Ecumenical Campus Ministry Newsletter, 2020

ECM Turns 25!

November 29, 2019 was a very special day at the University of Lethbridge! Over 100 people gathered in Markin Hall atrium to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Ecumenical Campus Ministry (ECM) at the University – and also, notably, the leadership of Chaplain Erin Phillips.

The grand celebration included many special guests, including Erin's family, students, friends and colleagues from ECM, the Lethbridge community, Lethbridge College, and the University. Speeches were given by uLethbridge President Mike Mahon, ULSU President Andrew Gammick, ECM Board Chair Alan Besplug, Kathleen Massey, Associate Vice President (Students), and Abed, one of Phillips' grandchildren.

Erin and Dr. Mike Mahon, President of the University of Lethbridge celebrate

A surprise live performance by the uLethbridge choir, led by Janet Youngdahl, made the event even more memorable.

Erin has been instrumental in working to build community and address food insecurity among students at the University, inspiring many others to take action to provide support. The Campus Care Parcel program, now in its 17th year, distributes up to 300 bags of groceries to students twice each school year. Donations from ECM and many community members help to sustain this program. Under Erin's leadership, the new Food Pantry program – providing free grab-and-go food to students who need it year-round -- was launched shortly before the 25th anniversary

celebrations. Both are part of the new Nourish program, a food security initiative.

Without question, she has a tremendous ability to bring people together to build community and support each other. The University is very grateful to ECM and Erin for 25 remarkable years of collaboration, inspiration, spiritual guidance, leadership and support.

Thank you, Erin!

Kathleen Massey
Associate Vice President (Students)
University of Lethbridge

A happy Canadian grandma

Dear ECM,

Congratulations on your 25th Anniversary!! The ECM plays such an important role for our Lethbridge College Students. There have been so many wonderful events/ programs that the ECM has either organized or been a part of at Lethbridge College. One of the most important and amazing is the end of semester suppers that they put on for our students and their families. Over the years, I have heard rave reviews from students about the food and the wonderful people who put it on. The students always look forward to the amazing home cooked meal that they can share with their family.

Feeding college students an early Christmas dinner!

The ECM has also participated in the Students' Association elections and Adopt a Family program. I absolutely loved working with the polling station volunteers. Each semester it was like getting to see family you haven't seen in a while. It was always overwhelming to see the generosity of the members of ECM with the hampers they put together for our students for the Adopt a Family program.

It has been a privilege working with ECM and I look forward to more amazing events in the future. On behalf of the Students' Association, Thank You so much for all you do for the students at Lethbridge College.

Sincerely,
Angela Fretts-Waters
LCSA Association Service Coordinator

The Glory of God is the Human Being Fully Alive

Although a quick google search reveals a big debate about the translation and meaning of the famous quotation from the second century Christian theologian Irenaeus, I learned it as "the glory of God is the human being fully alive." It has certainly been my experience over more than 25 years of chaplaincy that there are few things more joyful that seeing people becoming more fully alive. It is our privilege as Ecumenical Campus Ministry to contribute to that lively flourishing on our post-secondary campuses.

We do this by contributing to the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social well-being of the faculty, staff, and students we encounter through many programmes like our campus care parcels and our Cade Community Lecture Series. This year was no different. We put on an incredibly successful Christmas dinner in partnership with College Drive Community Church for students at the college. With the help of the enthusiastic and organized Jack Derbich we distributed hundreds of bags of groceries at the end of fall term to students at the university and were in the process of putting on both events for the spring term when covid hit. Unfortunately the college supper was canceled but we found a new way to do the campus care parcels - more on that in a minute!

Jack Derbich started as a volunteer for the college supper while in high school and as a first year student in political science at the university organized this year's campus care parcels

Lisa Lambert who teaches political science at the university engaged us with a talk on why she learned to kayak and crochet when she turned 50

Fortunately our annual lecture series took place before the shut down. This year's Cade Community Lecture Series was entitled "The World Shall Be Saved by Beauty" and despite terrible weather had excellent engaged audiences. It may have been brutal outside but inside we experienced some beauty.

Otherwise many of the regular kinds of chaplaincy things happened. I met with students, I officiated at some weddings and baptized a new godson. I was asked to do some workshops at the college on mental health and spirituality and participated in their learning event to help connect students with community resources. At the university, I continued to be active with the Food for Thought committee, which supports food security projects on campus. In the spring term I was honoured to serve on an independent study committee for Aimee Yurris as she established a "Meal Exchange" club on campus. Meal Exchange is an Ontario based charitable group that helps students organize to improve food security on their campuses. Aimee won the gold medal in Health Sciences and

has returned home to work in public service. Our amazing students teach me so much.

This year wasn't an ordinary one. We celebrated 25 years of service in Lethbridge with a big party and three new programmes! Kathleen has described the party. I'll only say that the memories of it lift me up in this tough covid time. Seeing so many people from our churches, from both campuses, and from my circle of friends and family was amazing. Four years ago I became the Canadian grandma to an amazing family from Syria. The memory of my oldest grandsyrian talking about what this means to him still brings tears to my eyes. It was a cold miserable night but in the Markin Hall atrium it was warm with love and joy. We really are blessed to be involved in this ministry. This month I will be receiving my long service award from the university, safely and without the big party that normally happens!

New Programmes

Jessica Goodrider steers the Kerber Friendship Programme - photo Nadine Eagle Child

Inspired by the example of Dick and Yvonne Kerber from Christ Trinity Lutheran, who took an homesick international student into their hearts, we established the **Kerber Friendship Programme.** With the help of grants from the Anglican Diocese of Calgary and the South Alberta Presbytery of the United Church of Canada we were able to hire Jessica Goodrider to oversee a programme where students who wanted local "family" were connected with local families. Jessica matched students and families and organized great social activities for us all to get to know each other.

With a Compassionate Justice grant from the Alberta/NWT Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada we were able to establish **Little Library Food Pantries** on the university campus. A pre-social work student from the college, Aidan Shields, worked for us putting together a proposal for the university and the university embraced the project. Facilities built the pantries and we installed them in four locations around campus. We couldn't keep them stocked with food, the demand was so great. Food bank use was up 50% this year so it was a very good year to provide extra food support.

There are four Little Library Food pantries on campus

Chris Jong of Martin Bros. Funeral Home donates to support our work

The university also decided in the midst of this to group all of these food initiatives, our food pantries and campus care parcels, the Student Union food bank, and the alumni Breakfast for Students programme and Dinner for Eight programme, into one umbrella "brand," **Nourish**. This allowed them to fundraise for all these programmes and to promote them on campus and to the media. If you are interested in learning more the U of L created a great video outlining the programme:

Our third new programme was kind of a surprising success. For the last couple of years I have been helping my grandsyrians with their homework and they call it "granny school." One of the offshoots of our refugee sponsorship project which involved Anglican churches, the university, and a group of doctors, was a World University Service of Canada (WUSC) club on campus. These amazing students have been able to establish a levy from every student enrolled at the university which funds student refugees for their first year at the U of L. One of the WUSC students suggested that more kids in the community could use tutoring help. So with the assistance of about two dozen WUSC and education students and some community volunteers we ran a weekly tutoring programme for new Canadian middle school and high school students on campus called, you guessed it, **Granny School.** Every Friday afternoon these wonderful students would show up to help about 20, mostly Syrian, kids with their homework and with their English. It was the highlight of my week.

Students working together on a problem

Chaplaincy in the Time of Covid

Kathleen Massey, AVP Students and Mark Slomp, Director of Student Services pitch in with campus care parcels

When campus abruptly closed in March it radically changed how we ministered. For the first time in 25 years we had to cancel our college supper. The next problem was what to do with all the groceries churches had collected for the campus care parcels. Normally we gather all the food at Immanuel Lutheran Church and with about 25 volunteers organize the bags and make up bags for special dietary concerns. Then a few days later the university maintenance workers bring over a couple of trucks, load up the bags, and we distribute the food in the U-Hall atrium in under 20 mins. We have this down to a smooth process and the actual sorting/ distributing takes about 6 hours total. This year none of that could happen. Students weren't on campus to pick up their bags and we couldn't have that many volunteers in a small space. So we did a major pivot, organized the bags on campus in an empty classroom with a much smaller group of volunteers, registered students to receive the bags, and then did safe curbside pick up or delivery. It took six days. For this we received a Northern Lights Volunteer award from the Government of Alberta.

We realized through this that access to food was going to be a challenge for students who had lost their jobs due to covid and to those who relied on public transit to shop. The university received a major grant from the Lethbridge Community Foundation as well as donations from individuals and asked me to administer a new style food programme. With a group of volunteers and the assistance of Plum Grocery Club we delivered around 270 hampers to students over the summer.

Now that the buses are running

ALBERTA
CULTURE, MULTICULTURALISM AND STATUS OF WOMEN
Office of the Minister

Rev/Chaplain Erin Phillips
ecm.erin@gmail.com

Dear Rev/Chaplain Erin:

The Alberta Northern Lights Volunteer Recognition Program recognizes Alberta's everyday heroes. The program celebrates the contributions of Albertans who volunteer, formally or informally, demonstrate community spirit, and serve as a role model for others. We are pleased that we could profile your story on the Alberta Northern Lights Volunteer Recognition Program page at www.alberta.ca/northernlightsvolunteers on April 30, 2020. Your picture and story of how volunteerism has helped your community has been featured on the site with a number of other amazing volunteer stories throughout Alberta.

As Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of the Government of Alberta for your acts of service, and for demonstrating community leadership. Your efforts to support members of your community are admirable, and I appreciate your work to support fellow Albertans during this challenging time.

I encourage you to continue demonstrating community service and generosity through volunteerism. If you are interested in additional opportunities to serve your community, please visit the Alberta Cares Connector, at volunteerconnector.org.

Thank you again for being an Alberta volunteer, and supporting others in your community!

Sincerely,

Leela Sharon Aheer
Minister

Room 227 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6 Canada Telephone 780-422-3559

Classification: Protected A

again students will be referred to the Students' Union Food Bank for grocery cards and we are reopening the two Little Library Food Pantries that are accessible to students who are on campus.

Part of the commitment for the Kerber Friendship Programme is for volunteer families to host their students for dinner or some other activity once a month. This obviously had to stop during the shut down and we had to cancel the social events we had planned. The volunteer families were wonderful though in continuing to reach out to their students to make sure they were doing okay through a very stressful time. Now we are trying to figure out how to continue to offer that kind of support during these strange and stressful days.

Normally in the summer my focus is conferences, admin, holidays, and hanging out with students, faculty, and staff who are less busy than during term. We don't try to do much in the way of programming. This year with covid though I wasn't traveling to conferences and it felt like a good time to stay connected. So a group of us formed a zoom reading group and met every week (Tuesdays and Thursday to allow flexibility for working students) to discuss Ibram Kendi's book, *How to be an Anti-Racist*. The discussions were really great and the students came from a wide variety of backgrounds. We will continue this term to meet and see where this may take us.

The Ecumenical Campus Ministry offers a weekly reading group that tackles the big questions of identity and inequality, place and history. It is a place to tackle issues of racialized relations in school, work, and at home. It is a place where Christ's love is shown in the kind humility of a stranger, reaching out in honest dialogue to an issue they might not have considered before. The space responds to Jesus' message of social justice. A place where God's perfect love and divine understanding opens up a space to consider how to make all of creation a more loving place.

The group provides a time to come and discuss the inequalities and shortcomings of this world. Through it all, loving empathy is shown to the sensitive issues the group covers. No matter one's background or faith tradition, the group allows for deep dives into books that challenge old norms and common sense ideas, and instead, question what it means to live in harmony with those around you. As a past and still present attendee of the group, I can attest to all this from experience. I fully support the ministry's involvement and passion for such pursuits.

Peter Campbell, McKillop United Church Representative Board-member, Ecumenical Campus Ministry

I wish I could introduce you to all the students, faculty, and staff who make up our ECM community on campus. When I become discouraged by the suffering and turmoil that

surrounds us I look to the people I get to work with and I am inspired. Watching them in this terribly difficult time I have been really amazed at the gracious and generous way students have rolled with the punches and the incredibly committed way staff and faculty pivoted to continue to serve and educate students. It has been seriously awe inspiring to watch people put in incredible hours, to learn new skills, and to re-think how they do their jobs. Mostly I have been moved by the compassion and the generosity people have shown one another.

May the glory of God continue to be seen as we share in the work of becoming fully alive!

Erin, blessed to be the chaplain for Ecumenical Campus Ministry

Just over three years ago in September my wife and I were young, a little lost and new to Lethbridge so we spent a lot of time in coffee shops trying to figure ourselves out. On this particular day we were sitting in the Penny, the weather was cold and wet so it was packed.

A gentleman in a clerical collar was sitting at the table inches away from ours talking to another young person about their doubts and fears as they struggled to wrestle with their childhood faith. Because their story so represented my own - of course I eavesdropped. A woman wearing a clerical collar came in and spoke to the gentleman at the table beside me. She invited the young person to a weekly supper discussion group she held for students who were feeling lost and disconnected like spiritual refugees.

I interrupted the conversation and asked if we could come as well. Erin smiled at me as if I'd always been part of the conversation and said OF COURSE! I had no idea how those two words of welcome would change our lives over the next few years.

Where we had felt lonely we began to find family, where there had been doubting and questions I began to find grace for myself and others, even when the questions went unanswered. I have seen the impact feeding hungry students has, I know personally how much it means to be seen and loved when you feel like you're unseen. Erin and the ECM tell all of us young and wandering hearts that there is space for us at the table, grace enough for our questions, and a community in which to learn to let go of our fears - because in community we find love and love is perfected nowhere better than around dinner tables.

I have seen the love of Christ so beautifully lived out through the many many people who work to make sure that students stomachs and hearts are fed. That work is important now more than ever as students feel afraid about an uncertain future and struggle to pay for food and housing. I know what it is like to feel as if the future is not worth fighting for, but a miracle happened three years ago, and happens every day to show every student that there is a place of hope and love for them too.

Shandi Bleiken
Written originally for presentation at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd's Campus Ministry Sunday

Financial Support for ECM

Ecumenical Campus Ministry relies on the support we receive from our denominational partners, our congregations, and from individuals.

Over the years as our programming and presence on campus has expanded we have come to rely even more on donations from individuals. We can not do what we do without your financial support. We have been encouraged by the response to direct appeals and are delighted when we receive unexpected gifts.

If you are interested in supporting ECM there are two ways you can do it. The first is to send a cheque payable to **ECM c/o Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (2406 11 Ave S, Lethbridge, AB T1K 0K8).** The second is to contribute on line through Canada Helps at **https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/ecumenical-campus-ministry/.** If you are interested in making a regular monthly contribution please contact us at ecm.erin@gmail.com.

ECM is a registered charity and issues tax receipts for donations of $25 and over.

ECM is a ministry of the Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Evangelical Lutheran Churches to Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge