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## Ministering to ministers

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.B.

I was touched by a forum for ministers and those studying to enter the ministry in how they were ministering to one another. It was an interfaith service at the All Faith Chapel at Vanderbilt Divinity School on Sept. 11.

Each one struggled with his or her sadness, as a red-haired woman began to play a small Celtic harp. I recognized the tune - "Let it Be" by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. A fitting prelude.

Assistant Dean for Student Life, Dr. Lloyd Lewis, commented after the service: "9/11 has made clear the absolute importance of being in interreligious dialogue around the world. But it has also made some people entrenched in their belief that they hold the truth... For some people, the world they want to hang on to is a world that no longer exists.

"I can understand their fear. [They are] trying to avoid living in chaos... Now when ministers go into the parish, down the street is a mosque or Buddhist temple. Ministers have to take on responsibility for learning how to be in dialogue, to respect and honor others. They also have to be good educators about their own religious traditions."

More than 30 denominations are represented at Vanderbilt Divinity School. The student body includes parents and grandparents entering the ministry as a second career, a majority of women, and a multiracial population. These are seasoned workers for God struggling to make sense of things.

Student Jason Shelton dedicated the first hymn to a family friend who died in the World Trade Center. Jason wrote haunting music to the poem "How Sweet the Darkness" by Rachel Bates.

Kurt Schreiber, from the Christian Science tradition, read passages without comment from the Bible and "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by

Mary Baker Eddy. I was touched that in an hour of need, it wasn't preaching but the inspired Word of God that ministers wanted.

He began with the words, "God - is - Love." Readings on peace comforted the crowd. "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Ps. 56:4). "Seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14). "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matt. 5:45).

A murmur of astonishment and approval rippled when Kurt read from Science and Health: "The wicked man is not the ruler of his upright neighbor. Let it be understood that success in error is defeat in Truth" (pg. 239).

The worship committee had asked Kurt to conduct this service. They felt the format of the Christian Science Wednesday testimony meeting was what was needed - inspired readings read without comment; an opportunity for quiet thought and prayer; worshippers participating by sharing remarks and gratitude for blessings. More than a third of the worshippers spoke. "I stand to celebrate life today," one man said. Another said, "My prayer is that we will stop personifying evil and recognize fear as the evil."

A young woman with hair down to her waist said, "My prayer is for real guidance." Another student remarked, "All we need is for God just to be God- to do the things that God does best."

Elaine Faithful, a Unitarian Universalist and second-year student from South Carolina, gave a prayer beginning, "Holy One, Creator, Mother, Sustainer, Father, Healer.... Glorious God, on this day of remembrance, fill us with your grace, your love, and your strength."

After the service, the room was full of chatter and hugs. One woman said, "I didn't expect to get much out of this service. But it really met my need. "Later she met Kurt in the hall. "I really must get that book," she said, referring to Science and Health.

One of the organizers, MarLu Scott, a Methodist and third-year student from the Philippines, capsulated the event: "Fear mobilized different kinds of responses - some superficial, some deeper. After the hype, we settled back to business again. [As a minister] I need to be more tolerant and more accepting of differences. I want to be an instrument of charity and love. "

As I left, the silence had broken. I recalled Kurt's benediction - a prayer written by Mary Baker Eddy: " 'Thy kingdom come;' let the reign of divine Truth, Life, and

Love be established in me, and rule out of me all sin; and may Thy Word enrich the affections of all mankind, and govern them!" Amen.