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# A tribute to Donald H Voigts, 1924-1976

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A TRIBUTE TO  
DONALD H. VOIGTS  
1924 — 1976

Donald Voigts is remembered as the father of campus ministry in Canada. His vocation as a pastor in Regina and chaplain at Luther College brought him into the forefront as the Lutheran Churches considered increased mission to the campuses of Canada. He was the first denominational chaplain in Canada and began his work in Edmonton in the mid fifties. Through his efforts the Lutheran churches dreamed of a Lutheran presence in every university in Canada. His vision of campus ministry as "home away from home" brought about the establishment of campus centres in many universities.

He was a Canadian and would have welcomed the current emphasis on an indigenous theology. Even though he was born and nurtured in the heartland of mid-west American Lutheranism, and shared its triumphalism, he learned from his Canadian experience that this would not define life for the rest of the world and certainly not for Canada. He believed that the Canadian experience was unique. The Canadian inferiority complex was troublesome to Don Voigts. He mistrusted those who wanted to shape the Church, the nation and its culture as an American facsimile. Canada was to play a unique role in the world. The fact that it could not be strong enough to be a colonial power and its internal struggles with many cultures would enable the nation to be a peace maker.

He respected the artists of the land. The musicians, film makers, poets and painters were all special people who would touch our souls and bring new insights to all. He saw them as a group of prophets and believed that the church, understanding the Biblical tradition would automatically respect them.

Don Voigts loved students. He always saw the potential they have for the present and for the future of the land. He loved and respected them often more than they loved and respected themselves. He always had a word for the church about its youth ministry. He affirmed that the congregation and pastor who spent time with the youth would be faithful to the present and the future. The students and the youth help us all to be honest folk in the church.

He served as a pastor to pastors. This was particularly true for people serving in Campus ministry. Many parsonages in the country invited him to share in joy and sorrow. He was able to listen with compassion. His compassion helped many to get through the night. He also learned to share himself with others, including his anxieties and doubts. People saw him as a fellow traveller who could be trusted.

He lived by grace. He saw the love and respect this gave him as a gift from God. He believed that God's grace and forgiveness would uphold in the midst of pain and personal difficulty. It was this same grace which would bring new life to tired institutions and broken people. He celebrated this grace in his own life and celebrated the opportunity to announce this grace to fellow travellers.

These gifts and insights which he brought to the church remain in campus ministry and in the whole church today.

— Donald W. Johnson, Campus Chaplain  
University of British Columbia