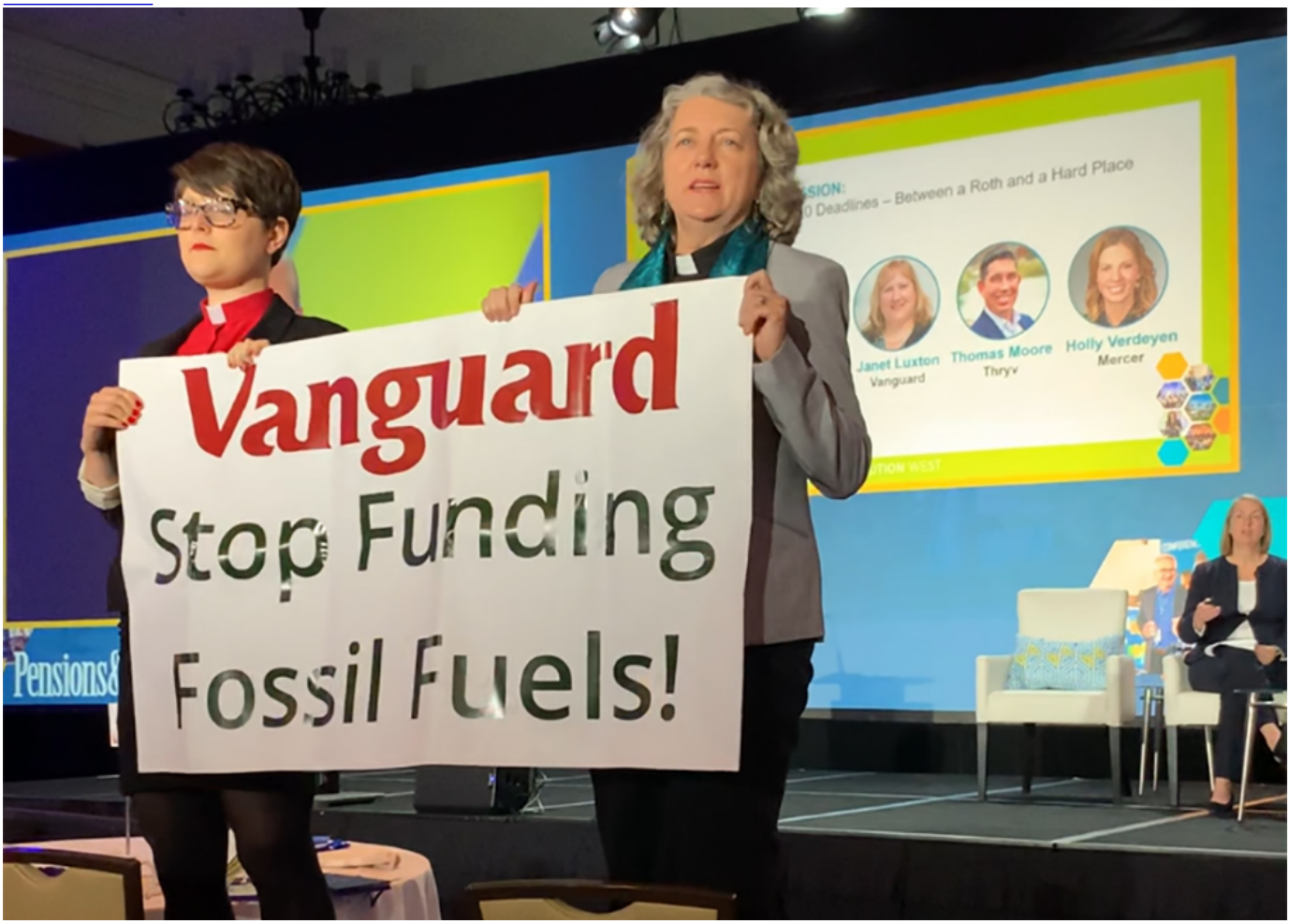
News
EarthBeat



GreenFaith organizers Chelsea MacMillan, left, and Amy Brooks Paradise hold up a banner that reads, "Vanguard Stop Funding Fossil Fuels!" during an Oct. 23 investment industry conference at the Omni La Costa Resort in Carlsbad, California. (Courtesy of GreenFaith)



Amy Brooks Paradise

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Monday morning, Oct. 23, we said a silent prayer, stood up and interrupted a speaker at a retirement planner's conference in front of hundreds of people.

This investment industry conference near San Diego drew around 500 investors and industry leaders from around the country. One of the speakers was an executive from Vanguard, one of the world's largest investors in fossil fuels and a sponsor of the event.

In the middle of a packed hotel ballroom, we stood up on our chairs and unfurled a banner that demanded Vanguard stop funding fossil fuels. "I'm a mother, a minister and a client," Amy called out. "I'm desperately worried about my child's future. Aren't you worried about yours?"

Then Chelsea spoke. "Vanguard has $300 billion invested in oil, gas and coal," she said as security guards approached to force us to leave. "This is reckless and immoral."

Here's the thing: 85% of people want to invest sustainably. One study showed that 76% of all investors would rather make a dentist visit than invest in an environmentally destructive company.

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Investors don't want their retirement funds to destroy their children's or grandchildren's future. But Vanguard, BlackRock and other major asset managers have placed a minuscule amount of their trillions of investments in sustainable funds. Vanguard is ranked worst among all major asset managers for climate commitments.

This is not OK. The science is clear: There can be no further fossil fuel development if we are to stay within the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit that protects our planet from utter catastrophe.

Disrupting a professional conference in front of hundreds of attendees was not easy, but we have come to believe that the climate crisis is too urgent to wait. We can't stand by as companies like Vanguard fiddle while the planet burns.

We are people of faith and spirit. Amy's Unitarian Universalist faith affirms the interdependent web of all creation and the dignity of every person. Chelsea's interspiritual background inspires public action that expresses the deepest of moral values. Our religious backgrounds call us to work for a more just future for all beings.

So, we stood up.

Our spirituality helped us through the process. To prepare, we grounded ourselves in prayer. We remembered all those suffering from climate disasters, both human and more than human. We held close our visions for a world in which all beings and our common home were revered rather than desecrated for profit. We felt clear in heart and spirit that this was the right thing to do. We were together, supported by other colleagues. Without these spiritual practices and community, we couldn't have done it.

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It would be great if we could simply ask Vanguard to do the right thing, and they'd do it. But, for years, countless people have called, written letters, asked for meetings and held protests. Vanguard, BlackRock and other financial firms still have billions invested in fossil fuel companies — in fact, they're moving in the wrong direction by

pulling out of the Net Zero Asset Managers Initiative.

It is irresponsibly naive to think that polite and rational approaches to this threat are sufficient when dealing with corporations stuck in outdated ways of thinking and obsessed with short-term profits.

As people of faith, we need to summon deeper courage and act. For decades, we've pointed to Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi as our spiritual heroes. The time has come when we need to draw on the same well of inner strength that made them into giants.

The solutions are clear: Vanguard must decarbonize, massively scale up sustainable investments, adopt a human rights policy and use its power to hold the worst climate actors accountable.

Vanguard can use its power to give us a chance at a liveable future. But it's not going to happen until the company experiences a wave of grassroots pressure that forces it to change.

This story appears in the **Small Earth Stories** feature series. View the full series.