

SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER



JACKSONVILLE CAMPUS MINISTRY



Students gather to play games and chat about ministry in the new campus housing space. This fall, we will have room for six students to live in an affordable, inclusive, and safe place thanks to our partnerships.

Seeds planted in all types of soil...

For the last several months, our board of directors has been spending the first few minutes of our meetings meditating on Jesus' parable of the careless farmer (Matthew 13:1-9). The parable depicts a farmer who scatters seed all along his land: some on the path, some on the rocky ground, some on thorny ground, and some on fertile ground. And in the fertile ground, the seeds yield a crop that is a hundred or sixty or thirty times what was sown.

This parable feels perfect for campus ministry because we never really know on what kind of ground we are sowing our seeds. It may vary from year to year, too. Last year, the thorny ground was perfectly fertile, while this year the rocky soil might be what was clearly the path last year. Our congregation of students changes each year and we faithfully sow seeds, hoping to hit some fertile soil here and there. (Continued on next page.)



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New student residents this fall.

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17

Students traveled to Germany with us.

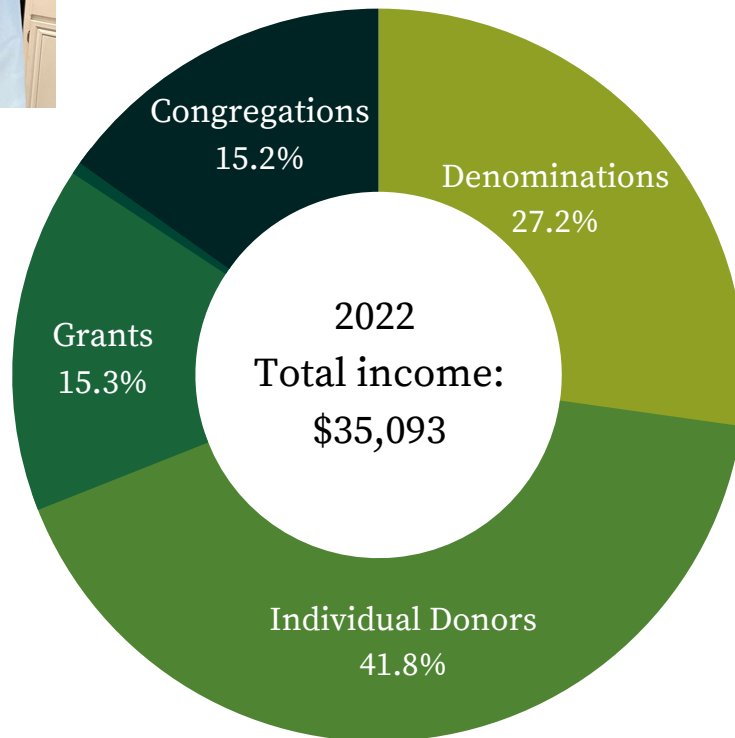
(Continued from front) In the past year, we have certainly been able to find some fertile soil. But even in the rocky and thorny soil, we have found blessings in gathering with one another and struggling together. In the next few pages of our newsletter, you will find the many different yields of the seeds we have sown. Some seeds were sown just in the past year. Some were sown years and years ago, by people who came long before Pastor Sarah was shepherding this ministry. All of these yields give us hope that the seeds that we continue to sow today will one day mature into good fruit.



Students enjoy authentic Puerto Rican cuisine and s'mores at Pastor Sarah's house over the summer.

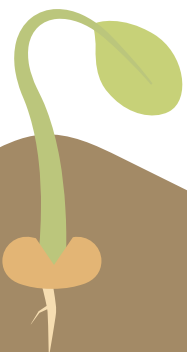


Pastor Sarah says hello to Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the presiding bishop of the ELCA



Give now

Pastor Sarah's salary and benefits are paid by Redeemer Episcopal Church and St. Mark's Lutheran Church, two of our partners in ministry.



A note from Pastor Sarah

Through the doubts and anxiety of the past several years, one thing has remained constant: this ministry is more important than ever. One of our self-proclaimed agnostic students has been one of our most involved over the past year. Early in the spring semester, after asking some very pointed questions about Christian beliefs, he said, "well, maybe eventually I'll join a Christian community." I replied, "Welcome. You're already here and a vital part of one." This ministry is about community and living together in hope for the future.

I love this work and I am so grateful to be able to continue in this ministry with the support of our amazing student leaders, partner congregations, board members, and donors. Thank you for your invaluable support and encouragement.



Once in a lifetime in Germany



After several years of COVID derailing our travel plans, we were finally able to get excited about our spring break last semester. We teamed up with two other campus ministries: Lutheran Campus Ministries at Appalachian State University and University of North Carolina to create the Luther tour of our dreams! We spent ten days exploring Berlin, Wittenberg, Leipzig, Eisleben, Mansfeld, Buchenwald, Erfurt, and Wartburg. Funds from a [previous Lilly Endowment Fund](#) allowed 17 students and three adult leaders from our ministry to attend the trip. We used Cole Arthur Riley's *This Here Flesh* as a focus for our conversation throughout the trip and really leaned into the ways in which God is calling us into community here in Jacksonville.

One of the best experiences was planning and leading worship in the 600 year old chapel at Mansfeld Castle. It was great to see the students step up into faith leadership roles and take on a new challenge in the midst of so many new experiences. Worship was so meaningful and sharing Holy Eucharist in that space has nourished us to continue the practice as we gather back on campus this fall (continued later).

Why I support campus ministry

*The Rev. Erin Dickey
JCM Board Member*

I grew up at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Lake Charles, LA. It was a small, incredibly loving congregation that helped foster and nurture my call to ministry. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tends to be a small but mighty denomination which means it is pretty common for youth groups to be... sparse. It wasn't until I went to college that I truly got experience what it's like to be in a faith community of my peers on a regular basis. Being able to experience day to day life through a lens of faith was a gift I longed for and finally received through the Disciples on Campus ministry at Texas Christian University (GO FROGS!). Campus ministry was the greatest part of my college experience - giving me a safe space to ask questions about my faith, about scripture, and about life in general. Campus ministry gave me incredible mentors and lifelong friendships.

But more than what campus ministry did for me, I saw what it did for those who longed to experience the expansive love of God. It acted as a triage unit for those students who have been wounded by the Church, and yet, weren't willing to give up on their faith. One of the most formidable moments of this was when my dear friend Julian, who had been kicked out and condemned by his home church because of his sexuality, was invited to share in communion during a campus ministry worship service. We didn't know, and likely will never know, the depth of the pain he had experienced in the name of the Church, but he wasn't quite ready to give up on his faith. As we were preparing to receive communion, he asked if I'd walk up to the Table with him. As we walked back to our seats, having just received the bread of life and the cup of hope, he leaned over and said, "This the first time I've felt like God loves me since I came out."

It was because of the work of campus ministry, of creating spaces that allow all of God's beloved children to be immersed in God's love, that Julian began a new relationship with the church - one filled with new life and hope.



Though my only connection with UNF is that I now serve a church in Jacksonville, I believe deeply in the power of campus ministry and have witnessed what God can do when we make space for the Spirit to speak. When we partner with campus ministries, we do it for college students just like Julian who know deep in their bones that God loves them, but have been in spaces where their belovedness is not affirmed.

How might God be calling you to help create spaces for students just like my friend Julian?

**Learn more about how to support
JCM at jaxcm.org/give**

Redeemer HOUSE

Sometimes we plant seeds that look dormant for many years until one year there are sprouts and blooms and suddenly vibrant fruit. Father Wiley Ammons of Redeemer Episcopal Church reflects on his time of planting seeds with Jacksonville Campus Ministry and what fruit we see emerging:

“

When I was first involved with JCM as a member of the board 10 years ago, we talked about the days of yore when we had a paid chaplain and regular weekly offerings on campus. We were doing our best at the time, but there was definitely a sense that our best years may have been behind us. I wish those board members could see where we are today. With Pastor Sarah's enthusiasm, hard work, creativity, and faithfulness there will be days to come when today will be considered the successful days of yore.

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In the past few years, we have worked closely with Redeemer Episcopal Church, but just in the last two years, we realized that our partnership had the potential to go deeper as Redeemer's 3000sqft of rental space became vacant. Through some dreaming and a lot of strategic planning, we are able to provide a new campus ministry space and affordable, safe, and inclusive housing for six students this fall. Fr. Wiley continues:

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Few of us could have imagined where we are today as an ecumenical fellowship, and even fewer would have imagined eventually housing our students. My excitement for what this effort adds to the life of our parish and my hope for what living in intentional Christian community can do in the the lives and faith of our students is hard to express. I have heard people of deep faith talk about how formative it was for them to live in this type of faith community in early adulthood long after they've left college. We're forming relationships with the potential to last a lifetime and we're forming disciples who will, by God's grace, live forever. I give God thanks and praise for these efforts, for this project, and for our continued ecumenical fellowship and gospel work for the students of our Jacksonville campuses.

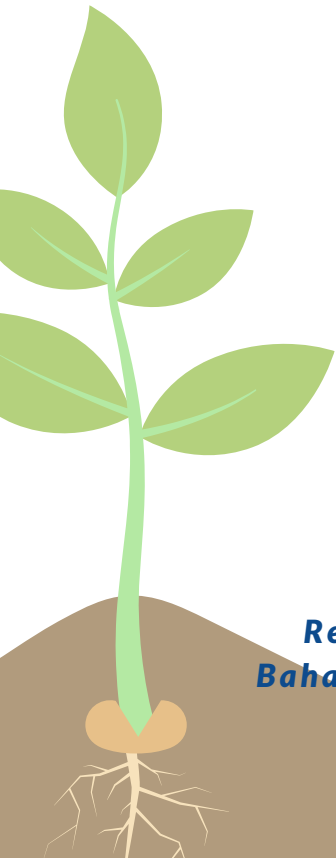
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Redeemer House is funded by the generosity of the Florida-Bahamas Synod Together in Mission Fund, the National Lutheran Campus Ministry Capital Fund, and partners like you.

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN JCM & REDEEMER EPISCOPAL CHURCH

- 6 bedrooms
- Full kitchen
- Study room
- Laundry room
- Living room
- 2 full bathrooms

Affordable, inclusive, and safe housing for some of our most vulnerable students.





Ash Wednesday on campus, reminding students, faculty, staff, and community members alike that they are made of the earth and God's breath.



National Day of Coming Out is an important one for us, because it allows us to witness loudly and boldly that everyone is a part of God's family.



JCM Christmas party games!



Interfaith "Find your Folks" event on the Green in the spring semester.

Queer Bible Study // Coffee & Conversation with the Interfaith Center

(continued) One of our students, Joy reflects on her experience in Germany. It was one of the first times she has stepped back into a church building since high school. "The main pieces of our Germany trip were education, connection, and self identity. We learned a range of Lutheran history, while intimately bonding as a group through shared experiences and reflection. Our trip was focused on Christianity, yet we made a space open, welcoming and celebratory to those exploring from other faiths while simultaneously learning from each other." It is obvious how much our group was able to connect and bond during this pilgrimage. It is definitely something we want to do again. We are so thankful for all of the prayers that you provided for us as we planned this trip and as we traveled around Germany. We could feel your presence and we are grateful for your accompaniment.



The group heads down the street in Wittenberg.



Joy (front center) and many students cheese for the camera in Germany.

Looking ahead...



We continue to hope and dream about the potential for spring break trips with our students. This year we are looking a little closer to home in North Carolina. If you are interested in helping us get there, please let us know!

This summer we will have our first campus ministry leadership retreat for students who attended our summer discipleship group. We look forward to the fall semester when we will continue to gather weekly for Food for Thought, Queer Bible Study, and Wednesday Market Days.

We will begin having Holy Eucharist on campus once a month (at the request of our students) during Food for Thought.

A note from our ministry student intern

*Milesh Patel
History*

The first time I heard about the JCM was my friend telling me a church club provided dinner every Tuesday night right before Anime Club. I thought it was weird that my friends would go to a church thing for food but I ended up joining them. I instantly loved going every Tuesday and stayed even after Anime Club began because of how much I loved Pastor Sarah and the welcoming community. After 3 years I still look forward to every Tuesday night, spending it with the JCM community which has provided me with some of my most cherished memories: going to my first haunted house, playing fun Christmas games, and going to Germany. Also, thanks to JCM I started becoming interested in Christianity, I've regularly attended church every Sunday and read the Bible. They have created an inclusive and welcoming community that allows me to be me and shows how I can be a part of a religious community.





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A note from our ministry student intern

*Ama DeLeon
English*

As someone with a lot of experience in Christian spaces, I never imagined finding one that fully clicked. As I've gotten older, spiritual alignment has become more and more important to me and finding a space where my values align with what happens spiritually has been a challenge I was determined to overcome. JCM has become not only that place, but a home, and even more— a family. JCM is a place of safety, learning, community, advocacy, and love. JCM recognizes and celebrates diversity, while creating a safe place to ask questions without shame. I am blessed to have the opportunity to be in this space, to ask my questions and answer others. It has been a place essential to my spiritual journey and growth as a leader. I am so proud to call JCM my home and can't wait for all of the exciting things to come.



Learn more about how to support JCM at jaxcm.org/give