

A Unique Chaplaincy Ministry

How does a chaplain at a Seventh-day Adventist college create an environment that fosters the integration of faith and learning? When I accepted the position of campus chaplain at Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences (Orlando, Florida) in October 1999, I was faced with this dilemma.

In comparison with other Adventist colleges and universities, Florida Hospital College has unusual demographics. With these come both challenges and strengths:

- *A diversity of faith traditions* (43 percent of the students are Seventh-day Adventist, the rest come from a variety of different faith traditions including Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim);
- *A large number of commuting students* (only 18 percent of the students live in the residence halls);
- *A large majority of female students* (80 percent, with many single parents);
- *Age diversity* (55 percent of the students are over 22 years of age);
- *Students enrolled in an intensive health-care program* (58 percent of students are in specific health-care programs, while about half of the other 42 percent are enrolled in prerequisites to enter one of these programs).¹

How does a chaplain at a Seventh-day Adventist college with many non-Adventist students create an environment that fosters the integration of faith and learning?

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Chaplain Roberta Fish, (center), author of this article, ministers to students through teaching and counseling on the campus of Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences.

BY ROBERTA M. FISH

It seemed likely that “the way it is usually done” wouldn’t work here. But what *would* work? I needed the Holy Spirit’s help to know how to minister to a religiously diverse, commuter-based, largely female, adult, and program-focused student body.

Along with the challenges came some wonderful resources. The administration, faculty, and staff enthusiastically supported a strong spiritual focus. Roy Naden, a consultant who worked with the college in its continuing process of mission redevelopment during faculty/staff pre-week in 2000, had this to say:

“The most dominant finding of the research is profoundly encouraging. Never, in research conducted by N associates at academy, college, and university levels, and all levels of the church structure from local churches to the North American Division, have we heard such frequent, spontaneous, and heartfelt expressions about the dynamic spiritual environment of an institution. And never have we heard so many people speak the name of Christ

with such spontaneity and obvious joy.”²

Another great resource that enhanced campus spiritual life was the influence of our parent institution, Florida Hospital. Its focus on the “healing ministry of Christ” helps weave a strong spiritual thread through the lives of the students, fac-

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The mission of the Ichthus Drama and Music Company is to share God's radical passionate love through their performances.

ulty, and staff at the college.

The third resource was the diversity of my job description. I was to minister in three areas—teach religion classes, counsel students, and coordinate campus ministries. This has allowed me to influence the lives of students in many ways.

The Grace Group

Since one person could not “do it all,” I knew I needed to enlist the faculty and staff from the very beginning to assemble a successful plan for spiritual development on campus. I focused first on an area about which faculty and staff had voiced concern. We had many single mothers who were trying to improve their lives by studying to become health-science professionals. While most had adequate financial funding for their educational needs, they struggled with other needs—food, clothing, Christmas presents for their children, etc. We established the Grace Group—faculty and staff members and others who want to provide support for students in times of need. The Grace Group keeps the Campus Pantry (an area in the kitchen of the Student Services building where students may go and take what they need without having to ask anyone) stocked with food, personal items, baby items, etc. College faculty and staff members contribute to the Grace Group Fund, and students

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have even “gotten into the act,” reaching out to help and support. These funds have been used to purchase crutches for a student's daughter, Christmas money and children's birthday presents for single moms, and to pay for auto repairs—to name just a few things. The satisfaction gained by faculty and staff members and the gratitude of the recipients have created a wonderful faith/learning interaction.

Ichthus Drama and Music Company

I also sought ways for students to become involved in ministries that included various faith traditions. Creative arts seems to break down barriers to reach the heart and soul for Christ. We have started the

Ichthus (Greek for *fish*—the Greek letters stand for *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*) Drama and Music Company, whose mission is “to share God's radical passionate love with others.” Participants have expressed delight at being able to minister through this medium to fellow students in assembly and at area churches and agencies.

Student Spiritual Leadership

One of the demographic challenges of FHCHS is its rapid turnover of students (most are earning two-year associate's de-

grees), all of whom are enrolled in strenuous, time-consuming health-sciences programs with clinical assignments and labs. How could we, given this challenge, grow spiritual leaders?

We made two decisions that helped a great deal. The college initiated a Spiritual Leadership Award, which it presents each year to a graduating senior at nearby Forest Lake Academy who has exhibited spiritual leadership throughout his or her academy years. Along with a scholarship, the recipient is given the opportunity to work alongside the campus chaplain as a student chaplain. The other decision was to create the position of Student Association Vice-President for Spiritual Life. This helped provide strong student spiritual leaders.

Student Health Ministries

Since our institution has a strong health focus, we decided that campus ministries should reflect that emphasis. Consequently, we established the Student Health Ministries. We are blessed to have as leader an R.N. who is pursuing her baccalaureate degree at the college. Each month, we focus on a national health concern. For instance, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, so Student Health Ministries made pink ribbons of remembrance for the students to wear. Even the male students enthusiastically wore ribbons to help raise awareness about the issue. Student Health Ministries handed out literature and showed videos on the topic in the

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rotunda, where many students pass through and congregate. December 1 was World AIDS Day. Student Health Ministries invited students to attend a program on AIDS at a local United Methodist Church. Additional events include fitness testing in February for American Heart Month and a sampling of vegetarian recipes on March 20 for the Great American Meat-Out.

Revival Zone

We also felt the campus needed a formal Friday evening service. Our students lead busy lives. Many times, they come to the end of the week drained and tired. Working with student leaders, we created the “Revival Zone.” We wanted to create a place where churched and non-churched students alike could come together to slow down and focus on issues of life and faith in a relaxed atmosphere. We decided

to hold the Revival Zone on the third floor of the Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church. Round tables with cloths, greenery, and candles helped create the desired ambience. The program includes bands, praise music, drama, speakers, videos (of Christian comedy or Bible subjects), outings to nearby natural sites like New Smyrna Beach or Rock Springs, and local Christian music events (such as Night of Joy at Disney World).

Volunteer Opportunities

Our campus has a strong commitment to service and volun-

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Chaplain Roberta Fish leads Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences students in prayer and remembrance after the September 11 tragedy.

Monthly college chapel programs provide opportunities for students to minister to one another.

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tarism. All the health-sciences programs are service oriented—nursing, radiography, sonography, and occupational therapy assistant. We wanted to reflect this emphasis through our campus ministries. We proposed that the academic administration establish a co-curricular transcript that included students' volunteer hours. We felt that formalizing the record-keeping in this area would express an important belief: While academics are important, it's better to get B's or even C's while showing compassion and gaining experience in serving others than to get straight A's and care nothing about your fellow human beings. We believe that there is a behavioral component to spiritual development; that is, students learn by actually doing spiritual service. The proposal was passed unanimously by the college's administrative council. Students presently volunteer at Sunbelt Orlando (a nursing home), at the Pediatric Rehab (Florida Hospital), the Center for Independent Living, the Make a Wish Foundation, and the Ronald McDonald House, to name a few places.

Here is what one student said about her experience at Florida Hospital College, which highlights how God is working in individual lives: "This school has taught me some important things. By growing up in a very religious Catholic background, I always thought that we were the only ones who believe what we believe. I [now] realize that is not so. I am aware that I can talk to other religious groups without any prejudice about what they believe and about what I believe. My relationship with God has grown stronger because I am able to open my mind and learn new things about Him and what He means to me, and also about what it means to be a good Christian."³

What a journey it has been! God has been faithful and has opened doors every step of the way. A student-led prayer ministry, called Soul Space, and a Bible-study ministry, called Daily Bread, are in their infancy. This coming year, campus ministries will sponsor a health-focused mission trip. The trip will be supported academically by specific curriculum teaching health care in Third World countries, including a clinical practicum. I know that God will continue to lead and guide our Campus Ministries team as we plan for Him. Facing the challenges of this "unique" ministry has been a real joy! ✍

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The Ichthus Drama team performs on Friday night at the Revival Zone.

A Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences student participates in Second Harvest, a program for the homeless.

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Heart and Hands is the
Community Volunteer Organization
of Campus Ministries.
Find your place to serve!

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REFERENCES

1. Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, Winter 1999-2000 Enrollment Statistical Report.
2. "Exit Document and Recommendations" From a consult by Roy Naden of N Associates, August 21, 2000.
3. Student quotation, December 2000.