

GreenFaith Launches Program to Green Faith-Based Schools

Jewish, Christian, Muslim Schools Represented

For decades, environmental initiatives have flourished in institutions of higher education, with numerous efforts underway to begin the “greening” of college campuses. Primary and secondary schools, however, have lagged behind in this area. In response, in the fall of 2006, GreenFaith launched the Green Flag, GreenFaith Schools program, a pilot effort to green the operation of New Jersey faith-based primary and secondary schools.

In the first program of its kind nationwide, GreenFaith is partnering with the Center for Health, Environment and Justice in Washington, DC to help faith-based schools conserve energy, use non-toxic products, and integrate care for creation into their teaching mission. Program Coordinator Stacey Kennealy described the aim of the program, saying, “By providing education, resources and support, we are aiming to turn these schools into role models that any school in the country can emulate.”



Fletcher Harper speaks to students at an assembly at Our Lady of the Lake in Verona.



Students at the Solomon Schechter School in West Orange take part in a waste audit.

A diverse group of schools is taking part, with Jewish, Christian and Muslim institutions represented. The schools currently taking part are Resurrection School in Jersey City, Our Lady of the Lake School in Verona, St. Patrick School in Chatham, Solomon Schechter Day School of Essex and Union in West Orange, Academy of the Holy Angels in Demarest, and Al-Hikmah Elementary School in Prospect Park.

Although each institution is unique in its approach to environmental issues, the program is evoking a consistent sense of motivation, hope and commitment. Joyce Raynor, coordinator of the project at Solomon Schechter Day School, said, “We are motivated through this program to enrich our school community by reducing our *p’solet* (the Hebrew word for ‘waste’) school wide. ... We feel that we can make meaningful changes in the behavior of many members of our school community – students, faculty and staff alike.” Amanny Khatthab, principal at Al-Hikmah school, echoes this

sentiment. “The program will reinforce what our faith already tells us, that the safety and security of the earth is the responsibility of each and every one of us ... and that each and every one of us can make a difference.”

Empowerment is a hallmark of the program, with leaders at each school learning from Kennealy and others about improving their school’s environmental performance. This will enable these schools to set an example for other institutions in coming years. “The expert support and valuable resources enable us to promote environmental initiatives within a faith context,” said Sr. Mary Agnes Sullivan, OP, Principal of Our Lady of the Lake. “The Program gives our school the encouragement to educate and mobilize our students and parish community on issues of environmental health.”

If your faith-based school would like to apply to participate in this program, contact Stacey Kennealy at skennealy@greenfaith.org or 732-565-7740.



Principal Amanny Khatthab, Teacher Reem Fakhry and students at Al-Hikmah Islamic School in Prospect Park celebrate their environmental work