

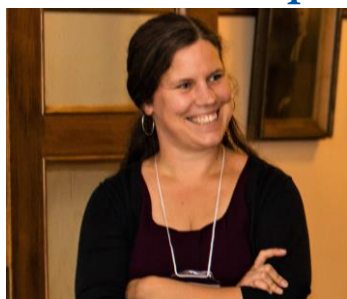


THE ECUMENICAL CHAPLAINCY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

## CALLING OUR FRIENDS

Fall 2022 Volume 16

### From the Chaplains



Chaplain Jeanette Unger

At the first grief support group this fall, a student remarked that she attended the group last year and found it helpful, in part because she met another student whose mom had also died. They connected outside of the group and have become friends. Having a friend who “gets grief” has kept her going through hard moments.

A few years ago, I remember a staff person at Hillel telling me that one of the most radical things he could do on campus was to introduce one student to another.

Connection, friendship and community - being in relationship with others is important to our well-being and flourishing. This is exemplified in Jesus’ ministry and the promise that where two or three are gathered, God’s Spirit is present. This is what we strive to offer as campus ministry, to build community and to connect students to each other and to the God who loves them (and all of us) deeply.

*Jeanette*

### A New Vision for Campus Ministry



The Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto (ECUT) is excited to announce the unanimous adoption of a new Three-Year Strategic Plan by ECUT's Board of Directors at its 2022 Annual General Meeting. This plan will serve as a roadmap for launching a new vibrant, diverse, and inclusive spiritual community grounded in the Christian faith at the University of Toronto.

This new strategic plan grows out of The Ecumenical Chaplaincy’s vision of offering a ministry of friendship in Jesus’ name. In partnership with Knox College, Emmanuel College, the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and numerous other churches, organizations, and individuals, ECUT seeks to forge a new path forward in campus ministry for our current context. This “new path” is rooted in and stands in solidarity with ECUT’s historic work for justice and inclusivity, while recognizing the new challenges faced by students today.

Over the past several years leading up to the pandemic, ECUT staff noticed a shift in the cultural climate on campus. Many students reported feeling isolated and lonely. Following the untimely deaths of several students at U of T, ECUT began conversations related to how we might respond. The Covid Pandemic of the past couple of years worked only to further exacerbate the problem. Despite the development of technologies that help connect people as never before, students continued to express a sense of loneliness and longed for authentic connections with God and others. In an effort to help

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## A new vision.....

bridge this divide, the Ecumenical Chaplaincy developed a bold new Strategic Plan for the next era of campus ministry at the University of Toronto. Through innovative programming in worship, small groups, leadership development, and service, ECUT will focus its efforts on building a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive spiritual community as an antidote to the pervasive loneliness so apparent on campus today.

This plan is the fruit of many conversations held by members of ECUT's staff and Board of Directors over the past several years. It is not meant to replace ECUT's current Vision and Mission statements, but rather serve as a roadmap for more fully living into ECUT's Vision and Mission on campus and in the world.

Central to this new plan is the development of a vibrant community of faith on campus, a place where all students can connect with one another and grow in their knowledge and love of God. The author of the book of Hebrews writes: "Do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but spur one another on towards love and good deeds..." (Hebrews 10:24-25a). Creating space for students to live life together, support one another, pray for one another, serve others, and grow in faith together is the primary purpose and goal of this new initiative.

The first year of this new strategic plan will be devoted to finding best practices for connecting with current students and developing methods for remaining connected with them through social media, email, and other online resources. The second year will focus on the creation of a weekly gathering of students around food, worship, fellowship, and the study of scripture. During the third year, students will be invited to engage in service to the broader campus and world. You can read more about the plan in depth on ECUT's website: <https://ecut.ca/strategic-plan/> or contact Rev. Tim Kennedy at [tim.kennedy@utoronto.ca](mailto:tim.kennedy@utoronto.ca)

As we reflect on the pandemic, we are aware of the unique challenges faced by students today. We believe ECUT is called to meet these challenges by building a community where all students are welcomed, embraced, and empowered to grow in faith hope, and love, and to use their God-given gifts to help make the world a better place. You will find in this newsletter a few stories of students whose lives have already been impacted.

We cannot do this important work alone. The prayers, encouragement, and support of all our partners are an indispensable part of the success of this plan. Please consider signing up as a Vision Partner by scanning the QR CODE with your smart device today!

We are asking three things of all our Vision Partners:

- 1.) Pray for our campus ministry daily,
- 2.) Support our campus ministry financially,
- 3.) Promote our campus ministry within your sphere of influence.

Thank you for your past support of ECUT and we look forward to your continued partnership as we begin this new season of campus ministry at the University of Toronto. As always, we express to you our most sincere thanks and our personal commitment to ensure faithful stewardship of the financial resources entrusted to us.



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**Students at an Ecology & Spirituality Retreat**

## Grateful to Our Friends

Many thanks to the following donors and sponsors who contributed to ECUT in 2022 as of November 30, 2022. ECUT is a CRA registered charity (884133315RR001). We do our best to acknowledge all donations received, let us know if your name is missing. (\* Monthly donations through PAR or Canada Helps)

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## Queer & Christian at U of T

By Luke Cui



I attended a conference and heard a quote that left a deep impression on me, "Many gays are loved and known, many Christians are loved and known, but many gay Christians are not. They are either loved but not known to their Christian families or known but not loved by the gay community. Why can't they get both?" The conference I went to was called "The Reconcile and Reform Conference -- The Great Communion", which took place in January 2020. It was a meaningful gathering of LGBTQ+ Christians from around the world. I was working to start a Queer Christian Fellowship at U of T during that time, but it wasn't an easy journey. I was sure there should be many gay Christian students like me, but it was difficult to identify them due to the stigma that still exists. After much effort but limited results, I began to doubt if such a fellowship would be possible. Then this conference caught my attention and reaffirmed that building an inclusive Christian community is in fact possible.

With Tim's encouragement, I registered and applied for a grant to be a volunteer to help fund the trip. I received the grant which helped pay for part of the trip and ECUT identified a donor to help out as well.

Two things left me with a deep impression:

- 1. What I did at U of T matters:** The world desperately needs loving, safe, and caring places for gay Christians to grow in their faith and find acceptance and compassion.
- 2. I am not alone:** I met many who were doing their best to welcome and support LGBTQ+ Christians. I am not alone in fighting this good fight. I have millions of brothers and sisters in Christ by my side.

From this conference, I realized that creating a safe and loving community for gay Christians really matters and most importantly is possible. Through my experience as an intern with ECUT, I have learned that gay people and Christians don't have to be two sides fighting against each other. There are many who are willing to work together to create loving Christian communities that value everyone's voice.

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## ECUT means to me....

by Nic Da Silva



I'd like to share with you all my experience with the Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto (ECUT). I first came across ECUT in the summer after my first year in the Master of Pastoral Studies program at Emmanuel College. I was at a Pride event for LGBTQ+ friends and allies within the Christian community. While I myself no longer identify as a Christian (I was raised Catholic), I am someone who is hungry for spiritual growth and wholeness. ECUT is made up of people who are deeply compassionate and see their spirituality in a non-exclusive way. They value and celebrate all spiritual approaches, whether that be theist or non-theist, and they invited me to give a talk on queer faith and spirituality during UofT's Queer Orientation week which was a great opportunity for me to live out my own experience of inner healing and spiritual wisdom.

I wish more people knew about ECUT. They are super accessible and available throughout the week, they're well trained and approachable, and have been a huge source of compassionate and deep support for me at UofT, which is not always an easy thing to find in the city. I feel like they are the type of people who you can tell anything to without judgement and in total safety. I hope that as ECUT continues their work at UofT, more students can find out about the help they provide as chaplains and friends and access this amazing source of support.