

Interfaith gives support, safety

By Will Holbert
Of the Emerald

The people who work there call it a place of refuge, of safety, and of fellowship. People can go there for many different reasons: to have fun, to find help, to make friends, or to worship God.

The Campus Interfaith Ministry prides itself on being many things to a lot of different people. Housed in the Koinonia Center across from PLC, the Interfaith Ministry is an ecumenical organization representing 10 local denominations, including Catholic, Baptist, Jewish, and Quaker organizations.

"Campus Interfaith Ministry itself as an ecumenical program is Christianity plus — it encompasses Christianity, but it also encompasses the Jewish community. So our thrust isn't primarily Christian, it's

broader than Christian. It's more of a spiritual focus," said Susan Fjerkenstad, Interfaith program coordinator.

The Interfaith Ministry in its present form started in the late 1970s. Back then it was known as Campus Christian Ministries. Members decided the organization was too narrow, and when the Jewish community joined it became Campus Interfaith. The Interfaith now incorporates the staffs of the 10 "faith communities," as Campus Interfaith Pastor Tom Heger prefers to call them.

"It makes a whole lot more sense for us to do something in common than in competition or isolation," Heger said.

Heger, 43, has worked with Interfaith since 1982 as a Presbyterian pastor. He also serves as the representative pastor for three other local denominations.

Heger sees Interfaith's purpose as providing a safe place for students, a place where they can ask tough questions, and "be both vulnerable and supported" at the same time. Today's society contains an abundance of materialism and selfishness, according to Heger. The church as a whole, and his campus ministry in particular, should provide an alternative to such a society in Heger's view.

Interfaith can put students in touch with the religious organizations of their choice. The selection ranges from the conservative to the more broad and open religious groups. They also hold devotion services and discussion groups. Moslem students gather to worship at the center, and Jewish members celebrate High Holy Days there. But religion plays only

Turn to Interfaith, Page 18A



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Child

Continued from Page 8A

Reynolds' long-term goal is to have a resource referral service on campus, but currently suggests parents contact Victoria Koch at the American Red Cross. The Red Cross keeps updated lists on who has spaces.

Beginning this fall, Westmoreland will offer 22 spaces for a combined preschool and kindergarten program for ages three to six. The six EMU programs have separate activities for different age groups.

Westmoreland has never had a child care site for its 400 plus family units, but students approved funding for staff, which led to the Westmoreland addition.

"I'm real glad students were given a chance to say what they felt in the University's Spring election. They voted to increase spending for child care by a 3-to-1 margin," said Reynolds.

Increased child care was also strongly supported by student government, "who don't even have kids," said Reynolds.

The Amazon housing community has a child care co-op offered first to its own residents. It operates from 7:45 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and offers 24 spaces for two-and-a-half to six-year-olds.

The tuition ranges from \$58-\$180 per month, and because it is a co-op, parents must help out a few hours a month. Registration can be for a quarter or for the full school year. Applicants can contact Suzy Blanchard, Amazon Teacher/Director at 485-6554.

Blanchard suggests parents go to Amazon community tenants' meetings and let members know there is greater need for child care. She and Reynolds each want to set up a parent network for infant/toddler babysitting.

The Amazon situation exemplifies the crisis for quality daycare. There are over 100 school-age kids among Amazon's 246 houses, and the daycare's 24 spaces hardly meet that need.

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