Over a long weekend in September, more than 70 Young Harris College students, faculty and staff gathered at Camp Glisson in Dahlonega for fellowship, fun and faith. Centered on the theme of C.H.A.N.G.E., the 2010-2011 Spiritual Life Retreat was divided into six distinct but interrelated sessions designed to deepen participants’ relationships with God.

In addition to the six sessions, students took part in worship, the ever-chilly “creek walk,” an afternoon of outdoor activities that included climbing walls and zip lines, a “tacky prom” and the (in)famous late-night dinner run.

For first-year students in particular, Spiritual Life Retreat serves as a great introduction to the Young Harris College campus, to the Religious Life program and to a new stage in their spiritual growth.

“Spiritual Life Retreat opened my eyes to the fact that I was not alone and that there were plenty of other college students that were living their lives for God. It was very amazing to me. I was encouraged knowing other people supported me in my life decision,” said Danielle Ashby, a freshman allied health major from Cartersville.

Taking Danielle’s sentiment further, Elizabeth Land, a freshman from Thomson said, “I loved Spiritual Life Retreat. It was such a nice getaway to just focus on God and really feel His love for me. As a freshman, the weekend really helped me find the group of friends I have been looking for at Young Harris. I met a bunch of great guys and gals. I would suggest it to any incoming Christian freshman.”

For returning students, Spiritual Life Retreat was equally significant.

Don Bracewell, a sophomore history major from Alpharetta, found it to be both a place to find community while also intentionally connecting with God. “Spiritual Life Retreat was an excellent bonding experience with fellow students and God,” he said. “We formed lifelong friendships and connections mentally, physically and, most of all, spiritually.”

Michelle Brun, a sophomore allied health major from Kennesaw, added, “there were breakthroughs for people who were struggling with trusting the Lord.”

Tim Linley, a freshman music education major from Cartersville, captured the spirit of Spiritual Life Retreat best. “This was my first time at SLR, and it was an awesome, amazing experience!” he said. “I cannot wait until the next one.”

Students enjoy the climbing tower (top) and the Cane Creek walk (bottom) during Spiritual Life Retreat.

Above, students enjoy Cane Creek Falls during Spiritual Life Retreat.
The fall 2010 semester was wonderful. From three travel opportunities, to local mission workdays, to celebrations, to new programs beginning, to great student leadership—Fall 2010 was a gift.

On average, an estimated 200 students participate weekly in one of our Religious Life offerings. In fact, this year has been defined by student involvement. Our student-led Inter-Religious Council (IRC) has been particularly active, intentionally involving a cohort of three freshmen as part of the leadership team in an effort to lay the groundwork of future ministry.

Yet, students have not been the only ones involved in our ministry this term. Regularly, faculty, staff and administration support Religious Life by sharing in worship, speaking at chapel, advising our small groups or offering their faithful presence. Such a broad range of opportunities and involvement is intentional.

It is my prayer that Religious Life is not something limited to my Office or restricted to just our student population but that it becomes an ever-more integrated, broad-reaching and essential element of what it means to say “Young Harris College.”

Rev. Dr. Tim Moore
Campus Minister

YHC HOSTS

New Thanksgiving Celebration

In 1621, the Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag tribe shared an autumn harvest feast that is acknowledged today as one of the first Thanksgiving celebrations in the Americas. For more than two centuries, days of thanksgiving were celebrated by individual colonies and states.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued a presidential order at the height of the Civil War scheduling a common, official Thanksgiving holiday for the final Thursday in November. From their inception, American Thanksgiving celebrations have been marked not just by their character of thanks but by their background and experiences—yet perfectly willing to hear from the differencing perspective of a fellow student. The student leaders showed their leadership abilities in their planning of the weekend, the arrangement of the worship space and activities, and especially in their leadership during the final night’s worship service. I came away from the weekend experience with a deep appreciation for the students and their ministry at Young Harris (as well as Rev. Dr. Tim Moore). It was a great weekend for students to further explore their faith, to worship God together, and to have an excellent time in fellowship with other students in an off-campus setting.”

JOSEPH MCBRAYER, CAMPUS MINISTER AND WESLEY FELLOWSHIP DIRECTOR, EMORY UNIVERSITY, ATLANTA

Hayesville, N.C.

The celebration was an effort to expose students to the diversity of beliefs and faith practices that define the YHC community. Matthew Kammerer, a senior from Loganville and Student Government Association president, confirmed that the evening accomplished that goal. “I enjoyed the presentation from the Cherokee, and I loved hearing stories from an Elder of the tribe,” he said. “Overall, I enjoyed hearing so many perspectives; it was an eye-opening event!”

Reiterating Matthew’s observations, YHC President Cathy Cox, who also attended the event, said, “It is important for us to provide opportunities, like this multicultural dinner, that expose our students to things that challenge them and enlarge their world view.”

On that night, YHCs small corner of the world felt much larger.
Fall Break Trip Provides Volunteer Opportunities for Students

Eleven Young Harris College students traveled to Charleston, S.C., during Fall Break, Oct. 6-10, to take part in the “Scratch Beginnings Experience.” Jointly coordinated by the Office of First Year Experience, the Bonner Leaders Program and the Office of Religious Life, the trip emerged as part of the College’s recently adopted campus-wide reading program. The reading program book, Adam Shepard’s Scratch Beginnings: Me, $25, and the Search for the American Dream, chronicles Shepard’s time spent living in Charleston on the edge of poverty. “We wanted to provide a firsthand learning experience for students that would allow them to volunteer in the Charleston area while also gaining a better understanding of the issues of homelessness and what Adam Shepard experienced,” said Niki Fjeldal, director of the Search for the American Dream.

The group sorted and prepared boxes of food at the Low Country Food Bank, worked at Rural Missions with children that participate in a Head Start program for migrant workers, and cooked breakfast for the Women and Children’s Shelter and Men’s Shelter at Crisis Ministries. “God used the fall break trip to show me that serving Him is not about my agenda, but about the joy of knowing that He has blessed me by letting me be His servant in the first place,” she said.

Students Travel to Asheville To Assist with Church Outreach

As part of a larger program co-sponsored by the Office of Religious Life and other campus departments, a group of Young Harris College students, faculty and staff participated in the National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, held Nov. 14-20, by traveling to Asheville, N.C., Nov. 13-14, to take part in outreach activities with the Haywood Street congregation of Central United Methodist Church.

Each year, one week before Thanksgiving, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness co-sponsor National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. During this week, a number of schools, communities and cities take part in a nationwide effort to bring greater awareness to the problems of hunger and homelessness.

While in Asheville, the group from YHC learned about the work of the Haywood Street congregation, took a walking tour of downtown Asheville to witness homelessness firsthand, volunteered in the Haywood Street clothing closet, and participated in a weekly meal for the homeless and poor at Pritchard Park. Rachel Ren, a junior business and public policy major from China said, “I feel very touched by the homeless people we encountered and Rev. Combs at the Asheville church. No one is too young or too busy to make a difference.”

Rev. Brian Combs, the pastor of the Haywood Street congregation, was delighted by the grace and demeanor of the YHC students. “When an epileptic homeless brother with mental illnesses and substance abuse struggles walked in unannounced to our dinner gathering [at the Haywood Street church], the theology of the weekend moved from conversation to incarnation,” he explained. “The students from YHC responded just as Jesus would. Hospitality was extended, conversation was engaged and the table was widened.”

Campus Minister Rev. Dr. Tim Moore added, “In addition to widening the table, it is my hope that that the perspectives of students on issues of homelessness and poverty also expanded.”
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NEW GROUPS ADDED TO RELIGIOUS LIFE ACTIVITIES

In an endeavor to expand the reach and impact of the Office of Religious Life at Young Harris College, three new or renewed groups began during the fall semester.

SIGHT (Seekers’ Interfaith Group for Honoring Thought) is a new program for faculty, staff and students co-sponsored by the Office of Religious Life, the Bonner Leaders Program and the Department of Religious Studies. Meeting on Tuesdays, SIGHT offers an open and relaxed environment to discuss the dynamic matrix of faith, doubt and spirituality. Deliberately non-sectarian, SIGHT hopes to foster dialogue for those interested in spiritual exploration.

“A college campus is a natural place to engage in conversations about faith, yet at YHC, only about 25% of our students regularly participate in College-sponsored religious activities,” said Campus Minister Rev. Dr. Tim Moore. “We hope this new group allows those from our college community interested in conversations about faith but who currently are not engaged in the College’s offerings to experience this organization as a welcoming and comfortable environment to ask those deep and probing questions with which we all wrestle.”

Tad Tarleton, a freshman from Dalton said, “Being in SIGHT has benefited my college experience. SIGHT provides me a sense of belonging within the college community with fellow students who are also interested in open discussion and reflection on issues such as religion and spirituality.”

Another new group, Catholic Student Association (CSA) is a reconstitution of the College’s Newman Club. Open to more than just Catholic members of the YHC community, every Monday, students, faculty and staff gather for prayer, fellowship and mutual support. “The CSA has made me feel like I have a place to be myself in my faith. It has brought me closer to my Catholic faith, and I have made some lifetime friends. I encourage anyone to be a part of this amazing organization!” said Allen Lim, a sophomore science major from Mt. Airy. This past fall semester, the CSA sponsored a bake sale, participated in Chapel services, held monthly praying of the Rosary, and organized an on-campus saying of the Mass.

Thirdly, after some prompting by members of the faculty, the Office of Religious Life started a bi-weekly faculty/staff bible study. Initially studying the book of Esther, the gathering has provided both new and returning members of the YHC community a convenient way to engage their faith and explore scripture together during their lunch hour. Eric Dickman, Ph.D., assistant professor of religion, described the new bible study as “a great on-going conversation.”

NEW STUDENTS ATTEND INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE CONFERENCE

Young Harris College students Amanda Noonan, a senior English major from Smyrna, and Jack Tripp, a junior business and public policy major from Fayetteville, and Campus Minister Rev. Dr. Tim Moore recently attended the Interfaith Youth Core’s (IFYC) Interfaith Leadership Institute conference, titled “Better Together,” in Washington, D.C., Oct. 24–26. The conference included a welcome event at the White House hosted by the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The IFYC was founded in 1998 to build mutual respect and interfaith cooperation among young people from different religious traditions by empowering them to work together to serve others. The conference was designed to provide intensive training for 100 student leaders and 50 campus staff allies on the knowledge and skills necessary to lead interfaith and community service initiatives on campus.

“We attended workshops on how interfaith activities can be organized on campus and how we might engage in cooperative interfaith actions without compromising our individual faith commitments,” Rev. Dr. Moore explained. “We discussed how our faith might bring us together rather than drive us apart, balancing our particular commitments with our common commitments to the betterment of the world.”

The group also learned about IFYC’s “Better Together” international campaign that empowers students to speak out about the power of interfaith social action and mobilizes students to work with different faith communities and design efforts to sustain long-term interfaith work on college campuses.

“The most inspiring part of the conference was listening to people share stories about their faith traditions and how they have used their faith as motivation to make a difference in the world,” Noonan said. “I was interested by the idea that people of different faith traditions can find more common ground than we often realize.”

“It was an eye-opening experience to the potential relationships that can be cultivated across cultural lines,” Tripp added. “I truly enjoyed everything about our trip, from the sessions I attended to the friends I made there.”

During the conference, Noonan, Tripp and Rev. Dr. Moore had the opportunity to engage in activities with college students and staff members from across the country and meet with staff from the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

“The trip was a great and challenging success. Our hope is to begin expanding interfaith dialogue and interactions on the Young Harris College campus,” Rev. Dr. Moore said.