

## NEW PROGRAM

## Union and Oxford University Offer Certificate in Science and Spirituality

**I**ntercessory prayer, or prayer on behalf of another, is not associated with positive medical outcomes, according to last December's *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. Researchers arrived at these results after conducting a two-year, double-blind, controlled trial of 799 cardiovascular patients.

Not so long ago a study this scientific would never have been conducted on prayer, much less intercessory prayer, and certainly not by the prestigious Mayo Clinic. But increasingly, science and spirituality are exploring each other, even if it is to prove the other wrong. Says Union Graduate College core faculty **Kevin Sharpe**, Ph.D. "In the last decade, studies like these have become more professionally acceptable."

The medical establishment's investigation of prayer represents only the beginning of a general trend to unite the two disparate disciplines. "We see a lot more about science and spirituality in the media," says Sharpe, founder of *Science & Spirit* magazine. "Certainly, I have noticed that more people are willing to talk about it on airplanes, which is just one indication that the general public has become more fascinated by this subject."

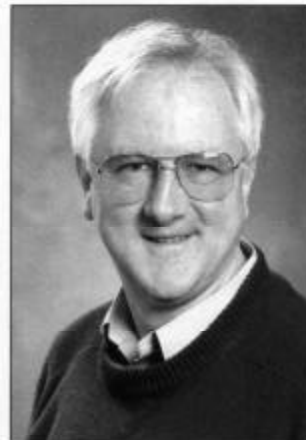
This is just one of the reasons that Sharpe has developed a certificate in Science and Spirituality, offered through a partnership between Union Institute & University and Oxford Institute of Science and Spirit. Although Sharpe himself is a scientist and an ordained Episcopalian priest, he imagines that most learners seeking this certificate will be "inquiring generalists," those who may spend their leisure time pondering questions such as "will computers eventually have 'souls'?" and "how does quantum reality change our perception of existence?" Says **William McKelvie**, dean of Union's Office of New Program Planning

and Development, "The idea is to bring learners from the two disciplines together to discuss issues ranging from cloning to stem cell research to the origin of the universe."

Although there is no disputing that learners in this program are engaged in a higher purpose, they also gain a practical benefit. For example, faculty will be able to use this certificate to teach courses in science and spirituality at their respective institutions. The certificate is also part of Union's overall goal to offer more certificate programs to faculty and alumni, helping them continue to bring their expertise and skills into the public domain, says McKelvie.

The 15-hour certificate program consists of four graduate-level courses, including interdisciplinary investigations of spirituality in the human, biological, and physical sciences. While learners can take three of the courses via Internet, the fourth requires a two-week residency in England at Harris Manchester College of Oxford University, which houses the Oxford Institute of Science and Spirit. Like Union, Harris Manchester College specializes in higher adult education, and supports the world's only university chair for science and religion. "As far as I know there are no other programs like this," says Sharpe. "It's a certificate program, it's graduate level, and it also examines spirituality as opposed to more institutional religious belief systems."

It is not only the certificate's uniqueness, but its potential to impact society, that excites Sharpe. He says, "In our society there's a lot of separation between science and 'wisdom on how to live.' This is an attempt to bring wholeness back to life, and better social health to civilization." ♦ — HEATHER SMITH



**Kevin Sharpe**, Union Institute & University Graduate College core faculty and creator of the certificate program in science and spirituality.