



Center for Climate Justice and Faith
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

YEARBOOK 2022-23





WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

Climate justice holds that the climate crisis is inherently a crisis of racial, gender, and economic inequity. The humans suffering first and foremost the ravages of climate change are disproportionately the world's people of color and economically poor people. Thus, climate justice weds efforts to address climate change with efforts toward racial and economic justice.

Tree of Life by Kristen Gilje

The Center for Climate Justice and Faith empowers leaders to cultivate moral, spiritual, and practical power for the work of climate justice in communities of faith and in collaboration with others. The Center is an initiative of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary a graduate school of California Lutheran University and a member of the Graduate Theological Union.

PLTS has long been on the forefront of linking faith in Jesus Christ to the quest for social justice. Today, environmental degradation – and in particular climate change – is a ferocious engine of racial injustice and economic injustice. The people ravaged or killed by climate change (who will measure in the hundreds of millions) are and will be disproportionately people of color and economically impoverished people, while those who cause climate change are primarily the world's high consumers.

Our moment in time is breathtaking... pivotal. Today's adults and young adults will determine whether climate catastrophe in its worst forms will be averted. Lutherans claim that God created a world that is tov (Hebrew word translated as "good" in Genesis, but more specifically a good that is life-generating). Yet the world's high consuming people now threaten that very tov, Earth's capacity to generate and re-generate life. We have become the "un-creators."

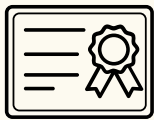
The PLTS Center, along with ecumenical and interfaith partners, seeks to reverse that trend. We equip people for the joy of healing and transformation.

OUR YEAR

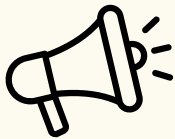
BY THE NUMBERS



40 students in the English-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith



24 students are earning a Spanish-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith



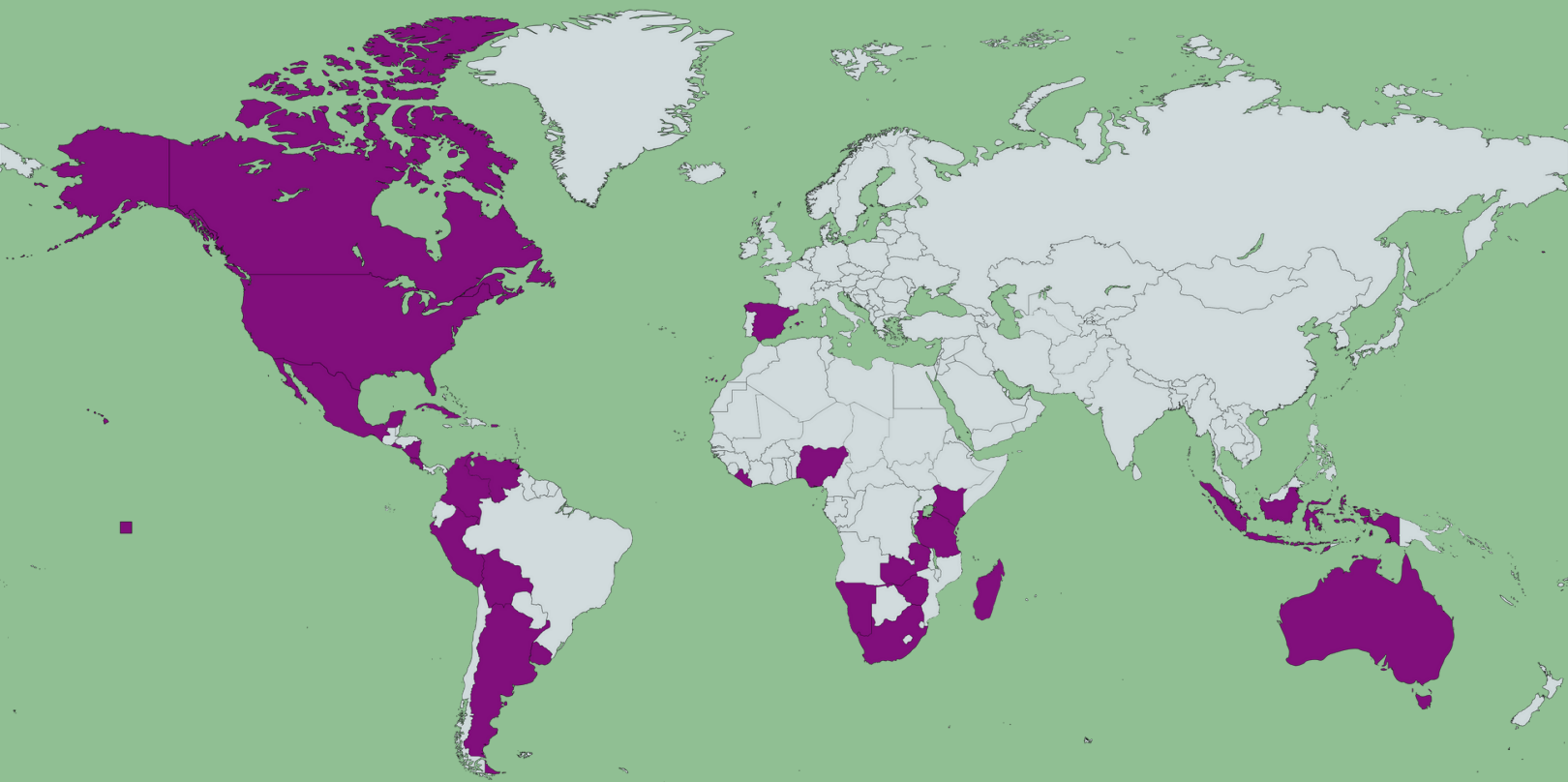
8 students joined Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action Training



7 current MA and MDiv students in the Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith at PLTS



74 STUDENTS
PARTICIPATED IN CENTER FOR
CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FAITH
PROGRAMS IN 2022-23



64 students from the 26 countries highlighted above participated in either the English or Spanish-language Certificate in 2022-23

Created with mapchart.net

CERTIFICATES IN CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FAITH

The Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith empowers students to cultivate moral, spiritual, and practical power to be effective advocates for climate justice.

The Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith offers a two-semester, 100% online, cohort-based curriculum that empowers students to cultivate moral, spiritual, and practical power to be advocates for climate justice in their community. This year, 64 students from 26 countries participated in this impactful program. Over the course of two semesters students read theology, heard from climate policy experts, gained an understanding of climate impacts in their region, and gathered every other week in cohorts of 8-12 students to discuss what they learned. The certificate is now offered in both English and Spanish.

STUDENT PROJECT:

FAITH IN ACTION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE IN LIBERIA



Participants at the launching event for "Faith in Action for Climate Justice" in Monrovia, Liberia

A new relationship forged in the Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith program led to the launch of Liberia's first faith-based climate justice initiative: **Faith in Action for Climate Justice Liberia**.

Korpo Sailley and Willie Korboi are the first Liberians to graduate with a Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith. Although Korpo lives in Liberia and Willie lives in the US, a shared concern for the future of their country led them to work together across continents to develop **Faith in Action for Climate Justice in Liberia** for their final Sacred Action Project.

Korpo and Willie are both active members of the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) which has several social and advocacy programs, but had not yet addressed the climate crisis. Korpo and Willie changed this when they launched Faith in Action for Climate Justice in Liberia as an official program of the LCL on April 21, 2023. The launch event brought together the Bishop of the LCL, Program Officers at Liberia's Environmental Protection Agency, the CEO of GreenCities Liberia, and other leaders in the LCL.

With a grant from the Center for Climate Justice and Faith, this coalition of faith, government, and NGO leaders are working together to organize a tree-planting event to raise awareness of climate impacts among members of the LCL.



NEW PROGRAM: Spanish-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith

The PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith launched the inaugural cohort of the Spanish-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith in February 2023. This inaugural cohort includes 24 students from 14 Spanish-speaking countries throughout the Americas, the Caribbean, and Spain. Together, students embarked on a two-semester journey to build the moral, spiritual, and practical power to be effective advocates for climate justice in their communities.

The Spanish-language certificate is contextualized for Spanish-speaking regions of the world. Students studied climate impact reports focused on Latin American and the Caribbean and read texts by Latin American theologians and scholars. Students also attended monthly online plenaries with theologians, climate justice activists, and indigenous rights advocates from Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Uruguay.

The certificate was designed and implemented with partnering organizations: Seminario Luterano Augsburgiano (SEMLA) in Mexico, Universidad Luterana Salvadoreña in El Salvador, Instituto para la Pastoral Contextual of the Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida of Argentina and Uruguay, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran World Federation. Our first cohort is on track to complete their final projects in Fall 2023 and graduate in December 2023.

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This class has made clear a natural vocation I have always had.

-Student in Spanish language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith

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Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action

In February 2023, the Center for Climate Justice and Faith launched our second cohort of the Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action training. Eight students from across the US zoomed into a three-day training where they learned the principles of community organizing, history of the climate movement in the US, and the role of the faith community in this work. Over the course of the following 12 weeks, students put what they learned into practice designing and implement projects in their community with the support of regular meetings with their cohort and instructor.



Photos 1 & 4: Neighbors learn about native seeds and a child stands in front of the new mural at St. Marks Lutheran Church in San Francisco, CA; Photo 3: Harold Vanicek's neighborhood in Marble Falls, TX where he is organizing to establish a Dark Skies Ordinance.; Photo 2: Preserved natural land in Southbury, CT that Rev. Abigail Johnson is organizing her community to protect

STUDENT PROJECT:

CREATING A HAVEN IN ST. MARK'S SQUARE



Shannon Valenti Cheng and members of St. Mark's Lutheran Church plant a pollinator garden in St. Mark's Square, San Francisco, CA

For her project with the Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action class, Shannon Valenti Cheng, set out to activate St. Mark's square, a parcel of land in the heart of San Francisco. The square is located next to St. Mark's Lutheran Church, and encompasses an affordable senior living facility (a ministry of St. Mark's), an auditorium, and non-profit office spaces.

Through one-on-one meetings with community members, Shannon received feedback that they didn't find the square welcoming, needed better places to sit, and even didn't know they were welcome to use the square. With this feedback, Shannon and her team developed goals to make the square more welcoming, increase awareness about the square, and create a vibrant intergenerational campus. Their long-term goal is to develop additional affordable housing for seniors and families.

To launch this initiative Shannon organized an Earth Day celebration in the square. **More than 60 people** from the congregation and surrounding neighborhoods came to plant a pollinator garden, attend a forum on native plants, learn from local non-profits, and join in the Earth Day celebration.

STUDENT PROJECT

WATER AND WALL: Climate and Migration Collide in South Texas



Jamie Stark is building bridges between environment and immigrant rights advocates in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Southeast Texas. Jamie describes his area as a natural migration super highway for both birds and humans. The region is a destination for birders and a common entry point for immigrants (many of whom are climate refugees from Central America) to cross into the U.S.

Hemmed in by the Rio Grande, the border wall, and the Gulf of Mexico, residents face extreme heat and hurricanes. A surge of climate refugees has affected the development of unincorporated communities called colonias which lack water, sewer, and electricity making them especially vulnerable to droughts, extreme heat, flooding, and hurricanes.

For his project for the Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action, Jamie interviewed dozens of people in the area including priests, immigrant rights advocates, farmers, teachers, environmental activists, and ranchers. Jamie found common threads of burnout, anxiety regarding water scarcity, desire to care for new refugees, and many opportunities for collaboration.

Jamie summarized local leaders' justice goals to be 1) Develop Leaders, 2) Unite local environmentalists and immigrant advocates, 3) Introduce this unified base to power players. Proposed next steps included hosting media trainings, placing op-eds in local newspapers, and hosting an interfaith vigil connecting the climate crisis and immigration crisis.

Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith at PLTS

The Center for Climate Justice and Faith continues to attract fantastic students to the MDiv and MA programs at PLTS. During the 2022-23 academic year, there were seven students with a Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith. These students found ways to incorporate climate justice into their papers, academic projects, and involvement in the community. Activities ranged from attending the United Nations Climate Change Convention (COP27), organizing a day of action for climate change, and leading the seminary community in an initiative to reduce plastic usage.



Regina Banks, MDiv student with Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith, attended COP27 as a representative of the ELCA in her role as the Director of Lutheran Office of Public Policy in California.



*Climate change is the defining issue of our time. PLTS has demonstrated its commitment to meeting this kairos moment by creating a revolutionary climate justice concentration, but also working with me to help fit the program into my busy schedule. **It's the balance of the personal and global that sets PLTS apart.***

~ Regina Banks, MDiv student with Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith



STUDENT PROJECT: NO FAITH IN FOSSIL FUELS



Photo by Brooke Anderson | @movementphotographer

Stop Dirty Banking Direct Action, San Francisco, CA
Photo by Brooke Anderson @movementphotographer

Through the PLTS Ministry in Context program, Katie Evans (a PLTS MA student with a Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith) was able to work with GreenFaith, a multi-faith movement addressing the climate crisis, throughout her spring 2023 semester. On March 21, 2023 Katie helped GreenFaith organize the faith contingent for the Stop Dirty Banking direct action at the Wells Fargo Headquarters in San Francisco. The day of action coincided with a severe Atmospheric River, but Katie led a group of faithful congregants through the wind and rain to join hundreds of fellow climate activists from organizations including ThirdAct, 1000 Grandmothers, and 350.org.

“The most moving part of the event for me was getting to participate in the massive street mural that was painted throughout the action. Anyone could step up, grab paint and a paintbrush, and start painting the street alongside others. I got to paint a section with Karen, who has been doing this work for years. It was so lifegiving to be with people who have a deep love for this work. As a person of faith, I could feel the Spirit present in every song, speech, and brush stroke.”

During her semester with GreenFaith Katie also played a leadership role in organizing the No Faith in Fossil Fuel Climate Finance Summit. Katie’s experience not only equipped her with new skills and perspective, but it empowered her to bring other people into the climate justice movement.

STUDENT PROJECT:

#FewerPlasticsForLent at PLTS



Seminarians Mak Sanders and Trevor Boe use paper and cloth bags to purchase produce during the #FewerPlasticsForLent challenge

During Lent 2023, the PLTS Green Justice Team mobilized the larger PLTS community to participate in the ELCA Young Adult Ministry's #NoPlasticForLent Challenge with a slight edit to make the challenge more accessible (#FewerPlasticsForLent). Each week during Lent the team shared one change individuals and communities can make to reduce their plastic consumption and be better stewards of creation as a Lenten practice. These changes ranged from reducing plastics in cleaning supplies to simple swaps at the grocery store to changes in beauty routines.

Throughout lent, the Green Justice Team brought the entire seminary along with them as they learned that the extraction, production, and incineration of plastics produces 850 metric tons of greenhouse gases annually (equivalent of 189 coal-fired powerplants) and that only 5% of plastic sent to recycling facilities in the US is actually recycled.



CENTER FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FAITH AT COP27

Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer (left) and Shede Habila (4th from left) with the LWF delegation at COP 27

In November 2022, several students and faculty from the Center for Climate Justice and Faith traveled to Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt for the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27).

Shede Habila joined the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) COP27 youth delegation as one of eight youth delegates. This delegation was organized by Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer, co-facilitator of the Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith from which Shede graduated in Spring 2022. As a member of the Lutheran Church of Christ of Nigeria, Shede has seen the impacts of the climate crisis and understands the urgency in solving it. *"We are here to push and advocate for the governments to put more effort in addressing the global climate crisis... The right time to act is now"*, he said.

Anania Ndongole from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania was another one of the eight LWF youth delegates and Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith Spring 2022 graduate. He is a leader for climate justice in the ELCT. *"Young people must raise their voice for climate justice and a future on this planet,"* said Anania Ndongole. *"Young people must be ambassadors of change."*

Regina Banks, an MDiv student at PLTS with a Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith, attended COP27 as a representative of the ELCA in her role as the Director of Lutheran Office of Public Policy in California. Regina shared the role reversal she experienced at COP27. *"At home in California I'm accustomed to advocating for marginalized communities. Here at COP27 I am not Regina Banks from a marginalized community, I'm Regina Banks from the U.S. the largest carbon emitter on the planet"*

Rev. Dr. Walter and Barbara Stuhr Fund for Climate Justice and Faith



Rev. Dr. Walter Stuhr

In fall 2022, Rev. John Melin, PLTS Class of 1974 and his wife Barbara Melin gave a bequest of \$500,000 to launch the Rev. Dr. Walter and Barbara Stuhr Fund for Climate Justice and Faith. The Melins wanted to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Stuhr, who was John's professor at PLTS. This fund will provide ongoing support for the Center for Climate Justice and Faith, ensuring its programs continue to equip people of faith to work for climate justice.

Dr. Stuhr began teaching at PLTS in the late 1960s and went on to serve as the Academic Dean and then President. He is remembered for his career-long efforts to open up Lutheran ministry to all who are called. He was a leading advocate for women's ordination and then for the ordination of LGBTQIA+ candidates. He passed a few weeks after learning the fund was established in his honor. From his obituary:

"[Walter Stuhr] was a man of great Christian faith who took the Gospel's teachings seriously and literally. He once wrote that the Bible was very clear about God's unconditional love, and that rather than trying to explain or interpret what Jesus would want, the job of humanity was merely to try and keep up."

If you are interested in making a big impact gift, like the Melins did, please contact Rev. Sara Wilson, Director of Development for PLTS, at swilson@plts.edu or 510-559-2717.

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*We want to honor Wally and we want to inspire others to give to something that matters... we want to give while we live with this planned gift commitment because we want to participate in and see the fruits of the Center for Climate Justice & Faith grow and make a difference in our communities right now. **And we want others to join us in honoring Wally & Barbara Stuhr.***

~ the Rev. John and Barbara Melin

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Public Programming in Climate Justice and Faith



The Ants & The Grasshopper

The Center for Climate Justice and Faith and Lutherans Restoring Creation hosted a screening of the film *The Ants and the Grasshopper* followed by a Q&A session with Director Raj Patel. The film is told by Anita Chitaya, a farmer in Malawi, who takes on the challenge to persuade Americans that climate change is real. More than 200 people joined the screening either in-person on the PLTS campus in Berkeley, CA or online via Zoom.



PLTS Founders Day: Dr. Larry Rasmussen

Dr. Larry Rasmussen, a renowned Christian environmental ethicist and Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics, emeritus, at Union Theological Seminary was the keynote speaker for PLTS Founders Day 2022. Dr. Rasmussen has mentored a generation of Christians in eco-theology, including Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda. More than 100 people tuned in either via Zoom or in-person to hear his lecture, *The Planet You Inherit: A Re-founding Catalyst?* which centered on letters written for his young grandchildren.

OUR TEAM

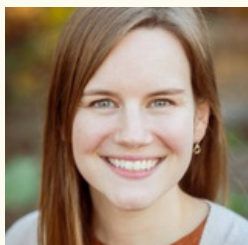
Staff



Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda
Director, Center for Climate
Justice and Faith
Professor of Theological and Social
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Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo
Coordinator of Spanish-language
Certificate in Climate Justice
and Faith



Sarah Berg
Acting Director, Center for Climate
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Phoebe Morad
Coordinator of Certificates in
Climate Justice and Faith
Executive Director, Lutherans
Restoring Creation

Instructors & Steering Committee Members

Elena Cedillo

Instructor and Steering Committee Member, Certificate in
Climate Justice and Faith (English & Spanish)
Program Executive for Climate Justice, Lutheran World
Federation

Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer

Instructor and Steering Committee Member,
Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith (English)
Rector, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Rev. Dr. Angela Trejo Hagar

Instructor and Steering Committee Member,
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Program Director for Hunger Education, ELCA

Rev. Dr. Mercedes Bachman

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Lic. Fidel Nieto Laínez

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Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos

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Bishop of the ELCA