

# Graduate Chaplaincy: Connecting

By Eric Yates

It's roughly 12 miles from PLNU's main campus to its graduate program facility in Mission Valley. But to graduate students in the School of Education at PLNU Mission Valley, 12 miles never seemed so close.

That's because an innovative program has been established to help the students stay connected to the university's mission of integrating faith and learning through the use of a chaplain.

The role of the chaplain has been designated to School of Education professor Jim Johnson. Johnson took the position last year, the first year of the chaplaincy program, and his duties are two-fold.

"One is the pastoral role for graduate faculty, staff and students. I provide a lot of support and counseling and interactive dealings with their day-in and day-out lives," said Johnson.

May. In that short time, she can see the benefits of what the program provides.

"I have been very impressed with what Point Loma deliberately does to create a vital Christian community for our students," said Bentley. "The whole issue of spiritual formation and the moral and ethical standards of all graduate students in the School of Education is a very high priority. All the research shows that whether you're a young person or an older person or an adult, the idea of being able to have that connection with someone on campus is very important. So we wanted to be sure that with the spiritual leadership of a chaplain, it makes [that connection] stronger."

Since the program's genesis, the response from graduate students has been positive, said Bentley.

"Dr. Johnson is very well-known and loved among the graduate students to begin with, as a professor,"

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He mentioned that last spring, after a student in the graduate education program died unexpectedly, he was actively involved in consoling her family and fellow students.

"Those typical roles that you ascribe in a pastoral kind of relationship for a shepherded flock are the same [in the chaplain role,]" said Johnson.

The second role is more on the instructional level. Johnson is working with the graduate faculty, both adjunct and full-time to establish the same faith foundation for instruction that is found in undergraduate education. Johnson has organized retreats for the graduate faculty and has begun developing and implementing strategic plans in service training, advising and mentoring.

"The integration of faith and learning into the classroom is an integral part of carrying out the mission of the university," he said.

Sue Bentley has been involved in the Point Loma graduate program for a year and has been in her position as director of the School of Education since

said Bentley. "Various events that he led for the students last year were well received."

Another one of Johnson's roles is helping with the cross-cultural and international perspective trips and encouraging graduate students to get involved as well. Johnson plans on leading a Love Works trip this summer in Africa.

Plans are in the works to establish similar chaplaincy programs at PLNU Arcadia and PLNU Bakersfield.

"The whole chaplaincy support system is very much connected to a School of Education vision of explicitly addressing the spiritual formation of our graduate students," said Bentley. "The University's mission is to teach, shape and send for students who are academically highly proficient, but also students of noble character."

*Eric Yates (2000) earned a journalism degree from PLNU. He is an editor and freelance writer in San Diego.*