The Availing Encounters Across Borders and Traditions
Cover Art: A woman ringing bells at a Buddhist temple to signify to the Buddha and bodhisattvas that she has done something of merit.

Brianna Deutsch ’11
The Availing
Encounters Across Borders and Traditions

There are moments in life when the boundaries that seem to confine our world disappear. When we venture beyond the familiar, we can stumble upon the meaningful, upon the beautiful, and upon the sacred. The Divine often comes to us in a break from routine, as we stretch our hearts and dare to explore things we’ve yet to discover about the world and ourselves.

Personal expressions of faith and spirituality find inspiration in connections with people and places that are unexpected. Davidson College hosts a wonderful blend of individuals whose unique beliefs have been shaped by a rich variety of experiences, both at home and abroad. We found, therefore, that “Encounters Across Borders and Traditions” is a fitting theme for this year’s Availing. In the following essays, poems and artwork, students recount moments in which they have glimpsed something beyond themselves and greater than themselves. Uniting these individual pieces is the recognition of the spiritual insight gained when we are open to new encounters.

We’d like to thank Chaplain Rob Spach and the members of the Religious Life Council for their support and encouragement.

In peace,
Paul Spellings ’13
Ann Watford ’10
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We have known one another for such a long, long time though still, even now, you’re a stranger in my mind.

I call you on most everyday and even late at night; I’m sure you won’t pick up, again, but there’s still a hope you might.

On Sundays I always dress myself and your company I pretend to seek, but I forget your door is open to me every moment of the week.

I’d like to invite you over to mine for a home cooked meal, but drinks and laughs and book discussion isn’t a part of our deal.

I’d send you a card on your birthday I know you’re old as hell, but I have no idea when you were born and that’s probably just as well.

You’ve written on my heart to teach, to ask, to plead; and while I feel your letters there it’s a language I can’t read.

Take my hand and tell me, friend, of your Torah, Qur’an, and Bible; for most, like me, alive today they seem so indecipherable.

You’re not exactly a pen pal, or a friend, or lover, or kin, and though I can’t define you now, you’ll be with me until this ends.
Pause. Remain. Be still. How often do I still my heart before God? Rarely. I’m seldom at rest in a spiritual sense when my mind is spinning with assignments, reviews, rehearsals, and social life. However, in Taizé I found this stillness, this quiet peace of spirit. It didn’t come immediately, but seeped in as I refocused myself toward God during prayer services. As a friend related to our group one night after evening prayer, Taizé is a “heartbeat.” I found this metaphor to be indicative of my time in the ecumenical community that breathes life and exudes tangible love in a life-sustaining way.

Amidst Taizé songs rising up to God in French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, English and Latin, God reminded me that He is love. God’s source of love is a wonderful and binding force—across languages, across backgrounds, across cultures. One of my most meaningful conversations in Taizé was with Lisa, a young woman from Japan. She asked me deep, probing questions in a gentle and lovely way. “What is faith?” she asked, and “what goes on in your head during the times of silence?” I grappled with these difficult questions; never had I been so genuinely questioned about my faith. Suddenly, I felt as though Lisa had more answers than I did. She explained to me that she believed she already had faith in herself; why, then, did we Christians believe that faith came from an outside source? I
didn’t know how to respond. I still don’t know if I could have explained myself fully to her. What amazed and impressed me the most about Lisa was her courage and strength to come to a foreign country and experience a foreign religion. During my conversation with Lisa, I realized that it wasn’t my job to convince her of anything. My only purpose was to be open with her and, when asked, express myself out of God’s love. The transparency that I found in Lisa’s spirit was a beautiful thing. She was so open and willing to relate to me and to many others in Taizé and wasn’t afraid of revealing her true self to us; her joy was palpable. I strive to live with an authentic interest in others, pausing to listen, as Lisa does. Only then will I be available to see God in and working through the lives of others.

On my pilgrimage to Taizé, I witnessed God’s love manifested in many different ways. Even simple acts of being served breakfast by other visitors to the community spoke volumes more about God’s love than we could have possibly conversed about. It is still incredibly striking to me that in a world so broken and with so many conflicts, people can come together to worship the same God. After all, His love ties us all together and, as I experienced with Lisa, it has the power to overcome differences of faith. In Taizé, our common respect and love for one another allowed a sincere sense of community to drive each moment. The fellowship between brothers and visitors created a way of life that focused on, but was not limited to, continual prayer and actively being still in the presence of God.

In all respects, Taizé fosters a way of being: one that I hope takes precedence in all corners of my life. In the community, it was easy to find silence and pause, as this constituted a major part of each day. I could even stroll through the quaint village of Taizé to the little church where undisturbed silence was always guaranteed. Back at Davidson, I’ve been searching out times for myself to be still before God. As I’ve come to understand, it is vital for me to stop during the day to forget the insignificant worries of this world and open my heart to the only One who can satisfy my life. It is my hope to slow the pulse of my Davidson life to regain what enveloped me in France: the ever-present heartbeat of God.
In a past life I was a fly
Buzzing around the head of a bodhisattva
As he meditated alone in a cave.
I reawoke to new life as his disciple—
He lived many years before nirvana.
It will be my labor to imagine
How I lost those monkish ways,
Which have given me much karma
That has saved me until now.
The contemplation, I fear, will frustrate.
Yet here I may sit on my back porch
Observing the stoned circle arranged
In the woods across Watson Street—
One might build a fire within
Although the ring has long rested empty.
I see that instead it must contain
Large reserves of ancient dharma
Like a forgotten reservoir
It partakes in the form of purity.
I will decide one day to sit inside
And perceive when the cleansing fire
Washes over my spirit.
A Buddhist monk receiving morning alms from a lay person. Buddhist monks normally collect their daily food each morning, but this photo was taken during a scheduled charity event, where 10,000 monks gathered to collect alms for the monks in predominantly-Muslim Southern Thailand.

Brianna Deutsch '11
It’s the last Sunday morning in September. I’m on the 35 bus, with the map in my hands. The red squiggles are the streets of Norwich, on one of which I’m supposed to find the church. I check my watch, again. 10:20. Hurry up hurry up hurry up hurry up hurry up...

I’d walked tentatively into the Chaplain’s Office at the university on Friday afternoon, finished with my first week of classes in England. A round-cheeked man, kind, blustery—the chaplain himself, I discovered—seemed delighted and a bit taken aback to have an American poke her head in to ask if she could join for evening prayers, which had been advertised on the wall outside the door. I sat with him and with the Catholic chaplain and answered their questions (Where was I from? What was my denomination? Would I be interested in helping to organize a Thanksgiving dinner in November?). When the clock hit six, the three of us bowed our heads in the tiny lamp-lit office and prayed. A cool rush of something like comfort swayed my bones. God had followed me across the ocean.

But now I’m going to be late, going to be late to the church the chaplain told me to find, Chapelfield Road Methodist. I still don’t know the bus routes well, so I hop off at the Roman Catholic cathedral, ancient gray stones overwhelming me higher and higher. Where to go from here? 10:30.

The hazy sunshine drops onto my footsteps, and I clip quickly down the sidewalks trying not to look lost. But let’s face it—10:35. Service starting and I’m not there. So I do a little praying of my own, muttering under my breath.

“Lord. Seriously. Let me find the church.

“Not kidding.”

10:35. I want to go to church. I want to go to church! Cars whiz past me, past the ancient city walls that still stand, crumbling sea-shell rocks stacked and scattered. I can’t see far enough down the street to know what’s next. Am I even going in the right direction?

“Help me find the church, help me find the church, please God, I—”

I give. “Excuse me!” I call brightly to an older man in front of me. He stops, checks himself at my voice. I’m extremely aware of who I am. Yes, American. Yes, woman. Yes, lost. “Can you tell me where Chapelfield Road Methodist Church is?”
He puts up his hand to shield his eyes from the sunlight. “Eh, Chapelfield? Think you jus’ keep headin’ down this way, should run straigh’ inno it.”

“Down this way?”

“Yeh, think—”

“Thank you!” I’m already jogging. There it is! There it is! Right across the street from Chapelfield Mall and city centre. No steeple, just straight-edged stately stone with a pointed roof and a curved window in the middle that looks like it’s been etched with whalebone. I pause in the parking lot. 10:40. Thank you.

I drag the heavy door open and slip in, holding it with my palm until it clicks shut. My ears are suddenly stuffed full of sound, the sounds of my childhood, deep organ swells and a musty copper richness of mingled voices.

“Bri-ing forth the ro-o-yal di-i-a-de-em—”

Hey, I know this one! I tiptoe into the narthex, getting bright curious smiles from the gray-haired ushers. I smile back, apologetic, new, late. One of the ushers opens the door to the small sanctuary and I go in.

“—and cro-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-
After Sunday morning service on the first full day in Iona, Scotland, ushers at the doors of the abbey held a basket of small oatcakes, sort of like a cookie to us Americans. We were invited to take one as we left the service and enter into the courtyard for tea where we were to exchange our easier because you have the excuse that someone told you to do it?).

I cautiously walk up, tea in one hand, oatcake in the other, to a shy girl sitting along the wall who looked to be a few years older than me. “Hi!” I chirp. “I already ate my oatcake,” she tells me with an unenthusiastic voice. “Hmm, she doesn’t seem to be a fan of this whole let’s-make-friends thing,” I think, still keeping a smile on my face. I try again: “Well, maybe I can break mine in half and we can share?” She seems fairly agreeable to this, watching me attempt to break the quarter-sized compact circle of oats without losing most of it in the form of crumbs on the ground.

Now, let me provide a little insight. I was really excited about this oatcake. My first real one from Scotland! You see, my dad has been cooking them for years in celebration of our Scottish heritage, but he always says they don’t come out quite right, and I believe him because they’ve come out of the oven in all forms: so gooey it’s hard to chew, so
crumbly you can’t pick it up to eat, so green it makes you wonder (oats aren’t green, are they? Hmm...). But alas, I have been tricked out of half of my oatcake by this apathetic girl with a negative attitude who’s already had a whole one all to her self. I notice I’m having a self-centered moment and move past it by turning my efforts to stirring conversation with this reluctant individual.

I find she’ll respond shortly to my questions and doesn’t immediately come up with something else she has to do, so I continue encouraging the conversation. While she doesn’t seem terribly interested in hearing anything from me, I am happy to hear more of her story. She is a volunteer from Lithuania. She came on a suggestion from her psychologist who told her the beautiful surroundings and safe environment might help her emerge from her depression. I ask her how she likes it here. “I hate it,” she replies. “Oh my,” I think, “that explains the attitude.” It was rather brave of her to be so honest with me. She is not afraid to tell me how lucky I was for being American. “Why?” I ask with a laugh. I worry she thinks I’m an American snob. I sure hope not; I recognize Americans have plenty of their own issues. Still, I wonder how she could discredit her own home country for one she’d never visited.

“Everything is better there,” she replies. One thing’s for sure, traveling abroad does help you count your blessings as an American.

Though I stayed energetic while speaking with her, I found myself troubled by this conversation afterwards. Despite our awkward first encounter, I found that throughout the week when we saw each other we always made a point to smile and wave – something I never saw her do otherwise.

When it came time for goodbyes on the last day, people shuffling around the common space sharing hugs and well wishes, a special connection held me in the room. I knew I would regret it if I left without saying goodbye to her. I approached her, less shy than when I held an oatcake, but still apprehensive, unsure whether an acquaintance that consisted of a single conversation expected a goodbye. She welcomed a hug and smiled back at me.

An appreciation for life rushed through me, in awe of the power of human connection. I knew I had somewhat unexpectedly made a friend. As they say, many people come in and out of our lives and each one of them makes an impact. I can’t be sure what kind of impact I made on Erica’s stay on the island, but I like to think we were able to share not just an oatcake but also heartwarming smiles full of encouragement — evidence of a connection much deeper than words.
I never actually learned the little boy’s name. My two Spanish phrases did not stand a chance against the break neck speed of his rolling tongue. He was about three years old and had come to visit the clinic with his sister. His parents were not there, but it was not unusual for a five-year-old to be in charge of her younger siblings. He was about three feet tall and wore a turtleneck shirt, hand-me-down jean overalls, and a pair of red rainboots. Like most of the children we saw at the clinics, his outfit was constructed from a hodge podge of hand-me-downs and hand-outs. His cheeks were chapped from the wind and sun; at age four his body already showing signs of slowly wearing down from enduring life in Quito Sur. In my feeble attempts to communicate with “¿Como te llamo?” and “¿cuantos annos tienes?” we did not get very far. Instead we bonded over airplanes.

I was in Quito as part of a medical mission trip. That day in January, my airplane folding abilities helped me to foster a friendship.

The boy’s sister was five years old, so she had been given the flouride mouth rinse. In an attempt to be just like his older sister, the little boy tried repeatedly to get me to let him use the flouride. He tried to use a pleading face and ask, “¿a mi?” He even tried
to pump a cup full of flouride for himself while I
was not looking. So I was desperately trying to find
any possible way to distract him for longer than five
seconds and grabbed one of the coloring sheets from
the table and began folding it into a paper airplane.
Now I would consider myself well versed in the fine
art of paper airplane construction; you must have the
perfect wingspan-to-paper length ratio and not have
too much resistance from the upward flaps. That day
in January, my airplane folding abilities helped me to
for a friend-
ship. He was
absolutely en-
thralled by the
airplane and
proceeded to
run around the
courtyard with
it zooming
it in and out
of imaginary
clouds. After a while he got tired off running around
and sat on my lap flying the plane up and over the
nearby mountains and volcanoes that surround the
city of Quito, a long narrow city that blooms out of
a thin valley in the Andes Mountains. Some areas
of the city seem very developed and in others most
of the children have parasites and bony cows and
pigs wander through the streets. While he was sit-
ing in my lap we folded and unfolded the paper
plane until he was able to make one by himself.

Instead of just making the
little toy airplane fly, all of
the sudden he was flying.

For a while the little boy sat at the table and colored
with the shards and scraps of crayons that were left
after the first round of kids came through. After a
little bit he got tired of coloring the same picture green
over and over again and needed some new entertain-
ment. I was standing up stretching out my back,
which was very sore after a day of sitting at a table and
chairs meant for a preschool. The little boy walked
over to me and I picked him up and spun him around
and around. Instantly a huge smile spread across his
face and a loud giggle emanated from him. Instead of
just making the little
toy airplane
fly, all of
the sud-
en he was

flying. As I went to put him down a he squealed, “¡otra
vez de nada!” and lifted up his arms for me to spin him
again. So we span around in circles until we were both
so dizzy that we could hardly stand up and had to sit
on the cement laughing hysterically while we waited
to regain our equilibrium. We never went back to that
community, but I feel certain that if you went back
there is a little boy who can show you how to make the
perfect airplane. It may not fly straight or be prop-
erly balanced, but in my mind it is utterly perfect.
I have learned why my mother cries in church—
I cry too—it happens when we sit still.
We are creatures of ceaseless movement,
my mother and I, and only when we cease
moving can the great sad wave of the world break
and foam and wash down our faces.

For all people according to their need, she faces
forward, head bowed, praying for the whole Church
in Christ Jesus in whom she trusts still.
We pray for those with AIDS. The world is the movement
of pain from soul to soul; the current never ceases
and in a moment it will reach my mother and break
through her pale, freckled skin. It will break
upon her brain and flood it with faces
lacerated and gaunt and begging the Church
for a moment full, whole, and still.
Soon will come that fiery, clenching movement
behind the eyes. The week ceases
its mindless, intemperate hurry; she ceases
the accomplishment of things and breaks
her heart open as much as she can. Her face
sets itself and the bodies of the Church
scream and push at the fissure and she fights to keep still,
anchors herself to my hand. We rock in the movement
of wave upon wave. I feel the steady movements
of her heart through our laced fingers and I cease
self and shame and seize this momentary break,
this gasp in the business of the world, to turn my face
to the altar, to the North wall of the church
where all is still.

And whenever I return home, she will still
hold my hand. When my wobbly movements
bring me close enough to touch, when I cease
my flappings; when I fall; when I break
my wild migration, she will cradle my face
in her hands and pray for me as she prays for the church.

Let daylight flood the church and break on our upturned faces.
Let us move unceasingly into the stillness of God.
Enveloping cool mossy limbs is glowing Eternal light.
Three limbs in all, one may see,
yet looking closer, the self-same Tree
remains the true image in sight.

How can it be that the darkness flees and the day defeats the night?
That fear and doubt melt away and fade
when we come to know that our debts are paid,
and the reason is God’s great might.

Like the beauty of tender leaves’ first green,
the love divine He chose to sow,
Is knowing that the Victor’s come, that what there’s to win has been won.

Yet the greatest sight this world has seen
does not lie in that which can grow
but only in the glory of the Son.
The prophet Isaiah gave the most beautiful description of Heaven: On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations (Isaiah 25:6-7) This Heaven is a place of perfect inclusivity, one that is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine in our fragmented world of language barriers and cultural walls and guarded geographical boarders.

Last summer in Myrtle Beach I was blessed with an opportunity to work at McDonald’s for seven weeks. I certainly didn’t go there expecting a tiny view of Heaven, but God has a wonderful sense of humor sometimes.

My coworkers were Guatemalan, mostly illegal immigrants. I am a privileged American girl. I was soon to return to Davidson, on my way to a degree and a better job; my friends have no end in sight. They will experience the monotony of McDonald’s should have been miserable. And yet, I have never seen anybody find such joy in working! Their smiles and laughter were what kept me going. According to worldly logic, we shouldn’t even have mixed. Had they decided to ignore me, I could...
easily have understood. And yet, all that I experienced was an outpouring of Christian love. They invited me in and we began to communicate, they in broken English and I in broken Spanish. My friends host any sort of serious game. You can see a difference in people when they leave this place, not only by the layer of sweat and dust on their skin, but also because they leave with a noticeably lighter spirit than when on its grounds. There were people everywhere—it appeared to be the gathering place for all of the immigrant workers in Myrtle Beach, coming to watch the game, but more importantly to escape the pressures of American life. I knew five of them. And yet again, against all worldly logic, there were no walls. I was immediately adopted by their team. Nobody cared that I didn’t actually know all the rules of soccer.

After the game my friends asked me to stay. Everywhere I turned people were eager to befriend me. They were honest and open and they trusted me even though they had just met me. I heard stories of hardship and incredible pain, stories of family members left at home, of the difficulties of traveling here and of finding work, of the fears of deportation, of the frustrations of stereotypes.

Heaven is a stunted soccer field, ill-kept but clearly loved. My friends were blind to cultural boundaries.
But at Iglesia Getsemani, that stuff is pushed aside. It’s the one place where my friends can go to be free of American culture, which is ultimately at the root of their struggles. And yet they invited me in.

I was brought to the point of tears that night by the way that they loved me, a stranger from among their oppressors, and I simply didn’t understand. In spite of the ruthless pain that my culture inflicts on my friends, they are joyful. Iglesia Getsemani is much more than a small Hispanic bubble in an American world, though. It is a true Christian community. In it God provides a refuge, a space away from the oppression of American culture, and yet it is not exclusive. My friends were blind to cultural boundaries.

They reached out to me in love, and they rejoiced and celebrated with me when I arrived. Isaiah’s heaven is a place for all peoples. This beautiful inclusivity is something that my dear friends seem to have no trouble understanding. They accepted me without question, and were patient with me as I stumbled through their language. They trusted me though they had no reason to do so. Heaven on earth was a place I was truly sad to leave.

And yet again, against all worldly logic, there were no walls.
Can be neither created nor destroyed,
But it can be passed on, freely. Spread it
From your palms to the tips
Of your chapped fingers. The air
From your mouth is moist, limbering,
Enlivening to hands that would at first
Tremble and splice the notes of
A perfectly pitched treble clef.

Cup your hands together, as if
You needed every sip of a stream
To fill your soul—you wouldn’t
Want a single drop to get out. Now
Lift them to your wind-whipped face,
Blushing because the winter
Caught it unclothed, and breathe
Deeply from within. Where
Does that warmth come from? Energy
The measures advance
Too quickly for quivering
Hesitancy. Music is unmerciful—
Those notes are set in stone. Miss
One, and sound waves will make
Everyone’s teeth clench, eyebrows wince;
Salty waves that could heal
Wounds, if ears didn’t immediately

Take cover. Shake off any remnants of
Cold. Twist your wrists slowly. Place
Your fingers on the keys, without
Making a noise. Feel
the grooves on both sides
Of each slab of ivory, and find
Its smooth center. Your hands must form
Domes, strong enough
For Structure, delicate enough
For a divine fresco
Underneath.
We all have our favorite type of music, the songs that sing to our inner core, and yet we can also appreciate other genres or musical cultures. And, as we grow to understand our favorite genre, learn the terms and hear the nuances, we better communicate about all types of music. I found the same is true for religions. We each have our faith that sings to and from our soul. By fully living into that faith, we can better communicate it and understand it, and better appreciate other faiths and communicate with people of those faiths. Likewise, learning to appreciate another religious tradition helps one understand his or her own tradition in a new light.

While staying in Taize, Cittaviveka, and the Iona Community, I experienced a common rhythm of life among distinct religious communities: devotion in the morning, common work, common meals, personal time in the afternoon, and service at night. At the same time I grew to appreciate the differences between the communities and traditions represented, like the different rhythms and harmonies, melodic contours, and instruments available to a musical genre or culture.

In these communities, I discovered that I love community life; the rhythm of the day and the song of faith that rings out in every action. Part of that means faith is coupled with action. Which makes sense. If you have a piano, you play it and make music. That is the purpose of the piano. Likewise, if you have faith it requires action to make the song. And each of our actions is like

I think sometimes we don’t realize how truly awesome our God is.
a note, and we are playing a great symphony with other instruments, each musician doing his or her part. Too often it is thought that everyone must share the same faith, or understand faith in the same way, or that there is a particular way to live out that faith, like a checklist of actions. But if that were the case, I think we would end up with a song like our childhood music class attempts at “Hot Cross Buns”: an uninteresting melody, played by lots of people, not very well, who are trying to play in unison but are off just enough to sound bad. Compare that image to a great symphony or film score (to use western music as an example), with all the different instruments, with their varied timbres and volumes, playing their own parts and rhythms and creating a beautiful song through the harmony. I think that this symphony image represents what community can be when it fosters open discussion, questioning, and challenges people to discover together new ideas about ourselves, faith and God.

In traveling and meeting many different people, I grew to appreciate the wonder of faith in its varied manifestations. Overall through this experience, I was struck at what an amazing God we have: a God who created each and every one of us and knows us all and loves us all; who knows no boundaries of language, race, nationality; a God who can have personal relationships with each one of us, and engage us all in different ways, and still be communal. I think sometimes we don’t realize how truly awesome our God is. I know I can get lost in struggles of religious doctrine, Church structure and politics, and questions of historical context, and lose sight of the wonder of God and the point of it all. Getting to experience community with people from all over the world, and set aside those seemingly all important polity and doctrine questions to seek understanding and God together was amazing.
Design
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Back Cover Art: A sign outside of one of the few Christian Churches in Taiwan.

Peace Be With You

Brianna Deutsch '11
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Peace Be With You