

## **Interfaith Student Center at UT Martin 2008**

For 61 years, students at the University of Tennessee at Martin have experienced the wide open way of Christian living through a campus ministry now known as the Interfaith Student Center (ISC). With increased promotion, we have seen a major increase in student participation.

The Interfaith Center currently averages 30 attendees at Thursday night worship, with another 40+ students regularly involved in other aspects of the ministry. This is a 50 percent increase over 2007. A weekly email is sent to more than 200 students, and we reach another 60-100 students through Facebook. Our goal is to average 60 in worship and at least 100 students in the facility every week. To reach our goal, we participate in numerous events that increase our visibility in the community.

In 2008, students from the ISC participated in tornado and hurricane recovery efforts in West Tennessee and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We also hosted the "Empty Bowl Soup Supper," which drew hundreds and raised \$1,500 to feed the hungry in our community. Interfaith co-sponsored a canned food drive for We Care Ministries, organized a CROP Walk to fight global hunger through Church World Service and raised funds to fight malaria in Asia and Africa. We also held special services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Recently, the ISC signed on as a host site for "Angel Food Ministries," which provides quality groceries at a greatly reduced price.

The ISC currently has six interns serving in the areas of worship/music; missions; fellowship; publicity; and computer technology. The result is that our ministry is now completely student-led, with the director, The Reverend Jolinne Balentine-Downey, a United Methodist clergy, and the active approved campus chaplains of the Episcopal Church (The Rev. Don Brooks), the Presbyterian Church USA (The Rev. Lee Clements), the Roman Catholic Church (The Rev. Joe Palozzi and The Rev. Dr. Rodney Freed, deacon), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (The Rev. Mace Jett), and inter-denominationally selected members of the Board of Directors providing pastoral oversight, nurture, and direction.

In addition to weekly worship services, the ISC offers a free meal each week to UT-M students, as well as munchies during the day and "brain sustenance foods" during exam weeks; Bible studies and Christian formation classes; a Rosary prayer group, licensed personal counseling sessions, and opportunities just to "schmooze" with other students and Center Staff members. The weekly meal is generally provided by area churches. Interfaith also sponsors intramural softball, football, and volleyball teams, and we offer both organized and informal times of fellowship, mentoring, and spiritual nurture.

None of this would be possible without the continued and generous financial support of the United Methodist Memphis Annual Conference and the several churches and organizations in our cooperative ministry. Campus ministry can be viewed as an expensive undertaking; or, it can be viewed as a magnificent investment in the life and health of The Church, and hence, of our world. Through campus ministry, the Voice of God is often heard as God calls young women and young men to a shaped and healthy life of Christian service and ministry. Campus Ministry offers to the Church and to the world young adults who love God, are growing in faith, and are passionate about serving Jesus Christ. It's hard to put a price on that.