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Interfaith Center Named for Alumnus Merle Fish '40

Alumnus Merle E. Fish supports the spiritual pillar of a Chapman education.

ORANGE, Calif., Sept. 21, 2004 Chapman University's gleaming new Interfaith Center has been named, thanks to a gift from a member of Chapman's Class of 1940. Through his gift, alumnus Merle J. Fish honors the memory of his late wife.

The naming of the Merle and Marjorie Fish Interfaith Center represents the culmination of a vision that began more than three decades ago, according to Chapman President James L. Doti. The building is in the final stages of construction; the general public is invited to the ribbon cutting event, Oct. 16, 2004, 1:30 p.m.

While Chapman is a secular institution, it remains rooted to its founding denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). A commitment to spiritual development is one of four pillars of a Chapman education, and the naming gift supports the spiritual pillar.

In making the gift, Fish said, I feel the Interfaith Center is sorely needed in today's world. This center will continue the activity of religions finding ways to adjust to changes in their community and better serve the world in which we live.

Initial support for the Interfaith Center began in 1967 when Flora Scott Wilkinson, the wife of a former board chairman and mother/grandmother of several Chapman alumni, asked that all memorial gifts be designated for a new on-campus chapel. The existing chapel is located at the corner of Grand and Maple streets, two blocks away from the center of campus.

For years, people of faith dreamed of a sacred center at the crossroads of the campus, Farmer said. Like all inspired dreams, this vision propelled the dreamers to action to give of their time, their talents and their possessions.

Originally referred to as the Wallace All Faiths Chapel, named in memory of the parents of alumna Ann Wallace Fisher, the building project was expanded to encompass the broadened spiritual programming available at Chapman. This programming includes a full-time dean of the chapel, Rev. Ronald Farmer, Ph.D., an office of church relations, a dozen student groups representing nine different religious and ethnic traditions, fellowship activities, guest speakers and special events.

The center will provide an everlasting sense of pride and joy for the Fish family, and it is a place where Orange County residents and members of the Chapman community alike can explore, discover and deepen their spirituality. Merle knows the time is right for such a center, said Doti, who with Farmer will preside over a formal dedication ceremony later in the school year to

honor the hundreds of donors whose gifts brought the building to fruition.

Merle Bud Fish graduated from Chapman in 1940 with a degree in sociology. He followed in the footsteps of his father, former Chapman trustee Merle Edison Fish, a 1931 Chapman graduate who also received an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity in 1941. Merle, like his father and brother Joe, was a minister within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The Interfaith Center eventually will be open to the public, both to tour and to use for events, including weddings. The 18,300-square-foot center includes the 250-seat Wallace All Faiths Chapel, the 50-seat Flora Scott Wilkinson Founders Chapel, Donald Yoder Sanctuary, Gloria and Julian Peterson Conference Room and Fashionables Courtyard. It also includes a columbarium.

For more information about the Fish Interfaith Center or the ribbon cutting event, call the dean of the chapel office at 714-628-7260.