Welcome to the Chaplain’s Corner newsletter. If you have a joy or concern you’d like to share with our staff, send an e-mail or give us a call at Ext. 8348. We only share concerns with the campus community, via newsletter or e-mail, with permission. You can view previous and current issues of our newsletter (in PDF format), on the Spiritual Life page of the Lynchburg College website—www.lynchburg.edu/spirituallife.

A Time of Reflection and Hope

This week begins the season of Advent, a time of reflection and spiritual preparation leading up to the celebration of Christmas. Two images inform my understanding of Advent this year. The first is that of the traditional Advent wreath, a circle of greenery with four candles for each week of the season. The other image is a photograph that has gone viral of a police officer in Portland, Oregon hugging a 12-year-old African-American boy. According to a CNN website:

“The boy, Devonte Hart, was holding a sign offering ‘Free Hugs’ during a Tuesday protest over a grand jury’s decision not to indict Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson. Portland police Sgt. Bret Barnum approached Devonte and extended his hand. Barnum said he approached Devonte ‘not as a police officer but just a human being’ when he saw him crying.” A hug and conversation followed soon thereafter and the photo is now referred to as the hug shared round the world.

Advent calls to mind light shining in the darkness, and each candle represents values such as hope, love, joy, and peace. Even one small flame can gradually bring a faint glow to the surrounding darkness. In a similar fashion, the picture of the young boy and the officer has become a symbol of hope in the despair that is now associated with Ferguson, Missouri, and sadly, other cities in our country as well.

The tragic events of the last week and months remind us that we are witnesses to a long history of institutional racism and systemic injustice in our country and in our world. However, institutions are ultimately made up of people, and systems can only be changed by the actions of those involved and affected. It behooves each of us to take a long hard look at how we participate in actions of racism whether willingly or not. Each of us is called to do serious soul searching whether we understand ourselves as victims or perpetrators. If a victim, how can I best address the injustice as I experience it and speak truth to the powers that perpetuate it? If I understand myself as a person of privilege who automatically has certain advantages and power, how can I honestly acknowledge my complicity and myself as a person of privilege who automatically has certain advantages and power, and seek to redress the wrongs that continue to plague our neighborhoods and our cities?

A young boy of color chose to be vulnerable and to bring tears of pain, hurt, and fear to the surface and to seek some kind of connection with the Black teenager who had been killed. A white police officer chose to respond in kind and received an embrace that led to dialogue and a momentary hopeful glimpse of what might be possible. Make no mistake—this was not a simple photo op that suddenly makes everything better. It will take far more than a warm hug to unravel the complicated, messy, and very painful past and present of racial discrimination. But even the longest and most arduous journeys is made one step at a time even as the Advent wreath is lit, one small candle flame at a time.

This Advent, may we light a candle, offer a hug, and connect on an authentic level with someone different than ourselves. May we seek to see the world through the other’s eyes. May we struggle to feel their pain and to understand the challenges they face. May we live in such a way that our very lives offer glimpses of Advent hope and light to a world in desperate need of both.

By Anne Gibbons

Associate Chaplain and Director of the Bonner Leader Program

Regularly Scheduled Meetings

For a list of our regularly scheduled meetings during the academic year, go to the Spiritual Life webpage and click on “Spiritual Organizations on Campus.”

By Anne Gibbons

Center for Spiritual Life
500 Brevard Street—434.544.8348
www.lynchburg.edu/spirituallife

Upcoming Events

Final Countdown:
Night of Worship
Saturday, Dec. 6th
Sydnor Performance Hall
Christmas service of praise, gospel music, and worship

Hanukkah
(Jewish Festival of Lights)
Dec. 16 – 24
Begins at Sundown Dec. 16

Campus Worship Opportunities

Sunday
• Quaker Meeting 10:30 a.m., Center for Spiritual Life
• InFaith [IF] — Campus Protestant Worship, 3 p.m., Sydnor Performance Hall
• Roman Catholic Mass — 4:30 p.m., Snidow Chapel