

Dishing Up 'Soul Soup'
Medicine Hat College

When I was hired as the part-time ecumenical Chaplain by the Medicine Hat Ecumenical Campus Ministry board, I had no idea that many students were struggling with food insecurity.

I soon discovered, however, that hunger was a significant problem on campus. Students were writing exams on empty stomachs because their funds had run out, and their cupboards were empty. Single parents were regularly choosing to go hungry, paying for daycare instead of adequate groceries in the hopes that they would be able to continue their post-secondary education. Community supports could sometimes make a difference for these students, and I advocated for those resources as much as possible, but some people fell through the cracks of the system and ended up both hungry and ashamed. The board decided to offer a free food ministry on campus as a practical expression of Christ's love.

We began serving hearty soup and a buttered bun at no charge to students every Wednesday last year from mid-October through to the end of the second semester in April. Word quickly spread, and hungry students arrived in droves. Most were incredulous that the church would provide such a service. Sometimes atheist students would self-identify when they reached the front of the line, and would then ask me defensively if I'd still give them some soup. "Well, are you hungry?" I'd reply with a smile, handing them their lunch, no strings attached.

Sharing the love of Jesus through practical expressions of Christian ministry has done more to attract students to the faith than any of the official Chaplaincy programs and activities that I have organized to date. Students are often lonely and insecure; they long for unconditional love. Part of my role is to support and encourage them, offering the love of God in the places where students feel vulnerable. With your faithful support, we will be able to continue meeting spiritual needs in creatively practical ways at Medicine Hat College.

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