Summary of October 14th Session of the Religious Life Review Process

Before the beginning, those in attendance were reminded that materials and summaries from previous sessions were available at each session.

Livia Hummel, Assistant Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science (CAS), served as convener of the session on the work of the Lantz Center: “Claiming Our Ecumenical Christian Heritage in the Context of Education for Service.” She introduced Jeremiah Gibbs and Cindy Tyree, who opened the discussion with a power point presentation that Ms. Tyree created for the 10th anniversary celebration of the Lantz Center for Christian Vocations and Formation (hereafter LCCVF) on April 17, 2009. This presentation supplemented the recommended reading of the Lantz center brochure, “If God calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak Lord, Your Servant is Listening’”. This fifteen minute presentation explained the origins of the center, which was created in the context of a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc., and provided information about the various programs that the LCCVF offers. (The Lantz Center power point presentation is available upon request. Please contact Cindy Tyree by phone at 788-2106 or e-mail ctyree@uindy.edu if you are interested.)

The principal focus of the presentation was the sequence of slides about the lives of the 39 students * who have been commissioned through the Lantz Center over the past ten years. Students who have completed the LCCVF curriculum have gone on to a wide range of pursuits. Some are pastors, while others have found their way into various pursuits. Some students have experienced vocational shifts during the time in the program, while others have continued on their intended path throughout their career at UIndy.

Following the presentation, Chaplain Jeremiah Gibbs said that he thought it was significant that from the beginning the LCCVF was an “ecumenical center.” Several influences are clearly visible in the curriculum. He named three of these: 1) the Wesleyan/Methodist heritage, which emphasizes covenant discipleship; 2) the Benedictine monastic tradition, which has fostered wisdom about what it means to live according to a rule of life; and 3) the tradition of Quaker spirituality, which is well-known for its use of silence for individual and group discernment of God’s direction in our lives. He explained that in some ways the CVOC classes are like the early Methodist class meetings, where persons came together each week covenanted with one another in disciplined accountability. Jeremiah indicated that the majority of students in the program are United Methodist. In part, this is due to the way the CVOC courses are integrated into the UMYL scholarship and Pre-theology programs.

Each of the directors has brought his or her unique gifts to the leadership of the LCCVF programs. For example, Sr. Jennifer Horner was a Benedictine monastic, and so it is not difficult to see the ways in which she brought a catholic and/or monastic perspective to her work. One of the things that distinguishes Gibbs’ own leadership is an emphasis on “the priesthood of all believers,” a teaching that is especially stressed in the Pentecostal tradition associated with the Assemblies of God. Dean Cartwright has noted that Sr. Jennifer Horner probably would not have used that kind of language in the context of interpreting Christian spirituality to students. In that respect there are differences that build on the strengths of the traditions as they are represented on campus and in the leadership of the EIP staff. At the same time, Jeremiah has been influenced by other Christian traditions, including the Anglo-Catholic tradition of Christian liturgy. He sometimes encourages students from more evangelical or “low church” traditions of worship to attend an Episcopal or Catholic worship service on Easter because he thinks it is important for them to learn about “high church”.

*Please Note: On April 24, 2009 another five students were commissioned (making a total of 44 persons who have completed the LCCV curriculum.
In summary, Jeremiah explained that the approach to programming and mentoring of students in the LCCVF is “not a lowest common denominator approach.” Gibbs went to explain what he and his colleagues in the EIP office understands “enriched Christianity” to mean. It does not mean that “we wipe away all lines” that distinguish various groups of Christians from one another (as if Christianity could be thought of as all one big grouping), but rather that students begin to able to identify with other traditions. For example, footwashing is a practice that is meaningful in the Anabaptist and Pietist tradition, but it is also practiced in monastic spirituality and Catholic tradition more generally.

Next, two Lantz Center Interns were asked to talk about their respective experiences. Ryan Brock talked about that he has had such as attending conferences as well as participating in the Taizé spiritual pilgrimage. As the Chapel Steward for Worship, he has a primary role in developing a peer mentoring ministry for college age males at Youth. He is also involved in the “The Peak” program (peer mentoring for men). Julie Bates has participated in the CVOC courses, the Threshold Retreat, and she has even been to Taizé on two occasions. When she thinks of her own experience, she realizes that what she has experienced at Taizé leads her to think of “ecumenical in the entire world.” The women’s peer group ministry that she has started has not yet been named, but there has been a strong response from college-age women to this peer based ministry.

The floor was then opened to questions and discussion. In the following the questions are italicized with their responses following.

*How do the numbers of participants compare?* At this point, there are slightly more women participating than men (which reflects other trends on our campus), but even so, the men’s group has a higher level of participation than LCCVF programs. This is also the second year for “The Peak” (peer ministry for men), which offers multiple points of entry. The monthly meetings and retreats provide men with the opportunity to come to new (and more positive) understandings of what vocation means.

“How has your involvement influenced your faith journey and personal sense of vocation?” Julie responded this way, “I started out to be a youth minister... I have learned that I can do social work from a Christian perspective without being overbearing.” Ryan Brock talked about how he had no involvement with Christianity until he was 15 years old. When he arrived at UIndy, he said that the YMTP program “felt like home to me.” He recalled that he initially planned to become an ordained minister in the UMC, but at this point he does not think that he will proceed in the direction. “I have learned to be comfortable with uncertainty. I have learned that there are no clear mile markers that can tell me the direction that I can go.” Ryan mentioned the ways in which he has found members of the faculty, staff, and students to provide a supportive “community” for vocational exploration.

“How is silence practiced in the CVOC program?” Julie Bates talked about how silence is part of the Taizé worship services. Initially, she found the point in the service where you sit in silence to be uncomfortable. But later, she found herself growing in her awareness that prayer is not always about what she is doing. “I have learned to calm my heart enough to just sit there and be hugged by God.” Others mentioned the use of silence in CVOC retreats, etc. Jeremiah Gibbs also called attention to the ways silence is practiced by students who walk the labyrinth (which had been set up in the Chapel the previous week). Ryan Brock added that in his experience, the use of chants and time for silence in Taizé worship “provide a platform for you to focus so that you can listen to God.” Ryan has found that the songs help to “shut out the background noise” and redirects his tendency to focus on his “to do list.”

Livia Hummel asked the group to address a more general question, “What has worked particularly well in the LCCVF?” In the discussion that followed, two kinds of responses were offered.
Julie Gahimer responded to that question by sharing how she has enjoyed serving as a Christian Vocations mentor to three students in the LCCVF program. She described the relationship that has developed with a student this past year. Although Dr. Gahimer only teaches graduate students, she has enjoyed working with these undergraduate women. Most recently, she was asked to be her current mentee to be her faculty sponsor at the induction ceremony into one of the academic honor societies. Julie indicated that she would still be interested in mentoring even though the “funding, stipend, payment” has run out. [Please note: EIP staff would like to clarify this matter. Funding still remains available for CVOC mentors, although the overall stipends available are less than in the past.]

Lang Brownlee added that the Threshold Retreat for new students has also worked well. The Chaplains have found that the students who participate in Threshold really do form a community with one another. Dean Cartwright added that members of the Student Services staff have noticed that students who participate in Threshold are retained at a higher level than students elsewhere in the University. While we do not know all of the reasons why this is the case, we are glad that there are multiple reasons to think that the initial retreat before students start college is fostering community.

Dr. Greg Clapper, Professor of Philosophy & Religion (and one of the former directors of the LCCVF), interjected a concern that while students in the CVOC program seem to feel free to explore their vocations in the “widest possible sense,” it seems that the testimony offered by the two Lantz interns is pretty typical that they do not necessarily see becoming an ordained minister as a preferred vocational pathway. He asked whether the curriculum “positively represents” ordained ministry as a vocational path. The group discussed this concern with various persons offering perspectives. At the end of that sequence, Chaplain Lang Brownlee suggested that perhaps this is an area where the Philosophy & Religion Department can work with the Lantz Center, since the Pre-Theology major is the pre-professional curriculum that is designed for students who have the specialized interest in training for ordained ministry. Dean Cartwright concurred with Brownlee’s suggestion. The EIP staff plans to follow up with the chair of the Philosophy and Religion Department about this matter.

Cindy Tyree mentioned that the book discussion groups offered through the Lantz Center have been particularly well received. For example, the book group that she led last spring using Sue Monk Kidd’s book *When the Heart Waits* was very well received. Persons who have had little to do with LCCV programs often participate in these. This led to a question about who participates in these groups. EIP staff members indicated that they do offer books groups for students as well as faculty and staff. Occasionally, there is a mix of participants such as the study that Michael Cartwright led of Samuel Wells’ Lenten devotional book *Power and Passion*. For the most part, however, the books that appeal to faculty and staff are not the same as those that appeal to students.

At this point, Livia Hummel concluded the conversation by thanking everyone for their participation. Michael Cartwright reminded those present that the next session of the Religious Life Review will take place on October 28th. At that time, our colleague Lela Mixon will make a presentation about her work with the Sankofa Mentoring Community as we turn our attention to the needs of students of color on this campus.

**Addendum:** Terry Schindler reported that following the meeting, he and Chaplain Lang Brownlee discussed the possibility of finding a book on teaching with a religious component or slant that could be discussed as one of the activities of the Faculty Development Center. Michael Cartwright has indicated that the EIP staff would be happy to collaborate in making such an opportunity possible.