

St. Stephen's University Community Handbook

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Welcome to SSU

Welcome to a unique educational experience! St. Stephen's University was established over 30 years ago as a centre of Christian higher learning in Canada. As the university has developed it has become distinctive in several ways, particularly in relation to the pursuit of an academic excellence that is reflected in character building, the development of "world consciousness" (aided by the two travel semesters), and the desire to have a truly vibrant spiritual life in the midst of a transdenominational Christian community. Each year, we find it a difficult challenge to explain to newcomers all of the ways that these distinctives are reflected in everyday life. This Community Handbook is an attempt to help people make the transition to life here as easily as possible, and it is meant to serve as a general reference for the many spiritual, moral, practical, academic and community issues that are likely to arise over the course of an academic year. Parts of this handbook are very practical; others parts describe the vision of a community life that we will not always succeed in embodying. However, it is expected that each student, staff and faculty member will become thoroughly familiar with the contents; *to enroll here or to serve in this community means that you have agreed to support these standards and contribute to their ongoing development.*

Introduction

One of the greatest difficulties in adjusting to life at SSU is simply coming to understand the difference between what life here is designed to be in contrast to what most people have experienced in contemporary western culture. Voices in media and education, reflecting the dominant worldviews of our day, have often emphasized rationalism, individualism, relativism and hedonism. SSU embodies a conscious and intentional attempt to stand apart from these trends. Contemporary culture makes its plans without stopping to consider the claims, promises, and commands of a Living God; here we desire to allow God's reign to touch every aspect of our lives. Secular culture focuses on individual self-fulfillment; here we attempt to learn what it means to follow Jesus by dying to self and by honouring others above the self. Society at large operates as though truth is unknowable, if it exists at all; many people find their highest good in whatever pleases them for the moment. We maintain that Jesus' revelation of God has planted our feet firmly on a journey toward truth. Our highest good is found in seeking and living in accordance with this truth; we do not understand this truth perfectly, but when we seek it as a community of sincere followers, we are confident that we are drawing closer.

In other words, a great deal of modern life is about the exaltation of the individual at the expense of true community. We are seeking to create a life at SSU that is characterized by a desire to build community under God's leadership, and it is our belief that this

direction, and not the other, is the one that actually allows the individual to grow into his or her greatest potential.

This is in line with the message of Isaiah the prophet:

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. (*Is.55:2*)

Coming to God, and finding Him (or allowing oneself to be found by Him), does satisfy the soul. And it provides the necessary change of heart, which makes the idea of living in community a possibility. When St. Augustine was asked to write a handbook of Christian living, he wrote these introductory words:

And the true way to obtain this instruction is not to have a short treatise put into one's hands, but to have a great zeal put into one's heart. (*The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, 421 AD)

When we receive the security that God gives at the deepest level of our being, it satisfies our thirst for ultimate meaning and fulfillment, and it puts an end forever to a large measure of our anxiety and fear. If our point of reference is eternal, we become free as never before to "...do everything without complaining or arguing" (Phil. 2:14), and to do all things, "whether in word or in deed...in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17).

Therefore, we think it could be said that if a person truly understood and agreed with all of this, and meant to do his or her best to live it out, most of the content of this handbook would not be necessary. If each of us acted in such a way that our greatest concern was not simply our own pleasure or accomplishment but a sincere desire to love others and to help them develop into their full potential, very little would ever need to be said about issues such as morality or about caring for the property of others. However, none of us lives consistently at the level of best intention. This leaves us with the need for some practical instruction, and even a few rules. John Calvin commented:

The law of God contains in itself the dynamic of the new life by which his image is fully restored in us; but by nature we are sluggish, and, therefore, we need to be stimulated, aided in our efforts by a guiding principle. (*Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, 1550 AD)

Think of this handbook, then, as a "guiding principle," meant to help each one of us live up to the high calling of being a Christian in the midst of a Christian learning community. Hopefully, a rule or guideline will aid our efforts if we're tempted toward our sluggish side. When tired or distracted it is often possible to act in such a way that others

are forced to clean up after us, even though we know that this reveals both immaturity and selfishness. The rules and guidelines in this book are meant to remind us all to live at a higher level of love.

Even though the community will always fall short in many ways, this pursuit is worthwhile. If the people comprising our community at SSU have a strong determination to build something quite different from most other living situations, and if they learn how to allow the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to reign in their lives, a quality of life which is filled with the splendour of the Kingdom of God is quite attainable here and now.

St. Paul defined this quality of life as “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). It is our prayer that each person who comes here will experience something of this, and that a great hunger will be produced in each so that no one will ever be satisfied with “normal” living again. We hope that people will go out from here and become builders of Christian community life in whatever context they find themselves.

Mission Statement

The Mission of St. Stephen's University is to educate and equip our students to help bring the Kingdom of God to all the earth.

Our desire is to help students develop into people who will give themselves to the task of making the world a better place. Everything we study and everything we do is toward this end: we want to help our students fall increasingly in love with Jesus Christ and to find their own way of serving Him in the world. We aim for excellence in our academic programs because we believe that the world desperately needs Christians who have taken the time to study widely and to broaden their perspectives. We also believe that discipline and character are formed through a process of serious academic pursuit. Beyond this, we worship together, travel together, pray together and sometimes play together in order to model sincere Christian living in the world. Not everything can be learned in a textbook or a lecture; some things must be seen and experienced. Therefore, we pay great attention to matters of life and spiritual formation as well as to matters related to formal study.

We have sometimes described the nature of our community in the following way:

St. Stephen's University is:

- *a community of disciples seeking to be obedient to Jesus, who is the Way*
- *a community of scholars seeking to articulate a unified world-view centered on Jesus, who is the Truth*
- *a community of servants seeking to love God and neighbour through Jesus, who is the Life*

And we have used these words to describe the nature of our faith:

We rejoice to affirm the historic creeds of the Church, proclaiming our faith in the one living and true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We uphold the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God.

We confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and endeavour to follow and serve Him by the empowering and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

By this description we mean to communicate that this is a community of orthodox Christian faith. We stand for the truths proclaimed in the Scriptures, and understand them as they have been interpreted through the ages by the majority of genuine believers. People who teach here, as well as people who study here, come from a wide variety of Christian denominations, styles and perspectives. We are brought together by the great truths that unite us; we choose to minimize aspects of faith or style that might divide. We need each other. We believe that the many flavours of Christianity represent diverse strengths that are all necessary for healthy church life. Some traditions emphasize our historical legacy. Others focus on accurate understanding of the Bible, or caring for the poor, or fighting for social justice. Still others focus on evangelism, or holy living, or the contemplative life, or the presence of God in creation, or being open to the power of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, the best of each of these traditions is sorely needed in the church that will be "salt of the earth," "light of the world" for the 21st century. And clearly, each tradition has enough experience of weakness and failure that it should be able to extend understanding and forgiveness to the weaknesses of others. Over the years we have tasted something of the future: when denominations do not divide, but offer their unique flavours to our life together.

We also try to be aware of the exciting things the Holy Spirit is doing around the globe, and we have made it our determination to be open to His leading in our midst as well. We believe in a God who speaks, a Father who heals and restores those who trust in Him, and a King who leads those who take the time to listen. We value the historic and contemporary movements of the Holy Spirit by which He renews and equips the Church for her mission in the world. In other words, we do our best to make SSU a vibrant spiritual community, and many people experience God here in a way that is richer than anything they have known before. We pray that this will always be so.

A Network of Communities

Though we may often refer to a singular “SSU Community,” we also see this one community as being a network of distinct but overlapping communities. For example, SSU is composed of two groups that live and work together in St. Stephen. The *Student Community* consists of students who have come here for the express purpose of acquiring those things that the university has to offer them. The *Senior Community* includes people whom God has brought together to provide the various services that are necessary in order to be able to offer our programs. Whether part-time, full-time or volunteer, whether they’ve served for a decade or a year, whether they live near or far, the members of the senior community are dedicated to serving God, the students and each other. Acknowledging that we fail at times, we seek to model living and working together in a way that is characterized by mutual care and respect.

It is also worthwhile to draw a distinction between the spiritual or relational community and the institution of SSU. Like any academic institution, SSU must steward its financial resources well and must maintain a high level of academic standards. These concerns are sometimes in tension with more relational priorities. Sometimes individuals who get used to being treated like family or friends in one respect are surprised when they meet a firm policy such as a deadline for a payment or a late paper. Likewise, a certain set of values and flavour may develop among the student and alumni community which are in tension with the institutional values and standards of SSU. It is our hope that good relationships and respectful communication can make this a healthy tension.

The overall university community also includes a *Board of Governors* that gives organizational leadership and support, and various *Friends* and *Sponsors* who have contributed greatly to the building of SSU, as well as a growing number of people who have settled in St. Stephen because the university is here. Students experience the dynamics of community as they live, work, study and travel together. Faculty and others who are involved in the development of SSU experience community dynamics as they seek to discern God’s guidance for this work, pray for His provision, work together to build the

essence of this life for all who are involved, and minister to and share in life with each other and the students.

Philosophy of Education

Historically, a university has consisted of a community of scholars--both learners and teachers--seeking together to develop a universal understanding of life and the place it holds for the individual.

Education has traditionally been understood as the process of character-building, as shaping the individual student for a meaningful place in his world.

It is only in recent decades, as a result of the increased role of government in the funding of public education--in tandem with the disintegration of knowledge into increasingly minute and unconnected specializations--that this traditional character has largely been abandoned by our modern universities.

These words, written by Donald Kantel, founding President of SSU, are taken from one of our introductory brochures. We believe that the modern notion of university as primarily a place for career development is a faulty one. In our opinion, the older idea, that of building character, still holds great merit. Its absence has contributed to social breakdown in various ways.

The mandate of a Christian university, however, is even more demanding because there is a particular understanding of character that we are trying to see developed. And the standard is very high. It is our desire to see the character of Jesus Christ clearly evident and deeply formed in the lives of all of our Board members, faculty, staff, and students. We do not expect to produce people who all look the same; the character of Christ expressed in each of our personalities will be unique. (In fact, in large measure it will probably contribute to your sense of uniqueness by setting you free to be the person God intended you to be all along.) But it will help to form people who seek first the Kingdom of God, people who do all things to His glory, and people who will learn what it costs to truly love and serve others.

By focusing on the Liberal Arts, and by using a relatively integrated curriculum that allows students to see the interconnectedness of history, philosophy, literature, and religious studies, we are hoping to develop *informed disciples*, people who know what has

gone on before, and people who are well prepared to live within secular culture and to speak to its needs. In recent years, as a result of the insights gained through our travel programs, we have also become convinced that a more global perspective is required to balance our inheritance that has been largely shaped by Western Civilization.

In order to guide our work, the arts faculty have adopted the following mission statement for their teaching.

Arts Faculty Mission Statement

Inspired and sustained by our Christian faith and academic study, united in our acknowledgement of the authority of Scripture and our desire to follow Jesus, we the SSU faculty choose to practice the ministry of teaching in a community that is dedicated to both academic and personal growth. We believe that the vocation of teaching is both intellectual and religious. We are dedicated to the traditional ideals of a liberal arts education, and believe these ideals, as expressed through centuries of human history and artistic, intellectual and spiritual endeavours, prepare students to live lives of greater meaning and service to others. Our purpose is not primarily job-oriented training, but it is transformational. Knowledge and values acquired at SSU, through the study of the liberal arts, will prepare students to live more fully.

Our academic activities take on a greater richness in the context of our faith community. We are committed to living in relationship with students, with staff and with faculty colleagues. We dedicate ourselves to living an intentional life of integrated faith and learning and hope to communicate to our students both our academic insights and personal values, in an attempt to encourage in them the desire to think critically and integratively, love passionately and unconditionally, and live faithfully and intentionally.

The nature of our university community's commitment, both intellectual and spiritual, means the demands upon faculty and students are great; we as faculty commit to trust, challenge, and encourage each other and our students in our mutual desire to grow in love and wisdom. We seek to influence the world around us through spreading our love of learning and the Christian ideals of integrity and justice.

Philosophy of Moral Life and Spiritual Formation

At SSU, we've often thought of our community life as a garden. We've tried to make it a place of "good soil," where God is the One who calls people to new levels of

spiritual growth. We have believed that trying to legislate morality from the outside, that being too strict or legalistic, is actually counter-productive to real growth. Attendance at most chapels, for instance, has always been expected, but it has remained a voluntary act. Humans need freedom in order to come to understand for themselves the importance of boundaries, and to choose willingly to work within them. We have tried to make the atmosphere conducive to growth by holding up at all times the Lordship of Christ and talking openly about the principles consistent with the Scriptures. And we've tried consistently to welcome the Holy Spirit into our midst so that He can do the work of touching people's hearts and making them want to grow more and more into the image of Jesus. Sometimes people live here for a long time before they start to understand with their heart the importance of what God is doing among us and begin to open to His purposes for their life. We are at peace with this process. He is the Master Gardener. We will not try too hard to force matters of sanctification on students. But when God awakens individual hearts with a great desire to grow, faculty and staff will generally do all that is possible to be available to help. We believe in very high academic standards, but we consider spiritual development to be even more important than academic development.

Because of this philosophy, and because we have seen so many students grow into a deep and serious discipleship involving both heart and mind by the end of four years here, we have chosen to keep rules within this community to a minimum. People who come to SSU generally have some level of desire to grow as Christians, and allowing people space to grow, to make their own choices, sometimes even to make mistakes, seems to have borne good fruit. If someone does something that goes directly against the Scriptures, it affects the spiritual life of everyone in community, and we try to use these moments as opportunities for honest communication and growth. Generally this has worked well. On very rare occasions someone has decided that he or she does not wish to submit to Scriptural standards, or to the standards of this community, and has chosen to leave (see the **Accountability** section on Page 13). Usually, though, everyone involved has worked things through and continued to grow. There is great beauty to this approach.

However, there are also some dangers. Close communities, like individuals, are susceptible to various moods and seasons. As a result, there may be times when the atmosphere may be dominated by people who are at the earlier stages of this process, and community life may fall away from spiritual vibrancy into cynicism. This is regrettable, because most people will not have the opportunity to live in this kind of community for more than a few years of their life. If the Lord is welcomed into the midst of all that we do, life here can attain a quality of depth and fun that few who have not experienced it would believe. Years like this are highly formative and will be warmly remembered for a lifetime. Years that are not very different in atmosphere from life in normal culture will have much less influence. And there are prerequisites for the best experiences:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and to defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears. (Heb. 12:14-17)

The blessing of a rich, corporate spiritual life is worth fighting for; it may be one of the most important aspects of what SSU is all about. But how are we to balance these two values of freedom, on the one hand, and holiness on the other? If there is too much room for error, if life becomes less than it ought to be, if (as Calvin calls it) the sluggishness of our nature predominates, we may be giving the devil a foothold (Eph. 4:27) and losing forever the chance to have lived this portion of our lives at a higher level.

At this point, it may be helpful to return to the image of the garden. If God is the Master Gardener, and those of us who work here are His apprentices, it may well be that He expects us to do a bit of weeding. We can still allow each young seed to develop at its own pace and in its own way, but we can definitely rid the garden of some of the elements that are likely to rob nutrients or choke living plants that are trying to grow. This we will do. And this means that there is a need to determine what will be allowed in our community and what will not be. We are committed to the principle of freedom, but we believe that true freedom has sometimes done great damage by the oppressive atmosphere that seems to follow excessive license. At such times, freedom is an illusion. Only if the garden is healthy and well-maintained does it become an actuality. It will never be the desire of this community to fall into the Pharasaic errors of legalism, judgment, and self-righteousness. But the Bible warns that there are other errors to be avoided too, including those of the Sadducees who uncritically accepted the looser moral standards of Hellenistic culture. With the broadest possible intent, we are seeking "a narrow way" (Mt. 7:13-14).

Specific Applications

Smoking--For health, safety and insurance reasons all university premises are completely smoke-free. This includes the porches of St. Croix House and Todd Hall as well as the steps of Park Hall. Smoking is otherwise permitted outside of university buildings so long as areas are kept clean and people are considerate of others with regard to second-hand smoke (try not to smoke near open windows).

Illegal Drugs--Use of illegal drugs, including marijuana, is strictly prohibited.

Alcoholic Beverages--This issue presents particular problems in a community like ours with people coming from many different perspectives. The Bible prohibits drunkenness, but it does not suggest that drinking in itself is wrong. We believe that each person, for the most part, should learn their own limits, but balancing the needs of everyone in a diverse Christian community is a very difficult issue. We do not want the use of alcohol to play a central role in the social life of the university. Many Christians have chosen to have nothing to do with alcohol, and we do not wish to cause unnecessary discomfort or to have people feel an undue social pressure to conform. **Therefore, we have designated all undergrad residences, excluding privately-rented apartments, as an alcohol-free zone.** Drinking alcoholic beverages like beer and wine off-campus is permissible for students of legal age if usage is moderate and occasional. However, under-age drinking is prohibited (since the Scriptures clearly teach that we are to obey the laws of the land - Rom. 13:1-7), and the university also urges students to refrain from drinking games and the use of hard liquor due to the greater risk of alcohol poisoning.

It is a struggle in a community like ours to hold people consistently to this standard. It is a frequent occurrence that some perceive the SSU community as giving too much license to those enjoying alcohol, while simultaneously others are feeling that we are too strict. We encourage everyone in both the student and senior community to support a lifestyle of mutual respect and moderation. **It is our intention that repeated or excessive drunkenness will not be tolerated.** When incidents involving over-drinking become disruptive to the community or someone on the student life team becomes aware of a pattern of over-drinking, we will begin the procedure described under **Accountability** (page 13).

However, a rule in itself will not accomplish our goal; the community must stand together to support this principle that individuals have agreed to in coming to SSU. In our society many people begin long term drinking problems during their time at university. We need to work together at preventing this outcome. **Please consider the following patterns which are strongly associated with the formation of problem drinking (now or later in life):**

- 1) drinking to intoxication most of the times that a person drinks
- 2) often drinking to alleviate stress and/or emotional pain
- 3) frequently drinking alcohol in large quantities because a person can "hold his liquor well" without obvious drunkenness
- 4) feeling the need to drink alcohol at every social gathering

When you see one or more of these patterns, we urge you, as a part of a caring community, to lovingly confront your peers and/or engage each other in thoughtful and respectful conversations about your concerns. Please do not scoff at those who have the courage to voice such concerns.

Also, if serious complaints do arise in any given year related to alcohol usage the university may prohibit involved students from all drinking for the remainder of the term or the academic year.

Sexual Conduct--This, too, is a challenging issue for our community. We do not believe in creating a repressive atmosphere, as though there were something shameful about our developing sexuality. But irresponsible sexual behaviour has damaging consequences: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Therefore, we feel that some guidelines are necessary:

- men and women are allowed in each other's rooms during regular hours - the Community Advisors (CA's) and/or the RA's will clarify these hours and should be respected.
- we encourage couples to openly discuss with each other where healthy limits for their physical affection should be and to commit themselves to those limits. Sexual intercourse for unmarried couples is not an acceptable part of life in our community.
- normally, couples in a romantic relationship should not be in a bedroom alone with the door closed. However, we respect the need for mature couples who are confident of their limits to have occasional needs for privacy. This should be a rare exception to the rule and the RA's and CA's must be respected if they feel the freedom is being misused.
- couples have often found that the best way to resist sexual temptations is to be mentored by an older couple or to discuss any problems with a member of the student life team or faculty/staff with whom they are comfortable

Communication and Relationships - In a small community, it can quickly become apparent that patterns of communicating and ways of relating can either have greatly encouraging or significantly damaging effects. We normally see many examples of the former and unfortunately some examples of the latter. While these are not areas of life that are profitably controlled by rules, committing ourselves to certain principles and reminding ourselves of their importance can help us all to keep nudging our community towards spiritual health.

- *Gossip* - stories will inevitably spread, and this is sometimes quite necessary and positive, but we all need to guard against passing on information that is potentially harmful, exaggerated or false, inappropriately critical or judgemental, designed to create a common enemy or build up a faction/alliance
- *Indirect Complaint* - as much as possible our communication when there is broken or damaged relationship should be direct; we should try to work out our issues directly with the person involved. When

there are issues of a power imbalance, this direct approach may feel threatening. In this case, the individual should seek the safest, effective third party to support their communication. We should trust each other enough to assume a playing field of respect and goodwill.

- *Transparency and Boundaries* – There is a healthy tension between the positive values of transparent communication and appropriate boundaries. A community of secrets and inner circles is not a healthy community, but neither is a community of indiscretion a safe community. We should try to keep the areas requiring confidentiality or discretion small and as temporary as possible while acknowledging when and where they are required.

Off-campus students and senior community – All of the general principles so far mentioned as well as most of the following specific applications that are not directly related to the residence are reflective of the quality of life that we envision for our community. As such they apply to all off-campus students and senior community members as well as for students living on campus. We believe that it is our responsibility as a loving and discipling community to be diligent about holding each other accountable to a lifestyle fitting for followers of Jesus.

Movies and Music--A television and VCR will be provided for recreational viewing of videos. Students are welcome to use these as long as they are conscious of noise levels and are not disturbing others. We recommend that care is taken so that not too much time is wasted in this way (Get a life!), and we have very strong feelings about what kind of material is appropriate in a building that has been consciously dedicated to God's use. Students are free to make selections so long as the following guidelines are observed:

- Absolutely no slasher movies or horror movies that focus on supernatural evil are allowed--we do not feel that it is right or wise to welcome darkness into this building or into the subconscious minds of the viewers. (Remember Philippians 4:8: Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things)
- This is also true of music videos or sound recordings; if it's ugly, please don't bring it into this atmosphere
- Movies with explicit sexual content and/or excessive violence are not allowed for the same reasons
- If an RA or CA is available to help make a decision, these decisions must be respected

Sometimes these criteria will necessitate a judgement call by those present. It is often difficult to tell when a movie has gone too far and is simply sensationalizing sex and violence. Some excellent movies of high artistic quality include scenes that are difficult to watch, but which have integrity as an important part of the film; others are simply appealing to the baser side that exists in all humans. God is interested in raising your standards of personal holiness and leading you into freedom from the flesh. Please use wisdom and emphasize consideration of others.

We would also strongly encourage you to live by these same guidelines in terms of the entertainment that is provided via computers in your own rooms.

Firearms and Other Weapons--Firearms and weapons are not allowed on campus for any reason including room decoration (e.g. swords & knives).

Going Out on the Roof--Don't. This is dangerous and is not good for the building. It is not allowed to go on the roof of any of the university buildings. This includes the section of roof that is outside of the Pool Table area. Please stay off it at all times unless you are involved in its maintenance (by request).

Fire Exit Doors--The fire exit doors on the second and third floor residence wings are not to be used except in case of fire. With other usage they quickly become a security risk for the building.

Candles and Incense-- Sorry. We realize that they are pretty and that they add atmosphere, but they are a dangerous fire hazard in wooden structures. There will be occasional exceptions for candles, such as a special dinner in the dining room; but otherwise there are to be no open flames in the building.

Off-Campus Living

Living on-campus, until recently, was expected for all students. We believe the experience of living on-campus is invaluable for students, especially in their first years at SSU. Living, eating, cooking, cleaning, and studying together in close quarters inevitably has its joys and challenges, all which have proven to be great learning experiences for students. However, we recognize real life is not 40 people living together in a big yellow house, and allowing some senior students the opportunity to live off-campus has been important in making the transition out of SSU.

We would like to be in conversation with students who are interested in living off-campus to decide whether this move will be the best decision for the individual and community. Off-campus students, we pray, will soon discover that their role in the community is unique, but no less valuable.

In order for off-campus living to be a positive experience for the individual and the

community, we encourage students, and other members of our community who live off-campus, to consider the following:

Your role on-campus - While we respect people's need for space and sometimes privacy, we all can agree that divides between off-campus and on-campus students should not exist. It is important for the health of our community that each student, on campus or off, is intentional about being active in what is happening on-campus. This may look like any number of things from being on the meal plan to making an effort to study a few times a week with friends on campus.

Your role off-campus - The atmosphere on-campus is influenced by a large number of students who live here and travel through here. Each off-campus residence, or *sub-community* as we like to call them, has the opportunity to create an atmosphere that is either similar or dissimilar to what is experienced on-campus. It is the hope that each sub-community will make every effort to provide a space for other students that is welcoming of the wide diversity of students who attend SSU. It has already been noted that all of the general principles and specific applications of the handbook are the vision for the whole community, not simply students living on-campus

Your role in the town of St. Stephen - Students living off-campus have the unique opportunity to interact with members of our St. Stephen community in ways that on-campus students may not. Off-campus students will, in direct and indirect ways, paint a picture to neighbours about what SSU is, and more importantly, what it means to imitate Christ. Just as we encourage on-campus students regularly to be mindful of those they live with, so off-campus students should be mindful of those around them, and are even encouraged to consider ways they might serve their neighbours.

Accountability

Every act of self-control of the Christian is also a service to the fellowship. On the other hand, there is no sin in thought, word, or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship. An element of sickness gets into the body; perhaps nobody knows where it comes from or in what member it has lodged, but the body is infected. This is the proper metaphor for the Christian community. We are members of a body, not only when we choose to be, but in our whole existence. Every member serves the whole body, either to its health or to its destruction. This is no mere theory; it is a spiritual reality. And the Christian community has often experienced its effects with disturbing

clarity, sometimes destructively and sometimes fortunately. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*)

Regarding some of the more serious items covered in this last section (illegal drugs, excessive use of alcohol, improper sexual activity), lack of compliance is not optional. We have noticed that not holding people accountable quickly becomes perceived as a condoning of a lifestyle that begins to dramatically affect everyone else. If someone violates community standards in one of these areas, or lives constantly in violation of community expectations in lesser matters, someone from the student life team will speak to the student and address the issue. Many times, this simple discussion will suffice. However, if warranted they will then begin the accountability process as described below:

- 1) The offending student(s) will receive an official warning from the student life coordinator or a CA, followed by a written confirmation from the student life coordinator.
- 2) Students who have received a warning and are involved in a second serious incident will be asked to meet with a disciplinary committee of two or three senior community members (usually the student life coordinator, a CA and a member of the management committee). This committee will formulate a plan for what is required to remain in good standing at SSU. The purpose of this step is to ensure that no one will be asked to leave the school without having had a clear understanding of what is involved.
- 3) Students who do not agree to abide by this plan or who breach the agreements will be asked to leave SSU. They are free to seek readmission for subsequent terms if they are willing to recommit themselves to community standards. Money that has already been paid for tuition or living expenses will not be refunded if a student is asked to leave, but unused portions may be applied to subsequent terms if the student is readmitted.
- 4) After a complete term of studies without incident, any student will be considered to have a clean record.

Accountability in the Senior Community - Accountability is also important for those in the senior community who should hold themselves to at least as high a standard, if not higher, than the students. Everyone should be treated with grace and respect, but when behaviour threatens the shared commitments of the community, the following points, loosely informed by Matthew 18, are relevant:

- 1) Student concerns - When students become aware of questionable or inappropriate behaviour on the part of a senior community member that they find disturbing or confusing, they should prayerfully decide whether they

- feel comfortable approaching that person directly. If not they should discuss the matter with a trusted mentor or the student life coordinator, who will together help discern the best way forward.
- 2) Peer conversations – When senior community members become aware of behaviours which do not seem fitting for other members of this community, they should first engage one another in sensitive, humble conversation about the matter. If the incident is unresolved or seems to require a conversation with more participants, this intention should be clearly communicated. If the incident is resolved, both parties should be discrete and respectful about the matter. (I.e. it is just as inappropriate for the person hearing the complaint to spread stories about “this person had the nerve to complain to me...” as it is for the other party to pass on tales of misbehaviour after an apology and forgiveness.)
 - 3) Unresolved matters – If greater accountability appears to be required, but a disciplinary conversation is not yet warranted, then a trusted colleague or two could be invited to join the conversation. If there is still a lack of resolution or if there is still a belief that the incident needs to be known by the administration, then the person's supervisor should be informed simply and directly.

Care of Property and Other Practical Matters

As you may well imagine, caring for all of the physical needs of this community without a professional maintenance staff is extremely difficult. Students are responsible for cleaning Park Hall, for some minor maintenance tasks, and for ongoing work in the kitchen related to meal preparation and clean-up. There are several benefits to this: costs are kept to a minimum, benefiting everyone; students develop discipline and responsibility, and acquire new skills; and community “happens” as people share tasks together. A high level of cleanliness in the buildings is good for morale and reflects care for others. Normally, students are given the responsibility of giving the building a thorough cleaning once each week. Most other work is done by a student work crew comprised of those who accept bursary assistance from SSU.

Care for the Environment

Increasingly it has become clear to us that we are called to be wise and conscientious caretakers of God's creation through the life choices we make. The good life that God is calling us towards involves both our health and the health of the environment of which we are a part. As Wendell Berry writes:

The ecological teaching of the Bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished title to it. And He has never revoked the conditions, bearing on His gift to us of the use of it, that oblige us to take excellent care of it.

- "God and Country" (*What Are People For?*) 1990

As an institution we are trying to move in this direction by increasing the amount of organic and naturally-raised products we serve in the dining room and by encouraging better environmental practices wherever possible. In our experience, care for the environment as a community will not happen through rules, but when students lead by their example and passion.

We encourage students to catch this passion for themselves and continue a growing pattern of creativity for improved practices around the school. Here are some ways that you can help:

- be careful about heat and lights
- compost kitchen waste and food left on your plate
- recycle whenever possible
- use environmental cleaners when possible
- keep your eyes open for new ideas

Other Practicalities

In order to make sure that people do their jobs in a responsible fashion, each cleaning or kitchen task is assigned a value based on an hourly wage of \$8. If students neglect their work they will be charged this amount at the end of the term for each hour missed. As with all unpaid fees, transcripts will not be released until the account has been satisfied.

For other matters, here are some principles and rules that will help:

- if you make a mess of any kind, pick it up yourself (asap!)
- always try to clean a little more than you are actually responsible for
- **do not take furniture or linen without receiving permission from the Inquiries Office**; light bulbs are available from Residence Assistants--never take them from lamps in public places
- tools are to be requested from those in charge of maintenance, and must be put back when finished
- dishes and cups may only be taken from the kitchen if they are returned as soon as you are finished with them; do not allow them to accumulate in your room or in any other part of the building. **They are never permitted to leave Park Hall!**
- always do your own dishes if you are having a snack or a meal outside of regular meal times

- **do not tramp mud or slush into the buildings;** please keep an extra pair of indoor shoes on the shelves provided by the main door of Park Hall during messy seasons
- never use someone else's laundry detergent without asking; almost everyone will gladly give you some if you need it, but it's a rare saint that can smile at an empty box of recently purchased Tide, used only once by its owner, when it's desperately needed to clean clothes for an upcoming job interview
- don't leave your clothes sitting in the washer or dryer; if you do, don't be upset that someone has left them on the counter in a heap
- if you find clothes in a washer or dryer, try not to empty them on the counter in a heap; transfer them to the dryer or lovingly fold them, "as you would have someone do unto yours"

As you can see, most of these things are matters of consideration and common sense. They are also a reflection of maturity and courtesy. If you learn to live in this way, you will probably be thought of as an asset wherever you go; if you don't, it will only be a matter of time before you're considered a liability, no matter how lovable you are. St. Paul said, "Each one should carry his own load" (Gal. 6: 5), even though he taught, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). In other words, we should be responsible to care for ourselves, and willing to go beyond our own situation to help those around us. This is different from *not* caring for ourselves, and expecting those around us to pick up the slack.

It is probably helpful for you to understand right from the beginning of your time here that SSU exists because many people have sacrificed to make it possible. Tuition only pays for a portion of the costs of running the university. Almost all of the rest comes directly from gifts that people give to God, to be used here. And the costs are minimized anyway because many members of the faculty and staff draw relatively small stipends or salaries for their work, while others volunteer their time entirely. Most of the furnishings, books, computers, and most of the repairs in the buildings, have come as gifts of love. Countless hours of work have gone into improving these facilities, much of it done and even paid for, by members of the Senior Community. This is our delight. But we want you to know so that you won't take property here for granted. We constantly pray for God to give us "daily bread." If you make it your intention to wisely care for all of the property around you, and to try to make improvements in these facilities rather than wear them out, you too will have played a part in preparing the university for future generations of students. And this can be a gift of love that *you* give to God.

Based on this way of thinking, here are some other practical areas that may need attention or which you may need to know about:

Church Attendance--There are many fine churches in St. Stephen and the surrounding areas. Students are expected to find one that they believe will be an appropriate place for them to become involved and to be in regular attendance.

Student Ministry Teams--We are sometimes asked to visit churches to minister and to share about SSU. Please make this a priority if you are asked to take part. It will not happen very often, and it is a way that you can serve God, the people of the church, and SSU. This is one of the ways that we are able to demonstrate to people something of our life and vision.

Volunteering – There are a wide variety of opportunities for students to get involved with and serve in the town of St. Stephen. Students are strongly encouraged to find an organization that excites them, and commit to serving in some capacity on a regular basis. Generally, at the beginning of each year, an evening is held to introduce students to some of the various organizations around town, though opportunities often arise throughout the year that students may participate in. These experiences are valuable in gaining work experience, but more importantly in learning about each individual's passions and to give back to the community.

Medical Insurance-- It is a condition of attendance at SSU that each student carry adequate medical and hospitalization insurance. For students who are residents of Canada, this requirement would normally be satisfied by enrollment in the provincial medicare program of your home province. All students should have proof of coverage in their possession while at SSU.

Travel Medical Insurance-- Students participating in SSU travel/study programs are required to carry supplementary medical and hospitalization insurance to ensure that coverage would be adequate to meet any situations that might arise while out of the country, including provision for return airfare in the event of personal or immediate family medical emergencies. The cost for this insurance is the student's responsibility.

Property Insurance-- Students moving into residence should be aware that their personal valuables (clothes, books, computer, sound system, etc.) may not be covered against loss under their parents' insurance. Students who desire it should seek their own adequate coverage (usually provided as a "tenant's package") for their belongings, as they would not be covered by the university's insurance in the event of a loss by fire, theft, etc.

Transportation--We are located an hour and a half away from the closest airport (Saint John, NB) and 2 hours away for the Bangor International Airport in Maine. If you are flying to school and you need to connect from the airport in Saint John to St. Stephen, please phone Acadian Bus Lines at 1.800.567.5151. If you are flying into

Bangor, you can phone West Bus Service to connect to Calais at 1.207.546.2823. If the bus schedules conflict with your flight times, you may phone the Inquiries Office for a list of names & numbers of people you can contact to arrange for transportation for a reasonable cost.

Allocation of Student Rooms--Rooms for incoming students are assigned. Room requests are extended when possible to returning students on a "first-come, first served" basis favouring senior students. If you don't get your first choice for a room, please remember that you will have seniority someday, and that God has a habit of "working all things together for good for those who love Him" (Rom. 8:28).

Damage Deposits--A damage deposit of \$100 is required of all students moving into residence. This deposit will be held in escrow during your time at SSU. At the end of each academic year, room inspections are performed. If a room requires cleaning or damage repair, if there is missing furniture, or if a student leaves without having the room inspected, the student will be held financially responsible. Costs will be deducted from the damage deposit and the amount deducted will have to be replaced before the next academic year. After convocation and the final room inspection, the room deposit is returned. Please note that all fees and or fines must be paid before transcripts can be released.

Guest Policy - Often high school students from town or people from local churches may want to visit the residence. We've had good and bad experiences with this. It is now our firm policy that guests are welcome to visit individuals; that is, guests may only enter the building if they are coming to see a particular person (who happens to be at home), and they remain the responsibility of that person until they leave. Don't foist your acquaintances upon others. Not all are trustworthy, and it's not fair to others to have people roaming freely about their private living space without their express permission.

If you have friends or family members coming to visit from a distance, there is often space for them in Park Hall or in one of our other buildings and they are welcome. Overnight guests may stay on the floor of his/her friend's room, free of charge, for three consecutive nights. A longer visit requires special permission from the student life coordinator. If space is available, guests may choose to stay in a private room for \$10/night in Park Hall or \$20/night in NDL (these prices include linens). Speak to someone in the main office to fill out a visitor info sheet; the office must be notified about all overnight guests. In the event that the office is not notified, the host will be charged \$20/per night to their account.

Vacant Student Rooms--Empty student rooms are designated for use as guest accommodation. They are not to be used for any other purpose. In other words, they are off limits.

Vacating Student Rooms--Rooms must be left in a spotless condition before each vacation. For the Christmas break, room temperatures should be set at 7 degrees Celsius. In summer, the thermostat should be turned to the "off" position. All belongings must be taken from each room before students leave for the summer. A storage room is available where labelled boxes of personal items can be stored between terms. Unlabeled items, or items that are left in storage after a student leaves the university will be disposed of.

Valuables in Rooms-- While SSU has increasingly taken steps to secure the residences, the university does not assume any responsibility to protect your valuables. We have been proud of the trustworthiness of our students, but theft from rooms and storage areas is always a possibility during active study terms as well as vacation breaks. Please do not leave valuables unsecured during absences from the school. At all times, whether in storage areas, public areas or your own rooms, **all valuables are stored at your own risk.**

Heat--It is not our intention that you freeze (people used to say that SSU was the place where "many are cold but few are frozen"), and individual rooms can be set to as warm a temperature as you need to remain comfortable, but **we do ask that you consciously help to reduce heating bills by keeping doors and windows shut when heat is on.** This is one of our greatest operating expenses. Please help.

Phones--A pay phone is provided on the 3rd floor landing for student use. **Office phones are not to be used for personal calls.** It is possible for students to have private lines installed at their own expense. There are phone jacks in all the rooms.

Pets - No pets are allowed in SSU buildings. Friends that visit with pets may not bring them inside for even a short time. This is because some people have allergies and because we have had some trouble in the past with property damage. An obvious exception will be made for dog guides.

Parking Fee - If you have a car, the office will charge a fee per term for parking. All students must park in the lot on St. Croix Street, not in the Visitor/Staff parking lot on Main Street.

Computers--Several computers are generally available free of charge for student usage. They are for papers and assignments, and are not to be used for games or entertainment or personal correspondence. You are definitely not permitted to install any programs or make any changes to the university computers. If you have any concerns about the SSU computers, please bring them to the administrator overseeing computers.

Printer - A student printer is located in the computer room for personal and academic use. Each student will receive a student number and a small fee will be charged to your monthly account for each page printed.

Library--Our Librarian gives an orientation to the Library for new students each year. There is a policy for checking books out, and some books are kept on Closed Reserve, meaning that they cannot be taken away from the shelves. Others will have limitations of time put on them. Please never take books without following proper procedures.

Meals--Please take moderate first helpings at every meal. Once everyone has had a chance to get some, there will usually be enough for seconds. We want you to be well-fed, but once again, we ask for consideration for others.

Meals for Others--It is always permissible to invite a guest to lunch or dinner provided that you check with the kitchen first and find out if there will be enough food, and provided that the meal is paid for by you or your guest. Meal prices are set each year by the kitchen, but they remain reasonable. Simply find out how much it is, and pay the money to the Accounting Office.

Missed Meals--If you know that you will miss a meal, please make sure that you have signed out so that food is not wasted.

Snacks--Occasionally extra bread/dessert will be placed in the dining room outside of meal times and will be available for all who pass by. Leftovers, apples, oranges, bread and carrots may be eaten at any time. You may not take any other food from the kitchen or pantry unless it's on the pantry list of acceptable items. The food in the pantry does not belong to you - eating it without permission is a form of theft. A refrigerator is provided in Park Hall for students to store their own snacking materials (please clearly label items with name and date).

Academic Issues

Bookstore--We try to assign books that you will want to read more than once, books that will be valued in your personal library after you leave SSU. We are often able to provide them at reduced cost in comparison to other university bookstores. We now encourage students to purchase most of their texts online, but some textbooks are currently being sold out of the Main Office on the ground floor of Park Hall.

Copying Costs--Students will have to pay 10 cents each for any personal or hand-out copies that they make. The photocopier is located in the Main Office, which is open from 9 am to 5 pm.

Course Changes—Please consult the calendar for deadlines to make any course changes.

Grading Scale--The grading system in use at SSU is premised upon there being distinct learning objectives for each student and a *Standard of Achievement* that demonstrates that the student has attained satisfactory mastery of the learning objectives. For a detailed discussion of the meaning of letter grades and their numerical value, please see **Grading Standards** in **SSU's Academic Calendar**.

Learning Disabilities-- Before you begin classes, please ensure that the student life coordinator or Academic Dean is aware of any identified learning disabilities that will require special accommodations and ask for a copy of our policy on learning disabilities.

Homework Expectations--Although actual requirements will vary, a general standard is two hours of study outside of class for every class hour.

Late Assignments--In most cases you will be given a syllabus at the beginning of each course that will include all major assignments and their due dates. Professors may or may not speak of these again, but you will be responsible for your work being presented on time. Penalties may be assessed for each day that an assignment is late.

Missed Classes--Your attendance at classes will be expected. If you do miss a class, it is up to you to find out what assignments were given and what material was covered. Moreover, since the absence of even one student makes a difference to a small class, out of consideration both to the professor and to other members of the class, it would be courteous to advise your instructor in advance. American students will be given permission to miss classes for their Thanksgiving holiday, but this does not excuse them from taking responsibility for any work that is missed. If you must miss but are not able to give advance notice, then speak to your professor as soon as you are able.

Missed Classes After Vacations--Students are expected not to miss classes on either side of a designated vacation break. Therefore, the faculty may penalize students for classes missed during the week before or after vacations. Under exceptional circumstances, students may petition the faculty in advance to be excused from classes surrounding a vacation without penalty.

Release of Transcripts--After each term, you will be given or sent a transcript to notify you of your marks. However, these will not be delivered, nor will you be able to graduate, nor will transcripts be sent to other institutions, if there are any outstanding fees, charges, or library books for which proper arrangements have not been made.

Stylistic Expectations--Different professors have different standards for research papers and assignments. Ask each one to clarify expectations at the beginning of a course if you do not feel they are being well-enough outlined. Generally, there are increased expectations for each academic year. There are many acceptable styles, so long as each is applied consistently. Traditionally, most people have worked from *The MLA Handbook*, or the University of New Brunswick's *Form and Format*.

Undergraduate Thesis--The thesis exists as one important way to complete your four-year Bachelor of Arts at SSU. It is also possible to complete the B.A. by choosing to take courses in place of an undergraduate thesis. However, if the thesis is undertaken, it will be the major task of the fourth year. It is undertaken with the help of a mentor from the faculty, is meant to be interdisciplinary, and must be prepared in its final form according to the highest academic standards. Detailed guidelines are given to fourth year students, including a schedule for the stages involved in the planning and execution of the work. The thesis is to be presented in summarized form before the entire university community during graduation week. Two bound copies (prepared at the student's expense) must be submitted--one to the Library, and one to the faculty advisor, or mentor, who has helped with the project. This paper must reflect extensive research, include a *thesis statement* and a well-developed demonstration of this idea, include approximately 60-80 pages of text (plus notes and bibliography), and be defended orally after its public reading.

Communication between Student and Senior Communities

Free-flowing communication between the Student and Senior Communities is something that we very much want to see, and we hope in most cases that it can happen in a dynamic and spontaneous way. There are occasions, however, and matters that arise from time to time, which need to be handled in more formal ways. Because of this, we have made the following arrangements:

Student Life Team-- The student life team consists of a student life coordinator, the Community Advisor(s), the Residence Assistants and occasionally others who volunteer to help. All of these people are here to help you should you have any relational, spiritual and emotional concerns that you would like to talk about. The student life coordinator will also host regular student meetings at which concerns

can be raised and, if necessary, passed on to the senior community. As well, with varying degrees of availability, most of the faculty and staff are willing to serve as occasional or possibly year-long mentors for students. Please feel free to approach any member of the senior community if you need to have a chat.

Residence Assistants--Generally a senior male student and a senior female student are designated as Residence Assistants (RA's). They are selected on the basis of maturity, motivation, and skill in interpersonal relationships. If you are having any difficulties pertaining to life in community, you are welcome to speak to an RA.

Student Representatives—Students may be chosen annually to represent the student body at "President's Council" meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate communication and advocate for student interests and needs. These meetings will be held two to four times per year and include the President and members of the Senior Community and board when possible.

SSU Traditions

Over the first few decades of SSU's school and community life, we have developed several important traditions. For example, almost every year we have special arrangements for Thanksgiving Dinner, a banquet at Christmas, and a Baccalaureate Dinner that precedes Graduation. Other traditions include:

Grad Class Gift--Each year, since the beginning of SSU, the 4th year graduating class has presented the university with a gift. These have ranged from a ping pong table to communion settings. There have been gifts of commentary sets or art books for the Library, a CD player for the kitchen, as well as the beautifully designed wrought iron bench in the main entry of Park Hall and the stained glass window in the Chapel. In each case, the class was leaving behind something that they hoped would enrich life at SSU for those who would follow.

Graduating Students Farewell--Students graduating from the B.A., B.Min., and M.Min. programs are often invited to speak for a few minutes at the Baccalaureate Dinner about what their time at SSU has meant to them.

Special Events

Each year at SSU is enriched by several Special Events that are planned by the faculty for the benefit of the university as a whole. As should be obvious by now, our educational process involves much more than regular class work. It is a full-orbed attempt to build character and skills and at the same time deepen knowledge and broaden perspective. Sometimes we will bring in guest lecturers, or hold community meetings, or have other kinds of events in order to connect with people from the surrounding area. Many of these are not optional. If we bring in a guest speaker for instance, it's a much more positive experience for all involved if there is full participation by the SSU community. We will try to make sure that you know about each event as soon as we know about it. (Occasionally, because of circumstances, events are scheduled without too much advance notice. This will not happen very often, though, and in a case like this people who have already made commitments will, of course, be excused.) We believe very deeply that these sorts of events, taken together over a period of four years, will form an important part of the overall SSU experience and education. We can all stand to grow in terms of cultural and intellectual awareness, but most of us are *human* enough that we sometimes need to be helped to do things, even if they are in our own best interest.

For all of these reasons, we also ask that students participating in academic terms held at the St. Stephen campus take part in what we consider the *most* special event of each year--**Graduation Week**. This is a very important time in the lives of those who are completing their studies, and the quality of the celebration is deeply affected by the degree of community involvement. It is an act of courtesy and love to be present at all graduation exercises in order to honour the achievements of people that you have lived with, worked with, studied with, and prayed with.

Worship in Community

Paul said this about Jesus: "*He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*" (Col. 1:17). In our community, we sense that it is daily worship of Jesus that allows all of our concerns to be held together in right proportion by Him. However, to choose to faithfully take part in daily worship (which is, like classes, expected) demands a fairly deep understanding of the true nature of both worship and community.

And both are deep subjects. People typically go through a process in the formation of true community. At first there is joy at the excitement of meeting others, and people are polite, rarely expressing all that they have to say. Over time they begin to notice how different others actually are, as acceptance brings greater levels of honesty. This sometimes brings discomfort and a feeling of alienation. Soon, however, these negative feelings are replaced by a diligent attempt to *heal* the others, by making them think and act more like we do. It is only after the frustration and emptiness of this failed attempt that we actually

learn to accept people for who they really are, with all of their differences. This is the beginning of the learning of real love, and it is the beginning of true community. It must be this way. People must be accepted for who they really are, not who we want them to be.

Neither, as was already suggested in the material related to Philosophy of Education, must the community itself try to shape its individuals into some prescribed pattern. Jean Vanier, founder of the worldwide L'Arche Communities, in which mentally disabled people live side by side with those who care for them, wrote:

Too many communities form--or deform--their members to make them all alike, as if this were a good quality, based on self-denial. These communities are founded on laws or rules. But it is the opposite which is important; each person must grow in their gift to build the community and make it more beautiful and more radiant, a clearer sign of the Kingdom.

(Community and Growth)

These are important insights. But as you begin to take your first steps into the actual day-to-day life of Christian community, one more train of thought needs to be explored. It is related to that which has already been said, and yet it remains distinct. Perhaps it could even be given as the explanation for the importance of the earlier ideas. This danger was carefully described by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *Life Together*. Many people would say that this is one of the best books ever written about Christian community. It reflects the life of the illegal seminary that Bonhoeffer led for training pastors of the Confessing Church at Finkenwalde, Germany, from about 1935 to 1938. Soon after it was written, the seminary was closed by the Gestapo and he was forbidden to publish anything else. But his deep understanding about community remains in this little work, and we recommend that you read it at least once during your years here. In it he makes the following comments:

One who wants more than what Christ has established does not want Christian brotherhood. He is looking for some extraordinary social experience which he has not found elsewhere; he is bringing muddled and impure desires into Christian brotherhood....

Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and to try to realize it. But God's grace speedily shatters such dreams....

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world....

The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both.

What is the significance of this? It is essential to realize that community does not mean that you will always be surrounded by people who are “just like you,” or that you will always be in the presence of friends. Everything is not fun. Real life is not composed of a continuous diet of “warm and fuzzy” experiences. If you are hoping for something like this, you are in need of a change of perspective. You are dreaming of something that will become an idol for you, and you may become a destroyer of community even as you seek it. Instead of appreciating and building what God *has* established, you will be complaining and looking for something that He never meant to provide. Be thankful for what you find, and work faithfully to make it better.

A similar dynamic takes place with worship. We worship every day. We choose to give honour to the One who deserves it. Sometimes He draws close to us in ways that are tangible to us. We feel His presence, we experience the gifts that He works in community; these are great times. But sometimes He seems absent, far-off, distant. People who have worshipped Him all through the ages have spoken about this experience, too. What should we do? If we have an illusion of what worship should be like, we’ll complain at the dry times and perhaps even stop attending worship services. People often say, “I get nothing out of it.” As John Wimber once noted, this makes about as much sense as going to someone else’s birthday party and complaining that *we* didn’t receive any gifts. Worship is not about our receiving something; it’s about giving something to Someone else. The wonderful news is that the One who is having the party has a genuine desire for others to enter into all the joy of the occasion, and He very often has a bag of treats prepared for all who come. But even if He doesn’t, for some reason that’s obvious (we’re quarrelling with each other, for instance), or for some reason that only He understands, we still come to the party and give Him our best.

As an SSU student you need to understand the importance of daily worship, even if you go through times when it’s not meeting your needs, or if it seems contrived or boring. We’ll do our best to make sure that chapel is relevant, that there’s room for everyone to participate in meaningful ways, and that we are faithful to guidelines given in the Scriptures related to the worship of God. But we know that some times will seem more special than others. Often when we least expect it, God’s presence comes into our midst in unusual, not-to-be-missed ways. Sometimes we simply worship out of our desire to be faithful without any feeling at all. It’s possible that we are even being tested during dry times to see if we’ll hang in there out of obedience alone. And we have no assurance that these times that we call “dry” are without meaning. C.S. Lewis wrote,

I have a notion that what seem our worst prayers may really be, in God’s eyes, our best. Those, I mean, which are least supported by

devotional feeling and contend with the greatest disinclination. For these, perhaps, being nearly all will, come from a deeper level than feeling. In feeling there is so much that is really not ours--so much that comes from weather and health or from the last book read. One thing seems certain. It is no good angling for the rich moments. God sometimes seems to speak to us most intimately when He catches us, as it were, off our guard....

(Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer)

One other thing seems sure--the quality of all that we do around here is affected by the faithfulness of the whole community in worship. Provision, protection, rich experiences, and unusual evidences of providential planning, as well as direct communications from God to individuals and to the community, are all in greater evidence when the Student and Senior Communities meet enthusiastically and regularly to worship and love God.

So, we will not be counting heads, and yet we do expect you to come. If anyone consistently misses chapel we will eventually notice and hope to speak to him or her about it, but in the meantime, we will all be the poorer. We will all be missing out on the miracle of the *best* sort of experience. As Paul said, we are all one body, and, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). In terms of the quality of spiritual life, we stand or fall together.

Covenant

For this reason, we believe that it is appropriate to give you the chance to respond to the challenge that is implicit in this Community Handbook. We have tried to describe what SSU is meant to be, and what rules and guidelines we see as necessary in order to make this vision a reality. What it all comes down to, though, is what the individuals who are here at any given time choose to be and to do. We who have been here longer have seen seasons of drought and seasons of plenty. We've had great years and good years and difficult years (and sometimes great times and good times and difficult times all in a single year). But we know from experience that it is worth striving for the best that is possible, and we would like to encourage you to do just that. Love God, serve others, pick up after yourself, try hard at school, be faithful in attendance at chapel, accept the ways in which others are different, and try "...to do everything without complaining or arguing" (Phil. 2:14). If each person here is able to do this for the majority of the time, we will share a quality of life that will be wonderful, very different from that which exists in most places.

We will also see the healing effects of a positive community environment--if people are accepted for who they are in Christ, they will often show more of themselves. Each new part of the life that is exposed brings opportunities for healing at deeper levels. We

long for this experience for you and for everyone who comes here. We hope that you will leave this place with more than a good education. Our dream for you is that you will also have a rich and growing personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, a heart of compassion and obedience, and enough spiritual, social, and personal maturity that you will be able to deeply influence whatever context God places you in.

And we know the path to this ideal is attainable. It comes from walking in the Spirit and choosing to put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom. 8:1-17), one small choice after another. That is what we have tried to describe here. Jean Vanier, in the spirit of Mother Theresa of Calcutta, and the saint from whom she took her name, Thérèse de Lisieux, said:

We are all called to do, not extraordinary things, but very ordinary things, with an extraordinary love that flows from the heart of God...

Love is communion, communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. Love is manifested in all the little things of life that build community, not in heroic acts. (*Community and Growth*)

This is similar to something that Jesus taught:

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. (Luke 16:10)

So we have given you this Handbook to point you toward giving quality attention to “the little things of life.” How you respond is up to you. But a response is called for. The free gift of salvation that Jesus won for you had to be accepted, taken up by you, before it began to change you. Forgiveness is not pretending that something did not happen; it is choosing to let it go, intentionally releasing the debt into the hands of God. And our description of this life will not procure it for you. You, in concert with the working of the Holy Spirit in your life, must do that yourself.

And, as we see it, the only way to begin is to state your intention before God and ask for His help. If you mean with all of your heart to live according to the spirit and teaching of the Scriptures, to follow the rules and guidelines of this community as they are listed, and to be faithful in attending chapel and doing all that is required of you, we recommend that you make a covenant with God to this effect. And we invite you to express this covenant of intention. Tell others and ask for their prayer support. Words can sometimes do more than express our intent; in a very real way they can mark out our direction and propel us toward our destiny. May God bless every step of your journey toward Him.

For Further Reading

The body of literature on Christian communities is vast. Some of the best books on this subject are listed below. Please find opportunities to read some of these. It will make your time at SSU that much richer. Members of the SSU Senior Community will be very happy to discuss the history and practice of Christian community with you – just ask.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. (German 1938) Harper and Row, 1954.

Bradley, Ian. *Celtic Christian Communities: Live the Tradition*. Northstone, 2001.

Hauerwas, S. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Mellis, Charles J. *Committed Communities – Fresh Streams for World Missions*. William Carey Library, 1976.

O' Connor, Elisabeth. *Call to Commitment*. Harper & Row, 1963.

Palmer, P. J. *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. HarperOne, 1993

Palmer, P. J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Peck, M. Scott. *The Different Drum – Community Making and Peace*. Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Rutba House. *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. Wipf & Stock, 2005.

Stott, John R. W. *One People – Laymen and Clergy in God's Church*. Inter-Varsity Press, 1968

Vanier, Jean. *Community and Growth*. Griffin Press, 1979.