

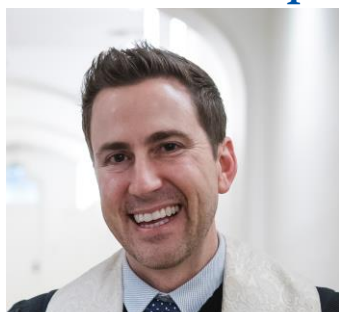


THE ECUMENICAL CHAPLAINCY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

CALLING OUR FRIENDS

Winter 2020/21 Volume 14

From the Chaplains



Chaplain – Tim Kennedy

We are often asked about life as a chaplain in the midst of Covid-19. As one might imagine, our patterns of work and ministry have changed, but one thing remains constant, God's love revealed to us in Christ.

Most of our programs, meetings, and counseling sessions have moved online. While we do not know how long the pandemic will last, we are committed to finding new and innovative ways to be in ministry to and with the campus community. We are privileged to work with an amazing team of staff and student leaders. Through modern technology, flexible ministry models, and a commitment to our mission of offering friendship in Jesus' name, the work of the Ecumenical Chaplaincy is thriving in new ways. Thank you for your partnership with us during these changing times.

By God's grace, and with your help, we will make it through this time together.

Caring for Community



St. George campus staff and intern meeting: Faris Nimry, Jeanette Unger, Tim Kennedy and Thérèse Nacaratto, November 17, 2020. Missing Esther Townshend and Fatima Mohammed

On the St. George campus, the ECUT staff and student interns have been meeting regularly on Tuesday mornings to check-in and to talk about the work we're doing and the programs we are planning. One such morning, we found ourselves in a long conversation about what work/ministry should look like right now. What do students need from another online event? How do we engage each other when so many of us are feeling stressed, worried, anxious, distracted, and overwhelmed? How can we support and encourage people? This year, more than ever, there is a realization that our relationships with each other matter. It isn't about programs for programs' sake, it is about the work of loving people and caring for each other. This is what God calls us to do - to love one another just as God loves us (John 15:12).

Esther Townshend, coordinator for the Student Christian Movement in the GTA, reflects: "What does campus community mean when nobody is on campus? Back in March, when the lockdown began, it was obvious. Everyone seemed shaken, anxious, and lonely. Many of us suddenly had far more free time. So SCM quickly moved our weekly Radical Bible Study online and created a bunch of new online spaces: prayer and meditation sessions, movie and games nights, and lots of unprogrammed Zoom hangouts. By September, "Zoom fatigue" had set in. Many students were longing for in-person connection, even while the pandemic's second wave rose. Many were privately struggling with mental health, but were reluctant to share

Caring for community....

this in online group meetings. I found my own energy and creativity ebbing. I eventually realized I needed to revise my vision of community. In my mind, a thriving campus community meant lots of people coming to weekly meetings, participating in programs, and developing friendships. This wasn't the year for that kind of growth. As it turned out, the things I didn't think of as "work" were the most effective community-building actions I took: messaging SCMerS to ask how they were doing, making hour-long phone calls for mutual emotional support, even inviting SCM alumni over for a backyard beer or two in carefully distanced lawn chairs. Maybe community, right now, looks less like a group of people gathering to talk about important issues and do important work, and more like a loose network of people who care for each other as best we can. Maybe that, in itself, is radical in a society where governments repeatedly prioritize productivity over human life."

While ECUT continues to offer and support online programs such as those planned by the Qu(e)rying Religion and Ecology and Spirituality interns, we are also aware of the small actions needed to support students. We are checking-in via email, text and social media. We are spending time on the phone with students who need to process all that is going on for them right now – from anxiety about being able to finish their programs to conflicts in relationships to feeling distant from God. Faris Nimry, an Emmanuel College Masters of Pastoral Studies student doing his placement on the St. George campus notices a "hunger for love" that comes up in different ways as we have deep conversations with each other.

Theologian, writer and pastor, Monica A. Coleman reflects on the Advent story of Mary meeting Elizabeth in this way: *"The lesson we all need for the beginning of our spiritual journeys: You aren't meant to travel this road alone."* This is the hope of our ministry and presence on campus – that we feel connected and supported by each other.



Qu(e)rying Religion online!

By Thérèse

My name is Thérèse and I am the Qu(e)rying Religion (QR) intern for the 2020-21 year! I'm a third year undergraduate student majoring in History and Criminology with a minor in Celtic Studies. Having the opportunity to work with the QR program is such a blessing.

The focus of QR is more than examining the intersection of sexuality and faith, though this is a vital part. Our main goal is to create a community that is accepting, supportive, and most importantly, a safe space for everyone. QR is all about building bridges that serve to connect people and hold each other up.

During Queer Orientation, QR held a panel that featured previous founders and members of the program. They shared how the QR program helped them during their time at the University of Toronto along with what the program can offer others. Our first QR Film night took place last week; we watched the 2011 film *Beginners* and had a lovely discussion afterwards about anything and everything. This is what QR emphasizes- open and honest discussion.

We will be hosting regular Queer film nights on Zoom starting in the New Year. Please be sure to join us and check out our website for more information: <https://queeryingreligion.weebly.com/>. I hope to meet you soon!

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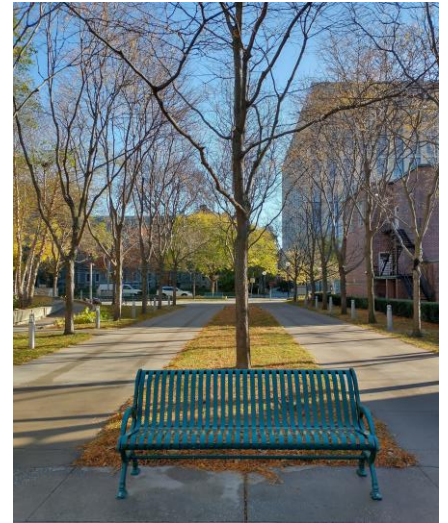
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ECUT 59 St. George Street, Toronto ON M5S 2E6
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Why I Joined the ECUT Board

By Alexandra Belaskie

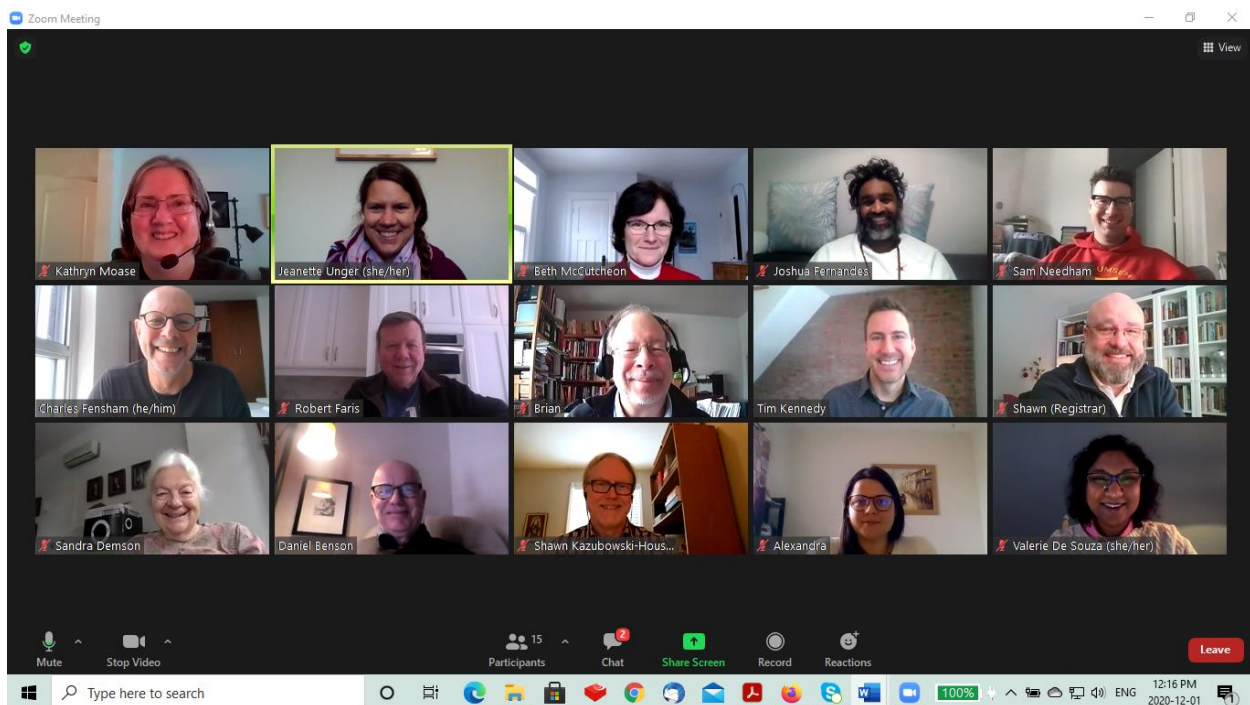


When I was in university, I struggled with coming to terms with how to access my faith, feeling lost between the community I grew up in, who I had become, the pressures of atheistic friends, and the questions I had at that time. I had dabbled in attending the occasional worship service, but never really found the right community feel to keep coming back.

In grad school, I felt as if something was missing and I kept coming back to the notion that I'd find that missing piece at church. I decided I wasn't going 'back to church' or making a commitment to going every Sunday. I decided to go as a philosophical venture- a way to dabble in questions about who I was and how I relate to the world and see what happened. The door I stumbled into happened to be full of the right people, and in retrospect I now understand God called me to be nurtured there.

This experience of re-entering faith as an adult was both daunting and enlivening. I empathise with anyone who is on a journey that feels that way. It can feel as if the first step into a church building is laden with an entire bucket of assumptions about who someone is or what God means to them. It took a long time to realize that faith could start as a commitment to asking questions and that was enough.

At the time and in retrospect, I have come to appreciate the depth of support and welcome my church community gave to me as I started trying to figure things out. That deep appreciation has now become a call in my life- to support the emerging and evolving faith of folks and helping them to find the right community to continue to nurture their faith. This call drew me to ECUT and eventually to join ECUT's board. ECUT's chaplains provide that space for inquiry and the community provides that cradled peer support. I believe that the existence of the chaplaincy and our chaplains helps to find those who are lost, like I was, and provide a home for them to grow.



ECUT Board members at a December 1, 2020 Zoom board meeting