Religious groups plan busy year

By Robert Reeves
Staff Writer

USC's religious organizations are cranking up for a relatively inactive summer to provide programs for students from many religious backgrounds.

Many groups are officially recognized by the university.

The Bahai Club, Campus Advance, Chi Alpha, Christian Science, Reel Life Fellowship, Maramatha Student Center, Student Christian Fellowship, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes are recognized through student organization charters.

ELEVEN OTHER university-sponsored student groups have leaders who are members of the Council of University Chaplains and Religious Counselors.

These groups are the Baptist Student Union, Catholic Campus Ministry, the Catholic Religious Center, the Baha'i Jewish Counselorship, the Latter-Day Saints Institute, the Episcopalian-Catholic Center, the Navigators and the Presbyterian Student Center.

The chaplains and counselors of these groups receive some recognition as professional personnel associated with the university and university staff privileges such as the use of campus facilities and free listings in university publications. They also staff parking and have access to students' religious preference information.

But there are no financial links between the university and the groups, according to university Chaplain Lauren Brubaker, an unofficial liaison between the "chaplain" council and the university.

"Each of the chaplains or counselors are paid by their own individual organizations," Brubaker said. "The staff privileges and council organization are simply to help them coordinate individual programs and to develop campuswide activities between the individual organizations."

Campuswide events to be coordinated through the Council of Chaplains this year include a Crop Walk for world hunger, a Fun Day festival, a Thanksgiving observance, various forums on topics of general interest and Religious Emphasis Week.

IN ADDITION, the council provides a continuing education program for faculty and will sponsor a Clergy Day on which area clergy will participate in various campus activities.

Council of Chaplains Chairman Steve Price said the council is open to any group that has a leader who is willing to cooperate with the other members. "Our purpose is not to be in competition with each other, but instead it is to set an example of showing a respect for other religious views through our joint activities."

The Baptist, Catholic and Presbyterian organizations have buildings provided by their national or state organizations. A fourth building is shared by the Episcopal, Lutheran and Methodist groups.

THE BAPTIST Student Center, 700 Pickens St., has two full-time chaplains, the Rev. Woody Hamnett and Jane Young.

"First we are here to represent South Carolina Baptists," said Hamnett. "Secondly we try to provide a growth experience for students, and thirdly we are here to provide the opportunity to share our faith."

Hamnett estimated that the center will work with 600-700 students this year through Bible studies, individual and group counseling and social events.

Hamnett said some programs are geared toward sending students out to take part in summer and Christmas vacation mission projects around the country.

The Rev. Steve Lynch of the Catholic Religious Center, 106 Greene St., said his center reaches several hundred students each week through daily mass. But, he said, fewer students participate in the center's other activities, such as Bible and Catholic theology groups.

"WE HAVE over 2,400 students enrolled here at USC who list their religion as Catholic, and over the course of the year a large proportion of that group will come through the center for one activity or another," said Lynch.

The Presbyterian Student Center, 122 Greene St., is operated by full-time chaplains C.J. Hammett and Steve Price. Its main programs are Bible study, sharing groups and Wednesday and Sunday night programs.

The center also sponsors several pupil teams that perform throughout the Columbia area and even an international folk dance exhibition team.

WE LIKE to stress the fellowship aspect of the center," said Price. "We have a lot of parties, and we encourage people to get to know one another. The university can be cold and impersonal at times, so we like to make the center a place that is really special."

The Episcopalian-Lutheran-METHODIST (ELM) Center, 106 Greene St., is operated by Episcopal chaplain David Stewart, Lutheran chaplain Robert Dasher and Methodist chaplain George Duttle. His main activities include worship services, Bible study and sharing groups and social functions.

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The ELM Center on Pickens Street is one of 19 religious organizations that provide programs for USC students. (Photo by David Caufield)