Summary of the February 3, 2010 session of the Religious Life Review
“Revisiting UIndy’s Multilateral Approach to Campus Ministry: Does it Stretch? or Will it break?”

Michael Cartwright, Dean of Ecumenical and Interfaith Programs, welcomed the group by explaining that McCleary Chapel ministries had been reorganized in 2002-03 so that a variety of interests in Christian ministries could be expressed. During this reorganization it was noted that certain ministries already existed on campus—Catholic Church through Fr. Don Quinn; University Heights United Methodist Church, a sibling to the university; and a few parachurch groups, i.e. Campus Crusade for Christ. The existence of these several ministries on campus and a desire to be hospitable to various other expressions necessitated a structure. A Code of Ethics was drafted to help bring order to the new structure.

Jeremiah Gibbs, Interim University Co-Chaplain, coordinated the rest of the discussion, opening with an explanation of how the current venture works. McCleary Chapel Ministries includes chapel stewards and their various ministries, the weekly Thursday Night Alive worship service, and other chaplain coordinated events. Christian RSO’s are student-led initiatives that go through the same process as any RSO on campus and have access to facilities and a budget. The third entity is “participating ministries,” partnerships with churches/organizations from off campus. When approved, these groups gain permission to lead ministry on campus and access to campus resources. The final category, “institutional partnerships”, includes the collaboration of the Youth Ministry Training Program with Christian Theological Seminary, where UIndy students are taught by CTS faculty. The “Multilateral Approach to Campus Ministry” consists of these various entities working in the context of mutual cooperation and accountability under the leadership of the University Chaplains.

Unity is achieved in both real and symbolic ways among these groups via several vehicles. Leaders of these various organizations meet monthly for the Christian Ministries Council and the parallel Student Christian Ministries Council. A sign of visible unity takes place at the beginning of each school year with the signing of the Covenant stating they will abide by the spirit of the Code of Ethics.

Gibbs pointed out three key elements of the Code of Ethics (See PDF)

1. Respect for students and hospitality (note Code of Ethics 1c, 4b, 4d)
   a. Students desires are honored
   b. No one enters residence halls for religious purposes unless invited by residents
   c. Off-campus staff do not solicit students themselves, but are encouraged to train students how to evangelize respectfully
2. Honesty (note Code of Ethics: 1c, 2c, 3d, 4b)
   a. Organizations must clearly state their name and intentions in advertising and conversations
b. Organizations must make honest attempts to represent the interests and beliefs of other religious groups fairly and within the spirit of hospitality

3. Tangible structures of unity (Note Code of Ethics 1e, 4g, 5)
   a. Annual signing of the covenant (See attached PDF of 2009-2010 Covenant)
   b. Monthly Council meetings to coordinate activities and reconcile grievances
   c. Preserving one hour weekly for unified Christian worship

Individuals in attendance were asked to share the work of their various ministries.

Perry Kea, advisor for Fellowship of Christian Students, described the events of FCS as weekly Tuesday Bible Study, Prayer, and fellowship. FCS is currently working with the Deliverance Project and has previously partnered with Psychology Club in organizing events. Attendance ranges from 4-14 people. Cartwright interjected that FCS was previously “Fellowship of Christian Athletes” and has recently undergone a “rebirth.” He described how a group from Mt. Pleasant Christian Church known as “One Accord” had operated on campus some years ago and their events drew members of FCS away from that organization. FCS then struggled to regain leadership. This occurrence was lifted up as an example of why it is important to not have ministries that compete with one another without mutual cooperation.

Terry Schindler asked what the “Deliverance Project” (see above) is about. Gibbs explained that it was organized for the sole purpose of bringing Christian entertainment to campus, generally sponsoring 4-5 concerts a year. The students who are a part of this organization learn a great deal about event planning and leadership. Gibbs mentioned the upcoming February ThirstIndy Project that the Deliverance Project is organizing in conjunction with several other religious RSO’s on campus as an example.

Kari Didier, Campus Crusade for Christ staff, explained that ministry included weekly Bible studies (1 for men and 5 for women, which take place in residence halls), monthly worship/fellowship on campus, and the national organization of CCC offers conferences and retreats. At the end of last semester CCC hosted a place for students to study for finals with refreshments.

Pingnan Shi, elder of Chinese Community Church of Greenwood, talked about the hospitality they offer the Chinese students studying at UIndy. They help them deal with home sickness, provide Friday night Bible Study, offer tutoring when they are taking Christianity class and provide an intro to American culture. The church is currently searching for host families for Chinese students. Kea offered to provide study guides for the church to help them in tutoring the Chinese student for exams in Christianity courses. The number of Chinese students on campus has gone from around 30 a year at the beginning to 140 this year. The Chinese students arrive here with varying faith traditions—Confucian, Christian, Muslim. Cartwright stated that Mary Moore has found that at least some the Chinese students “try on” different religious when they are here but often return to previous religious commitments when they return home.
Madeline Wengert, Chi Alpha staff, emphasizes that Chi Alpha states everything is “done in community.” Chi Alpha is a Pentecostal group that believes that the practices of prayer, worship, witness, fellowship and discipleship are empowered by the Holy Spirit. The large meeting is on Tuesday nights and has a speaker and worship. There is a prayer meeting on Monday nights and small group meetings which serves to develop student leaders. They are currently working on a campus service project. Gibbs noted that Wengert is the first full-time campus ministry staff person to this campus and her sole responsibility is to serve Ulndy students.

Gibbs pointed out that there are challenges and issues with the multilateral approach to campus ministry. Cartwright already pointed out the conflict with One Accord/Mt Pleasant church that happened several years ago. Recently a second Chinese church was added to the Christian Ministries Council, but only after careful consideration and it was determined that there was room for two without creating an overlap. Three Pentecostal groups have been/or are applying to become religious RSO’s on campus, including a “oneness Pentecostal” group that has significant differences in their beliefs. In both of these cases, it is difficult to determine when ministry among Pentecostals or Chinese students has become over-saturated. Ultimately, the chaplains cannot regulate new RSO’s from starting with similar missions, but can prevent approval of “participating ministries” which threaten the health of similar organizations.

Additionally, there is an Interfaith Forum (student group) in the works being created by Christians with Christian faculty advisors which brings up another set of issues. Will they be a part of the Christian Ministries Council? While the group is led by Christians, its mission is not specifically Christian ministry, which is the aim of the Council.

Cartwright expressed that it is important to ask about how the students are engaging these varied levels of ministry. In the last few years a Roman Catholic student was also a leader in Campus Crusade, an evangelical student group. A second semester freshman has already participated in every Christian group on campus with enthusiasm. While he and other students appreciate the diversity of Christian religious experience, at the same time some students have exhausted themselves in Bible studies to the point of addictive or consumeristic behavior.

Kea asked, “are there more Christian organizations than can be supported? Could we gain by consolidation? Shi responded that their church has more students than they can handle with only 5-6 families in the church. Male attendance is an issue, however, and most organizations are struggling to have any males in leadership roles.

Kea asked if students are complaining that they are learning something different in Christianity class that they didn’t learn from their church. One noted that some Catholic students have had trouble with what they hear in the courses, but few others have.

Cartwright thanked the Christian Ministries Council members stating that he recognizes that the chaplains can’t do their work without the Christian Ministries Council’s help. The increase in ministries on campus does however create more work for the chaplains.