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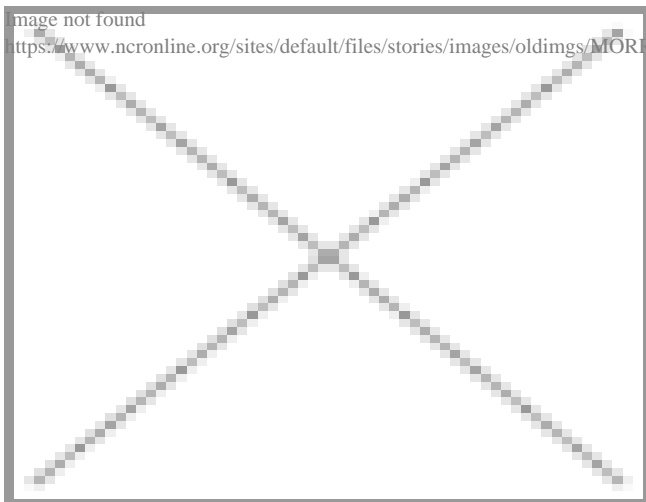
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Faith communities work toward sustainability at Michigan conference

by Charles Morris

Eco Catholic

Michigan Interfaith Power & Light and the Center for Sustainability at Aquinas College co-sponsored the *Leaps of Faith: Moving Sustainability Forward in House of Worship* Conference on Oct. 5, at Aquinas' campus in Grand Rapids, Mich.



For the seventh time total and the first time since 2008,

members of the faith community from across Michigan had the opportunity to hear experts on topics such as creating an earth care team in a congregation; what most religious traditions, including Pope Benedict VI, teach on climate stewardship; what peak oil is; how to make your church more energy efficient; the state of renewable energy; success stories from congregations; and energy efficiency legislation at the state and federal level.

Some of the workshops were technical in nature, such as an introductory tutorial on the Environmental Protection Agency's Portfolio Management Database system for houses of worship, presented by Steve Bell from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's EnergyStar Congregations program. Other workshops, such as how to make a rain barrel or create a rain garden, were hands-on.

During the lunch hour, Mark Clevey of the State Energy Office and Jennifer Alvarado of the Great Lakes Renewable Energy Association gave updates on the status of the Renewable Portfolio and Energy Efficiency Standard, and Bob Fegan of DTE Energy gave a report on an exciting project in the City of Detroit between MiIPL and DTE Energy to provide energy assessments and energy upgrades to more than 50 houses of worship.

The Conference culminated in a keynote by Dr. Andrew Hoffman of the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Michigan. A summary of Dr. Hoffman's lecture, "The Role of the Corporation in the 21st Century," will be featured in my next blog post.

Power of Networking

The Interfaith Power and Light movement and other NGOs value the power of nontraditional partnerships in service of a shared vision. Only at a conference like this have I witnessed power of partnerships among the faith community, the academic community, environmental NGOs, utilities, green businesses and the state and federal governments. Among the diverse sponsors of the conference were the Wege Foundation, the State of Michigan Energy Office, Mackinaw Power (a major wind developer) and DTE Energy.

In addition, attendees had the opportunity to meet various vendors of renewable energy, water conservation and partner retailers with MiIPL that provide significant discounts on ENERGY STAR appliances and energy efficient lighting/weather stripping to any congregant of a member congregation.

Carbon Neutrality and Sustainable Measures



We purchased carbon offsets to try to ensure carbon

neutrality. The meal options were based on local cuisine and vegetarian options. We used reusable dishes and almost all of the communication both in terms of conference planning and publicity was done electronically. We partnered with West Michigan Dioceses and Judicatories to publicize the conference in their own bulletins.

The story of the conference was featured on Grand Rapids Public Radio and in the Grand Rapids Press. Conferences such as *Leaps of Faith* reflect the power of partnerships. We are committed to an open-table fellowship model of speaking truth to power. The faith community, if it is to be an effective voice at the

table in the pursuit of a sustainable future, will build strategic partnerships while adding its own unique moral voice to the conversation.

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