

# 2024 YEARBOOK

**Center for Climate  
Justice and Faith**  
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary



## LETTER TO STUDENTS, DONORS, & ENCOURAGERS

Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda

Director, PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith

Professor of Theological and Social Ethics

I have long said that to face the terrifying realities of climate change, we need four-fold vision:

- Courageously honest acknowledgement of the devastation and suffering that climate change is rendering around the globe and will bring even more fiercely to the coming generation.
- Unfailing vision of the life-saving pathways and possibilities at hand for turning the other direction and building ways of living together that enable God's garden Earth to flourish.
- God's Spirit at work in the world – including within us – guiding and strengthening us to move in that direction.
- Beauty - the abundant awe-inspiring beauty surrounding us in every moment, be it the touch of breeze on skin, the face of a stranger, a child's laugh, or flutter of leaf in wind.

Held together these four nourish moral-spiritual power to face the realities of the climate crisis.

Your gifts of prayer, participation, financial support, encouragement, and more are enabling people around the world to see in these ways, hold them together, and – as a result – take action to foster healing and hope in the face of climate injustice and its ravishing impacts.

Just imagine the fruits that your support has born: the 200+ participants in the Center's programs engaging their communities in climate justice work. You will see some of that fruit in this Yearbook. Our students have fostered hope amongst youngsters, wise action by elders, spiritual awakening to God's Spirit at work, a sense of community spanning continents and cultures, priceless knowledge and skills. Our students have built eco-education projects, tree-planting initiatives, and congregational action groups. They have been part of closing down a toxic waste site, created liturgies, guided people in public policy advocacy, and so much more. The pages before you give a taste.

May you relish what you have helped bring into being. If the Center for Climate Justice and Faith is an abundant tree rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the liberating dynamic of Lutheran reformation, and the tree's fruits are the host of people empowered to throw their hearts, minds, and bodies into the healing work of climate justice, then the Center's supporters are the water, soil, and sunlight that feeds this tree enabling it to bear such marvelous fruit. Thank you for being a part of this holy host.

In hope and gratitude,  
Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda

# OUR YEAR BY THE NUMBERS



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



**33** students in the Spanish-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith



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



**9** PLTS MA and MDiv students in the Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith

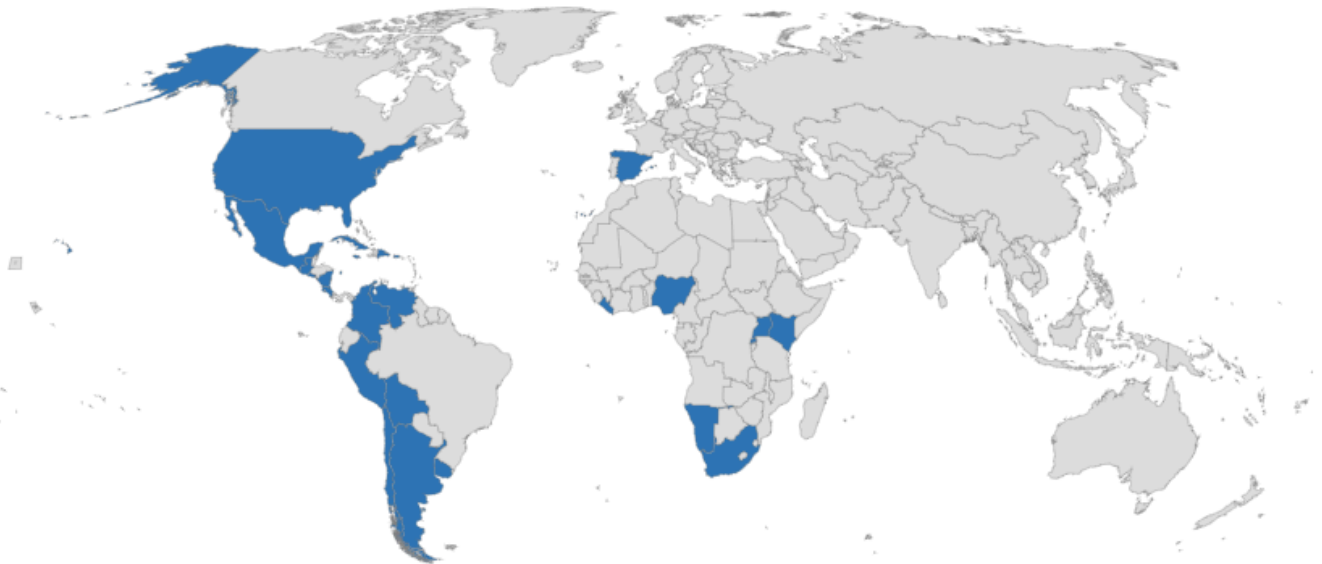


Certificate graduate Jean Pierre Methode Rokundo, plants trees to prevent erosion in Karongi Diocese, Rwanda

**100 STUDENTS**  
PARTICIPATED IN CENTER FOR  
CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FAITH  
PROGRAMS IN 2023-24

# CERTIFICATES IN CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FAITH

The PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith offers our Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith program in both English and Spanish. **During the 2023-24 Academic Year 73 students from 26 countries participated in these online programs.** These students are pastors, nurses, students, teachers, engineers, non-governmental organization professionals, and retirees from around the world. They have vastly different backgrounds and perspectives, but they built a community together on the foundation of their shared calling to help their community address and survive the climate crisis. Over the course of two semesters students meet with theologians, read UN climate assessments, hear from climate policy experts, and build an understanding of how they can use their unique gifts to work for climate justice. Every other week students gather on Zoom in cohorts of 8-12 to reflect on what they learned and share how climate change affects their context.



*73 students from the 26 countries highlighted above participated in either the English or Spanish-language Certificate in 2023-24*

“The certification program is more than just new knowledge. It is to move from thinking about what is happening and beyond actions, to feeling it in our skin and in our spirit.. In this recognition there is a different type of bond. It leads us to caring, to welcome, to sheltering, to love, to feel and embrace each other. The certificate is a great opportunity to make a difference in an integral way, from an integral Eco-theology. - Rvda. Mía Rocio Umaña, Costa Rica



*Community members gather for the Apthapi in a neighborhood outside of La Paz, Bolivia*



# STUDENT PROJECT:

## APTHAPIS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE IN BOLIVIA

Jazmin Soto Mayta is a university student in La Paz Bolivia and a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bolivia. Jazmin's final project for her Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith was to start bridging the urban/rural divide among Lutherans in Bolivia.

Working with a group of peers from her university, Jazmin organized three apthapis, a traditional Indigenous meal, to bring members of the rural and urban churches together in conversation about the environment. Together, they unrolled colorful blankets called aguayos where everyone placed the food they brought to share. Potatoes are traditionally the center of this shared meal, but the focus of the meal isn't the food. Apthapi is a time to share sorrows, celebrate joys, and strengthen the community.

Over these colorful blankets and piles of food, church members discussed the dangerous impacts of mining on their water quality and on their children's health, how rural communities are economically dependent on that same mining, and concerns about the fertilizers rural families are exposed to when the landowners spray their crops. These conversations are the beginning of a larger movement within the church to address the environmental degradation that threatens the well-being of the people and their lands and waters.

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE AS LOVE IN ACTION



*Still Smiling! Students and Teachers in the Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action Program after three days of training*

In February 2024, 18 strangers from across the U.S. hopped onto a zoom call. For three days they learned the basics of community organizing, built relationships, and began to dream about how they could be agents for climate justice in their community. These students are pastors, immigrant rights advocates, youth leaders, synod staff, and nurses. Together they formed the third cohort of the Community

Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action program. After completing the training, students spent 12 weeks in mentored practice with a seasoned community organizer as they began implementing their projects. Meeting in groups of 5-7 every other week students were challenged to look deeper into the issues facing their community, received guidance in overcoming obstacles, and practiced holding each other accountable. Students finished the course with the skills, confidence, deeper understanding of systemic issues, and community support needed to be effective advocates for climate justice.

This course was taught by the Via Consulting Cooperative, a collective of evaluators, faith leaders, and community organizers with over 50 years combined experience in community organizing and program evaluation. The team includes Maureen Okasinski, Lecturer at the University of Michigan School of Social work; Meghan Sobocienski, PLTS Graduate, Co-founder and Director of Grace in Action Collectives in Southwest Detroit; and Bianca Vazquez, Program Director at Beloved Community Incubator in Washington, DC.

*Peggy Drew at the community garden near her church in Nashua, NH.*



# STUDENT PROJECT:

## GARDENS COUNTERACT HEAT ISLANDS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

When Peggy Drew signed up for the Community Organizing for Climate Justice program, she thought she would organize a workshop for her congregation. However, after some nudging by the trainers, she started to think of how her unique skills and passions could be a force for climate justice in her community beyond her church.

Peggy's church's motto is "Church with a Heart, in the heart of Nashua". Having grown up in the heart of Nashua, NH, Peggy was familiar with the lack of greenery in the neighborhoods around her downtown church. According to First Street (a leading climate risk accessor) downtown Nashua has a major heat factor risk – all other Nashua areas have a moderate heat factor risk.

Downtown Nashua is a heat island – a term used to describe urban neighborhoods that absorb and retain more heat than other areas due to having more concrete and less greenery. Daytime highs within a heat island can be as much as 7 degrees hotter than surrounding neighborhoods. Rising temperatures caused by climate change makes heat islands more dangerous.

Despite – or maybe because of – growing up in the neighborhood, Peggy developed a passion and expertise in pollinator gardens. After learning more about heat islands, Peggy began thinking about how gardens could benefit her old neighborhood. With the encouragement of the community organizing trainers she began volunteering at a community garden near her church. Soon Peggy met neighbors who shared her interest in gardening while at the same time building a relationship with Nashua's Environmental Justice Advocate.

After five months of building relationships, Peggy has built a team that includes church members, the City of Nashua Environmental Justice Advocate, and other neighborhood community organizers and individuals to plant a pollinator garden in an underserved neighborhood or public space. They received a grant for \$350 and will break ground in the fall. The team hopes this will be the first of many projects to increase greenery and lower temperatures in downtown Nashua. Peggy said, "This project isn't about one community garden, it is about being empowered and then empowering others to do something."



# CONCENTRATION IN CLIMATE JUSTICE AND FAITH FOR PLTS STUDENTS

The Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith at PLTS provides an opportunity for students earning an MA or MDiv to incorporate climate justice into every aspect of their seminary experience. Students take three courses focused on climate justice, participate in activist events with local organizations, join a peer-led mentoring group, contribute to PLTS as Green-Justice Seminary, and complete an integrative project. Many students also choose to complete Ministry in Context credit with a climate justice organization. This past academic year students in this concentration found several opportunities to prepare themselves to be leaders for climate justice in their future ministry.

In September 2023, students in the concentration came together for a one-day retreat in Danville, CA and online. Students shared ideas and dreams for incorporating climate justice into their ministries, brainstormed ways to engage the entire PLTS community in climate justice efforts, and built relationships for the year ahead. After hearing from the Segorea Te' Land Trust during the 2022 retreat, students were moved to get involved with the organization's work to return Indigenous Land to Indigenous hands. The day after Thanksgiving 2023, students participated in a Shellmound to Shellmound walk in West Berkeley, joining Segorea Te' Land Trust and other Indigenous leaders in calling for sacred Ohlone burial sites to be returned to the Ohlone People.



*PLTS Students in the Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith at the Shellmound to Shellmound walk in West Berkeley*



*GreenFaith's Rising Leaders Fellowship Retreat visits Urban Adamah, an organic farm and Jewish education Center. PLTS Student Katie Evans (first row, second from left) helped organize the retreat through her internship with GreenFaith.*



# STUDENT HIGHLIGHT:

## PLTS STUDENTS EXPLORE THEIR VOCATION

Students in the Concentration in Climate Justice and Faith gained first-hand experience in the climate justice movement working with climate and advocacy organizations. Katie Evans, MA '24, completed a six-month internship with GreenFaith, a multifaith climate justice organization. This internship marks the first climate-focused internship for a PLTS student. In this role Katie helped organize GreenFaith's Rising Leaders Fellowship Retreat that was held at PLTS. Trevor Boe, MDiv '25, completed his Ministry in Context site with the Lutheran Office of Public Policy California, focusing on climate legislation. These opportunities exposed students to the larger climate movement, giving them insight into how to be an effective advocate, and building relationships with organizations with whom they can partner in the future.

Two students attended the Bioneers Conference – one of the largest environmental conferences in the country. The students shared that this conference was a seminal experience for their time in seminary. In fact, they were moved to organize a similar symposium where PLTS and GTU students can present their climate justice projects and papers in Spring 2025.

Many of these projects begin as faith-infused Integrative Projects that students complete for the concentration. Projects this year included a Food Justice Curriculum that a student implemented, a sermon on youth and climate change, and even an "Eco-Centered Faith Retreat for Renewal, Resilience and Response" that another student led. Students explained that these projects helped them "move through the intellectual aspects of naming injustices into embodying hope".

*Rendering of the Superior Midway  
Bike project in Cleveland, OH.  
Courtesy of Bialosky Architects  
Cleveland*



# STUDENT PROJECT:

## JUST BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE IN CLEVELAND, OH

As an avid cyclist Lucinda Cave's project for her Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith combined her passion for environmental justice and her love of cycling to lead a local effort improving biking infrastructure in her town of Cleveland, OH.

Pollution from cars account for 28% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Choosing a bike for just one trip a day reduces the average person's carbon emissions from transportation by 67%! However, not every community can safely bike. Cleveland's Superior Avenue is the highest crash street in a city with a fatal crash rate three times the national average. The Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith inspired Lucinda to assume a leadership role with Bike Cleveland (a bike advocacy group) in a major bike infrastructure project in Cleveland – the Superior Midway.

Lucinda explains, "The Superior Midway will be a two-mile separated bike track through the middle of Superior Avenue. It will run from an area that has suffered historic under-investment, past many places of work, worship, school, business and recreation, right into downtown."

Working with Bike Cleveland, Lucinda met with neighborhood residents, business owners, and current cyclists to gather their feedback. They even secured funding because the project will greatly improve the air quality. "Eventually, the Superior Midway will become an important part of the bike infrastructure in our city, that will: increase environmental justice, improve our health and safety, all while decreasing CO2 emissions and mitigating climate change!"

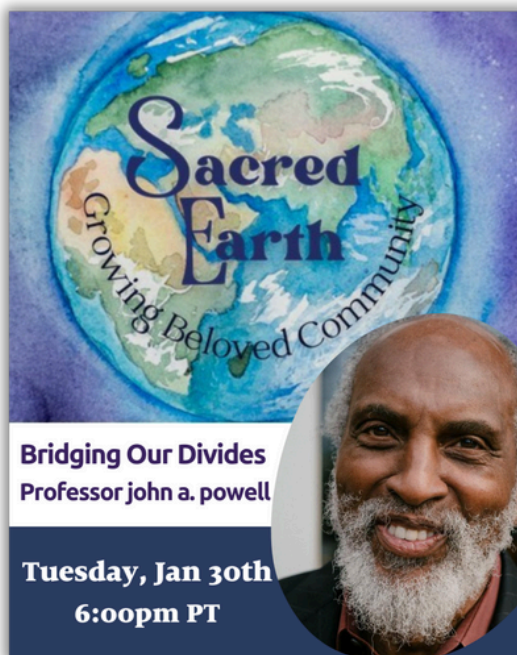


# Public Programming in Climate Justice and Faith



## Spanish-language Plenaries on Climate Justice and Faith

After receiving feedback that there are not enough Spanish-language resources for environmental activists. The Spanish-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith program opened up their plenary to the general public. The Spring 2024 plenary series featured theologians from throughout Latin America discussing a variety of topics at the intersection of climate justice and faith. These six plenaries featured speakers from across Latin America discussing immigration, food sovereignty, gender justice, eschatology, public advocacy, and climate justice 101. Recordings of these plenaries are available on the Centers YouTube page and have been watched almost 700 times.



## SACRED EARTH: Growing Beloved Community Webcast Series

Together with the Episcopal Diocese of California and the Breakthrough Communities Project, The PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith co-sponsored Sacred Earth: Growing Beloved Community Webinar Series exploring the intersections of faith, ecology, justice, and spirituality. Each month, Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus and Dr. Paloma Pavel interviewed environmental leaders about how their spiritual practices and learnings strengthen their work. The webinar series was helped demonstrate how climate change exacerbates the racial, gender, and economic injustices in our society.



# OUR TEAM

## Staff

### **Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda**

Director

Professor of Theological and Social Ethics, PLTS

### **Sarah Berg**

Associate Director

### **Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo**

Coordinator of Spanish-language Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith

### **Phoebe Morad**

Coordinator of Certificates in Climate Justice and Faith

### **Maureen Okasinski**

Co-coordinator of Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action

### **Meghan Sobocienski**

Co-coordinator of Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action

### **Bianca Vazquez**

Co-coordinator of Community Organizing for Climate Justice as Love in Action

*Cover photos L-R: Apthapi diners make a cross in La Paz, Bolivia; Certificate Graduate Betty Mutunda leads a climate workshop in Luwero, Uganda; Certificate Graduate Lucinda Cave bikes in Cleveland, OH, USA.*



**Center for Climate Justice and Faith**  
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## Instructors, Advisors & Committee Members

### **Rev. Dr. Mercedes Bachman**

Steering Committee Member, Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith (Spanish)

Director at Instituto para la Pastoral Contextual de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina y Uruguay

### **Elena Cedillo**

Instructor and Steering Committee Member, Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith (English & Spanish)

Program Executive for Climate Justice, LWF

### **Dr. Ryan Cummings**

Advisor, Certificates in Climate Justice and Faith

Program Director, Ethics, Education and Community

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### **MsD. Hilda Melany Erazo García**

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### **Lic. Omar Elenilson Flores Salguero**

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### **Dr. Agustina Luvis Nuñez**

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### **Rev. Dr. Karla Koll**

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### **Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer**

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Rector, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

### **Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos**

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Director of Theological Diversity and Ecumenical & Inter-religious Engagement, Office of the Bishop of the ELCA

### **Rev. Dr. Angela Trejo Hagar**

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Coordinator of Seminario Luterano Augsburg