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WKU to host inter-faith panel surrounding sustainability

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Nov 15, 2023



Submitted

You don't have to go far to find differing opinions in a place as diverse as Bowling Green.

That's good news for the organizers of Earth Care, a free inter-faith panel event to be hosted this week by Western Kentucky University's Department of History and open to

the public.

Bella Mukonyora, a religion professor and sponsor of the event, said Earth Care will center around religion, science and environmental sustainability, highlighting their often overlooked common interests.



“The so-called ‘conflict of interest’ between science and religion is really based on a misunderstanding of both from both sides,” Mukonyora said. “Scientists (often think) ‘we can’t believe (in religion) because we are scientists,’ when in fact, no culture can function without religion in some way or another.”

The event will feature a screening of “Dirt! The Movie,” a 2009 documentary exploring the relationship between humanity and the soil beneath it, followed by refreshments and time to mingle.

Afterward, several panels featuring local religious leaders, environmental professionals and students will discuss topics like climate change, sustainable living, religion’s

role in environmentalism and more.

“There have been terrible consequences caused by religion, such as conflicts or assumptions of religion, but also some very good things,” Mukonyora said. “If we look for them, we will find them through meeting minds, like this conference will do.”

Panel guests will include, in part, Bowling Green City Environmental Manager Matt Powell, Ram Pasupuleti of the Shree Swaminarayan Hindu Temple, Michael Sellas of the Holy Apostolic Orthodox Church and Megan Huston of First Christian Church.



Mukonyora said as the city continues to grow in size and diversity, it’s “in the interest of Bowling Green, which is predominantly Christian, to realize it has to coexist with three Islamic mosques, a Hindu temple ... and three groups of Buddhists from Asia who came as refugees.”

“Religion matters whether one is frustrated by the bad news, especially conflicts that harm people in cultures otherwise religious, or learning the good news about beliefs and practices that are universal or different world views – religious studies can help understand who we are on Earth, when and where,” Mukonyora said. “The city of Bowling Green is now a Refugee City facing challenges that will only grow with climate change catastrophes around the world.”

Mukonyora was born in the African country of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. She studied History of Religions at Edinburgh University in Scotland and spent four years working toward her doctor of philosophy degree in theology at the University of Oxford in England.

She came to the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar in Religious Studies at the University of Virginia before accepting a permanent job at WKU.

Mukonyora said before she was born, formal education like we see in the U.S. was largely inaccessible to people in Rhodesia. She was among the first generation of people to receive an education, opening doors that would take her across the world.

Her life has been a long search for the ideas and beliefs that unite even the most opposing religions. Earth Care is another means of showing off those common values while helping educate the public on the reality of climate change.

“There’s nothing intended to be too heavy – it’s a time of fellowship and healing, and getting to see that we are only too human,” Mukonyora said. “Everyone is welcome, and we want as many voices that represent the town as possible.”

Earth Care will be held Thursday at Jody Richards Hall from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Parking will be available at the Chestnut Street South Lot and will be marked with a sign.

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