

## **Ten Minute T(ea) with Ms. Lee-Ellen Strawn**

*Interview conducted by Olivia Morrison  
December 20, 2016*

Q) Do you feel that, because Christianity was such an essential part of NMH in its early days, Christianity should play a role in students lives today?

A) Even though DL Moody (our school's founder) was a famous evangelist, NMH has actually always been a secular institution and has never been connected to a religious institution. Today, we are a secular school that affirms religious diversity. NMH wants to encourage students to explore their own religious and spiritual identities, but there is not an institutional mandate to follow any particular religious or spiritual tradition.

Q) Why do we have school meetings in the chapel? How does the chapel add to our school?

A) Currently, it's the space that holds everybody, and in that sense, it's a good use of the space. The chapel is a visible symbol of the connection to the Moody Heritage. Personally, I do not think that going into a religious space makes me a follower of that religion, and although I do not think that being in the chapel makes everyone a Christian, I also recognize that it can be uncomfortable for some people.

Q) How does NMH differ from your previous experience of working and living in Korea?

A) I worked at an international school that identified as a Christian school, and because it self-identified and used that language in its publications, in some ways it made things neater than the situation of religious pluralism here at NMH. NMH is a secular school that affirms religious diversity and pluralism, and here we are faced with this wonderful challenge of what that means and how it should play out in our school traditions. Both schools are close-knit communities that valued history and tradition. Both are motivated by values, and at the international school in Korea, those values were outwardly religious ones. Here at NMH, however, although we have religious values in our history, today we recognize that we can be motivated by many different traditions and values.

Q) What is the role of the chaplain?

A) My role is to continue to uplift spirituality in a broad sense as something that is important for the holistic development and learning of a student and for the community. I try to, and feel that I am, define spirituality in a broad and inclusive sense. Important aspects of this are empathy, compassion, social justice, and peace. I help articulate these values and provide conversation around them.

Q) What do you hope to see in terms of religion for NMH in the future?

A) I would like to see more conversation about religion in our forums and more religious pluralism. I would also like the different religious and spiritual life groups to all feel equally empowered.

*Ms. Lee-Ellen Strawn primarily plays the role of chaplain but is also part of the Religious Studies and Philosophy Department at NMH. After moving from Korea, she is in her third year at the school and hopes to promote religious diversity. She works with numerous religious groups such as the Muslim Student Association, the Jewish Student Association, and the Interfaith Student Council.*