

## **EARTH EDUCATION: BARRY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP**

*New program gives college students hands-on experience in sustainable practices*

**By Sister Barbara Kelley, OP**



Barry University students visit the Adrian Dominican Motherhouse in Adrian, Michigan.

Initiated in May 2017, the Environmental Leadership Experience brings students of diverse educational backgrounds together at the Adrian Dominican Sisters Motherhouse campus. Through teamwork, hands-on work, talks, meditation, and tours of local sustainability efforts, the students learn about ecosystems and the principles and practices of permaculture, a system of learning from and working with nature in designing and implementing agriculture. Participants spend most of their time outdoors, working in the permaculture area of the Motherhouse. Service projects include installing deer fencing around the community garden; conducting a waste audit of the Motherhouse; planting an edible forest garden; and building a vermiculture system, in which worms are used to compost organic waste.



Barry University and Siena Heights University students build vermiculture system.

The program has an almost immediate impact, as participants are expected to return to their respective universities and implement campus sustainability initiatives based on what they have learned. But participants in the program also have found applications for their future. Rahbar Kahn, a Siena Heights student from Bangladesh who participated in the 2017 program, hoped to take the experience back to his native country and apply the sustainability practices that he learned in his farming.



Sarajen Butler, Barry University Law student and Ashley Ferguson, Barry University MSW student work on vermiculture bins and a rain garden.

Liza Avila, a social work major from Barry who also took part in the 2017 program, saw herself as implementing what she learned “on the policy side,” to help in the formation of sustainable practices. The Environmental Leadership Experience also has given students a new perspective on Earth and their place in nature. The meditation practices in the program have helped to ground Ashley Ferguson, a candidate for a master’s degree in social work from Barry. “Now I can see that you can look to nature to learn how to build,” she said. The program helped her to look at nature differently. “You start thinking of yourself as one of the elements, as part of

nature,” she said. Matthew Mohammed, a business and mathematics major at Barry, has learned to appreciate the beauty around him — whether in the green farming area of Adrian, Michigan, or the urban setting of Miami, Florida. Both Barry students participated in the 2018 experience. The Environmental Leadership Experience is coordinated by Elaine Johnson, Permaculture Specialist for the Congregation; Sister Corinne Sanders, OP, Director of the Congregation’s Sustainability Office; and Sister Carol Coston, OP, founding Director of Permaculture. Both Barry University and Siena Heights University faculty also collaborate in the program. Speakers during the experience include Sister Patricia Siemen, OP, Prioress of the Congregation and founding Director of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence, and staff members at local sustainability sites that the students visit.



Barry university students, Matthew Mohammed, Pa Sheikh Ngom, Victoria Martinez Mercado, and Jaedyn Amaro present to the AD Sisters about their accomplishments on the trip.

Barry University faculty and staff advisors for the 2017 and 2018 program years include Dr. Gerry Starratt, ADSOE, Dr. Ruth Tallman, CAS, Dr. Stephanie Bingham, CAS, and Dr. Meghan Homer, Alumni Relations.

For more information about this program or to serve as an advisor, please visit the [Environmental Leadership Experience page](#)