

# Creating Common Ground: Embracing Difference & Giving Voice

Examples from the Kalamazoo  
College Chapel Program

Presented by Rev. Dr. Mary Ellen Ashcroft, Chaplain  
& Ashley Loyd, Associate Chaplain

# Where do we start?

Given: Every person has a longing for something bigger, deeper and more meaningful.

Questions:

1. What do students say is most important to them?
2. If we look at students' lives, what are their felt needs?

# Creating Common Ground: Embracing Difference & Giving Voice

1. Creating Space by Giving Students Voice
2. Creating Space by Empowering & Valuing Student Leaders
3. Looking for Key Moments in the lives of students & the College Community
4. Facilitating Community Response to Crisis
5. Expanding people's concept of Spirituality

# Our Context: What K College is Like

- The “K” Plan

- Liberal Arts Curriculum
- Senior Thesis Projects
- Career Development Internships
- The Study Abroad Program

- The First Year Experience

- The cultural and social climate of K
- The history of the chapel program



# 1. Creating Space by Giving Students Voice

- Spirituality Groups
- Resources & Space for student Faith Groups
- Interfaith Dialogues
- Discussion Groups
  - Sexuality & Spirituality
  - Doubter's Discussion
- Jama Gatherings



*Women's Spirituality Groups Potluck*



# What do you like most about the Chapel Program?



“The atmosphere and the safe environment.” –  
*Sophomore student*

“The warmth of everything.” –  
*First Year student*

“Chapel = Haven.” –  
*First Year student*

“I like the safe space it provides for people to come and talk or just to be. I love the tea and cookies and soft lighting.” – *Sophomore student*

“Variety” – *First Year student*

“The caring, comforting, cool people.” –  
*Sophomore student*



“The oatmeal cookies & Mary Ellen’s library.” –  
*Sophomore student*

“It’s like home.”  
– *First Year student*

“Everything.”  
– *Junior Student*

“How welcoming it is to anyone who wants to be involved.” – *Sophomore student*

"I heard about the Cavern when my friends said it was a peaceful, quiet place to study. When I hear 'chapel' I think of being 'present' and building relationships, not resumes." –  
*Sophomore student*



# The Cavern

"The Cavern is a good epicenter for reflection on campus." –  
*Transfer Sophomore student*

# What do you like most about the Chapel Program?

“The lack of direct association with organized religion.” – *First Year student*

“The hugs. Everyone is very friendly and wants to spend time with each other.” – *Junior student*

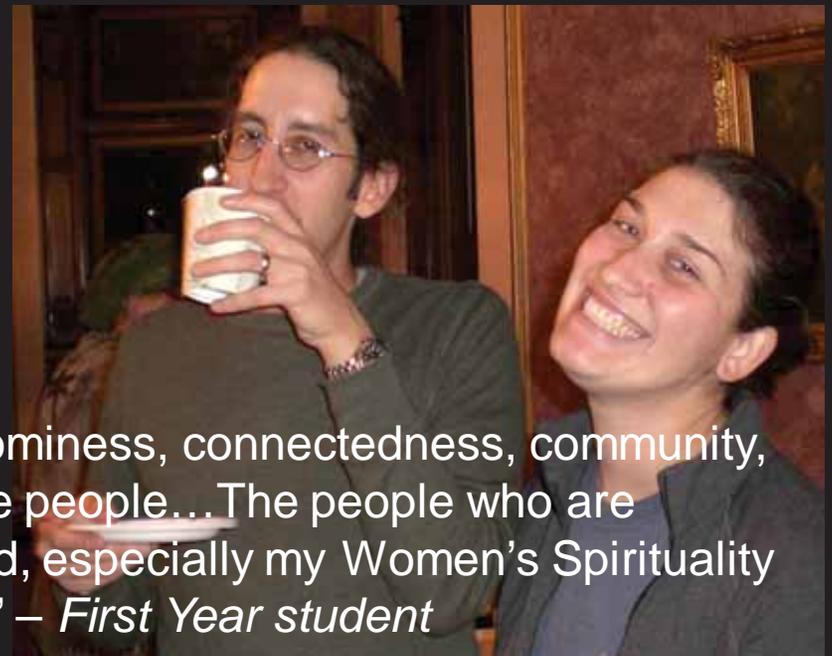
“The diversity of groups and spirituality options.” – *First Year student*

“That it offers a safe and peaceful place to counteract the stress of K. And Women’s Spirituality group!” – *Senior student*

“The support.” – *Sophomore student*

“[The program] helps me fortify my spiritual strength.” – *Sophomore student*

“The hominess, connectedness, community, genuine people...The people who are involved, especially my Women’s Spirituality Group.” – *First Year student*





Jama!



"My favorite one was the perfectionist Jama last year. It really brought to my attention what a perfectionist is and almost reaffirmed that I am one." –  
*Sophomore student*

**"I love the Jamas and how they relate to our everyday lives. Themes brought to the community such as sex, race, honesty, depression, etc. allows the campus to connect and discuss our own experience with these raw issues." – *Sophomore student***

## 2. Creating Space by Empowering & Valuing Student Leaders

- Student Chaplains
- Spirituality Group Leaders



# Student Chaplains

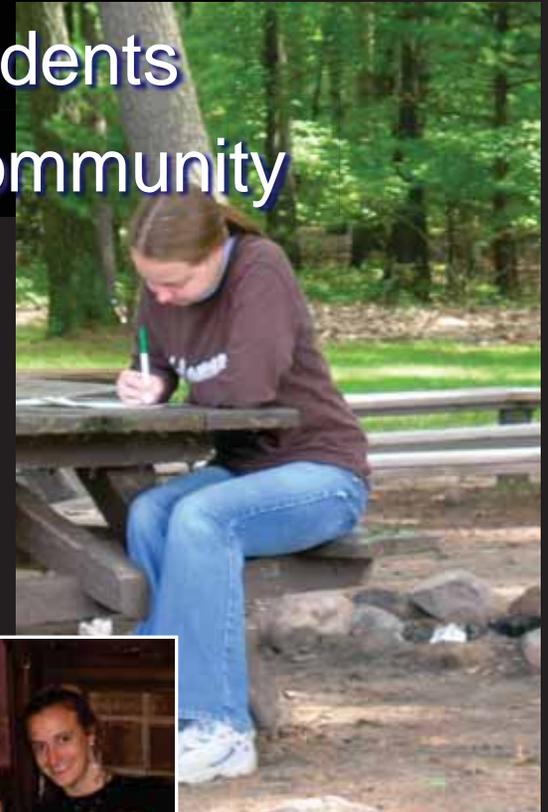
"...I was so impressed by your Cavern spaces and...your multiple programs and sensitive outreach, spiritual and otherwise, to students. I love the idea of student pastors, and more generally, given my own needs during college, deeply appreciate your opening up both spaces to gather in and encouragement to explore the life of the spirit."

*- Kim Cummings, Professor of Sociology*



# 3. Looking for key moments in the lives of students & the College

- Key Moments in the Lives of Students
- Key Moments for the College Community



# Key Moments in the Lives of Students

- **First Years**

- Bread Baking Retreat
- Outreach During Orientation Week

- Beach Trip
- Fire Circle

- **Letting Go Fire Circle Ritual**

- **First Year Tea**

“I think I first heard about the Chapel and the Cavern through First-Year Orientation. Mary Ellen is the first thing that comes to mind when I hear ‘Chapel.’” – *Sophomore student*



# Key Moments in the Lives of Students

- Sophomores
  - Decision-Making Retreat
  - 70's Party



# Key Moments in the Lives of Students

## ● Juniors

- Post-Study Abroad Retreat
- Reaching out to Juniors who didn't study abroad
- “Stories from Afar” Fire Circle Evenings

“I feel the Chapel Program gives my spiritual feelings/ideas a place to blossom.” –  
*Junior student*



# Key Moments in the Lives of Students

- Seniors
  - Senior Retreat
  - Senior Alter-Ego Party



# Key Moments in the Lives of Students

- International Students

- Outreach during Orientation

- Beach Trip

- Painting the Entrance to the Cavern

- International Insights Jama



# Key Moments in the College Community

- Homecoming
  - Fire Circles to connect Students & Alumni
- Family Weekend
  - Fire Circles for students and their families
  - Sunday Jama
- Graduation
  - Baccalaureate
  - Sunday morning service



## 4. Facilitating Community Response to Crisis

- Virginia Tech Tragedy
- Graffiti on Campus
- Student deaths &

Anniversaries of deaths



# 5. Expanding People's Concepts of Spirituality (Or how we have become Imperialists)

- "Take Back the Night" Closing Ritual
- LandSea Leaders' Discussions & Meditations
- Recreational Activities
  - Hiking, Canoeing, Snow Shoeing, Bread Baking

## ● Panels

- "Men & Feminism"
- "Faith & Feminism"
- "Science & Spirituality"
- Depression



# Religion vs. Spirituality?

## Expanding Concepts

“[The Chapel Program] doesn’t feel extremely religious (geared toward one specific religion) – just spiritual, which is lovely too.” – *First Year student*

“My whole life I have been afraid of churches, because they mean a lot to so many people and have no significance to me. But K’s chapel is homie, cozy, comforting, supporting.” – *Senior student*

“I come from a very secular background, but I feel very comfortable with the Chapel.” – *First Year student*

“I like that [the program] is connected to various religious traditions but not dominated by any one. I think it’s a good balance.” – *Senior student*



“I feel the Chapel Program does an excellent job at making the religious aspects available to the people who want them, while not forcing them on anyone else.” – *First Year student*

# Expanding Concepts of Spirituality



Canoe Trip

“The program, I think, is so open and encompasses many religious traditions. I would say I am more spiritual than religious and meeting and talking with different people here has been really great.” – *First Year student*

“I think the Chapel is perfect and allows for all types of spirituality.” – *First Year student*

“When I hear ‘chapel’ I usually associate it with something ‘religious.’ However, since coming to K, it has taken on another meaning: ‘spiritual.’” – *Sophomore student*

