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Gaia House gets international attention UCM presents green interfaith living center in Finland BY MARLEEN SHEPHERD

FOR THE SOUTHERN

CARBONDALE - University Christian Ministries' plans for a green interfaith residential college is drawing an international audience. UCM Director Hugh Muldoon spent the week in Finland presenting the proposal for **Gaia House** at the Global Conference of University and College Chaplains, Campus Ministers and Religious Professionals.

Muldoon is co-presenting with the University of California at Davis, which is opening its own multi-faith living community this fall.

"We'll be contrasting two models of multi-faith ministry on campus, looking at what other people have done, and generating what we hope is a bit of a buzz about this whole idea of doing campus ministry differently in this century," Muldoon said before leaving for the conference.

An award-winning vision

The concept of multi-faith living and learning communities is catching on at campuses across the country. But current plans for Gaia would make SIU's among the most innovative.

The proposed \$18 million **Gaia House** will be solar-powered, super insulated, naturally ventilated, passively heated and cooled, and made from recycled materials.

Gaia House gets its name from the Greek earth goddess, Gaia (sounds like GUY-uh). The Gaia Theory views the earth as though it is a single organism in which "living and non-living parts are viewed as a complex interacting system."

Gaia's design won a merit award in the St. Louis area 2007 American Institute of Architect's Design Awards. The jury felt Gaia "could be very practically executed, all the while meeting the project's aggressive environmental goals."

"It will have the highest LEED certification and that guides a lot of the design," said Muldoon of achieving platinum ranking in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. "We'd love to be able to say that this is a zero-carbon building."

"Zeroing out" carbon dioxide emissions is a goal of the design created by the architectural firm HOK-St. Louis, a recognized leader in sustainable architecture.

Gaia House details continue to evolve as green innovations emerge through the planning stages, said Yolán Presley, a member of UCM's board of directors and the **Gaia House** development committee.

"The HOK architects really are on board," Presley said. "They really understand our vision."

Gaia designer Ryan Kopp of HOK is an SIUC School of Architecture alum recruited for the project by Robert Swenson, a UCM board member and SIUC associate professor of architecture.

SIUC architecture and engineering faculty and students are among those helping with and learning from the project. Robin Morrow, an SIUC junior in architecture from Atlanta, Ill., has been a part of planning Gaia living arrangements for the last six months.

Her final design studio project last semester was the ground floor of Gaia, which included a sacred space, meeting room, garden, coffee bar and kitchen.

Morrow said Gaia "goes beyond sustainability to learning to live and work in harmony with fellow human beings from all walks of life."

"I think it is important to know that Gaia is a living-learning laboratory, not a static entity, and that the process is as important as the outcome," she said.

Living and learning at Gaia

The 150 students who will live in this model of ecological sustainability will learn how to be leaders in it. They will shop at the fair trade and globally oriented convenience store onsite and tend the rooftop garden.

According to current plans, residents will also benefit from an interfaith chapel, a library with resources that focus on the goals of Gaia, office space for campus ministries, a workshop-studio for arts and crafts, and meeting spaces for a variety of university and community-related activities. The building will be car-free and provide more than 100 bike racks to "exemplify future transportation patterns." The publicly accessible Labyrinth Peace Garden on the current site will remain.

Gaia, which will replace the current UCM Interfaith Center on the corner of Grand and Illinois avenues, "is not just a green building," Muldoon emphasized.

"It's a green lifestyle that's spiritually based. It's all about depth and connection and getting in touch with the reality of our world, and where better to do that than a day-to-day living environment that is conscious of these values? It's a very exciting project that expresses our mission as much as possible."

UCM's establishment of its current Interfaith Center in 1962 was a commitment to inclusion and interfaith dialogue. The space supports the ministries of several faiths and social justice groups "working together to create a better world." Muldoon sees Gaia as the next step for a new century.

The mini United Nations will bring people of different faiths, cultures, ethnicities, races, and economic classes together to work on UCM's mission of "spiritual development, peace, justice and ecological sustainability.

"It's something no other group is trying to put together in the way we are thinking about bringing these together," Muldoon said.

Getting Gaia off the ground

Muldoon hopes networking at the conference will help generate financial support and ideas for raising the \$8 million in private donations Gaia is expected to need. Other sources of funding include Illinois Finance Authority loans. "It's an incredibly ambitious activity, but we think it's worth our efforts and energy," Muldoon said.

Planners hope to see Gaia become a reality within three years. But there is still considerable work to do, including partnering with the city, negotiating with funding authorities, and gaining approval of the SIU Board of Trustees. Consulting also continues with expert advisors and professionals in the community.

"It's been a long slow process but one in which our vision has continued to evolve and we think improve," Presley said. "We want **Gaia House** to be the best that it can be."

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