Availing:
Collected Works on Religious Life
Cover Art: *Fertile Bleed*. Katherine Hester ‘08. Acrylic color stain
Manifestations of Faith: To You and Through You

Faith exists within the nameless boundaries that connect our daily lives to the spiritual and the sacred. It can be manifested in myriad ways, from those who encounter the divine in external experiences, and those who are blessed to be able to act in ways that mirror their own understanding of God. Human understanding of faith can be both subtle and powerful—and it is always personal. Whether it is the sublimity of natural beauty, through a loving and supportive friendship, or in the moments of holy inspiration, we experience faith differently. Davidson College hosts a wonderful blend of individuals whose unique expressions of faith appear in countless ways. This year’s Availing is an open collection of members of the community who have recognized faith in their own lives.

The contributors of the following pages have offered their own depictions of faith, both literary and visual, in order to express personal cognitions of the divine, and to help others to detect it in their own lives. We extend thanks to each person who has helped at every step in the process, and, as always, to God, whom we encounter in the seen and unseen, expressed and in our hearts.

Peace and blessings,
Gretchen Hoffman ’08
Ann Watford ’10
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When the LORD dropped us down into the arms of the Jordan again,
our mouths had something to chew on again:
a cotton candy cloud of sweet! Laughter;
golden, syrupy red with black seeds, juices running down
the narrow, endless pathways of renewed dimples;
our tongues danced as freely as our feet –
then it was said among the broken
“the Word became flesh and dwelt among them.”

the Word is flesh and dwells among us.
and thus we Rejoice.

1 Cf. Psalm 126.
In the afternoon the children will come—her children—“I call them mis
niños.” She will explain to them letters and numbers. Teach them to read. She will
show them that they are loved. Teach them to love each other. In the afternoon,
Cristina will dream for them a life outside of the machines of the maquilas and
five will go to college.

**Que lindos manitos que tengo yo**

**Chiquitos, bonitos que Dios me dio.**

**Migrant House**

For God’s hands at Casa Migrante
The priests, nuns and volunteers

Tell me migrant house
Of the women you have fed.
The mothers and daughters
Who have crawled to your gate
Violated, hungry, bleeding.

Tell me migrant house
Of the women you have sheltered.
Wives and sisters
Who have survived the beatings of rocks hitting trains
And loneliness.

Tell me migrant house
Of the women you have clothed
Friends and cousins
Who know what it is to
Depend on the Lord and others.

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you
gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in; naked and
you clothed me...

Matthew 25: 35
I am usually afraid, and really I still am,  
But time has taught me to have hope  
That fear will slowly fade.  
First I had faith in you,  
And gave myself away.  
But slowly I see more everyday  
That my faith in you has turned into  
Faith in me.  
It’s okay with me if you don’t succeed,  
And the car wrecks, the conversation halts.  
If it all ends, because I have faith now.  
I know now that having faith in myself  
Means accepting that I will fail –  
To go down with my own sinking ship,  
Just as I would go down with yours.  
Now that enigma that is grace  
Sparkles a little brighter in my eyes.  
New knowledge makes me freer every day.  
Thank you for a faith that trumps  
Pettiness, compulsion, and fear;  
Long live honesty, strength, and courage.  
From a faith that makes the difference.
I saw a water bottle today.
I looked across the library and noticed a beautifully scratched, one-quarter full, thirty-two ounce botella de agua just sitting on the table as if it had no better place to be, as if water bottles didn’t belong in Nicaragua, as if the stench of wealth on this campus hadn’t already turned that water sour.
I saw a water bottle today. It made my heart ache.
I can be pulled back there at any moment: the smell of hand sanitizer, the taste of mango, the flip-flops I wore that maybe still have Nicaraguan dirt on the bottom, rocking chairs, black coffee, water bottles.
Let me tell you what I know about Jesus. He is short like my host mom was short. He is wrinkled and a little shy like abuela. He sniffs glue in the street, sometimes, if the hunger hurts too much. He prays. He is poor.

The Lord is alive in Nicaragua because that is where His people need Him most. They are a suffering people, worn out by a world gone wrong. But even in that agony, they have the courage to call upon the Lord each and every day. Nicaragua is holding her hands in prayer; she is breathing the gospel with slow, steady breaths.
Before Nicaragua, I thought faith was something entirely internal. What mattered was always my relationship with God, my moral standards, my attendance in church. Now all I can think about is the reflections of God I see in other people.
There are two ways to know God.
The first is simple: go to church, pray, and read the bible. We praise God directly by speaking softly with Him in our private hearts. The second way to serve God is simply this: serve your neighbor instead. Helping each other—loving each other—is an act of prayer greater than any whispered Hail Mary or Our Father. It is a shout.
I’m shouting.
On Organic Offerings
Sara Kay Knicely ’09

Community for the sake of love is good and pleasant – uncaged and unrefined, as if freely dousing Your feet with the finest perfume filling the whole house with its fragrance.
costly perfume made of nard – unaware even of how right it is.
as the perfume runs over the dirt and grime we, without thinking, wipe with our hair.

it is not until later that we understand that there – somewhere within the yellowed cracks on the heels of those weather-worn feet where the oily perfume residue settles, mixing with blood, stale, salty sweat, and gravel, picked up from the dusty narrow path, imbedded in torn, broken, deepened fissures of flesh – there, there the LORD ordained His blessing, life forevermore.
This day only comes once a year but somehow it seems to arrive faster and faster. I love it, but I can’t lose it, I can’t let it go so quickly… Allison and I leave the choir room after practicing the anthems we know by heart, racing giddily to the sanctuary—we’ve been doing this since we were four, actually since we were born, but it never gets old. No, it becomes more precious as our five, ten, fifteen years become twenty. As we’ve made our way out of daily Atlanta home life and into college transience, this one night slams permanence back into our beings. I feast my eyes on the buzzing crowd in the pews, soaking in the electric energy that could only happen tonight. Making our way to the back, I stop to grin at people from past, present, future—Chris, Rob, Jessica and Elizabeth, Kallan and Kathy… I rush up to the balcony, wave feverishly, and bound back downstairs as people continue to choke the narthex. I hug Paul and David and Robert, jumping up and down. It never ceases to amaze me that nearly all the people that I love in the world are in one place. I can barely wrap my head around it, and so I simply chuckle at this normality that is far too abnormal. Bill Mallard is letting loose his sandpaper Southern voice, warbling yet sturdy, at the front of the church, leading us in the “Aymen” because of the clearness, the words that mark us so beautifully as children, as souls, as One Body, warmth in the cold outside—

Long lay the world in sin and error pining
till He appeared and the soul felt its worth

Finally Timothy ignites the organ, which is my cue to get this proud, silly, huge grin on my face as I impatiently wait in the processional line. Walking down that aisle, hearing my own voice mixed with others—O come, all you children of my Father—

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

I feel like I am walking with myself at different ages now. God, please help me to appreciate it for the soul-filled night that it is. Rushing is a part of it, but so is sitting still. I stare out at that crowd, seeing faces—Ralph, Cheryl, Flemings, Baran, Beth… and knowing the faces I can’t find in the blur—my family, David, Katie, Adrienne, everyone. Here we are again. Jack steps up to the podium and repeats those words—2,000 years ago…—

And then Cynthia comes out to sing “O Holy Night”—I gasp, my heart almost stops. I don’t know if I can do this anymore—singing without thinking, singing for the last time, including my little brother—in my heart. I don’t think I am getting used to this yet. I am overwhelmed, I am filled with emotion, I am full of gratitude. I walk the exact same steps, sing the same words at the same time on this day, as I walked into the choir loft amidst dancers, hearts, children, and we beam understanding at each other—this is who we belong. Nothing but this. Always. I will live forever!
I gaze out the magnificent windows to the dimming light. Gaze back inside. Crowded family hope. This is faith. This is life.

And Mary and Joseph carry their lantern and gaze around in the darkness, pretending they don’t hear us sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem…”

“Joseph, I’m excited about this baby, but I’m scared too. I wish we were at home with friends and family.”

The lines never change.

“I’m afraid too, Mary. But God will be with us.”

They disappear behind the old faithful sky-blue backdrop that watched my brother play Baby Jesus eighteen years ago, and in the choir watch Parker gently carry baby Banks to his mother, Messiah for a night. Parker, my age, acquainted from birth, whom I haven’t seen on a daily basis since seventh grade. I don’t know him at all anymore, but watching this man that I knew much better as such a boy do this sacred thing stings my eyes. They bring Banks out—Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!—lifting him up into the spotlight (the Godlight?) something straight out of The Lion King, but never as corny—Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth! And for tonight, this is our Savior. He doesn’t know it, he’ll be shown pictures, maybe he’ll even be teenagerly embarrassed. But these words resonate within my body, within this space holding the One Body, and they are true.

dance in the Christmas Eve pageant. The generations of teenagers wax and wane, shift and stay, always the glow of familiar faces. Then Barbara stands up and on cue the pews begin to bustle again, children pouring out of them, scrambling up to the altar with excited babble, Christmas eyes, and patent leather feet. They push and smash into each other and the dance fluently, but aborably high with Barbara’s waving arms—Jay, a manager, never for a second misses a strum, a tap, a “bed”—and I wonder, how many of us sitting here did the same so many years in a row? Can I get a show of hands?
Exactly two, five, ten years ago. In the midst of all this change, we always return to this. I would be nowhere else on this night of nights, the night that blurs me together at all ages—5, 16, 20. When I look into the eyes of my friends by my side I know they also feel that indescribable peace: this is where we are supposed to be. There is nothing else except this world, this joy of God and family, this song

With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King

On this night, our senior pastor does something new. At these words, he raises his candle high into the air, subtle but strong. And then one row, and another, until my family is lifting the light to the world, to each other—and I lose it. I cannot sing anymore, gasping salty tears with the beauty and longing and hope and history of it all. The faith that is raised as we raise our arms. As we embrace each other and laugh after the service. As we live each day away from our home.
As I knelt by the sudsy basin 
I realized the transformation.
I wasn't in church anymore, and
Couldn't see her face.
They weren't her feet
but suddenly became
the feet of
Every
Poor
Neglected
Nicaraguan
[Human Being]
Treading Your Earth with
nothing
Between the soles of feet
and the dust of dump-road-sewer.

I thought,
(maybe)
I could be
washing the foot of
that man
behind the fruit stands:
lifting it up
to show us his
bleeding wound
that no one would cleanse
or

I wanted to love and love and love,

Whatever pathetic love
I had left,
whatever tiny shreds
clung to the insides
of my broken heart:
Whatever was left spilled out
into the bucket
and I wanted to love and love and love,
still realizing my incapacity
to change, or impact,
on my own.

Yet:
I live with music and
laughter and
opportunity, and
I find beauty amidst un-health
and un-happiness. And
I blindly reach for a blind future
that I know is in the hands of
a God whose heart
suffers with Carmen and
the lady in the pink hat and
her babies and
the drug dealers and
the prostitutes who smile
at me behind walls
of worlds uncrossable- almighty-unreachable- but for smiles.

At the bottom of the bucket:
Wings.
It was a spontaneous trip. It took us four hours to plan, pack, and get in the car. Eight hours later we arrived at the lake house.

Sarah and I grew up together. After so many years together, it’s easy for her to know when I need to get away. That is why, despite her starting school in a week and my leaving for a semester abroad in ten days, she insisted on our making the trip.

On the road, somewhere between the barns and the cows, Sarah and I began discussing our faith. I was startled at the topic of conversation. Despite all of our years together, we never shared our religious beliefs.

My idea of Sarah’s faith stemmed from her upbringing. She grew up in a very talkative and religiously active family. This is what I knew of Sarah’s faith – the image of her religious activism.

My parents, on the other hand, did everything in their power to allow me to explore, choose, and find a faith of my own. They refrained from pushing certain beliefs or even discussing religion. They invited me to church with them on Sunday and I would always choose to go – but it was always a choice. Religion remained extremely personal to me and now Sarah was trying to change that.

Sarah decided to attend a Catholic university in order to engage with others and discuss her faith. In the car that day, she told me that the discussions with her peers help to confirm her relationship with God. She asked me how I am able to have a relationship with God without having the constant open dialogue with others regarding Him.
I had to be honest with myself and with her. I explained that my faith stems from internal reflection. I admitted that it is extremely hard to find reassurance in an isolated relationship with God. I profess my gratitude each and every day for the people God has placed in my life and the security He has provided. Nevertheless, there is never any external acknowledgement of those expressions of gratitude. “That’s where dialogues with others can help,” Sarah insisted.

I understood what she was saying. I understood why people participate in Bible studies and youth groups. I had tried it all. Unfortunately, none of it worked for me. I would sit in Bible discussions and think: Oh, that person over there—he needs God’s help and guidance more than I do right now. And there, I would leave it.

Sarah and I succeeded in escaping from the world for a few days. We discussed religion from time to time during our trip— but never to a great extent. It was okay that way; we had that mutual understanding.

On the road trip back, I noticed something in the distance. I had made the trip hundreds of times before and the scenery was never new. On this particular trip, however, I noticed a little white church between the cornfields. On the bulletin board, it read: You’re Welcome.

Sarah and I must have seen the sign at the same time because we looked at each other and smiled. Just because something isn’t immediately evident, doesn’t always mean it isn’t there.
"I am here!" shouts the sunlight rushing;
"I am here!" sing the marble walls;
"I am here!" booms the mighty vaulting dome.

With the sunlight ringing in my ears
I remember my sister kneeling,
head bowed
hands clasped,
firmly rooted in earth and Heaven both,
a living pillar holding up an
endless cathedral sky.

A bright line of sunlight races down the dusty nave.

Greasy timetables
and crumpled bus schedules
(testaments to my small and petty hours)
have brought me to this
High and Holy Palace on the Thames—
feet mired in the mud of centuries
but every stone cries out for Heaven.

Sunlight bursts
the flimsy window dams
and floods the grand
up-reaching spaces
and the Son is refracted
in a million jewel-toned mirrors.

Far below, a tiny white-robed man stops my soul.

Back in my light-filled Heaven on the
Thames, the little man’s words
break me open and the Sun pours in
and the bus schedules and timetables
burn in holy fire on my forehead.
Availing is a publication of the Religious Life Council of Davidson College in cooperation with the Davidson College Chaplain's Office.

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