



October 2018

## Dear Parents and Families,

Here in New England, the tree leaves are beginning to transform into beautiful shades of yellow, orange, and red, reminding us that we are entering deeper into autumn, and illustrating in our natural world the invisible processes we know are afoot inside all of us and our students—processes of transformation from one season and state to another as the days pass.

For most students, college is a time of tremendous personal transformation—as students discern their strengths and growing edges in their studies and as whole persons, interacting with their environment and exploring their academic and vocational interests, their friendships and other relationships, their co-curricular and community involvements, and even the larger questions of their identities, their values, and the beliefs and practices that guide their lives.

Each year, students come to Tufts, some with deeply held religious traditions, some with a sense of spirituality that might draw on more than one tradition, and some as humanists who may not claim a religious or philosophical identity at all. However they come, my colleagues and I in the [University Chaplaincy](#) seek to help Tufts be a space where they can find integration, where students can put their academic and other pursuits in the context of being whole people.

We are blessed at Tufts to have one of the finest University Chaplaincy teams in the country, composed of [seven staff chaplains of different traditions](#) who serve students, faculty, and staff of all backgrounds. We help to advise some [eighteen undergraduate spiritual communities](#) of various sizes, which offer nearly [twenty weekly gatherings for spiritual practice](#) and many additional special programs each week. We send an e-newsletter that describes these offerings to more than 8,000 student, faculty, and staff subscribers on campus each week, and you are welcome to [read past issues](#) or to join the list as well at <http://chaplaincy.tufts.edu>. The number and diversity of the opportunities for spiritual and ethical engagement at

Tufts are quite remarkable, and almost everything is open to everyone, to practice or simply to learn.

This is the time of year that we receive the reports of the Spiritual Interest Surveys incoming Tufts students are invited to complete in the summer before Matriculation. About 80% of incoming undergraduates complete our spiritual interests survey—which indicates that Tufts students are thinking about spiritual questions and wanting to make their voices heard. Our religious demographics are fairly consistent from year to year, and you can [view them here](#).

Beyond asking incoming students about their own identities, we also ask about their interests. Each year, about 65% of incoming students say they have some level of interest in [interfaith engagement](#) before they even arrive on our diverse campus—they are eager to learn about people from traditions different from their own, which suggests a sense of global citizenship.

Among the many possible forms of spiritual practice, our incoming students rank highest the following: activism, meditation, travel, service, holiday observances, discussion groups, arts opportunities, educational programs, leadership development, and musical opportunities.

Perhaps most interestingly, when we ask incoming students about the spiritual issues that most animate them, we receive a tremendously long and varied list of topics—eight pages worth of interests from this year's entering class—including: the existence of God, finding purpose in life, the afterlife, good and evil, happiness, suffering, politics, civil rights, church and state, LGBTQ and women's issues, Israel/Palestine, science, ecology, religious conflict, and cooperation.

Responding to this level of interest keeps our chaplains and spiritual communities busy, but our department is also eager to help students build into their Tufts experience a sense of Sabbath, of rest and rejuvenation, and opportunities for retreat. In the past four years, we have witnessed a flourishing of interest in our mindfulness and contemplative practice offerings, as the fast pace of life, many competing demands, and a constant awareness of national and global issues can take a toll on the spirit. We believe some of the best counterbalances to these influences are intentional relationships and caring community, service to others, and exploring ancient wisdom and literature, the beauty of nature, and/or new art and music. All of these opportunities are available to your student through the University Chaplaincy's programs.

In addition to our communities and weekly programming, we offer a number of campus-wide events, including Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Observances and the Russell Lecture on Spiritual Life, and we also offer confidential pastoral care and counseling, support for individuals and groups in times of crisis, and a number of [sacred spaces](#) where students can find relaxation and respite, a cup of tea, and the opportunity for conversation and access to support resources.

My colleagues and I would be happy to connect with you if you ever have questions or concerns or if you sense we could be helpful to you or your student. Please feel free to [contact us](#) or to stop into Goddard Chapel, Tufts Hillel, or the Interfaith Center if you are on campus. There are also a number of opportunities to connect with us throughout [Parents and Family Weekend](#).

Meanwhile, we are holding you and your students in heart as midterms are underway and the fall gets busier. In keeping with Tufts' inclusive Universalist heritage, we want you and your student to know there is always a warm place in our spaces for their hearts, souls, and spirits.

Peace and light,

**The Reverend Greg McGonigle**  
**University Chaplain**