



The Struggle is real, but hopeful: BEING LGBT+ IN THE SOUTH

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Contributing Writer

Auslyn Davis appears to be just like every other college-aged woman, except for one thing. Auslyn used to be Austin.

"When I was attending Mars Hill, people there are a little bit more close-minded, so I was treated by professors and students kind of like an 'other,'" said Davis, who attended the



Photo by Molly Jaben

Auslyn Davis

Baptist university in Madison County from 2011-2013.

Roughly 38 percent of LGBT+ youth report suffering physical violence from their parents as a result of their sexual identity, according to the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network. A Lambda Legal study shows 26 percent of youth must leave home due to their sexual or gender identity.

"One day I came back from math, and I went to my door and there was a used condom

stretched over the doorknob, and they had written 'fag' on my door in chalk," said the 23-year-old student.

A study by GLSEN reveals 90 percent of LGBT+ students hear anti-LGBT+ remarks at school.

"There is more general opposition to LGBT rights in Southern states compared to the rest of the country. You don't have to look any further than polling numbers to see that that's true," said Lindsey Simerly, campaign manager of Campaign for Southern Equality.

The Campaign for Southern Equality focuses mainly on Western North Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi.

"In Alabama, for example, it is still illegal to talk about homosexuality in any way at all in the public school system, especially in sex education" Simerly said. "There are still several states that allow reparative therapy."

Reparative therapy refers to a psychotherapy aimed at changing a person's homosexuality based on the view that homosexuality is a mental disorder.

"A lot of stuff for youth is much more in the home. Do they get kicked out when they come out? Do they have a good support network around them? Are they in a school system that supports them or where it's banned for them to talk about homosexuality?" the Asheville City Council candidate said.

According to GLSEN, 84 percent of transgender youth

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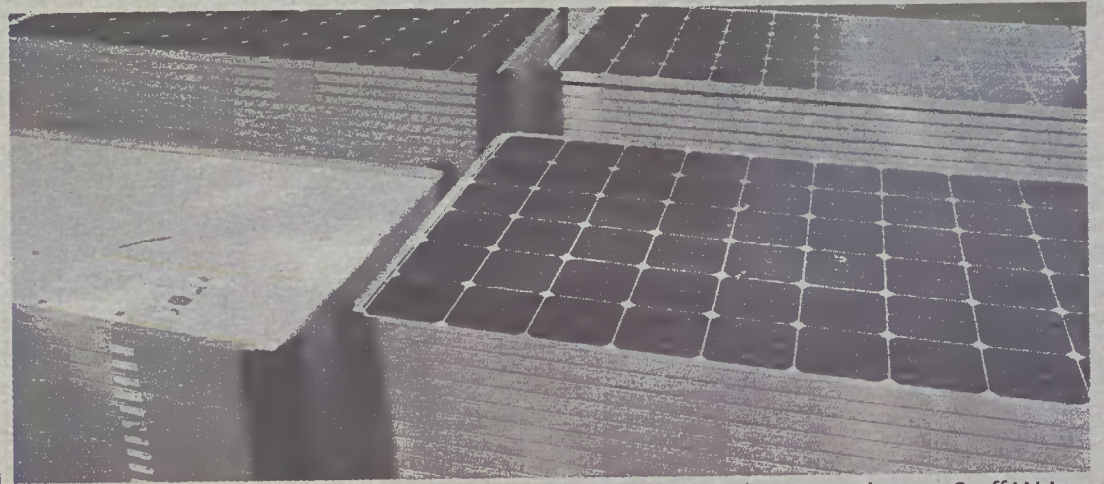


Photo by Rebecca Andrews - Staff Writer

Solar panels stand in stacks waiting to be installed.

Church responds to Pope's call for sustainable living

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In June, Pope Francis raised the topic of climate change to people all over the world with his encyclical document, *Laudato Si*.

"The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth," he said. "In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once-beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish."

He called for action on issues like pollution, chemical waste and global warming.

One local church took this message to heart. Saint Eugene's Catholic Church on Merrimon is installing solar panels on its roof in an effort to reduce its carbon footprint. Installation of the 146 solar panels began Sept. 8.

MB Haynes Energy Solutions of Asheville will install the panels. The panels will cover about 22 percent of the church's electricity needs.

The project began in March 2014 when a group of parishioners called the Care of Creation Committee approached Father Pat Cahill and the diocese of Charlotte with the idea.

Bill Maloney, a member of Care of Creation and the project coordinator, said they were nervous of being turned down

because, as far as they know, St. Eugene's is the first Catholic church in North Carolina to install solar panels.

"When you get into these things you really rely on prayer and the Holy Spirit to come through, because it really isn't our work. It's God's work," Maloney said. "With the diocese and the attorney and the financial officer, I thought those guys might just say no. In fact, the one guy told me they look at a lot of these and turn them down."

However, the diocese has been very supportive and started fundraising for the \$142,500 project in March 2015, Maloney said.

Six months and one day later, they reached their goal when the St. Eugene's Women's Guild donated \$4,000.

The fundraising process was unique in that anyone, parishioner or not, could donate any amount of money to the project and get a 35 percent tax credit and a 30 percent federal tax deduction.

"We were initially looking at an LLC, Limited Liability Company, that would be a group of maybe 10 parishioners on the project that would rent the roof and they would sell back the electricity and get all the tax credits," Maloney said. "We'd have to have an attorney,

it'd be hugely expensive, really difficult and it's not going to be the people's panels, it would be rich guy's panels. So I found that there is a thing called Senate Bill Three of 2007."



Photo by Rebecca Andrews - Staff Writer

Robin Steeples, UNCA senior and president of the Catholic Campus Ministry, signs the back of a solar panel to be installed on St. Eugene's.

North Carolina Senate Bill Three gives a 35 percent tax credit and a federal charitable tax deduction for anyone who donates to a non-profit for renewable energy before Jan. 1, 2016. This, Maloney said, allowed the project to be funded

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