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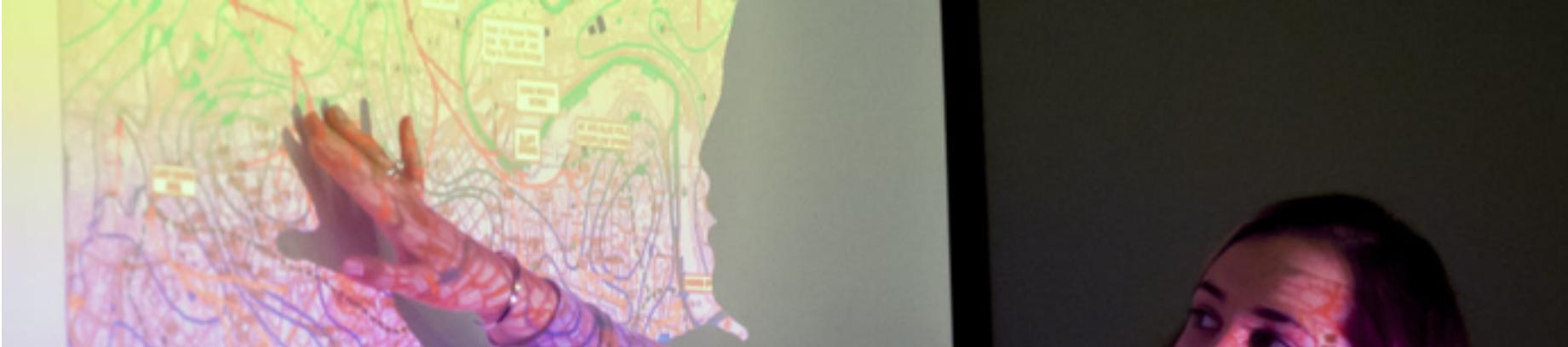
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TOP STORY

Faith community members stress environmental stewardship at event

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Feb 17, 2018

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Representatives of Bowling Green's Christian, Muslim and other diverse faith communities banded together Saturday at the Islamic Center of Bowling Green to discuss environmental stewardship and advocacy.

"I think it's important that we realize that this is a universal issue that doesn't just affect one type of denomination or religion," said Laurel Mayes, a junior at Barren County High School attending the event.

The conference stretched throughout the day and featured guest speakers, small group discussions and presentations. It concluded this year's Interfaith Workshop on Sustainability and Social Justice, a two-day event organized by Western Kentucky University's Department of Philosophy and Religion.

University co-sponsors of the event include the Office of International Programs International Year of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office of Research and Creative Activity, the Office of Sustainability, the Student Government Association and the departments of biology, communication, diversity and community studies, geography and geology, history, public health and social work.

Community-based co-sponsors include the Islamic Cultural Center, Christ Episcopal Church, First Christian Church, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, State Street Baptist Church, State Street United Methodist Church and the Unitarian Universalist Church.

For Mayes, and many other community members attending the event, it was a way to hear others' perspectives on environmental sustainability, and exchange ideas about how to take action.

Mayes, who helped represent First Christian Church, gave a presentation about a mission trip she took to Black Mountain, N.C.

Since then, her church has been working to implement what she learned about sustainability.

“We have been focusing on making small changes in our daily lives to better impact the earth,” she said, adding that includes using less paper, recycling more and generally producing less waste.

During her presentation, Mayes told a story about a hummingbird trying to put out a forest fire to illustrate the importance of each individual’s contribution.

When a fire breaks out and begins consuming the forest, all the other animals stand transfixed as their home burns. The hummingbird, however, begins frantically darting between the fire and a stream carrying tiny droplets of water in its beak to put out the fire. The other animals, including an elephant, mock the hummingbird for being too small to battle the blaze engulfing the forest. In response, the hummingbird simply says “I am doing the best I can.”

“Those small acts will add up to make a bigger impact than we can imagine,” said Rev. Kyle McDougall, First Christian Church’s associate minister.

Akisha Townsend, who is part of the National Fraternity of the Franciscan Order with the Catholic Church, also attended the event.

“It was my faith that drew me into caring about creation,” she said, adding the event helped her learn from others. “We have so much in common between our traditions.”

Chelsea Faught, a WKU junior from Lexington, is interested in sustainability. She created a sustainability committee within WKU's Student Government Association.

"For me, coming to this is a way to learn from people with different opinions," she said, adding it's difficult to communicate with people in today's polarized world. "We don't know how to build those relationships."

Faught, who is Catholic, said she appreciated hearing from representatives outside her religion and their sustainability ideas. She described the event as "eye-opening."

Sedin Agic, the imam of the Islamic Center of Bowling Green, also spoke during the event and highlighted the concepts of justice and mercy within Islam and how that relates to environmental sustainability.

"God wants us to live according to his teachings because that's the only way you can survive," he said in an interview.

He described the event as a way to find common ground.

"In the end, we have the same goal," he said. "That's most important."

Aaron Mudd

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