: We hosted the film [Climate Refugees](#), and ~60 members of the community attended.

Summer: We met with representatives of similar groups at several local churches and founded MidPeninsula Environmental Ministries. Our first project was to reach out to even more congregations with publicity about First Pres's upcoming lectureship.

Fall: We concentrated on publicizing, planning and participating in our annual Robert McAfee Brown lectureship. Dr. Larry Rasmussen spent a rich weekend with us in November, speaking on "Earth-Honoring Faith".

December: We participated in the Alternative Christmas Fair with a Regifting table, where people could donate new or gently used items and others could have them for a small donation to Cool Planet. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Regift! We also had alternative holiday wrappings (fabric, topo maps, comics) and information about various Climate Change related issues.

2012:

Spring: Around Valentine's Day we held a "Love the Earth" worship service with materials from California Interfaith Power and Light. We conducted an Earthcare Congregation Recertification Audit and were awarded that honor. We met with our own confirmation class and the Progressive Christian Community at Stanford. We worked with St Marks to develop and distribute Lenten Devotionals and helped Trinity with publicity for their pre-screening of "Last Call at the Oasis".

April: We conducted the Earth Day service, with words and music on the theme of "Earth-honoring Faith: Tilling and Keeping the Garden", and collected a special offering for tree-planting in Cameroon, which is a Carbon Covenant project with CIPL. We arranged a youth habitat restoration project with Acterra and other youth groups, sponsored Dr David Seaborg as the Adult Study speaker, and participated in the Social Justice fair, where we introduced our "Take a Trip, Plant a Tree" partnership with Canopy.

May: We held an end of the year party and decided we would try to find ways to become more politically involved in the Climate Change movement. We were delighted to meet our new eco-feminist intern, Abby Mohaupt, and immediately started plotting projects with her!

Summer: Bill McKibben, the founder of 350.org, published an article in Rolling Stone entitled “Global Warming's Terrifying New Math” and announced that he would lead a nation-wide “Do the Math” tour, including a stop in Palo Alto.

Fall: The Cool Planet group publicized the “Do the Math” lecture widely through our Press, bulletin, Yahoo groups and Facebook page. We especially encouraged members of the Session and the Financial Team to attend and about 20 of us heard Bill describe his strategy for a nationwide movement to divest from fossil fuel companies. We passed out handouts at the lecture for a follow-on discussion which we would host.

Dec: About 40 people attended our discussion, almost half from outside the 1st Pres community. This group became the nucleus of the divestment team of 350 Silicon Valley. A couple of our members continue to be very active in that group. Regifting again – it's a big hit and many people contribute their treasures to us.

2013:

Winter: We held another divestment meeting, met with our pastor and members of the 1st Pres Investment team, and presented a letter to Council outlining our proposed strategy for writing and advocating for an overture for Denomination-wide Divestment From Fossil Fuels, to be presented at GA2014. Three of us attended a Climate Change/anti-fracking rally in Washington D.C and more of us attended a similar rally that day in San Francisco.

April: Cool Planet presented an Adult Study series called “Divestment 101”, with topics such as “Doing the Math on Climate Change”, “The Moral and Social Justice Dimensions of Global Warming”, “What is Divestment” and “Why Join the Divestment Movement”. We also brought in a panel of financial experts to discuss the divestment and socially responsible investment.

May, June: We started working with other Presbyterians in Fossil-Free PCUSA who were also interested in bringing a Divestment Overture to GA2014, and wrote the first few of its 27 iterations! In June the 1st Pres Council approved taking it to the San Jose Presbytery. Two presbyteries need to concur for it to go to GA.

Summer: We recruited and trained people in our congregation who were interested in promoting the overture to people they knew in the Presbytery. We divided into small teams and contacted ~12 congregations, as well as retired pastors, made several presentations and published an article in the newsletter of SJ Presbytery. Several of us also attended a 350-led protest at the Richmond refinery.

September: In conjunction with FossilFreePCUSA, we made many revisions of the overture and then Presbytery of Boston became the first to approve it!

October: 1st Pres session voted to divest from fossil fuels within 5 years, and Abby was ordained by SJ Presbytery! Many of us attended our first Presbytery meeting that day.

November: After a long discussion, SJ Presbytery approved the overture, which meant that it would go before GA2014. Great celebrations all around!!

December: Regifting again – we can now do this in our sleep and it continues to bring in a few hundred dollars for our various projects throughout the year. We also decided how to distribute some funds from Social Justice to support various climate-change organizations.

2014:

Spring: We organized letter writing after church as part of a national preach-in weekend sponsored by Interfaith Power and Light (IPL). Two of us attended the Don't Frack California Rally in Sacramento. Presbyteries across the nation voted on our Divestment from Fossil Fuels overture, and 12 of them approved it. We continued to participate in weekly phone calls with Fossil-Free PCUSA (FFPCUSA) to plan our involvement at GA.

April: Cool Planet organized Earth Day Sunday on April 27. We showed Bill McKibben's Do the Math film at Adult Study, the youth group led the 10:30 worship service, and we held an "It's Easy Being Green" fair after church, where members and friends of the congregation shared ways to reduce our carbon footprints. We also stuffed envelopes with our Go Fossil Free brochures and sent them to the ~650 GA commissioners.

June: Six members of Cool Planet attended GA 2014 in Detroit. We staffed a booth with FFPCUSA and Presbyterians for Earthcare (PEC), worked with the overture advocates, hosted a meet and greet, received an award at the annual PEC luncheon, strategized, helped write a substitute overture and a minority report, and attended committee meetings. In a very close vote, our overture was referred for further study to MRTI (Mission Responsibility Through Investment), so we will return in 2016!

Oct-Dec: Several of us resumed working with Fossil Free PCUSA in the areas of grass roots organizing, communication and grant writing. At the annual Green Globe Awards sponsored by California Interfaith Power and Light (CIPL), we received an Honorable Mention for our work in the category of Outreach. We held our annual regifting table at the Social Justice Fair and distributed funds from Social Justice to various climate-change organizations (CIPL, GreenFaith, PEC and FFPCUSA). Two of us attended a panel discussion on science, religion, and the climate crisis at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Berkeley and were able to make a one-minute announcement about FFPCUSA. We joined a new consortium of local congregations called Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action (PICA)

2015:

Jan: Two of us attended a Green Chautauqua Speaker Series on Climate Change event at First Presbyterian Church, San Anselmo, which focused on green investing, both for individuals and organizations. With PICA we planned a letter-writing campaign to ask the Palo Alto City Council to write a letter to CalPERS, the retirement fund for city employees, to ask them to divest from fossil fuels. We had a Moment for Mission, tabled for two Sundays and generated 42 signed letters from Palo Alto residents.

Feb: We planned and participated in an Earth Care themed service on Feb 22. On Feb 15th we had a Moment for Mission and then had letter writing for two Sundays, asking MRTI and the Moderator of PCUSA to support Divestment from Fossil Fuels.

Mar-Apr: We helped out with a screening of "Merchants of Doubt" at Trinity Episcopal. We planned and put on another Earth Care related service on April 19th. During the service we passed out flowers that people could take as a token of an action they would commit to doing in the next year. After church we provided an array of locavore snacks and then showed the film "A Fierce Green Fire".

May: We contributed \$500 and helped staff a table at a talk by Mary Pipher, author of "The Green Boat", sponsored by PICA. Many of us attended this inspirational talk.

June: Several of us were very involved with FossilFreePCUSA in crafting an overture for 2016 that addresses some of the concerns raised at GA 2014. Our session passed the overture, meaning that it will be voted on by the San Jose Presbytery.

July-Sep: Some of us worked very hard on the passage of SB 185 which requires CalSTRS and CalPERS to divest from investments in coal. Many of us worked on the FFPCUSA Grass Roots Organizing Working Group (GROW), with the goal of having 25 Presbyteries concur on our overture for 2016. We sent out a mailing to all (~175) Earth Care Churches asking them to support the Divestment Overture. We supported our usual national organizations with money given us by the Social Justice Committee.

Sept-Oct: Several of us attended the PICA "Moral Action for the Climate" taping at the Media Center on the day that the Pope addressed Congress. We promoted the Divestment Overture in our San Jose Presbytery by passing out information at its September meeting, contacting individuals in other churches, publishing an article in the Presbytery newsletter, sending a mailing to all of its churches and talking with its Social Justice Committee.

Nov: Most of us were present as two of us presented the overture 2016 Overture for Divestment from Fossil Fuels at the San Jose Presbytery meeting where it was passed. We held an Individual Divestment Seminar which was well attended by the local community.

Dec: We repeated our “re-gifting” table at the Peace and Social Justice Fair and celebrated our year with a party at one of our member’s home, during which we Skyped with Janet who was in Paris for the Climate Accords!

2016:

Jan-Mar: Almost all of us were heavily involved with work for GA. Some of us were on the GROW (Grass Roots Organizing Working Group) group and were working with Presbyteries throughout the country to pass our Divestment from Fossil Fuels Overture. Some were starting to plan the logistics of our Meet and Greet at GA in Portland. Some met with our San Jose Presbytery commissioners and others worked on letters to all of the GA Commissioners. We passed our audit and received our 5-year award for being an Earth Care Congregation.

April: We worked with Andy for our annual Earth Day Service. We showed the film “The Burden” before church, participated in the service, and held an EV (Electric Vehicle) Expo after church. The congregation stuffed, stamped and sealed more than 600 letters to GA Commissioners and generously gave over \$800 to FossilFreePCUSA. We listened to a PICA presentation on EV Chargers and conducted a survey of possible use at 1st Pres.

May: Preparations for GA intensified. By now 31 presbyteries (out of 172) had concurred on the overture. We made menu and venue decisions for the Meet and Greet, sent out over 100 invitations, and made arrangements to stay in a downtown hotel where we could hold early morning and late night meetings. Susan was the Overture Advocate from San Jose Presbytery and participated in many strategic planning meetings.

June-July: 7 of us attended GA and worked night and day for a week. Although our overture passed in Committee, it was defeated in plenary. We were very disappointed in the result and also the way that the plenary discussion was handled. We held a post-GA gathering, inviting others who’d been at GA to share our feelings and ideas for the future. Some of us worked on CA legislative bills and on divestment of CalSTRS/CalPERS and other institutions, as well as divestment for individuals.

Aug, Sept, Oct: We held two Adult Study Forums: one describing what had happened with the FFPCUSA overture at GA and one led by Gary Payton describing what had happened at and since the Paris Climate Accord talks, where he was an official PC(USA) observer. We continued work on state and national campaigns and brainstormed ideas for allocating our funds and for possible 1st Pres Facilities projects.

Nov-Dec: We received an Honorable Mention for Advocacy at the CIPL Awards. Shocked by the national election results, we decided to give more funds to legal groups working to protect our climate progress. We repeated our re-gifting table at the Peace and Social Justice Harvest Fair and made plans to celebrate Cool Planet’s 10th anniversary with the 1st Pres Community.

2017:

Jan-Feb: We worked with MultiFaith Voices for Peace and Justice so that their Inauguration-eve service included an environmental focus, and we registered it as one of GreenFaith's "100 vigils in the first 100 hours". We repurposed signs from the Green Walk at GA with slogans such as "There is no Planet B" and carried them in Women's Marches around the Bay Area. As a fun break, we co-hosted with PICA a showing of "Before the Flood" and we shared a belated birthday cake with the congregation to celebrate Cool Planet's 10th birthday. Then it was back to the streets for a Defund DAPL Rally and March to banks in downtown Palo Alto. First Pres hosted a meeting of PC(USA)'s Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) committee, the group to which FFPCUSA's divestment overtures have been referred. We gave a presentation about divestment, participated in discussions with committee members, and learned a lot about the committee.

Mar-April: Our annual Earth Day Worship Service included special music and a flower-filled opportunity to make offerings of actions; we also encouraged donations to EarthJustice. After church Laura Stec held a cooking demo/tasting and educated us about the impact of our food choices on climate change. The next Sunday it was back to the streets for the Climate March, holding our new Cool Planet banner and wearing stoles signed by people in our congregation. We continued to support FossilFreeCA initiatives and started a regular second Sunday letter-writing campaign with Social Justice Ministry.

Summer: We prepared to bring two overtures to San José Presbytery: FFPCUSA's Divestment Overture and a new overture urging our Presbytery to divest its own fossil fuel investments. This involved presenting the overtures to our own Session and doing outreach to various Presbytery committees and to other churches in the Presbytery. After helping with our Earth Care Congregations audit, Gail joined the Facilities Committee. There was renewed interest in installing a car-charging station, since Palo Alto was offering some incentives.

Sept: Cool Planet took a more active role this year in organizing and publicizing Ingathering and the annual Social Justice Harvest fairs. The graphic arts team designed Cool Planet bookmarks to give out at these events and at the September Presbytery Meeting at 1st Pres. The Presbytery concurred with the FFPCUSA overture, referred its own divestment decision to its Finance Committee for further study, and held an Individual Divestment Seminar following their meeting. Pat represented Cool Planet (as an Earth Care Congregation) and FFPCUSA at the Presbyterians for Earth Care conference along the Columbia River Gorge and came back energized and recommending that we all attend the next one (in 2019).

Fall: We held another successful ReGifting table at the Harvest Fair, and also sold necklaces from Living Waters for the World. We decided on our annual allocation of Social Justice funds, giving to eight groups working on various aspects of Climate Justice. The details are posted on our website. We will follow-up with the Presbytery Finance Committee and with other churches who are interested in taking actions to reduce climate change. We will work on keeping our own facilities green, such as by offering alternatives to serving bottled water at First Pres events and recovering the Lounge chairs rather than buying new ones.

Ongoing:

We partner with groups such as Presbyterians for EarthCare (PEC), FossilFreePCUSA (as of 2017 a project of Presbyterian Peace Fellowship(PPF)), Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action (PICA), 350 Silicon Valley, FossilFreeCA, California Interfaith Power and Light (CIPL), Acterra and Canopy.

Annually we audit our efforts in Facilities, Education, Worship and Outreach, to renew our status as an Earth Care Congregation with the Environmental Ministries mission of the PC(USA).

In conjunction with the Social Justice Ministry, we inform the congregation about climate justice issues and events through email group lists and provide educational and letter-writing opportunities. We also make annual donations to groups addressing Climate Change.

We integrate our efforts with the work of many of the ministries within First Pres so that we can live up to our statement that **“We are a green church, committed to environmental action”**.

The Cool Planet Working Group usually meets in the Church Lounge on the first Sunday of each month just after the main worship service. For further information, please contact:

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Look for photos, news and events on the [Cool Planet Palo Alto Facebook page](#)