

In 2021, the Deep Culture Hive resumed its work, which initially began in 2017, and was being carefully held by Patricia St. Onge and several of The Chaplaincy Institute's (Chi) very committed staff, faculty, and other leadership. The Hive's focus is on the areas of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). The significance and impact of DEIB are essential here at Chi. We believe that in this work, every voice matters, especially those Chi has, since its very inception been highly committed to serving, our students.

The Deep Culture Hive was granted the opportunity to hear the unique perspectives of three of Chi's wonderful students, who were willing to openly share about their experience while being a part of Chi's diverse student base. The interviews that you will read below are not intended to be representative of all who have chosen to attend Chi. It is also worth noting that we hope you, the community, will read each response with the same thoughtfulness and care our interviewees Rose Devasia, Kelly Ann Nelson, and Lewis McCarter gave in their responses.

The information shared within these interviews was very rich and provided such great insight into how much of a difference Chi does make and can make. Thank you to all of you who have taken part in making Chi what it is today, in supporting people through their journeys of self-discovery and growth, in your decision to follow your calling, in making the world a better place, and a special thanks to our interviewees for sharing their thoughts and visions for what The Chaplaincy Institute can and one day will be.

**Rose Devasia**

**Welcome Rose! Would you like to introduce yourself to the CHI community?**

I'm Rose Devasia and I just completed the Spiritual Direction Course and am waiting for certification, which I look forward to having at the end of this year once I complete my practicum. I began in the Summer of 2021. I am a physician and I live in Tennessee.

**How did you first learn about The Chaplaincy Institute?**

I was interested in Spiritual Direction, and I searched a little bit for a "Spiritual Direction" program and I knew that I wanted something that was interfaith and not just Christian. That was one of my criteria. There aren't a lot of interfaith-only programs. I found maybe three or four and that is how I came to find out about CHI.

**Since beginning your program, have you felt welcomed, supported, and respected?**

Yes! Very much so. I don't necessarily come from a background or space that is intentionally welcoming. I definitely felt welcomed, heard, and supported.

**So, I have a serious question for you, do you feel like you matter here at CHI?**

I think if this program took place in person, it would have been different. Doing the program over Zoom, which I have to say is one of the reasons I chose it, being able to do this over Zoom instead of needing to fly clear across the country made it more accessible. Now that the virtual aspects of the program are over, I feel like there are so many people I don't know! I know my cohort and those people I feel connected to.

I feel like if I needed to reach out to Kari or John or just needed to run something by them, I would feel comfortable with doing that, but nobody else really knows me, so I can't say that I matter to the at large group of people at CHI because they don't know me.

**What are some potential actions you feel CHI could take in your experience to become a more equitable place?**

I think offering some sort of financial assistance because it is a lot of money for people to go through certification. I could see that being really limiting because only certain people are going to be able to afford the training and the classes

**Chi is absolutely taking that into consideration and looking at additional options as they relate to financial accessibility, just in our recognition that this is a significant piece of being equitable.**

Unless you are kind of already in this field already, it feels like a luxury to attend those classes. I can see where people might say “yes, I would love to do that!” Or “It would be great to do that!” ... but I’m not going to put my money towards getting an education in this field with it feeling like a luxury in these times.

**How important is it to you that CHI be diverse, equitable, and inclusive?**

It is very important to me, but coming from Nashville Tennessee, it felt different, in a good way. To me when I saw the class, it felt very diverse! I think I was the only Asian, but there was a Hispanic person, three African American people, and someone who was Jewish, which felt like a diverse group. There weren’t many male-identifying persons in the class but that might just be the nature of Spiritual Direction. So, I felt like it was very diverse, but this may be different coming from a Californian’s perspective.

**I get what you’re saying because at one point, we held a Director’s Townhall where we had done an activity around CODE, which refers to Cultural Operations that Determine Entry, and one of the things we heard was that being an institution on and from the West Coast can feel very different to people coming from other places; a potential difference in cultures if you will. So geographic space and culture is definitely something to consider as we invite people in.**

I did notice in our courses, that there were things that people can and did say, that people would absolutely not say in Tennessee because the culture is different. I've listened to the people that I've directed, and they just have a very different outlook. For example, you know, climate grief, that feels very much so like a west coast thing. People in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and places like this tend to have focal points that are not West coast Specific.

**What are some of the actions you feel we could take to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity to draw students in or people in your field and what they might be drawn to? What would it look like or what might it feel like?**

It would be a hard sell for my group. In the medical field, there are certain people who are drawn to Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Care. In the health care field, maybe talking about how there is listening to someone but really listening to someone. Maybe offering a short course where someone can utilize the skills learned in the course as a tool would make a difference. Instead of having it be an 18-month commitment, perhaps make it something shorter and more specific, such as a course where someone could earn a certificate in listening.

**What are some of your favorite things about CHI?**

I do like that kind of "anything goes" in terms of being able to be honest about who you are and how you feel and people being very accepting of that. I feel like my cohort was a very accepting group.

**Where do your values and the values you see within interactions here at CHI align?**

Being accepting of others as they are. Being welcoming of others. Everyone is very honest; in our cohort, it didn't feel as though anyone was holding back.

**Based on your experience over this past year and your observations, please tell me how you would rate CHI on its cultural awareness or its awareness of its diversity and inclusivity as a whole?**

I don't have any complaints. I don't know if it is because of my geographic-cultural experience or if it is something else. I see that you all are being intentional about not making obvious mistakes. You notice who isn't showing up or who may not be feeling invited. There are things that occur to you all like you know we are lacking in diversity here or we are missing viewpoints or input from this group or that group.

**We really are striving for equity and balance here.**

The hard part is that even when you try to get representation if you only end up with one person who is a part of that group, it is a lot of pressure because one person cannot represent a whole group. So just being aware of that as well is important.

**Do you feel that Chi is setting a good tone for the acceptance of differences in terms of what our faculty looks like, our curriculum, conversations that are had, etc based on what your own perception of this acceptance is or should be?**

I feel that CHI is setting a good tone for acceptance and there are just certain professions and fields that lend themselves to being more liberal, like public health or spiritual direction. With that in mind, we make a space to be especially accepting of others, but what space do we make for the person who isn't necessarily very accepting of others themselves?

**Being a physician, you encounter people who come from a variety of backgrounds, and knowing a bit about your person, I would guess that you do your best to make everyone feel safe and comfortable with you. With that in mind, I wonder if you wouldn't mind sharing how you feel we can support people that maybe have more defined ideas about what acceptance means than what it feels like the majority of Chi does?**

Well, yes, you know, in this field, you're going to treat people who have completely different ideas and viewpoints than you do. If someone disagrees with the way you look at the world, you can still respect their perspective. There are times when maybe we just tell people that there are appropriate times and places for certain discussions and if this isn't one, that can be shared. It is easy to shut down when you're in an environment where you feel as though no one agrees.

**So maybe just having a process in place to address situations around this.**

The people coming to Chi, like me, are maybe coming here because we don't want a very narrow focus. Sometimes we might have people who have narrower perspectives about the different things maybe but there must be a spectrum and that is something to consider, acceptance.

**Is there anything that I didn't ask you that I should have or anything that you want to touch on again?**

I already touched on this, but yes, the Midwest or middle- American culture and perspective might be missing from the California approach that it feels like Chi may have at times.

**Well, the point in this is being able to hear from you and seeing where we can make changes.**

I appreciate Chi's desire to want to be inclusive and diverse and all the good things.

**Thank you so much, Rose. It was so nice being able to talk with you.**

**Kelly Ann Nelson**

**Welcome, Kelly Ann! Would you like to introduce yourself to the Chi community?**

My name is Kelly Ann Nelson. I have been with Chi for about half of a year, and I am in the Chaplaincy Program. I am dual enrolled at Starr King.

**How did you first learn about The Chaplaincy Institute?**

When I was looking for ordination track programs for someone who didn't have a single faith background, Chi was the one that came up! The only one and I said ok, this is where I should be.

**Since beginning your program, have you felt welcomed, supported, and respected?**

Yeah, definitely. I have felt very welcomed and very supported. I think that who I am as a person has been respected in all ways.

**Do you feel understood by your colleagues as you go through the program and process?**

For the most part, yes. I think where anyone isn't understood, there is still a genuine curiosity and willingness to try to understand or be with it as best as they can.

**Do you feel as though you as an individual matter here at Chi?**

Yes, I do. I think, prior to the retreat, I wasn't so sure. I don't know how I would have answered this question before going to the retreat. The retreat, however, really solidified this feeling. People were coming up to me just checking in and greeting me and checking in around small things that mattered, other students and staff. It was very attuned and attentive. I said wow, school is really paying attention! People are paying attention. It really made me feel like I as a person do matter.

**You do matter!**

**What do you feel would make prospects feel like they might matter here should they decide to attend CHI?**

Chi already does this to a pretty good extent, I think. I feel like celebrating, especially, cultural differences and cultural diversity, but not in a face value way, which is obviously difficult to do with a prospect. I know that people are allowed to sit in on classes before joining programs and that makes a difference. I don't know how it can be done further than CHI is already doing it. Thinking of someone in another program who has a wildly different faith tradition than many people in that program do, I wonder what that school could do to make that person feel more accepted.

**What are some potential actions you feel CHI could take to make it a more equitable place?**

Equity really does see to individual hardships more directly. I don't know if CHI has this, but I assume that they do. If not, I am sure that it has something to do with resourcing, which has been challenging for nearly everyone working in the non-profit or religious fields do. For folks that come from historically inequitable situations where generational wealth is not a possibility or historic injustices, a large grant or stipend or even admitting one person a year for free could help. This stands in the way of people being able to enter into this field because it's almost like so what if this person wants to be an interfaith chaplain or minister, if there is little to no funding or accessibility available, what are they going to do? Now that there is no more dual enrollment with SKSM, I would not have been supported in attending CHI, and I may have decided to take a different route because CHI had to be a part of the deal. Now that there are no more loan opportunities to come to CHI, there is an additional barrier for someone who wants to be here. I understand that it is more complex than that. Now to be clear, I am not historically marginalized, looking at my colleagues and the staff, it is really apparent who gets to be here. I want to add an asterisk to everything I am saying because I

understand it: I work in religion, I am in it with all the seminarians, SKSM tuition just went up, and Night ministry is on a cusp right now, it is tough!

**You know, financial equity matters and there is also so much more to that.**

Financial equity is definitely only one part of that and then there is the rest, and CHI cannot solve that. I think that CHI does and continue to have a hand in making those inequities less harmful and less consistent here.

**What I hope is happening for anyone coming into CHI's programs, is you are feeling adequately trained and prepared to go out and serve and work beside people who are completely different than yourself.**

Right! Otherwise, it will be difficult to function. Like if you are going to go and work in a hospital, you will be around some of everyone. It is important to be able to meet them twice: 1. Meeting people where they are and 2. Being clear around your boundaries and the boundaries you have in place.

**So speaking of meeting people where they are, we are wondering what we could do to garner additional student support and involvement in say the Deep Culture Hive. What could we do to support you in feeling like you would want to be actively involved?**

Oftentimes, in these sorts of groups, and I have been a part of several within more liberal institutions, it seems like one of the things that I see a lot of is White people often trying to show how woke they are but there is no substantive action to follow. I am not personally interested in showcasing my "wokeness," because I don't find it productive. I am down to do real, hard vulnerable work. I am not sure how much I want to invest knowing that it may be another liberal organization placating an angry liberal White audience.

**What if I shared with you that we are not here to placate but rather to really support the work and the change that we desire to see by also doing the hard and vulnerable work?**

I appreciate what you just shared, and it does make a difference!

**What are some of your least favorite things about Chi?**

Can I ask if pre-pandemic there was a difference in class format?

**Yes, there was an in-person format at one point but it was similar in that the students who were not local would have to come out for a time for a certain number of modules and now you know we are primarily virtual with the retreats during the year.**

I think this is a general comment. It can be difficult to connect to others on Zoom. The courses can be heavy, and people do have to be vulnerable. Being a new student and not having a prior context around this has been challenging. As I have met with my cohort and gone to the retreat, this has become less challenging. It is a challenge I am not unfamiliar with.

The other thing is the quizzes. It is a little bit difficult to study for the quizzes with there being so many different subtopics being covered.

**Thank you for sharing this with me, you are absolutely heard and acknowledged in this.**

**Where do your values and the values you see within interactions here at Chi align? Please feel free to look at this in terms of macro-values.**

Valuing right relationship and integrity and valuing the shift that is happening where the old ways are dying out and new ways are being born are values that are being honored at Chi and that really aligns with how I view the world at this time. Many of my classmates have shared that they also feel this and that is a big reason they are feeling called to serve as well. I think Chi hears that and embodies that and really makes sure this is embedded in the value system.

**Do you have any further input about how you feel about Chi's cultural awareness or its awareness of diversity as a whole? i.e. from cultural diversity to persons with disabilities or any number of other differences.**

Chi is both aware of the diversity that is present and lack thereof that we also have. It is very meaningful to be aware of where people aren't being invited or able to show up if they may want to. I am happy to share that I am a disabled person. I have felt very supported by Chi,

especially around the retreat. Things I thought would be a problem for me really weren't at all.

**When you think of what is going to draw people in at CHI, in addition to financial accessibility, what are some places you see we could make improvements?**

I think the cohort idea is really great. At first, I was unsure about it, but it has been really helpful! I think highlighting the fact that as a student you will be a part of a group of peers that you get to go to the process with and in some cases be in classes with will draw people in because this is a big commitment. If you are committed to the program, it becomes less daunting knowing that there will be that type of support. As far as Moodle and technology go, CHI has done a great job and organizing the courses. If CHI can help students understand that there will be a month or two of pre-work and then Zoom online classes and have that be emphasized, it could be a big draw to a lot of people because it could work for a lot of schedules.

**Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to talk about?**

Maybe this could help someone coming into the program. There is a demographic of people out there who don't know the word "interfaith," but they would fit in really well at CHI, but they don't think there is a place for them. There are a lot of these people; this can be seen in the pew research! I don't know how we could let these folks know that there is a place for them with like-minded folks who want to make a difference on a spiritual level. Finding those people and helping them understand what interfaith is, could be really helpful for CHI.

**When you think of interfaith, what other word comes to mind for you that could mean the same thing?**

A bunch of academic words comes to mind, but if I am feeling and not thinking, words like love or adjectives like inclusivity would feel like it would be more resonant with folks. People who don't have a spiritual or religious background might say that they don't want to align

themselves with any particular religion, with the idea that being interfaith is a faith tradition or its own thing. People who want to do interfaith are often not interested in faith, they just often don't know it.

**Thank you for all of this Kelly Ann; It feels enlightening and rich.**

Thank you for this.

### **Lewis McCarter**

**Welcome, Lewis! How are you doing? Would you like to introduce yourself to the ChI community?**

My name is Lewis McCarter. I have been aware of the program since early last year and began the Chaplaincy program at the end of 2021.

**How did you first learn about The Chaplaincy Institute?**

I was searching for a program with an ordination track after determining that the one I was on no longer worked for me. I was led to start searching for an ordination process that did fit me and I came upon ChI, and it seemed to check most of the boxes I was looking for and it seemed to be the best fit for me.

**Since beginning your program, have you felt welcomed, supported, and respected?**

I've most definitely felt welcomed. I think part of being so welcomed is because I am a black man and I don't think there are a lot of black men here. I was also accepted; there were questions about my faith tradition, but overall, it has been a great experience thus far.

**Do you feel understood by your colleagues, overall?**

I believe that my process as far as what I have explained to my cohort is understood. I believe there are a lot more questions about my faith tradition in itself, but as far as my journey and where I am at with it, I do feel understood.

**Do you feel as though you matter at Chi in an individual sense?**

I think numbers matter to Chi, and I have heard that in a variety of different ways at the retreat, so I matter in that way. I also think diversity matters to Chi, and I have heard this since day one, so I think I matter in that way as well. I don't think my faith tradition is well known or understood, so I don't think that matters, from what I can tell. Just being accepted as a person, yes, I matter in that sense. I have heard all of these themes.

**What would make you feel as though you matter?**

I think Chi knowing its identity would make a difference. I have heard it be mentioned that Chi should be looked at as a school, but I haven't looked at Chi as a school. I was confused by what Chi is vs. what Chi is saying it is. When I came to Chi, it was partly because of the ordination process and then I was also looking at the materials covered, which made the difference. I went to a Historically Black Theological Seminary and a far narrower focus, solely Christian, which was very different. My thought in coming to Chi was that I was coming to a place where I could be ordained and licensed as a chaplain, not a school. We don't qualify for grants or loans, we are not accredited by a post-secondary accrediting agency, and those are things I associate with a school. How can I matter if it seems like there is confusion around what the organization itself thinks it is? I need to know that Chi knows where it is going before I follow. If Chi wants to make me feel as though I matter, please clearly identify what you are and show the path and direction you are going to attain that. There has to be transparency in what Chi actually is doing and who Chi is.

**Chi is unique and being an interfaith seminary is definitely a unique charge.**

Since you've shared this, I was confused when I first started with respect to the interfaith experience. Katrina connected me to Dr. Mabry, which helped me get some clarity about what it means to be interfaith. I was concerned that Chi was perhaps intending to have me convert to "interfaith" in the sense of a faith tradition. It was a term that I saw and also that I heard in

my first course. Dr. Mabry explained that interfaith is in reference to your ministry and not your own faith tradition. This is a message that people should continue to be made aware of because there may be confusion without clear communication.

**How important is it to you that Chi is a diverse equitable and inclusive place?**

I would say that is a priority for me. Throughout my education in life, that has been one of the main considerations I have had. Chi is not diverse in the sense that I am seeing many people who look like me, but it is very accepting. It isn't bad or lacking in inclusivity. Chi is welcoming.

**In your experience, do you feel as though you can see where we have made efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging?**

I feel that there is diversity and inclusion in a lot of the classes that are provided and made available to us. In some of the class materials, however, I am not sure that there is a lot of diversity in the teachings. One example of this is that I took a class that covered Christianity, images were being used, and all of the images were indicative of the idea that Jesus was European, which, based upon my research isn't historically accurate. I am ok with everyone believing what they believe, so I am not saying that I have an issue with it per se, I just believe something different. There have been some classes that have covered Liberation Theology and a couple of other topics that show that there is diversity in the curriculum, but that differs by each class. As far as the actual community, I think there is an intent to be diverse, which is really good! I do appreciate that, and it is one of the reasons I feel so accepted. I appreciate this. There are, however, not many people who look like me. I believe that if there were more people who looked like me, they would also feel accepted, and Chi would welcome them; this is just not the makeup at this time.

**What do you feel would draw people who look like you? You can discuss this in reference to your ethnic and cultural background or even others who are male-identifying.**

Advertisement! I had to really search to find this place. If there had been advertisements on the initial sites I perused, that would have been great! Number 1, people have to know about it, which I believe is the biggest thing and after they know about it, people have to have the means to finance it. I know of a lot of people who are in a similar situation, looking for a place like Chi. I know of black women, who have trouble getting ordained in their faith tradition, but still want to be ordained and have had to go through other programs to do so. If Chi was out there showing that it can offer this as an option to people, it would probably make a huge difference. People are looking for places like Chi so they can be ordained. Chi offering people options to finance directly through Chi. I think Chi needs to go through the accreditation process to make this possible. The reason that I am at Chi is not necessarily because of the education, which is an added benefit, but the path offered for ordination.

**What are any of your favorite things about Chi?**

I would say the ability to learn more about a plethora of religions which I only knew by name, to see what the religion's core values are and to see how people lean into them for their faith, and to have a holistic look into them. This wasn't something I experienced in seminary.

**Do you have anything that is your least favorite?**

I was nearly ready to leave when I thought that I would have to switch my faith tradition in order to become an interfaith minister as a result of some of the wording used at Chi in both the reading materials and in the class. I don't think it is always clearly communicated that this is interfaith in the context of learning as opposed to personal application.

Listening to the trials that I have heard around financing, it is a concern. There definitely needs to be a way to may these programs accessible to people who want to attend.

**Based upon what you know to be true of CHI, where do the values of Chi and your own align?**

The Bible is my text. I don't look at it through a Jewish, Christian, or Islamic lens, but I see the core principle of the Bible coming out at Chi for the most part. As far as loving everyone the best way I know how to love them, is also a core element at Chi. Trying to meet people where they are and accept people is something that comes out at Chi. I would say that these things make Chi really important to me at this time.

**What are some potential actions you feel Chi could take to become a more equitable place?**

I think by voicing and ensuring that people are aware of and understand what they are participating in. In my very first course, we went on a Shamanic journey, and for me, in my faith tradition, it is very important to me that I am not praying to any deities. After Katrina explained to me that it was about praying and guided imagery, I felt more included. Prior to that, I felt like I would be betraying my faith. There is a couple of different ritualistic sort of practices here at CHI that could use more explanation in order to make people feel more included and aware of what is actually taking place. A thorough understanding of these practices and whether or not they are problematic in my own beliefs and spiritual practices would be really helpful, especially prior to when it happens. For example, personally, I don't pray to ancestors or invite them in the same way some faith traditions might. It didn't feel equitable or inclusive in that sense. There should be an option to ask questions prior to the courses being offered.

**What did I not ask you that I should have asked and what would you like to share that you haven't yet shared?**

I believe that there needs to be a space for people to share at least their core beliefs. I think that the process of being able to share this while being in the learning process of other faith

traditions would be beneficial, especially for ongoing awareness. That is even true for those who identify as Christians because there are many types of Christians now.

An example of this was an experience wherein someone asked me what the ring I had on my hand was representative of, and I let her know that it was Yahuah and she asked if I meant Yaweh, but I wasn't. I was speaking in the context of my own faith traditions. So, I think it would be beneficial for us to have this space so that we can be resources to one another in that way. Me being able to understand what people believe and hold close to them and to share the same would make a difference.

From a holistic perspective, I would like to have had a question about locations. Should we have locations in other places? Should we advertise more strongly in other geographic regions? Once you get to the Midwest, the whole understanding of faith traditions changes. The west coast and Midwest have very different perspectives on faith traditions.

Another thing to consider is that a lot of people are interested in the idea of chaplaincy and ministry over pastoring. Really sharing that in advertisements is important. There are so many different types of chaplains and ministers and making it very clear that Chi is not centered solely on pastoring to prospects is good.

**If different, in the sense of uniqueness is what you are looking for, you can definitely find it here at Chi.**

Oh, I have found it (with a smile).