

CAMPUS CHAPEL
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INKLINGS

the newsletter of campus chapel ministries
www.campuschapel.org



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AN OPEN-DOOR PROPOSITION

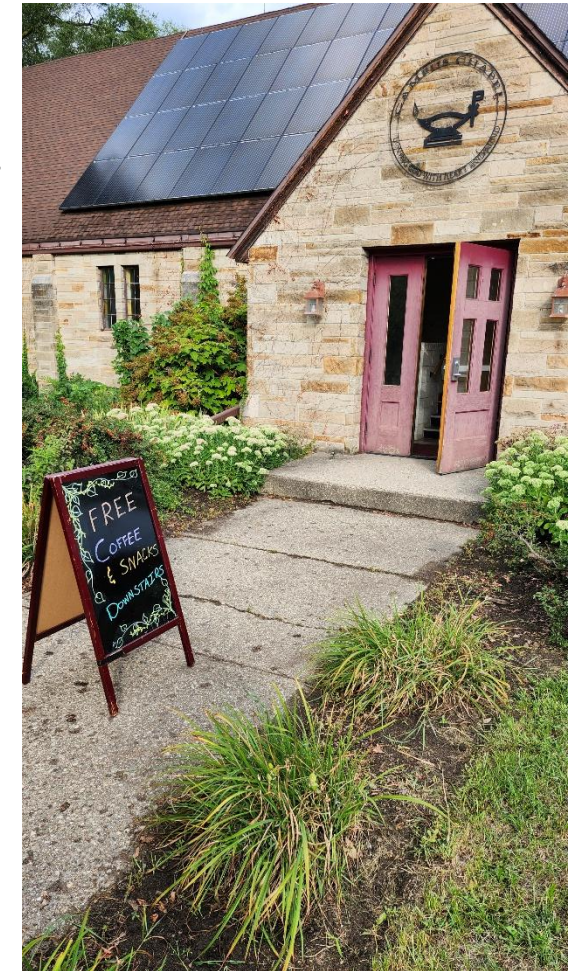
For the first few weeks of the academic year, while the weather is still warm, we prop open the doors to the Chapel. It's a way to let people know they're welcome to wander in and check out the place. Of course, we hope they will linger, enjoy a cup of coffee, and strike up a conversation. If it means we also welcome in more than a few bugs and the leaves from our beloved linden tree blow in, it's worth the tradeoff.

One Thursday in September we had the doors open and our sign out, and a few undergrad students meandered in. After I welcomed them, offered free coffee and muffins, and explained a bit about the Chapel, one of them asked, "Is there a catch? Do we have to sign up for anything?" After I assured him the snacks and the space really are free, he added, "But I'm Jewish." I responded, "We mean it when we say all are welcome here. Make yourself at home."

Lately, I have been thinking about the available space at the University of Michigan, both literal and metaphorical. While the campus footprint is continually expanding (new dorms AND a new central campus recreation building opened this fall!), it seems there is less and less space available. Especially rare are the unallocated, freely available spaces for people to simply be. Two weeks ago, a UM professor and I were simply looking for a table or couch or bench on campus to sit and talk while drinking the coffee we had just purchased, and we had to circle nearly all of central campus to find a spot!

It's also difficult to find distinctly religious or spiritual space at UofM. Long gone is Lane Hall serving as home for the Student Religious Association and then the Office of Ethics and Religion. The Student Life division now has a two-year-old fledgling program for Religious, Spiritual, and Secular Life, with a small but mighty staff of two people. But they have no physical home, just cubicles in an admin building. For years, our joke has been that the only truly religious space actually on the UM campus is the football stadium.

Of course, we want the Chapel to be part of addressing both of these needs. For so many of us, the Chapel sanctuary is a holy space of peace, rest, and connection to God. I love it when some of those people who wander in go upstairs and sit for a moment, enjoying a
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sacred encounter (whether they have the language to articulate that or not). And keeping the Chapel basement a space of welcome and hospitality means we run through a lot of coffee and snacks, but it brings me joy to see friends reconnecting, study groups hard at work, and community members just killing time between classes or meetings.

This year we’ve been able to keep the space open even more thanks to our new part-time office manager, Madison Allen. She’s always delighted to greet people with a warm smile and her southern hospitality. And, of course, it’s your support that enables us to live into this calling to be sacred space at the University of Michigan, so thank you!

- Pastor Matt

REFLECTIONS FROM A BOARD MEMBER

By Ross Vander Meulen

As a new school year begins and the seasons change, I’m reminded of God’s providence as I watch the hours of daylight dwindle and the



leaves start to change. While it has been over five years since I was a graduate student attending the Campus Chapel, having the opportunity to worship with this community recently reminds me of its beauty and uniqueness. Surrounded by a university that is constantly changing and evolving, the faithfulness and presence of the Chapel is a refreshing change of pace.

Living in Detroit and working for an engineering consultant who is always looking for the next project, I similarly need to remind myself to reconnect with God through the beauty of creation and Christian community. Recently, this was achieved personally through both an extended weekend away in northern Ontario and also through participating in the Chapel’s journey through *The Prologue to the Story*. This fitting sermon series for the start of an academic year, focusing on Genesis 1-11, demonstrated the importance of relationships as an



The annual bike trip to Dexter Cider Mill continues, and this year’s outing had perfect fall weather!

essential part of God’s narrative in a world where loneliness and isolation abound. In closing, I’m grateful for the beauty of the Campus Chapel community to cultivate a place of belonging that is rooted in God’s intended design for humanity.

Are you interested in serving on the Campus Chapel Board? Our Board members serve for three-year terms, and our monthly meetings are on Zoom, so you can be a board member from anywhere! Send Pastor Matt a note for more details.

TABLING AT FESTIFAITH

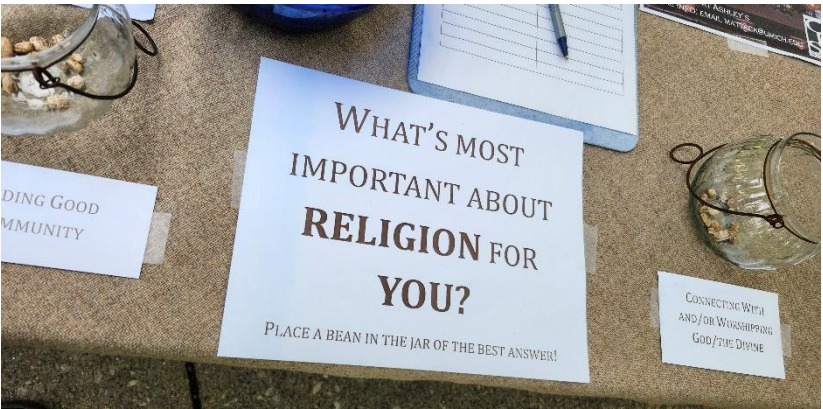
For many years a cornerstone welcome event at Michigan has been FestiFall. For an afternoon during the first week of classes, the Diag is overrun by hundreds and hundreds of student organizations. We set up tables with info and swag, hoping to catch the attention of new students. It has grown so large, there are now two sessions, afternoon and evening, with an absolutely chaotic changeover in between. Students report that while it is fun and exciting, it can be overwhelming.

In response, the office of Religious, Spiritual, and Secular Life, along with religious student organizations, has developed FestiFaith as an alternative. With only 50 organizations or so tabling, it’s far more manageable (and peaceful!). It’s also an opportunity for representatives of these religious organizations to connect with one another and learn more about how we approach our work.



Beyond the tabling, the event includes a variety of activities for students. There is a central stage with performances by groups ranging from the gospel choir to the Bharatanatyam dance group. Students have the opportunity to build themselves a “Spiritual Wellness Kit” that includes candles and incense, essential oils, small succulent plants, and a variety of other items. (A member of the Chapel community quipped that his spiritual wellness kit would simply be a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer.) A particularly popular option this year was an on-site Tarot reader who offered students free Tarot readings. The waiting line stretched across the Diag.

Obviously, FestiFaith is a fascinating and vibrant interfaith space, so our attempt to engage the conversation this year was a simple (and non-scientific) survey. Students could place a bean in a jar that matched their answer to the question, What’s most important about religion for you? The results are listed below, but the most important outcome was the conversation generated as students considered the options and then made their choice. Asking “Why did you choose that one?” generated some fascinating responses.



“What’s Most Important About Religion For You” Survey Results

Answering the Big Questions: 17
Teaching How to be a Good Person: 25
Finding Inner Peace: 34
Finding Good Community: 36
Connecting with and/or Worshipping God/the Divine: 49