



THE ECUMENICAL CHAPLAINCY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

CALLING OUR FRIENDS

Fall 2020/21 Volume 15

From the Chaplains



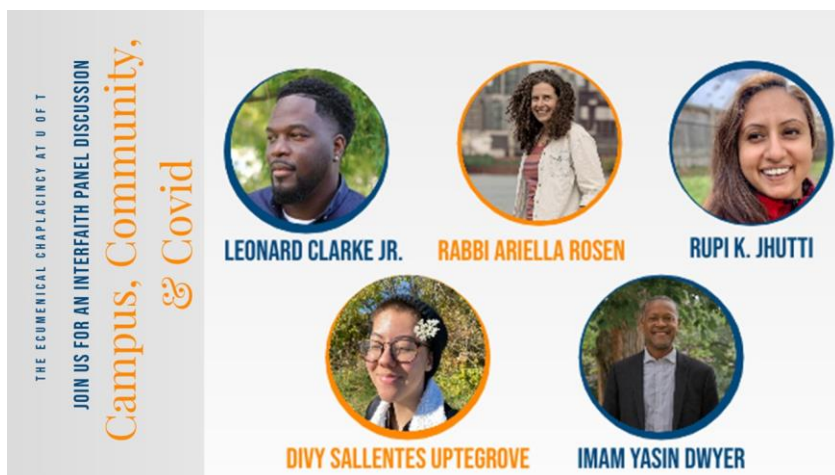
Associate Chaplain Jeanette Unger

“The place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5) God tells Moses as he approaches the burning bush. This is an invitation to notice the holy, especially in a dry desert, especially when we least expect it.

As I sit down in front of my computer screen for yet another Zoom, I have started reminding myself that the place where I am sitting is holy. The digital space that allows us to meet each other during this ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is holy. The Sacred shows up in all kinds of places, if we remain open.

In order to notice the holy ground, Moses is commanded to “shed” his sandals. Shed. Cast off. Leave behind. In her book, *Rooted*, Lyanda Lynn Haupt writes, “*this is the verb we use for the great transition of animals, the shedding of fur, the sloughing of an entire snakeskin, the emergence as the same creature, made new.*” What must we shed? What must we leave behind in order to notice the holy ground in our lives? What great transition are we being invited into?

Campus, Community & Covid



“*Survival is the key. When I think of community, I think of support. Community is necessary for physical, spiritual, and mental health.*” These opening words by Divy Sallentes Uptegrove, SCM national coordinator, started a meaningful conversation on campus, community & Covid.

On a chilly afternoon in late November, ECUT hosted an online interfaith panel discussion on the themes of campus, community and Covid. We invited five panelists, including campus chaplains and spiritual leaders, to share their ideas, insights and reflections. What is your working definition of community and how does it take shape on campus? What role does spirituality and religious tradition play? What impact has Covid had on campus community? What insights have you had about community and religion/spirituality during Covid?

Both Leonard Clarke Jr. (Jae), ECUT chaplain at UTSC, and Rupri Jhutti, Sikh spiritual care provider, talked about community as a place of belonging, familiarity and comfort, where students don’t have to explain who they are. Imam Yasin Dwyer, Muslim chaplain, and Rabbi Ariella Rosen, Jewish chaplain, spoke about creating community in pluralism, bringing students together who have a wide and diverse relationship to their religious practices and affirming that all of these identities are valued and beloved.

Religious and spiritual traditions can have a wide impact on community. Divy Sallentes Uptegrove (SCM) mentioned that Christianity can be a limiting place, especially for queer folks. So the SCM’s queer positive Bible studies,

Campus, community & Covid.....

where there is “no right answer,” makes a huge difference to students. Leonard Clarke Jr. also noted the hurt that Christian religious communities can cause, that community and faith/religiosity is not necessarily synonymous.

Imam Dwyer emphasized that when you carry faith, it doesn't necessarily translate into an easy or perfect life. You will have struggle. Faith, scripture, and tradition help us cultivate hope. For students who are scattered or dislocated and missing the community they hoped they would find at university, there has to be some meaning out of this disruption. That's where religion comes in.

The Jewish tradition tells us you can practice your faith alone, but it's better together, noted Rabbi Ariella. It can be done at home and a person can fulfill the obligation to pray three times a day by themselves, but there are certain prayers like the Mourner's Kadesh, that can only be said if ten people are present. This creates a sense of responsibility and commitment to support each other. *“The pandemic reminded me of the privilege of being able to take care of each other and the collective responsibility we have to take care of each other,”* said Rabbi Ariella.

Rupi Jhutti also emphasized the connection between community and religion as a place of support and help. Sikhs gather in *“pungat,”* a communal way of serving and eating food. Pungat was also disrupted by the pandemic. Students weren't getting an opportunity to serve and to support the farmers' protests and had to ask themselves, how do we visibly live out this mandate to serve? Finding a rhythm of regulation and a daily doing of something are important in finding our way through the pandemic.

As is true for many of us, the Covid pandemic has offered both opportunities and challenges to campus communities. For some students, the challenge was, how can I really explore who I am when I am still at home with my parents all long? How can I live out my beliefs? For example, the Sikh tradition highlights wonder and acceptance, but what does this look like during a pandemic? Students also felt lonely, isolated, uncertain, and confused. Imam Dwyer emphasized that his role as a chaplain means helping students ask the right question, which is, what is our response to all of this? How can we extract meaning from what has taken place?

On the other hand, moving online allowed students to connect across distance, without having to worry about a commute or other physical limitations. It broadened the horizons and the options for students. As Leonard Clarke Jr said, meeting in-person isn't going way, but COVID has taught has us you can meet online in meaningful ways.

Thanks to the panelists for their willingness to share their experiences and insights with us as we continue to live through this pandemic and start to reflect on the many ways it has shaped our lives, our studies, and our work.

Meet Charlotte, Student Chaplain



Charlotte (she/her) is completing the Master of Pastoral Studies (Buddhism) program at Emmanuel College. Her undergraduate degree is from Queen's University, where she studied history and religion. Before TST, Charlotte studied at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where she researched teachers' use of mindfulness in the classroom.

Charlotte grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition, and became interested in Buddhism as a young adult. This spurred a lifelong interest in and practice of mindfulness. She has work experience in group facilitation, student mentoring, and youth mental health. Charlotte is currently pursuing the Certificate in Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy with TST.

She is available for mindfulness-based counselling for students at U of T. She also runs a weekly Spirituality and Mental Health group with ECUT. She enjoys camping, chocolate anything, and reading novels.

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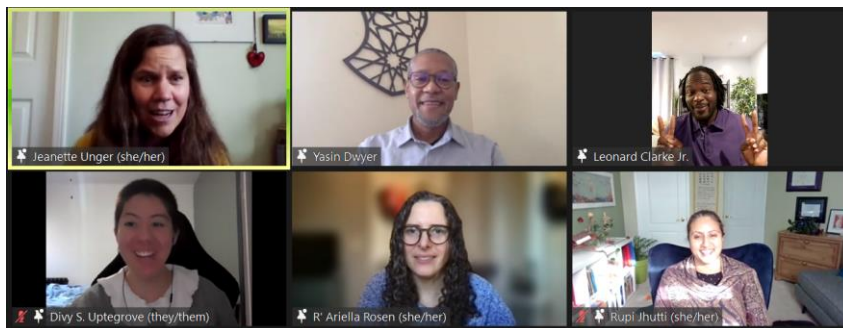
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Panelists for the Nov 23 ECUT discussion on Campus, Community & Covid

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LET'S TALK ABOUT MUSIC: A REFLECTION

BY LEONARD CLARKE JR, ASSOCIATE CHAPLAIN

1 Samuel 16:14-23 tells the story of David's ability to use music to calm the spirit of King Saul. Verse 23 reads, "Whenever the evil spirit from God bothered Saul, David would play his harp. Saul would relax and feel better, and the evil spirit would go away." This scripture highlights the affect of music on the king's mental health. But it also draws attention to music's liberating power.



Music is a universal language. It is a language that speaks to the hearts and souls of all humanity. It is a language that laments suffering from the bottomless pits of despair, and communicates the joy of survival from the hearts of the victimized.

Music has always given humanity a voice. A voice that speaks reason in the midst of confusion. A voice that maligns injustices and sounds the call for equality. A voice that comforts the oppressed, heals the sick, and strengthens the weak. Music has the ability to transform lives and restore communities. In essence, music can be the source of humanity's greatest joys, and it can come from the depths of humanity's greatest suffering.

One brief example of the liberating power of music can be found in the language of the Negro spirituals. Negro spirituals were a major part of the African oral traditions and served to encourage, elevate, restore and rejuvenate the heart and body of the enslaved African. Negro spirituals were more than just a musical expression, they were the way enslaved Africans communicated their struggles in a language only they could understand. Spirituals told of pain and agony. They were a language that connected African souls to each other and offered strength and encouragement in the midst of an inhumane way of life.

However, spirituals are not relegated to the experience of enslaved Africans. A spiritual can also speak to the souls of people across racial and cultural divides. A spiritual can also speak to the predicament of gays and lesbians, refugees, the physically impaired, and the mentally disadvantaged.

For instance, Lady Gaga's "Born this way" is a spiritual that affirms the humanity of individuals who struggle with identity and body image. She declares that there's nothing wrong with being who you are because God made you that way, and God doesn't make mistakes.

So, as you go about your day think of your favourite song. Think about why that song brings you so much joy. Do you remember the first time you heard that particular song? How did it change your perspective? Did it move you? Did it change you in any way, and why?

That's the liberating power of music. It is a universal language of hope, faith, freedom and joy.