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A brief history of the Kinney Program

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History of the Kinney Program

The Kinney Program originated in the 1950s with Dr. Laurence F. Kinney, Professor of Biblical Studies, who was also instrumental in developing the original Search curriculum. The first proposal for a student service program was written by Professor Kinney, based upon developing the moral, spiritual and religious life of students and the Christian ethic of service and social responsibility. In 1956-57, Dr. Kinney and his colleagues received a grant from the Danforth Foundation “to strengthen still further the moral, spiritual, and religious life of the campus community” through service in the community.

The service program was first known as the Danforth Program, and renamed in the 1960s in honor of Laurence F. Kinney, at the recommendation of student volunteers. Dr. Kinney believed that “with the privilege of education comes the responsibility of service,” and he served as faculty advisor for students in service until his retirement. Kinney recruited Mrs. Estelle Cone from Idlewild Presbyterian Church to coordinate the growing numbers of student volunteers. Mrs. Cone served as program director 20 years and the Cone Award for Outstanding Kinney Volunteer is given in her honor.

Larry Lacy ('59) and Beth Lemaster Simpson ('58) were among the first group of Kinney volunteers. Simpson, who later became director of the program, recalls starting with about 35 students and 8 projects, including local churches, the Methodist Neighborhood Center, and the Crippled Children's Hospital (now LeBonheur Children's Hospital).

Estelle Cone led volunteers into service, often shuttling them in her own car, since most students did not drive in those days. In 1976, Julia Allen (Class of 1947) took over direction of the program, and was followed by Beth Simpson. Kinney Coordinator Bo Scarborough (Class of 1967) was instrumental in naming the program after Dr. Kinney. Later as Dean of Students, Scarborough strengthened the program by increasing the Kinney staff. In 1986, the Kinney Program was combined with the work of a full time Chaplain, Steve Musick. In 1990, Billy Newton (Class of 1974), a former Kinney volunteer and a Presbyterian minister, became Chaplain and Director of Kinney and Community Service. In 2007, a year after Kinney's 50th anniversary, current Chaplain Walt Tennyson joined the Rhodes Community as chaplain and Director of Community Service and the Bonner Program.

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