

United Campus Ministry at Montana State University Billings

This year has been marked by transition as Rev. Dwight Welch started as the new campus minister at UCM this February. In that time, we've been building a core student group of about a dozen on campus, raising the visibility of UCM on campus, and providing opportunities for discussion, service, and worship.

Table Talk is our weekly gathering with discussion over a wide range of religious topics, that students often lead or bring to the table. And homemade cookies are added to the mix. Weekly communion on campus and the celebration of Ash Wednesday provides a chance to worship. Our International Coffee Hour provides cookies, coffee and a chance to cross cultural barriers.

We had two spring break day trips to Bozeman MT and the Museum of the Rockies and to Sheridan WY where we worked with First Christian in supporting Lunch Together and providing free meals to the wider community. This summer, a trip with international students is planned to Yellowstone Park.



UCM is partnering with the philosophy department to bring back the Big Sky Philosophy Group. I will also be teaching a philosophy class in the fall.

And we're working with Student Disabilities to bring back Uniquely Diverse, a group of support and advocacy for students with disabilities.

We're starting Social Justice Mondays with Women and Gender Studies, where students are provided materials and resources on issues they choose to write to their elected officials about.

And we're working with Out on Campus, the LGBT student group at MSUB to help facilitate outreach for the group. We are also helping create a diversity committee for MSUB that can be intentional in creating support for varied populations at the school from Native Americans to veterans.

In this, we're working to build community at MSUB and be an integral part of the campus.

Encouraging transformational experiences particularly in places where we are not present, engages our energy with Mimanagish and beyond.

The UCC has had a historic presence and involvement with United Campus Ministry. That relationship is now 51 years old, since our founding. It's reflected in the two UCC board members of our campus ministry. It's reflected in a UCC ordained campus minister, the first in 34 years.

On the other hand, the students are always new and changing. And UCM has a unique kind of ministerial outreach at MSUB. It involves crossing the divides in our time. Those divides are social, cultural, political and religious but religion often finds itself at the center of them all.

The result is that many students will opt out of identifying with any religious tradition. There is a distrust against religious institutions that UCM contends with as surely as churches do. It affects all institutions.

Our response is to relate to every student, without an agenda. We do not seek to proselytize.

What we do is listen to students as they share their faith, their hopes, their life experiences. In my time here, I've been honored to be a part of many such sacred conversations

Some of those are expressed in our programs Table Talk. Often, they happen in unplanned encounters in the student lounge, in student offices, at the library, or when we table at UCM's Listening post.

That is what a ministry of presence can mean for a campus like MUSB. I'm grateful for the full-time position UCM provides for me, in that I can spend most of my time on campus.

In this, we have entered in relation to a wide range of students, most of whom struggle with the same questions of life, faith, vocation, and more but who do not identify with any religious tradition.

They make up the majority of UCM students. The other group are students from mainline Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical churches. We also have atheists, Muslims, and the spiritual but not the religious.

At UCM we provide the traditional role of campus ministry in connecting churches and Christian practices for some of our students. But we also create a space for questions over vocation, faith, and the sorting out a life journey for a wider group of students.

Both kinds of ministry is the calling of a Christian ministry, whether it is the church, or in our case, a campus ministry.



We value our relationship with the United Church of Christ. If a presentation to students or congregations is needed feel free to contact me. Or if you want to meet for coffee. I'm willing to travel to share the story of UCM. My cell phone is 307-763-7990 and my email is dwelch@msubillings.edu- Rev. Dwight Welch