Drew University

Tu'bishvat Interfaith Gathering

On February 4, students of all faiths at Drew University in New Jersey gathered for a meal and an interfaith conversation. This year the Jewish holiday of Tu’bishvat, which celebrates the “new year for trees”, fell during UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, and so Drew’s Center on Religion, Culture and Conflict used this holiday as a platform to bring together students of varying faiths – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu - for discussion and activities around ecology and environmental conservation. Passages from the New Testament, the Koran, and the Talmud were shared and discussed.

One student said, “The interfaith Tu'bishvat event was a great chance to show a lot of my non-Jewish friends one of the great universal themes in Judaism: Tikkun Olam, and more specifically conservational awareness. The idea of environmental responsibility resonates with pretty much all of the students on Drew's campus, which is why I think we had such a great turnout. I also learned that the seven species for Tu'bishvat are also found in the Koran, something that appeals to my Muslim-Jewish relations interest.”

Another student spoke about how the main themes of conservation and environmental responsibility are portrayed in the Christian faith. Sharing from Genesis 1:28, Romans 1:20, and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), highlighting how God reveals His glory through nature and how it is His will for us to preserve and care for His creation. “It was encouraging to be welcomed to share my faith with my friends and peers and I found the environment to be very open. You could sense the deep, mutual respect that everyone had for one another, despite any differences in faith. Through this event, I gained a much greater appreciation and understanding for the other faiths and I felt the time spent sharing a meal together and discussing our faiths has brought me much closer to my Jewish friends. It was great to see people of different faiths uniting for the same mission of conservation awareness and I am grateful for this new dialogue that has been started on our campus.”

In the spirit of Tu’bishvat – the new year for trees - students planted tomato seeds; some of these seedlings have grown into plants are inches tall already today! Finally, students blessed and dedicated a tree that now lives in Drew’s Interfaith Prayer Space.

