



# holy in the uncomfortable

by Mari Wiles, Minister to the University and Associate Dean of Students at Chowan University,  
and Drew Phillips, Associate Minister to the University at Chowan University

Mari Wiles relates this tale: “I used to say that I am ‘color blind’ and that I just see students. One of our students told me that was a shame because she is a beautiful shade of brown and I am missing out. I no longer say that. Lesson learned.”

Chowan has had an exciting educational mission for the past 169 years: educate the students of eastern North Carolina in a Christian environment. Campus Ministry is given the freedom to pastor the university in this endeavor. With a radically diverse student body, we approach campus ministry and service in ways to meet the needs of our students. We have ministry options six nights a week and we offer 3-4 mission trips a year. We pray and believe that our students will do their best leading when they leave Chowan and give them the opportunity to lead here. Our ministries are student-led which means they are sometimes messy, constantly changing, and many times uncomfortable.

There is holy in the uncomfortable. Our communities are begging for truth, groaning due to the pervasive lies of division. The blessed ministry of forced interaction with others (racially other, sexually other, internationally other) that is reflected on our campus and in our ministries points us all toward the truths that we are infinitely more alike than we are different and that we are all image bearers of God. We get to learn that together.

When we wrestle with the emotional and hard topics of race, gender equality, and sexual identity, we are sharing together in the ancient Christian practice of hospitality. We encourage and invite any who will come to participate in worship, prayer, service, study, advocacy, and ministry under the Lordship of Jesus. We believe that Jesus’ table is larger than we can imagine—we aren’t gatekeepers to his invitation, rather hosts at the feast. That he feeds us all in spite of ourselves is a blessing.

We do it together. The commitment to work through it together makes it hard and messy and true and holy.