

Why Support our College Chaplains?

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We make promises at an infant's baptism: parents as well as gathered witnesses. "Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture this child by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging him to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church?" And we, the faithful and committed, say yes. Yes we will do all that we can to guide and support a young baptizand. Yes, we will provide for him or her as they grow into the faith. Ministries on college campuses are extensions of this baptismal promise. The need for spiritual guidance and nurture is very real on college campuses today and our support of such ministries signal our continued commitment to our baptismal promises.

The college experience is a formative one. It offers a time for reflection, for intentional expansion of horizons and it often grows the beginnings of vocational identity. Students try out new ways of being in relationship, they adopt alternative perspectives on their world and re-evaluate values of all sorts. Ministry on college campuses affirms the importance of our religious practice and perspective amidst the processes of this particular time of growth.

Spiritual interest is alive and flourishing on college campus's even as interest in "organized religion" is on the wane. Congregational support for campus ministry allows for some amazing experiences in the lives of the searching *and* the secure. In the spring of 2000, a student who had never

been to church joined us for our midweek prayer service. One year later she was baptized and joined a Presbyterian church in her home town. Alum from Union College and the Protestant Ministry met while at a wedding 4 years after his graduation. He was in the army and serving as the assistant for weekly services. He was wondering if now was the time to be confirmed; this from a student who would inspect every prayer we offered in unison to make sure he could say them with integrity. Another student, a pre-med candidate who had rarely attended any church before joining Campus Protestant Ministry, took a year off prior to graduate school to explore a possible church vocation. Our presence on campus has allowed for these reflective individuals to find their way to a church with which they were previously unfamiliar.

The newest program at Union College involves peer ministers. This program invites a student to propose a project and while completing that project he or she meets with the Campus Protestant Minister weekly to reflect theologically on their experience. With one participant last year, this year we have at least 3 who will apply. It is a program that impacts the student as well as those around that student.

The next time you offer your assent to the baptismal vow for an infant in your congregation, perhaps you will also offer a prayer that where ever that child goes during the formative post adolescent years there will be a program like those offered by campus ministers that he or she will explore faith in such a way as to make it more fully their own.

