Martin House Stands Alone
Intentional Community Life Rich but Rare

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“What’s so great about Martin House?”

Many students may ask that question and not have the answer until they have considered the purpose and history of Martin House.

Martin House is located on the corner of Mt. Clinton Pike and Park Road. This on-campus residency holds all the comforts of home and still exudes the collegiate atmosphere. In other words, it has a homey kitchen, an enormous table with a lazy susan and a comfy living room decorated with tapestry and several guitars.

The 13 people living in Macep House are striving to build community, hence the term “intentional community,” which is often used to describe Martin House. Building community can be more difficult than it seems, but junior Joanna Souder enjoys the achievements they have already made in this respect. She loves the fact that they cook together, eat together and run the household together.

Junior Hebi Diener, who transferred from Hesston, likes the mutual respect and dependency of the people in Martin House. She said, “If I were to need anything, from a razor to a textbook to 3 hours of crying, I could ask anyone,” she said.

For junior Lynette Nussbaun, also a transfer student, “it’s been a good way to get to know a variety of people who are involved in various circles.”

Senior Sarah Neuschwaner especially likes “coming home knowing that you’re going to have a family [at Martin House].”

Obviously, the people of Martin House have a high opinion of their intentional community. So why not have more intentional communities like Martin House?

There was a similar house on campus at one time. According to Ron Piper, vice president for finance, the Lehman House began in about 1987 and existed as an intentional community for about 10 years.

The house was converted into the current music studios after a former house was demolished to make way for the University Commons. There were also difficulties with water problems in the basement. “It was not very suitable for occupancy,” said Piper.

Attempts have been made at establishing intentional communities in residence halls. Gloria Mast, coordinator of special projects, described a failed attempt at intentional community in Northlawn, consisting of two suites and a few rooms.

Obviously, the additional accountability and responsibility that is required among community members can be difficult to maintain.

Mast, who works closely with Student Housing, said that one reason that there aren’t other “Martin Houses” today is that there just isn’t enough interest. She says that interest varies from year to year because “the cool place to live changes from year to year.”

When asked if she would like to live in Martin House, first year Trinette Brandt said “[it] would feel more like a home than just a place you’re staying.”

There were 15 to 20 applicants for Martin House this year. Thirteen were accepted, which wouldn’t leave enough to fill another house. Also, it would be senseless to prepare another house (which couldn’t be used as offices) for residence use if the residence halls designated for the purpose aren’t full.

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Muslims and Christians also differ in their viewpoints regarding the devil and hell. There is a concept of heaven and hell in Islam, but no concept of Satan ruling over hell,” said Tori during one question and answer session. Many of the speakers incorporated into their presentations a strong message of acceptance for all faiths.

For those who are confused about which religious path to follow, speaker Suleyman Majid had some words of advice: “Seek the will of God, seek the will of Allah. Pray fervently, and your questions will be answered.”

Several members of the EMU community attended Sunday’s open house. Professor of Old Testament James Engle was among them.

“We were greeted very politely,” said Engle. “They were building bridges. It showed in their willingness to converse about their faith. The activities that they underscored served to increase a further understanding that Islamic fundamentalists do not represent all Muslims.”

Visitors were also invited to view the center’s mosque, where all were encouraged to remove their shoes and women to adorn head coverings out of respect for the area of prayer. Visitors entered the mosque solemnly, as they admired the calligraphy inscribed on the walls of the mosque.

The mosque was constructed in June of 1998 and completed in 2000. “The construction was mostly done by local volunteers, a practice very similar to Mennonite communities,” noted Ahmed.

The Islamic Center of Shenandoah encourages people from all religious backgrounds to visit. Prayers are held five times a day, and the public is encour-