



THE ECUMENICAL CHAPLAINCY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

CALLING OUR FRIENDS

Spring 2023 Volume 17

From the Chaplains



Chaplain Tim Kennedy

As another academic year comes to an end, we wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to our mission of building a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive Christian community on campus. At ECUT, we are dedicated to ministering to all campus community members, fostering an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered as individuals created in God's image. We are working tirelessly to establish safe and inclusive spaces where students from various backgrounds, perspectives, orientations, and identities can thrive together as one community. While our journey towards greater inclusivity is always ongoing, we eagerly look forward to collaborating with other campus groups to strengthen our efforts in the upcoming year. Thank you for your partnership as we strive to extend to all the unconditional love, abundant mercy, and radical welcome revealed to us in Jesus Christ, creating a campus culture that celebrates the full diversity of God's creation.

Partnering for Student Community



Rev. Michael Blair, April 25, 2023

On Tuesday, April 25th, the Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto, in partnership with The Centre for Religion and Its Contexts at Emmanuel College, organized an event called "Partnering for Student Development: A Conversation with Michael Blair, Executive Secretary of the United Church of Canada." The event aimed to bring together various stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, administrators, pastors, campus ministers, donors, and supporters, who shared a common interest in fostering a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive Christian community on the University of Toronto campus.

Michael Blair, drawing upon his experience in campus ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, discussed the crucial role of chaplaincy in supporting students spiritually throughout their academic journey. As a ministry of the church, university chaplaincy plays a vital role in creating a safe, liberating, and affirming space where individuals have the freedom to explore their faith and construct meaning from their diverse life experiences.

Campus ministry provides students with a unique opportunity to ask significant questions about meaning, purpose, and the intersection of education and faith. According to Blair, one of the fundamental roles of chaplaincy is to create spaces where students can ask these questions and make meaning out of life while honouring and celebrating their different lived experiences. These spaces should be affirming and liberating, enabling students to make choices that are supported and respected.

Partnering for Student Community

Furthermore, chaplaincy has an opportunity to guide students in actively contributing to the well-being of society. By drawing inspiration from Isaiah 58:12, which speaks of rebuilding ancient ruins and restoring streets to live in, Blair emphasized that campus ministry helps students hear the call of God and discover how their lives can contribute to the common good. By fostering an appreciation for the complexity and diversity of the world, campus ministries prepare students to think deeply about important issues and utilize their unique skills, education, and faith perspectives to work towards creating more just and inclusive communities.

Chaplaincy also has the capacity to create a space for individuals to explore faith in an inclusive manner, respecting the diverse ways in which others express their beliefs. Within this context, students can engage in thorough examination and reflection to deepen their faith in a healthy and life-giving way. Blair emphasized that this approach is not about syncretism or reducing faith to the lowest common denominator but about being in a relationship that strengthens each person's perspective and understanding, enabling them to express their own faith in a life-giving manner.

In addition to Blair's keynote address, the event provided participants with an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the ongoing work of the Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Toronto. Attendees heard from current students, staff, and donors, who shared their experiences and perspectives. One student, Nic da Silva, praised the inclusive and supportive nature of ECUT, stating that it represents a safe space where students can be themselves, regardless of their theological or worldview differences.

The conversation with Michael Blair sparked reflections on the potential of nurturing campus ministries that embrace inclusivity and diversity. Within the fertile ground of higher education and faith exploration, campus ministries like ECUT play an essential role in helping students make meaning out of life and live faithfully in the world. Through collaborative partnerships, ECUT aims to cultivate vibrant, diverse, and inclusive campus communities, positively shaping students' lives and inspiring them to become agents of hope and positive change in the world.

Lenten Taizé



Throughout the season of Lent, the Knox College chapel became a sacred space for worship, prayer, and reflection during weekly Lenten Taizé Services. This transformative series of services, held every Tuesday, was a collaborative effort between ECUT, The Christian Reformed Chaplaincy, and Knox College, bringing together students, faculty, staff, and community members in a shared spiritual journey.

As the services unfolded each week, the Knox Chapel became a haven for prayer and reflection. The gentle melodies and harmonies of the Taizé chants, evoked a sense of the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace among participants. The simplicity and repetition of the chants allowed individuals to enter a contemplative space, letting go of the busyness of everyday life and opening themselves to the Sacred Presence.

The feedback we received from attendees was very positive, with many expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to engage in such a spiritually enriching experience. Students shared how the services provided them with a much-needed respite from the pressures of academic life and offered a space for solace and renewal. Faculty and staff expressed appreciation for the inclusive and reflective nature of the services, finding them conducive to their own personal spiritual growth. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who participated, contributed, and supported the Lenten Taizé Services. Your presence and engagement made these services truly special and meaningful. We are grateful for the support of the campus community and for the shared commitment to fostering a vibrant spiritual life on campus.

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In memory: The Rev. Karen Bach

It is with sadness and deep gratitude that we remember Rev. Karen Bach, who died on April 13, 2023. Karen was the founding chaplain of the Ecumenical Chaplaincy at U of T (1990-2002). In her role as chaplain, Karen did everything! She hosted spaghetti suppers; facilitated weekly meditation groups; advocated for and supported sexual assault survivors; presided at memorials for students who died on campus; persuaded the university to make multifaith worship space a priority; and provided compassionate pastoral care and counselling for students. Despite the demands that came with being a campus chaplain, Karen was solid in her belief that *“the opportunity to be an agent of support and sometimes transformation in people’s lives is not only an honour, but also a sacred trust. God calls each of us to be God’s hands, arms, eyes and feet according to our own particular gifts wherever God leads us.”*

Karen was respected and well loved on campus by students, staff and faculty alike. Students who knew her described her as an incredible support, present in times of crisis and unafraid to speak up.



Rev. Karen Bach

Rev. Jenni Leslie, minister at Kitchissippi United Church in Ottawa, recalls the compassionate support Karen offered to her when she was a student at U of T: *“When our floor at New College experienced the sudden, accidental death of one of our first-year students in early 1991, (I was a second year senior house rep), Rev. Karen Bach came and spent time with us as a group. As a group we mourned openly, and Rev. Karen helped us to process our grief. I remember feeling so comforted by her simple affirmation that God was with us in this time of mourning. My call to ministry came out of my friend’s death: I felt called to sit with people and to reassure them that God is with them. Rev. Karen’s warm and gentle presence was a balm for me and she inspired my ministry of presence.”* Sheilagh McGlynn, animator for youth ministries in the Anglican Church of Canada, reflects: *“Karen was such an incredible support when I worked as UofT SCM coordinator. She wasn’t concerned with rocking the boat and did so on a number of occasions. She was a real model for me in how to do ministry.”*

In a 1998 chaplaincy report to the board, Karen wrote: *“Campus ministry continues to feel a bit like providing light in the darkness; providing a non-anxious and encouraging presence in the midst of anxiety and chaos; and helping to light the way for those struggling to find their path. It is hard work because nothing is for certain, but it is rewarding work because of the limitless opportunities which present themselves to impact people’s lives in a positive and caring way. Working every day at being the face of Christ to all those whom I meet is a challenge but continues to be what gives me life. I am ever grateful for the opportunity which I have been given to serve God and the church in this very special ministry.”*

Karen was diligent in writing “Comments from the Campus,” updates about campus ministry that were sent to the ECUT board and supporters. She ended most of these updates with gratitude, expressing her thanks for the individuals, presbyteries and churches that offered both financial and prayerful support. *“I minister each day with a strong awareness of Gods’ faithful servants holding me and this ministry up to God, and for that I am eternally grateful.”*

We at ECUT are grateful for Karen’s legacy and are honoured to continue the good work that she so faithfully started. Our prayers go to Karen’s family and friends as they mourn this huge loss. She will be missed.