



**MCGILL OFFICE
OF RELIGIOUS AND
SPIRITUAL LIFE**

MORSL Mandate and Scope

Written: February 13, 2018
Last updated: June 26, 2018
Author: Carlene Gardner, Director

1 General

2 Audience

2.1 Scope

All MORSL staff should be aware of the mandate and scope of activities of MORSL.

2.2 Work in progress

This document is a work in progress!

3 Target Population and Mandate

As a proud member of McGill Student Services, MORSL is responsible for providing multi-faith resources and programming for the religious and spiritual well-being of students. Student services are funded almost entirely from student fees, so we therefore reserve the right, **when space and resources are limited**, to restrict our service members of the McGill community who pay Student Services fees.

Within the community, we particularly target and serve three overlapping student demographics:

- Students who self-identify as religious within existing faith traditions;
- Students who may not fall into typical religious categories but who are nonetheless exploring spirituality or seeking spiritual community during their stay at McGill; and
- Students who may not particularly identify as spiritual or religious but who wish to increase their religious literacy in order to confidently negotiate a pluralistic world.

We do this by:

- Connecting religious students with our faith volunteers and/or their faith communities on campus, advocating for them, and collaborating with them
- Providing resources for spiritual practices inside and outside religious traditions
- Providing experiential religious literacy education

MORSL is dedicated to:

- Facilitating religious expression, fostering spiritual wellness, raising religious literacy, and encouraging inter-faith harmony among McGill students.
- Supporting the diversity of student religious traditions on campus, including those students who do not have a religion, but nonetheless seek to flourish spiritually and to live meaningful and ethical lives.
- Providing a team of excellent faith volunteers* from faith communities and spiritual traditions, both student (peer) and non-student, to support as wide a range of students as possible and respond to student need.
- Working together with other Student Services in line with the Student Services Core Values, Student Services Strategic Plan, and Student Services Goals and Objectives.

* Faith Volunteer is the term that replaces Chaplain, Faith Liaison and Peer Faith Liaison

4 Role in Campus Communities

Beyond the students who access our programs and services, we serve the wider community by modelling pluralism, religious diversity, and interfaith harmony.

We form the spiritual and religious arm of the holistic vision of student wellness outlined in McGill’s developing Wellness Strategy.

In addition to following the general mission and purpose of Student Services, MORSL also takes part in CACUSS and in particular its communities of practice (specifically, the Spirituality and Religious Pluralism Community of Practice), who are actively collaborating on webinars and publications (both peer-reviewed and popular) that will help formulate best practices for multi-faith chaplaincies at the university and college level in a uniquely Canadian context.

5 Changing Role over Time

Since the change from McGill Chaplaincy to McGill’s Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, and in an increasingly secular setting, it has sometimes been difficult for the McGill community to understand the role MORSL plays in university life. In the past, housed in the Newman Centre, the former Chaplaincy Services focused on pastoral care and charitable initiatives, similar to a church without a specific denomination. To a certain extent, the idea of the former Chaplaincy as a ‘church’ meant to some that MORSL should fulfil the role that churches do (when they can afford it) of community centre, soup kitchen, second-hand clothing shop, after-school tutoring or sports programmes, and so on. Thus, MORSL found itself running programs that go beyond the two main pillars of its current mandate: religious literacy and space/resources for spiritual well-being.

It is important to note that MORSL is no longer led by clergy such as a priest, and we are no longer called upon to give opening prayers, invocations or benedictions at university ceremonies. Our faith volunteers may be called upon to privately fulfil requests for religious rites such as weddings, but MORSL itself is not a religious institution.

In light of the changing times, it is important to highlight the pillars of MORSL’s mission: development of religious literacy through experiential learning, and provision of space and resources for students’ spiritual well-being.

6 Guidelines to Manage Scope of Activities

| Led by MORSL | With MORSL collaboration |
|--|---|
| Religious literacy (e.g. My Neighbour’s Faith) | Intersectional initiatives (e.g. with student groups, address race and religion, or gender or other areas where justice work is needed) |
| Physical space for drop-in non-denominational prayer and meditation | Wellness initiatives that are connected to spirituality but not the main focus |
| Virtual space for spirituality (Radix magazine, web site, social media, podcasts, videos) | Interfaith initiatives on and off campus that are ad hoc in nature (panels, conferences, social justice events, etc.) |
| Information and resources on various spiritual practices for experiential learning and personal growth | Triage of students in distress or need, and referrals to services at McGill or through our faith partners |
| Education on spiritual well-being for student groups and staff | Guide groups to resources for memorials, weddings and other rites of passage (through our faith volunteer network) |

| Led by MORSL | With MORSL collaboration |
|---|---|
| Resources for students in distress (grief counseling, pastoral care, etc.) | Hub for volunteers from various faiths who want to work together on a social cause (e.g. environment, poverty, hunger, racism...) |
| Interfaith dialogue on campus | |
| Leadership in identifying and assessing spiritual needs (space, tools, resources, dialogue, etc.) | |
| Liaise with groups on and off campus to promote spiritual well-being and religious literacy | |

7 Excluded Activities

| Other Groups (not MORSL) |
|--|
| Direct source of funding for food security or charitable donations |
| Buddy program for international students |
| Meal service |
| Weddings, funerals and baptisms |
| Academic programming related to religion |
| Student-only initiatives (i.e. no administrative involvement) |