

The 1st North American Emerging Leaders Multi-Faith Convergence



Faith Raising

Organized by GreenFaith the convergence took place at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 20th through 24th 2016. At the Convergence over 60 diverse millennial faith leaders - from over 20 states (USA) and across Canada - who care about climate change and the environment, and who are eager to mobilize their communities to protect the Earth gather in a spirit of friendship, hope and optimism. Juan Milling from Canada represented the Brahma Kumaris in this wonderful event.

DAY 1: Water Unites All of Us

Archbishop of New Orleans Gregory M. Aymond open the Convergence by saying that the time where all faith communities must come together to care for the Environment is now and that faith based groups have the moral power to make people change. Hope and optimism was the core message from the organizers. They wished all the participants to receive something valuable from this gathering and said the best work happens when we make friends. During the opening ceremony all the participants brought water from their own places therefore remembering how the spirit of water connects us all. The day ended with a beautiful Moon ceremony for all who identify as women.



DAY 2: New Orleans a City of Resiliency

On the second day of the convergence, young faith leaders had a chance to immerse themselves in Louisiana's history, heritage and cultural background by visiting two museums and the French Quarters. In one of the museums they had the opportunity to learn about New Orleans' ecosystems and the catastrophic effects of climate change, like hurricane Katrina, that affected so much of their coast lands and their people. At the end of the day, back in the University, a panel of three Katrina survivors shared their own personal story of survival. One of them highlighted that "Katrina caused a lot of damage but brought people together, including all of us tonight." Another panellist shared the story of how he lost his mom and granddaughter but, despite the grief and the lack of aid from the government, he never blamed anyone. He chose to use his trauma to become a better human being. It was a powerful evening of connection, hope and the future.



Day 3 : The direct Effects of Climate Change on the Bayou

In this day, young faith leaders had an incredible chance to appreciate the beauty of Louisiana's Bayou. They visited the wetlands, the marshes and the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium. Most importantly, they learned of the direct effect of Climate Change on the Bayou and how it is affecting people's lives by destruction of their environment, their culture and their economies. It is now known that the sea level is rising quite rapidly, therefore the amount of land that they are losing is at a rate of 1 football stadium every 38 minutes! The local community of the bayou is very concerned because of the risk of losing everything they have. Nevertheless, despite the clear reality of the effects of climate change in their lives, there is a powerful sense of resilience. The youth faith leaders were touched and inspired even more deeply to take action on how we can help communities that are affected in this way.



DAY 4 : Action Day

Young faith leaders joined Louisiana Bucket Brigade for a faithful climate action at the office of Congressman and climate denier, Steve Scalise, who has been leading Congress in opposing a carbon tax. As part of the faithful action leaders sang, offered prayers, speeches and BK Juan Milling offered a peaceful meditation recalling everyone that faith leaders are beams of light and hope. After a beautiful day of peaceful faith climate action, we ended our morning with a

delivery of sacred objects for Rep. Steve Scalise - a symbol of all the lives at risk of climate change. The day ended with a interesting summary of the outcome of the Paris agreement.



DAY 5 : A Community of Greatness

On the last day of the convergence, faith leaders gathered in different groups to share about their experiences. A sincere feeling of love, friendship and joy created a beautiful atmosphere among them. A special interfaith ceremony was prepared for the final moments of the convergence. BK Juan Milling had the opportunity to lead a meditation allowing the participants to have a powerful experience of peace; setting the tone and the intention for the whole ceremony. During this final event, songs, poems, mantras, readings and other special moments made the closing ceremony an unforgettable experience.

