For the Final Session of the Religious Life Review Process on April 21, 2010

Prefatory Remark: At the beginning of this process, we identified several trajectories. We said that we were going to look back at our past (particularly the past ten years), we indicated that we were going to try to “look forward” and we stated our aspiration to continue to “reach out.” I hope that in some sense we have done that over the course of this academic year.

1. Even before we held the first session of this religious life review, the staff of the EIP office invited members of the UIndy community to join us for a conversation about Henri Nouwen’s book Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life (: Sept. 2, 9, 23). In the context of discussing that book, we named some of the ways in which campus ministry has been grounded in an ethic of “giving and receiving hospitality.” We also named the fact that moving beyond hostility to hospitality is but one of the “movements” of the Spirit in our lives. I wonder how comfortable we are now about talking about matters religious and spiritual in the context of our various journeys. As Charles B. Jones aptly states in another context, “Do we trust God to guide the process?” Dare we seriously think that perhaps the work that we have embarked upon is being providentially directed? What if it is not only about me & UIndy!

2. At the time that the office was constituted, I (as the founding dean) called attention to the ways in which the ecumenical and interfaith agenda was consonant with the United Methodist Church’s own interests in “Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.” I wonder how much that authorization matters now, and I candidly wonder how much it really mattered then. I know that it matters a great deal to me personally because I am an advocate of United Methodist-related higher education, and I know that it matters to the United Methodist Church’s University Senate. But have we gotten to the point that we can say that it matters to folks outside the EIP office. If it doesn’t, then what does that indicate about the ways in which we understand this university’s mission as a church-related university?

3. Over the past eight years we have employed persons from a variety of Christian traditions in various short-term and long-term positions in the EIP office: American Baptist (Janet Hoover), United Church of Christ (Janice Kemp), Episcopal (Michael Williams), Roman Catholic (Jennifer Horner), Independent Christian Church (Micah Weedman), Moravian (Cindy Tyree), Assemblies of God [Pentecostal] (Jeremiah Gibbs). I am not sure it is clear to folks across the university how diverse the staffing has been. I wonder if we are ready to claim the fact that UIndy is now and will continue to be “ecumenical” regardless of whether the Christian ministers that we hire are the denominations that we most identify with. We are still “trying on” ecumenicity. Some of us have felt a sense of loss when our religious affiliation is no longer --or not yet -- present in the “ecumenical campus ministry team.”

4. I wonder if we are in a position to say that our interfaith engagement is more than “aspirational.” Eboo Patel’s visit last fall, the visit of Fr. David Burrell earlier this month, and the REL 299 “Christian Approaches to Interfaith Relations” course that I offered this semester, and the recent conversations about the formation of the Interfaith Forum (a student led group) might be indicators that we are more interested in that prospect than ever before. But I am not sure what word we would choose to replace “aspirational” at this juncture. Perhaps that will become clearer as we learn more about the prospects for the Central Indiana Interfaith Youth Movement that appears to be taking shape (steering committee, etc.

5. I was intrigued to hear the responses of persons who attended the session at which Lang Brownlee reviewed the interfaith ventures at UIndy that have taken place over the past decade. Even before Eboo Patel visited UIndy, we had already started engaging one another “beyond parish and ghetto” over the past ten years. I wonder what the longterm significance of this period of “introducing interfaith” to the UIndy campus will be. Have we used the time well to establish working relationships with one another?
6. I wonder what we can and will do in the coming years about engaging persons of color here at UIndy. Lela Mixon’s presentation about what we have learned thus far about ministries to and with students of color (both African-American & International) is a reminder that there are challenges that we are not able to address at present even where funding exists and student interest is evident.

7. I wonder how we should engage adult learners in the future in light of what we learned about the students in the School for Adult Learning. . . How significant is it that a large group of SAL students have little or no awareness of religious life programming at UIndy? And, as we attempt to look beyond the concerns of undergraduate students associated with SAL, how should we think about the role of the chaplains for engaging graduate students at this university?

8. I wonder what role the conversations about Student Development that we initiated this semester should play in any future decisions that we make about staffing in the EIP office or in the spheres of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs more generally. It is not clear to me how seriously folks at UIndy want to take the body of literature that has emerged in recent years about how young adult students learn and develop during the college years. Arthur Chickering’s "seven vectors" of student development is simply one marker. Christian Smith’s book Souls in Transition makes it clear that this terrain is more complex than the category “emerging adult” can convey. Yet it is also clear that it would be a mistake to act as if student journeys do not have to be differentiated from other developmental patterns.

9. I still wonder whether what the answer is going to turn out to be to the twofold question that we posed when we discussed UIndy’s “multilateral approach” to campus ministry: does it stretch? or will it Break? For the past six years, a growing group of faculty sponsors, student leaders and off-campus ministers from Christian Ministries Council have been working together in the context of their mutual covenant informed by the Code of Ethics for Religious Organizations and Participating Ministries. Over the past two years, the number of “participating ministries” has grown significantly. With this growth, the responsibilities of the chaplains [to coordinate relationships and programs] have increased as well.

10. When we created the EIP office, we built on the decision to bring staff of the Lantz Center for Christian Vocations together with the work of the University Chaplain(s). I wonder if this is a decision that we need to revisit? As the first “ecumenical” unit here at UIndy, the Lantz Center has played a key role in the development of this office. But the LCCVF is not designed to foster “interfaith” engagement (beyond the framework of the historic traditions of Christianity). What kinds of programmatic structures do we need to sustain the kinds of curricular and co-curricular engagements that we hope to have with students about matters religious as we enter the second decade of the 21st century?

11. I wonder what vision will carry us into the future? One of the things that we did not do this year was to “cast a vision” for the future of religious life at UIndy. Although we had imaged the prospect that several UIndy faculty, students and staff might present vision statements with proposals and reconsiderations for how we might think about religious life programming at UIndy in the years to come, in the end the chaplains and I determined that the campus did not have the energy for that conversation at this juncture. But no one should act as if such conversations are expendable. They still need to happen!

12. Finally, while it is by no means clear where we are in this particular narrative sequence in the history of UIndy, I do wonder what kind of staff we will need to carry out whatever vision that we develop for the “next chapter” of religious life at this university. We are coming to the end of our first year of operating the EIP office without funding from the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment, Inc. LEI is the outside agency that provided the financial support for restructuring campus ministry at UIndy. The EIP office is no more vulnerable (or less!) than other offices to financial pressures of the university as a whole. If, due to financial circumstances, we were asked to make staff cuts in the future, I wonder what we could actually cut without doing damage to the fabric of the already existing programs. What takes priority?