

You gotta have faith

By Krista MacLean

A small, unassuming building lies nestled between the large academic infrastructure of UPEI.

Although conveniently located in the centre of campus, the vine-covered building is tragically under-used.

Most of you have witnessed the beautiful array of vines and leaves that seem to change daily as autumn turns into winter.

Some of you may have noticed the worn wooden cross partially hidden behind the foliage. The majority of you have never ventured inside.

After receiving this assignment I dared to go where so few have been - The Chaplaincy Centre.

At first I thought I was the least likely candidate to take on this story.

I am not a religious person, I was never baptized and I can count the number of times I've been to church on one hand. But after spending an hour with Father Charlie I realized I am exactly the type of person who should visit the centre.

The interior of the Chaplaincy Centre is modest but cheerful. Bright blue walls and colorful pictures make up for the lack of windows and natural light.

The chapel is made up of rows of brown office chairs that face a simple altar.

I followed the sound of voices and discovered a lounge area where three girls were relaxing on couches and sharing an afternoon snack.

They pointed me in the right direction and I quickly found Father Charlie's office.

"Well hello," he bellowed as I entered the room.

"Come in, come in!"

Then he gave me a high five. This is not what I was expecting, but then again, neither is Father Charlie.

He is the quintessential grandfather type with snow white hair, twinkling blue eyes and the slightest gap between his two front teeth.

He wore a striped golf shirt instead of the white collar I assumed all priests always wore.

He stressed that although he is a Catholic priest, people of all religious backgrounds are encouraged to visit the centre.

"The question of the faith of the students is in part what we're about here," he said.

"People who come here are Christian, Muslim and foreign students. Sometimes they have a for-

mal practice of their faith and sometimes it's just a nice place to come and reflect."

The programs run by the centre are devised by students under the watchful eye of Father Charlie.

A ten-week program called ALPHA is currently underway that explores the history and different aspects of Christianity.

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of fall and winter clothing that's available to anyone in need and proves especially helpful to foreign students who did not come prepared for the cold weather.

In fact, the centre is always looking out for the students whether they're aware of it or not.

Bowls of candy are placed in the foyer of the library during exam times and big chilli dinners are prepared in the Chaplaincy Centre free of charge on the first and second day of final exams.



Father Charlie, of the Chaplaincy Centre, stands in front of a wooden cross outside, surrounded by leaves on an autumn day.

Krista MacLean Photo

Christianity in general," he said.

The Chaplaincy Centre is also the home of the Campus Cupboard, a small food bank run by students for students. It's available to everyone and comes in handy at the end of the semester when money begins to run out, said Father Charlie.

"There's always a good supply and we encourage everyone to come. Some students may feel guilty about using it if they think others are worse off than they are, but I disagree. If students need to take a break and go see a movie and they are able to do that by supplementing their income with help from the food bank, I am not opposed to that."

The centre also has a closet full

"We're expecting about 200 people this year," said Father Charlie.

"Apart from stuffing their faces it gives students an opportunity to interact, although some do hunker down in a corner with their books."

Although exam time is a busy couple of weeks for Father Charlie he finds the time to pray for all of the students and faculty that make up the UPEI community.

"I pray for the students but I also pray for the professors. I pray they will be honest in giving their exam, just in correcting it and charitable with their marks."

Father Charlie knows about this process all too well.

He was a professor of Biology for the first 38 years of his career.

Being new to the idea of religion I asked if his belief in God conflicted with his love of science. He assured that has never been a problem.

"Do you think love, sympathy, hatred and joy is real?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "Although it's not something I can touch I have felt those emotions and believe them to be real."

"Exactly," said Father Charlie, "I can't see a soul but I know it exists just like I can't see joy but I know it exists. The idea of God is not up to a scientist."

"But what about evolution?" I wanted to know.

"God created things in an evolutionary way.

"For those that are Christian it's a matter of learning more about their faith and for those who are not it's a matter of learning about Christianity in general" - Father Charlie, on the Chaplaincy Centre

"It is much more powerful to create something from which everything can evolve than creating everything individually."

I couldn't argue with that.

"There will come times in life when things will befall us and we just don't know the answer," said Father Charlie.

"What's your support system? How do you handle it? That's where the question of faith or spirituality comes in. It forces us to think beyond our human capabilities."

Clearly this man knows what he's talking about, and judging from the hundreds of pictures that line the walls of his office his message has hit home with a lot of people of the years.

"My heart goes out in joy to the students who can come to the Chaplaincy Centre and discuss their lives regardless of their religious backgrounds. My heart goes out to those that are searching for something else in their lives. My heart really goes out to the whole large body of students who are indifferent to their faith. I think the faith is there, they just need to find it."

So the next time you pass by this charming little building on your way to the library why don't you take a little time to go inside. Maybe, just maybe, you'll find what you're looking for.