Availing

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Layout and Design  
Marybeth Campeau '11
It almost goes without saying that college is a time of personal transformation, of growth, exploration, and challenge. But what can often remain unarticulated is the rich, dynamic relationship between the ways the community of which we have chosen to be a part shape us and the ways we consequentially shape it.

We are convinced that there is something special, something unique about Davidson. The pathways, the buildings, the trees seem to be infused with a particular energy, a vividness we have come to know and love. There is a religious and a spiritual element that lives and breathes here every day.

We chose this year’s theme, “Faith in this Place,” both as an homage to the place for which we have strong feelings and as an effort to capture what is distinctive, what is particular, about the spiritual life of our school. “Faith in this Place” does not suggest a statement to be stated, but a question to be asked.

Faith is alive at Summit Coffee, in the classrooms, in the Sprinkle Room, as it certainly is on the white steeple of DCPC, before the sunset over Lake Norman, and during Jumu’ah prayer.

To be sure, not all our submissions are explicitly about life on campus or in the town. However, the perspectives all return to our common center. It is the pull of this place that ties together this magazine, that grounds the collected works.

We would like to thank Chaplain Rob Spach and the Religious Life Council for their support and guidance in this process.

Peace and Love,

Nick NoReña ’11
James Wudel ’11
Nina Anand ’12
A Blessing
Sarah Jordan ’13

Bless the ground on which I walk
Let it be holy ground.
Bless my feet
That they may respect and connect to this holy ground.
Bless those feet that walk beside me
That they may feel the holy ground and walk in solidarity with me.
Bless those feet that walk behind me
That they might see both the unholy and holy paths in front of them.
Bless the feet that walk in front of me
That God will give me the strength to catch them if they stumble.
I used to stare into your eyes and see the entire yawning universe expand endlessly before you. There were stars there, and there were planets, too. And they all splashed and bobbed in that inky, purple empty sea. Even that space between everything felt full to you, as if you could swallow the void and let it expand like hot air inside a balloon and lift you up, out, into the swirling night sky. You never did though, and your tired red tennis shoes stayed just here, holding down the Earth.

On each of your planets, there were people. I used to watch them walk back and forth in endless circuits, from pencil sharpeners to trees to steeplechases. But you knew them better. You knew not only the people’s names, but the colors of their eyes. You rattled off their favorite flavor Ring Pops, their hobbies, and their dreams. You never cracked their secret codes, but you knew them. Of course you knew them; the people themselves told you. And your love for them became my love too and taught my arms to hold and my eyes to feel.

In those days, I watched the sun rise over the hills—in shades of crimson, amethyst, and dandelion gold—as we flew through forests splattered with green pearls. Those days harbored sunsets and the hush of firewood crackling as a story tiptoed into life. I watched cowboys win the West, in your eyes; I saw Sputnik get to space.

At Davidson though, your eyes grew dimmer. I think you said you were reading too much with bad lighting. And I believed you. I still believe you. You tell me that we’re happier now, that “all that stuff before was training wheels.” You laugh at the silliness, which is, perhaps, more accurately just forgotten-ness, of where we used to be. It is a deep and rolling, hollow laugh that makes me remember that void you must have swallowed by mistake with the stuff you took on purpose. I wish you hadn’t, but you did. You imbibed a mix of things: alcohol, of course, but also other, more potent things including there is no God—no—that there was no God. And this, well, I believed you.

Now your eyes show libraries. You undress them book by book. You’re smarter for this, I think. At least your grades seem better. And you’re thinner too. I grew envious of your success at mastering our new life. You have it all together, I think, friend, and I’m getting better about crying with you when you cry. Just goes to show what they say about practice, I guess.

All we’d understood before was training wheels, you said. Training wheels… Training wheels for what? For this? For this you-and-I-don’t-know-where-to-go-from-here? We grew out of it, I suppose. We learned the lie and tried to break it. Strangely, I felt instead that we just broke me. I can’t really prove anything, but I have thoughts. I remember what I used to see, and I want that place still. The deep swirling night sky calls me back, with those handmade stars and the people with dreams and a name. I’ve tried to break the lie, but it seems more durable than you or I perceived. And I wonder, at night on the bike ride home, alone in the cold whistling air, if perhaps—I just mean that—at least for me, I mean—well, just that maybe we’re not so—you know—all and it—I mean, well—maybe that it wasn’t really—you know—a lie after all. You know?
Nine grandsons bore the casket down the aisle; proof of their grandfather's devotion to family, they sat together after placing his remains before the altar, projecting not only dignity and strength, but also familiarity and companionship. Ranging in age from twenty-one to thirty-three, they had grown up around one another, eating their grandmother's cooking every Sunday after church for as long as any of them could remember. Their six female cousins sat across the aisle with twenty-five other family members, listening to the pastors tell stories of their grandfather's love for his church and his family. Grand, as we knew him, was industrious and caring, working at his practice until the age of eighty-nine and taking his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to Jekyll Island, Georgia, for a week every summer for thirty-six years. At the end of his long illness, we celebrated that he is now with his Heavenly Father, surely much happier now that he is no longer suffering on Earth.

Two siblings and a cousin preceded Leslie, whose father would escort her, down the aisle as she prepared to join her almost-husband for the most important days of their lives. Hers was not the first family wedding to take place in that sanctuary, nor will it be the last. My own parents were married there more than thirty years ago, as were my aunts, and four other cousins had been married there in the preceding six years. Of course, as is the case with each wedding, they were all slightly different, though the same man has officiated most of the more recent ceremonies. Leslie, the twelfth of Grand's fifteen grandchildren, married Matt on that July day, with rows and rows of family members and close friends looking on, witnessing the joy of the bride and groom as they said their vows.

Though they mark two entirely different stages of life, weddings and funerals are not so very different. Both are attended by the family and friends of those being honored; both have an additional gathering after the main ceremony; both have hymns, flowers, prayers and tears. The chief difference between the two, I believe, is the set of thoughts and emotions going through the congregants' heads: joy versus grief, anticipation versus fond reminiscence, hope versus memory.

Not Grand's brothers, sons or friends, but his grandsons carried him down the aisle as many who loved him looked on. Pastor John and Reverend Hicks presided over the service, each pastor having known Doc, as he was called, for years, having seen him and known him before his hearing loss hindered his ability to really take part in a meeting or discussion. They knew him for his wisdom and generosity and sense of humor, noted his love for his wife and family, and were aware of just how much he would be missed, by those who knew him best and by those whose lives he may have only barely touched.

Two weeks later, there we were again, seated on the bride's side on the biggest day of her life. Familiar music played on the piano, hymns and Bach, the prelude to the procession, time sliding by as all awaited the wedding's start. Matt entered through a side door, his best man, best friend—incidentally, a cousin of the bride's—close behind. Leslie's five bridesmaids proceeded down
the aisle escorted by the groomsmen, her sister, matron of honor, walking solo as the doors closed before her own grand entrance. Pastor John was once again the man in charge, speaking to the couple—and the congregation—about the decision love is, about the commitment Leslie and Matt were making before God and all their friends.

Though our family does not frequently sing together, usually only once a year at our extended family Christmas party, we all sang in unison at both funeral and wedding. Singing a congregational hymn is not quite like singing carols in my aunt’s parlor, but it binds us together in a similar way. I think: a declaration of faith going hand-in-hand with the commemoration of our patriarch’s life on Earth, or with the festivities surrounding the union of two people, with words from the hymns “Just When I Need Him Most” and “My Hope is Built.”

As the summer afternoon in Hoschton drew to a close, the other girls and I each received a magenta rose from the arrangement that had adorned Grand’s casket. The boys each picked out rocks that had come out of the grave as it was dug, generally taking care to keep their suits clean but occasionally forgetting. Some departed shortly thereafter; others stayed to rehydrate at the house and enjoy one another’s company, though most everyone would see the others again the next day—how fitting that Grand’s funeral preceded the family’s annual beach retreat by only one day. A chance for all to recharge after his illness, death and the surrounding events. At the wedding reception, the tossing of the bouquet faintly echoed that distribution of roses, and the best man and matron of honor reminded everyone of Grand, giving his immortal advice as part of their toast to the bride and groom: “A wise man once said, ‘Drink water ’til you pee water.”

Being a member of our family has taught me this: From birth to death, we take every important part of life and place them on the altar. Birth, marriage, our children, death. As Grand was laid before the altar when we honored his life, so did Leslie and Matt stand as they were married. As we sought to understand Grand’s death in the terms of Jesus’ own death and resurrection, we took our grief, our understanding that life on Earth was impermanent and said to God, “Here. Deal with it.” And then, just fourteen days later, we brought the hope and promise of marriage and new life together to the very same place. We take all of these moments to God because of the role He plays in our lives—because of how we trust Him to be there, just when we need Him most, a solid rock upon whom we can so reliably stand.
"I’m fasting," my roommate said in a charming yet firm voice. I shivered involuntarily. I could not help the perplexed expression temporarily fixed on my face. "It is because of Ramadan," she added with a friendly grin in a failed effort to make me see the apparently obvious connection that I had missed. I wanted say something, but no words came from my mouth. Ahlam, whom I had only just met recently, said we would see each other once I got back from lunch. I was filled with puzzled feelings, and questions and thoughts bounced around in my head. "Why is she fasting? What is Ramadan? Why did she not look upset by not being able to join us for lunch?" I had just realized that my roommate was a Muslim and I did not know what that was supposed to mean to me.

I have never considered myself closed-minded. However, it was hard for me to understand how somebody could fast, not seem to feel bad about it, and have a religious reason to do it. I was intrigued and fascinated, yet I was too embarrassed to ask and perhaps too afraid of making her feel uncomfortable. I would ask all sorts of questions and she would reply with ease and comfort. Ahlam's
charisma made it easy for me not to be embarrassed. These discussions made me reject all the misconceptions that I had held in the past, not only of Muslim women but also of Islam itself. I soon discovered that our religions and cultures have more vital values in common than I had thought—the importance of family, service within our community, love for others, and devotion to God, just to name a few. Opening myself to these matters not only taught me about religion and tolerance, but they also had a strange effect on the way I felt about the new physical place that Ahlam and I were sharing. It made our new room feel just like home. It was more than a matter of a Muslim and a Catholic co-existing together. It became a friendship built upon diversity and true solidarity, where no one judged the other, but only tried to truly understand.

I love the metaphor of stepping into other people's shoes. I have found that idea to be the hardest but most considerate way of truly understanding others. It illustrates exactly the difficulty of truly understanding others. The shoes we are about to "step into" are not going to be the same size as our own, they may not be the color we want or be made of the material we like. They will not be ours. Ahlam was voluntarily choosing to fast. She liked it because she learned from it and could be grateful for what she has. She had become an inspiration to me. I had made a decision: I was going to fast.

I had absolutely underestimated the situation. I could not consume water or food from five in the morning until eight in the evening. It was not hard. It was almost impossible. The first days were emotionally the most difficult. By day four I was glad and proud to be able to continue fasting even if it was hard. I would have people eating in front of me and offering me food, but I chose to say no. I had to say to friends: "No, I can't go with you (to lunch) because I'm fasting." Looking at their confused faces was sometimes stressful. They would ask if I was kidding, if I had converted, or if I was dieting. Very few actually asked me my reasons for doing it. The fact that some of them disapproved of what I was doing made me upset and bothered me. Then, I would think about the numerous times that Ahlam must have been in the same exact situation. I would feel so proud of her.

I fasted for six and a half days, when I almost fainted. My body could not make it to the seventh as I had expected. It was not impossible. It was just hard, very hard. The fasting was successful because I learned from the experience. It really pushed me to leave my comfort zone in order to look at life from another perspective. I was able to see and understand the world from Ahlam's perspective. I felt compassion for those who suffer and starve. I felt what it is like to see others having something we cannot have. I felt the annoyance of one's religious ideas or rituals being disapproved of by those who do not understand them and rush to judgment. I proved to myself that I am able to control my mind and body. I also discovered that Ahlam and I come from very similar backgrounds and that our religions are based on love. I loved discovering my roommate's religion. Most important was realizing that Ahlam, because of how she lives, acts in ways that are more consistent with the Catholic faith and lifestyle than I do. Seeing her living her religious tradition every day made me see how little I know of my own religion, how I have not been truly Catholic, and how I have been wrong in seeing religion and everyday life as mutually exclusive. I cannot help but feel puzzled. Nevertheless, I like having questions bouncing around in my head. The questions are no longer about my roommate's religious beliefs and what they are supposed to mean to me. Now, the questions are about discovering what my own beliefs are, and what they mean to me and to how I live my life.
Before I embarked on my trip to Israel over winter break, I often questioned my faith and my place in Judaism. While I have always considered myself Jewish, my upbringing lacked just about every traditional facet of Jewish life. My family does not keep Kosher, we do not keep the Shabbat, and I never had a Bar Mitzvah. Much of this was because my family lived in upstate New York and was the only Jewish family in

I was no longer a questioning student who happened to identify as a Jew. I was now a Jewish man.

the school district. Further, the nearest synagogue was over an hour and a half away. All of this led to a very secular childhood.

When I found out that I was accepted into the Birthright program, I was filled with unparalleled excitement and utter fear. Birthright is an organization that sponsors Jewish youth around the world to travel to Israel in order to connect with their Jewish heritage. It was Rabbi Michael Shields who, during a conversation, mentioned the organization and asked me about me having an interest in going to Israel. I must acknowledge that had it not been for Rabbi Shields I would likely have missed this opportunity.

After acceptance into the program, I could not believe that I would have the chance to go to Israel, the homeland of the Jews. To go to Israel had always been a dream of my Grandparents, so, even if for no other reason, I wanted to go to make them proud. Further, I knew that Birthright would be my opportunity to really interact and connect with other Jews. On the other hand, I had some reservations. I knew that many of the people that I would be going on this trip with would be far more traditional and observant of Jewish customs. I was worried, to put it bluntly, that I was a “bad Jew”. Not only was I questioning my place internally within my faith, but now I questioned my place among forty other Jewish peers.

When I arrived in Israel with thirty-eight Jewish strangers, I was filled with anticipation. I remember leaving the airport and heading out of Tel Aviv and just feeling a sense of wonder. As the trip progressed, we hiked in some of the most beautiful places I had ever seen. The first time I truly felt the wonder of Israel and a real connection with my new Jewish family was when we hiked Mount Masada, an ancient mountain fortress, at sunrise. In the year 72, Roman forces laid siege to the mountain forces. Far outnumbered, the Jewish soldiers decided to commit suicide (each killing the next). However, first the soldiers piled up their weapons and massive food supplies in order to show the approaching Romans that they could have survived a siege and fought, but preferred death to slavery. When I arrived at the top of the mountain fortress with my forty Jewish peers and watched the sun come up over the Dead Sea, I felt that only God could create something as magnificent and awesome as what I was seeing. I stood there in awe and tried to imagine the bravery of my ancestors 2,000 years ago.

Later, we traveled to the Negev Desert to spend the night in a Bedouin village. Our group walked out of the village and into the darkness of the desert. Under the stars, we discussed Judaism and how each of us related to our faith. It was very
helpful to hear that others had questioned their place within Judaism in the same way I had. We discussed how being Jewish means many things to many people. Then we each found a spot by our self and thought about God. Under the starry night, alone in the Negev Desert, I found myself thanking God and considering myself blessed to be Jewish and to be part of this family of Jews.

On the eighth day, we finally went to the Western Wall. Standing in front of the massive site, the holiest place in the world, a place that Jews fought to be able to call home took my breath away. Going down to the wall and seeing dozens of people, some praying, some crying, some doing both, was remarkable. Further, as I placed my prayer (and the prayer that my mother, who had yet to have the opportunity to go to Israel) into the wall among the thousands of others, I felt like I was truly connected to my faith. I had made aliyah!

On December 25, 2010 in Jerusalem I had a Bar Mitzvah. Reciting the Hebrew prayers and performing the ritual call to the Torah was a profound and fitting end to my trip. I was finally a Bar Mitzvah, a Jewish man. I saw this as an opportu-
I can say for certain that my outlook on life has been changed for the better.

My trip to Israel has forever affected my life. I cannot say for sure how it has changed my plans for the future but I can say for certain that my outlook on life has been changed for the better. I no longer take my heritage for granted. I no longer question my place within Judaism.

Furthermore, I look forward to increasing my knowledge about Judaism and continuing on the path that my Birthright trip has set me on, wherever it may take me.
Song about Visions
Paul DiFiore ’13

Chorus
Oh, scorpions in the water
I was afraid to open my mouth
Oh, my countrymen, my Father
I’ve seen the floods heading up from the south

Verse I
I’ve been up above the clouds
To get away from all the crowds
People don’t live up there, you know
God forgot we were in His hands
He accidentally dropped us down to this land
We fell through the sky to the earth below

Verse II
What have you been up to lately
Are you hanging with the wise and saintly
Did they tell you where they hid their gold
It’s no secret anymore
It’s all been dug up for conquistadors
Blood, bones, and swords from the world of old

Verse III
Gabriela spoke another language
I had to listen close to hear her anguish
As she explained the foundations and the way things are
Life doesn’t fit into a masculine rhyme
I couldn’t tell you all the times I’ve tried
For a 19-year-old single mother it’s hard

Verse IV
Some people say you have a right to choose
The ones you love and the ones you use
And then they go and treat everyone like shit
We all have some things to spare
Being good shouldn’t be such a cross to bear
And if it is, brace yourself, and carry it

Verse V
In our confusion, in our shame
We are dying for something to proclaim
If we don’t find it now I fear we never will
There is a heart that seems to be
Somewhere neither you nor I know how to see
But we feel the pulses of its beating still
The Book of Common Prayer
    sits upon my desk
    collecting dust and particles,
    waiting like all the rest.

My Father gave it to me once
    when I joined the Church;
    so valuable it was to me
    its pages I did search.

I took it with me every week
    squeezed God out of every word;
I threw my prayers and songs up high!
    though I don't know if he heard.

But now it sits upon my desk
    yellowing in the sun;
I want to pick it up again,
    but the binding's come undone.

How long, I wonder, will it take
    to disappear completely?
Dissolve and flake and whither like
    my bones packed oh so neatly.

My Common Prayer
THOMAS NOEL ’11

The Book of Common Prayer
    sits upon my desk
    collecting dust and particles,
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    when I joined the Church;
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    to disappear completely?
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    my bones packed oh so neatly.
This morning, I visited Inhijambia, an organization that reaches out to street children from the Oriental Market area of Managua, Nicaragua. Inhijambia works specifically with girls who come from broken, impoverished homes and are vulnerable to drug addiction and prostitution.

I spent much of my own girlhood imagining. I imagined that I was Laura Ingalls Wilder or Anne of Green Gables or Pippi Longstocking. But mostly I imagined that I was a princess, adored and cherished.

Today, I imagine something different. I imagine that I am a young girl living two blocks from the Oriental Market. I don’t remember my father, but I have a step-father. I like him mostly, except when he gets red rings around his eyes and raises his hand to –

Mama says I must contribute to the family. I am not very good at begging, seeing as all my limbs are intact. So I mostly sell gum on the street, 4 cordobas a stick. If I smile, I get 5. If I wear my miniskirt, I get 10. If I climb into the passenger seat and shut my eyes while rough hands snake up my thigh, I get 20.

And still, that isn’t enough to buy the rice it takes to keep a house of tummies full. I know what is going to happen to me, because it happened to my older sister. One day, a middle-aged man with a paunch and a limp came to visit. He took her away for a few hours. When he brought her back, her eyes were coals. But she had coins for Mama. So he came again and again, until my sister began to grow a paunch
of her own. Now, she has a child, and the man with a limp does not come anymore. Other men come instead. Mama says one day soon they will come to see me, too.

But I am scared. So to escape the men, to escape the hunger, I have begun to buy glue. I have begun to-

I shake myself from this reverie, but I cannot shake the reverie from myself. My horror flames into anger. For one of the first times in my life, I am angry at God.

Oh, God, how could you allow this? Where are you in these girls’ lives? Aren’t you supposed to be their father? Aren’t you supposed to protect them?

When I see a close friend in deep pain, I can share the comfort of the conviction that she is being held in the palm of a mighty and compassionate Creator. Together, we can feast on the promise voiced in Isaiah 43:4, “Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.”

Precious.

Honored.

Loved.

Those three words feel like a reality to me. When I look back over my life, I see God’s rich provision everywhere, both physically and emotionally. Hasn’t my earthly father always assured me that I am special, loved, and full of potential?

But now I am trying to imagine myself sitting down to coffee with one of the girls at Inhijambia. She has grown up surrounded by poverty and abuse. There seems to be no escape. I am searching for God in this girl’s life. But now she is telling me about the glue.

**Later**

I didn’t plan to cry that night at group reflection. I simply said, “It was difficult, seeing those girls. What they were going through reminded me a lot of the girls I worked with at Barium Springs Home for Children, but at least then I felt that there was hope. The legal system, social workers. But seeing those girls,” voice breaking, “and imagining sitting across from one of them and trying to convince her that,” voice breaking, “God loves her.” Broken.

At this moment, I was angrily questioning God’s character and His love, but He refused to abandon me. Instead, He surrounded me with a loving and supportive team. And He placed a face in my heart. The face of a woman who had spoken to the group a few days earlier.

Her name is Yamileth Perez, and her black eyes sparkle. Her black eyes sparkle while she speaks of the years she spent living and working in La Chureca, the Managua city dump. Her black eyes sparkle, now with tears, while she tells us about one of the darkest times in her life. A time when she and her infant child came close to starvation. But the tears in her black eyes begin to sparkle with joy as she praises God for blessing her so abundantly. With earnest sincerity, she thanks Him for giving her the chance to work for a Fair Trade Corporation called Esperanza en Accion.

In many ways, I do not understand Yamileth. I do not understand why she is not bitter about the hardships in her life. I do not understand why she still chooses to live among the poorest of the poor in Managua. I do not understand how she finds the energy to volunteer as a health promoter, to coordinate a soccer league for at-risk youth, to serve as a community organizer. Most of all, I do not understand how Yamileth came to know the love of God.

But I do understand that through Yamileth, I have encountered the body of Christ in Nicaragua. In her sparkling eyes, I have glimpsed a joy that cannot be explained by worldly comforts. It is this joy that convinces me that, just as He worked to transform Yamileth’s life, God is working in the lives of the girls at Inhijambia. They are not alone. They are precious, honored, loved.
One of the things I appreciated most about the Reformed University Fellowship, or RUF, service project to South Carolina was the ability to simply disengage my mind and work with my hands. I was reminded of the fact that in Genesis 2, God gives man two jobs: to name the animals and "to work [the land] and take care of it." As humans, we are not just called to do intellectual "heavy lifting," but also to use our bodies and their power for God's glory. Being a Davidson student—often so entirely consumed in my work that I might not budge from my desk for several hours—my humanity can become completely wrapped up in and defined by my mind, my brain, and my intellect. No matter how physically challenging I found yanking disobedient, rusty nails out of old wood or mixing cement, these tasks felt innately right for my body, and brought rest for my mind.

Reflecting now on our trip, I am also struck by the difference between what God originally instructed Adam to do in the Garden of Eden with what we were doing on John's Island. After Adam and Eve sinned, God punished them by cursing the ground and proclaiming that humankind would thereafter have to work against it for their living. Adam and Eve might have had an easy or enjoyable expectation...[hoping]...that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay. It is no secret, especially in light of the recent natural disasters in Japan and manmade crises in Libya, that the world is decaying. As Paul goes on to say, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

While nothing will bring an end to this decay and pain except for the complete renewal and rebirth of the earth when Jesus returns, that does not mean we should throw our hands up and despair. As Christians, we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, to work towards redemption for all of creation. During the RUF trip, I got to witness and participate in this work of redemption: bringing good out of a bad situation, beauty out of ugliness. Mrs. Gathers' previous house had been demolished because it was no longer safe to inhabit (the project supervisor told me that it was so rotten from the inside that heavy winds could have eventually caused its collapse), and Rural Missions had built her a new one. We constructed for her a new screened-in porch, shed, and step, and each accomplished task brought with it the feeling that we were restoring some order to this individual's life.

Finally, I am reminded of the privilege it is that God desires us to carry forward his mission of redemption until he comes again—or "Kingdom Work," as I have heard some people refer to it. Though God, as sovereign creator, could easily and quickly set things right himself, he calls Christians to demonstrate the grace and love that has been extended to us through Christ, and to in turn extend that to others. To quote 1 John 4:19, "we love because he first loved us." Service comes from the overflow of the love that we have been bestowed; it is "faith with deeds" to accompany.
Christ in Distressing Disguise

I read the longer work from which these words were taken both before I went to Nicaragua and again after I returned. When I read them the first time, for a class I’m currently taking, they seemed to be just pretty words that I’ve heard over and over again throughout my life. I skimmed the longer quote when I returned and this excerpt hit me hard. It won’t leave my consciousness. It seems to be floating around in the mess that is my thoughts and emotions right now. At inconvenient moments it will speed towards the front of my thoughts, leaving me breathless. These pretty words with no context have now become faces. At the public, touristy square in Granada, faces full of despair looked me straight in the eyes and begged for anything I could give them. They lacked not only the physical needs but also the love, dignity, respect, and acceptance that are so crucial. I turned and walked away from these faces. I knew in my heart that I had missed something really important. Later, I realized: I had looked Christ in the eye and walked away. I couldn’t get this acheing, burning feeling out of my chest no matter what I did. Even when I finally bought some gum from a little boy (paying at least triple its price out of my guilt), the feeling wouldn’t leave. Every time I read this excerpt, the feeling returns. This feeling that I had utterly failed in that moment to do the one thing that Christ has asked me to do: love my neighbor as myself. Their faces haunt me, reminding me of my failure. Yet, in other places in Nicaragua, they accepted me with open arms and hearts, fed me with both food and love, and inspired dignity and self-respect in me. They were the true disciples of Christ. They let his love shine through them. I can still see their shining faces in my mind, reminding me that I too am needy. Now, after my return, I walk around the lush and privileged campus of Davidson College amidst the green grass and blooming trees and see faces “hungry for love,” “naked of dignity and respect,” and “homeless because of rejection.” The only difference is that we can hide these deprivations behind our “room[s] of bricks,” our full bellies and our well dressed bodies so no one has to know. No one has to see that we are hurting or lacking because God forbid we need anyone’s help. But really, we are all “Christ in distressing disguise.” We all need to be fed, clothed and accepted for who we are. On the other side of that, remember, these faces of despair, begging for anything we can give, whether that be material or immaterial, surround us, and I don’t think I can ignore the acheing, burning feeling in my chest anymore. I can’t look Christ in the eye again and just walk away.

“At the end of life we will not be judged by How many diplomas we have received How much money we have made How many great things we have done.

We will be judged by ‘I was hungry and you gave me to eat I was naked and you clothed me I was homeless and you took me in.’

Hungry not only for bread — but hungry for love Naked not only for clothing — but naked of human dignity and respect Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks — but homeless because of rejection.

This is Christ in distressing disguise.

—Mother Theresa, From “Words to Love By”
Learning to be a Prophet
Corinne Hester ’13

On our last night in Nicaragua, Karen Soos shared an email of advice and well-wishes she had received a few days before we left Davidson from a former Journey to Nicaragua participant. The letter, which began, “Brothers and sisters in Christ,” was from my older sister, Katherine, a member of the 2006 Nicaragua team. Katherine is five years older than me and in many ways five years wiser. She wrote, “The greatest words of wisdom I could offer you for this time in your life, this time in Nicaragua, is to stop, look, and listen…Take all these things in… and allow them to show you that life is a vastly richer, deeper, and more mysterious business than we might typically think because we are all connected to each other, because God is in all of us, and because we are all one in God together.” I heard only my sister’s voice.

When Karen finished reading the letter, my teammates were touched and amazed by my sister’s wisdom. I smiled, wiped my tears, and said: “It’s hard to have a sister who is a prophet of your life.” Having returned from my own Journey to Nicaragua, I realize how important it is to be a prophet for those we love.

The first time I heard God’s clear call –or maybe command –to be a prophet was on our first night in Batahola Norte, a neighborhood in the city of Managua. We attended a Catholic evening mass at the beautiful community center. Each wall of the center presented a colorful mural; the pews of the outdoor sanctuary were cerulean blue; and the surrounding gardens were bursting with big, green leaves. When the service began, I was too mesmerized by my surroundings to even attempt to translate the priest’s brief homily. Luckily, Rob Spach told me the major points of the sermon. “He is telling us to be prophets,” Rob told me, “He wants us to go out and share what we know, what we’ve seen and heard.”

As the mass came to a close I pondered the role of a prophet. What did I know of prophets before I came to Nicaragua? I thought of the Old Testament prophets like Jonah, who whined, complained, and even yelled at God for calling him to be a prophet. I thought of Moses who made plenty of excuses to avoid his calling. “I am slow of speech and tongue,” he told God. Even Isaiah had moments of fear, doubt, and denial. As I lay in bed that night in a humble Nicaraguan home, I thought: “How long have I been running from God’s command to be a prophet? How long have I been whiney and fearful of the life that the gospel calls me to live? How many times have I missed an opportunity to share what I’ve seen and heard with others?”

Though I was disheartened to realize that I had responded to God’s call like a typical wimpy prophet, I was inspired by the Nicaraguan people. They did not shirk their duties as prophets; they had a sense of urgency about their calling. There was an unmatched strength in the women of Nicaragua, who carried the tumultuous history of the country on their back and babies on their hips, and still welcomed strangers into their homes. I was captivated by the women of Red de Mujeres Contra La Violencia (Network of Women Against Violence), who fought relentlessly for justice and protection for women who had been domestically abused; and equally amazed by the persistence of the male nurse in the Nicaraguan countryside, who served 7,500 people in el campo
de Samulali even though he was only required to serve 2,300 patients. The men and women I met in Nicaragua constantly worked towards a better life and a better future for their country and for the people they loved. They did not fear God’s call because they always put others first. They did not complain about the difficult life the gospel calls them to live, because they had a greater vision – a kingdom vision – in mind.

I am learning that this is a key aspect of one’s life as a prophet. We are not called to be prophets for ourselves. Jonah spoke to save the Ninevites. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Katherine wrote to encourage us to “stop, look, and listen.” No matter how difficult it may be, we are called to share our experiences with one another in love. We are called to be prophets for each other, for the world, and for a kingdom that has not yet come.

I have to tell the stories of my Nicaraguan brothers and sisters, whom I love, to my North American brothers and sisters, whom I love. I cannot just share stories, however; I have to share a vision, a vision that brings good news for the poor, release for the captives, and sight for the blind. This vision is not only “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;” but also “Venga tu reino, hágase tu voluntad en la tierra como en el cielo.” Though this is a daunting command and I am still learning to be a prophet, I am comforted by the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero who said, “We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”
I don't think I'm the only one—In fact, I know it
His faith's in isolation—He shows it
You think it's hard to reject Love, but it's an art
...The easy way out, because lonely, you aren't.
That one flesh, loss of self, that's difficult I'm sure
Commitment to the future, forever, and inevitable error
Admitting I don't know—never, or together.

Together
IVANA MASIMORE '14
What is and What Should Be

JOHN CATTICH, COMMUNITY MEMBER

It is a quiet evening at Santa Monica Beach. As I approach this Pacific divide, I am struck by how reliably it has served to shield us from vast forms of tragedy and evil: war, famine, disease.

As I walk further along the beach, I am struck – no, disturbed – by something else. Just a few blocks away, the Third Street Promenade is swarming with smiling people in fashionable clothes, weaving in and out of trendy stores. Some are plagued by disturbing thoughts of their own like, “Does my hair look alright?”, “Do I look fat in these pants?” or “Did she catch me checking out that other woman?” All of them, I’m afraid, are blissfully oblivious to the tragedy on the beach that lies before me: a dirty, tired man sleeping alone on the sand under a lifeguard tower.

It is this divide – this chasm – that has now rudely wrenched my attention away from my Pacific stroll along the ocean and doggedly refuses to release it. Just a few sandy paces to my left lies a human being – a man, someone’s son, someone’s high school classmate – whose life has apparently been consumed by poverty and isolation. Three blocks east, indulgent consumers are desperately trying in vain to quench the voices that incessantly echo “More! More! More!” from the bottom of what most of us fail to recognize as an abysmally broken spirit.

Deliverance for both the homeless man and the self-indulgent consumer may lie in each other. The homeless man needs someone willing to invest in him, and the self-indulgent consumer needs someone to invest in. Though geographically separated by only a few blocks, socially they are worlds apart. There must be some way to span the chasm between them.

My anxiety is building because, at this moment, the only thing I can see occupying the space between their two worlds is me. I am but one man, one graduate student who, fortunately or unfortunately, has become painfully aware of the difference between what is and what should be.

I decide not to startle the man under the lifeguard tower and head for Third Street. Shortly, I arrive at the Promenade with a bag of $1 burgers in hand. Shoppers and strollers are here too, many with dates in hand. On most nights, I’d switch places with them in a heartbeat – but not tonight.

Tonight I am doing exactly what I am supposed to do. I am being exactly who I was created to be.
I see a man wearing a winter coat and what appear to be several layers of clothing underneath, hanging onto a shopping cart full of blankets and stuff. “Would you like a burger?” I ask. “Sure!” he says, with a sunny smile not even slightly dampened by his missing teeth. He is Joshua. He used to run a small business with his wife of 22 years. In 1998 they both got sick and neither had insurance. He recovered, she didn’t. Because of their mounting medical bills, their business had to be liquidated and auctioned off. As he tells his story two things are constant: his smile and his desire to remind me that, “God has been good to me.”

“Some people might question how you can still say that,” I say. As if to prove his point, he responds with a laundry list of blessings that God has bestowed on him. If someone asked me to list all the blessings I’ve received, I’d probably start stammering within 10 seconds, tops. Joshua has forgotten his burger. He’d rather tell his story.

On the next block, a white-haired 76-year-old woman with a bruised eye won’t stop smiling and laughing and clapping. She is Betty. Although Betty is less willing to share how she arrived at this point in life, she proudly shares that God has used all her circumstances to make her a better and stronger person. Throughout our conversation she reiterates how happy she is. If you saw me looking as happy, you could safely assume I’d been drinking.

On the next corner, a small black man wrapped in a blanket sits in the doorway. “I feel his presence on you!” he says without a hint of doubt. Once Moses wraps up his sermon, I tell him how much I enjoyed it and hopefully I’ll see him again. He turns up the heat on that beautiful warm smile and says, “Let me get a hug.” It’s not one of those one-hand-ever-so-cautiously on my side and the other giving me three quick strategic pats-on-the-back-type hugs. He stretches both arms all the way around my body. His warm open hands press tightly against my back. Rarely do I feel so genuinely appreciated. As he lets go, he smiles and says, “God bless you brother!”

I think – I hope – that Joshua, Betty and Moses might rub off on me. However, I’m afraid that if I stop to think about how little I’ve actually done and how much more there is to do, my joy will fade too quickly into sorrow. So I don’t think about it – not tonight.

Tonight I have much to be grateful for: Joshua’s story, Betty’s laugh, Moses’ embrace. Tonight, I – a young, white, middle-class graduate student with unlimited opportunities for success – was blessed by the joy and strength of three people whose earthly possessions could be pushed around in a shopping cart.
I must admit, the best part of Sundays growing up was the church library’s movie collection. My favorite series, the tapes I repeatedly gravitated to, were the movie editions of C.S. Lewis’s Narnia series, created ages ago by BBC. The magical cupboards, talking fauns, and hapless British schoolchildren enchanted me. I wanted desperately to be Lucy Pevensie and drink tea with Mr. Tumnus, to befriend the majestic Aslan and later sob inconsolably as I witnessed his tragic demise.

C.S. Lewis didn’t go away when I outgrew the world of Narnia, either. He became, instead, a household name—constantly cited in Sunday school and sermons, quoted incessantly by my grandmother—revered, it seemed, by everyone. A summer reading list for a Manhattan church recommends Lewis’ Mere Christianity with a caption beside it saying, “You may not want to admit (around Redeemer) that you have never read this book – so stop being a hypocrite and read it!” I noted the hubbub and put Mere Christianity on my mental “to read” list, where it sat, gathering dust, for many years. By that point I was in high school, and Christianity had gotten a little too mere for my tastes. There were other, more important things to worry about, namely Prom, boys, and grades. I had my whole life to read that book.

In college I began to seriously wrestle with my own faith. I was drawn once again to C.S. Lewis, a man who had converted from atheism to Christianity at the age of 31, influenced by the writings of G.K. Chesterton and George MacDonald and a friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien. What is it that causes reasonable, intelligent men and women to believe in God? I see how one loses faith, but how does one gain it? I turned, finally, to Mere Christianity for answers to these questions.

Lewis describes his conversion in stark terms: “That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929, I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England.” Hardly the overzealous new believer, Lewis later said of his conversion that it seemed simply to be the next logical step in a series of slow conclusions he’d been forced to make.

Logic – that’s the key word when it comes to C.S. Lewis. A logic that was inherited from his cool thinking mother, and developed in reaction to his passionate, volatile father. A logic so logical that even his memoir seems to be a carefully constructed analysis of his life, told with signature wit and irony, but emotionally distant from the boyhood he is describing. Lewis was so distant from that dangerous blade, emotion, that when he published A Grief Observed, chronicling the aftermath of his wife’s death, he released it first under the pseudonym N.W. Clerk, because he thought it was too raw and personal. Here, at last, is a glimpse of emotion from the stoic superhero. Even Superman has his kryptonite.

I think Lewis’s relentless logic was what really got me. All my life, I had heard people weeping over the power and mercy of God, but rarely felt it myself. Lewis taught me that Christianity can make sense, that smart people believe it, that it’s not just a crazy conspiracy, and that it’s okay if I don’t always feel faith. In Mere Christianity, he says, “[… ] people are often worried. They are told they ought to love God. They cannot find any such feeling in themselves. What are they to do? The answer is the same as before. Act as if you did. Do not sit trying to manufacture feelings. Ask yourself, ‘If I were sure that I loved God, what would I do?’ When you have found the answer, go and do it.”

This simple advice is so reassuring. I’m not defective. It doesn’t matter if I feel a certain
way; it’s more important that I act a certain way.

It’s strange to think that the creator of Narnia would be so logical. If I had only read his children’s books I might picture him as some kooky bible pusher who went around weeping about the grace of God and comparing Jesus to lions. But he’s not. Lewis is one of the most mind-blowingly imaginative men to have walked the planet, yet he argues for Christianity with the levelheaded distance of a skeptic. In the first section of Mere Christianity he argues for the existence of some higher power, saying that there is a Law of Human Nature we are all bound to – conscience you could call it – which tells us right from wrong; he claims the fact that we know right from wrong but still choose to do wrong illustrates that this law must come from somewhere outside us, from somewhere bigger and broader than our parents or our cultures. Of course, he says it much more eloquently than that and spends thirty pages developing his argument.

But not everyone loves Lewis like I do. There are those who simply overlook him as a dowdy children’s author and then there are those who actively despise him. Polly Toynbee, in an editorial about the release of Disney’s Narnia movies, says, “…here in Narnia is the perfect Republican, muscular Christianity for America – that warped, distorted neo-fascist strain that thinks might is proof of right.” That’s fine. But I think the beauty of C.S. Lewis is that he would be more than happy to sit down and talk to Ms. Toynbee about her accusations. He is a rare species among Christians. One who is not ashamed of what he believes, and encourages others to dialogue with him – he truly believes Christianity is the most rational and normal thing in the world. It’s a comfort to know that, when I have crawled under a rock, embarrassed to talk about the God I claim to love, Superman is out there fighting for me.
Where can I find
You (when morning is quiet and fluorescent
Light in the bathroom buzzes
Like stained glass
Casting mirrors
On silent ears suffocating sound
With one thousand page books,
Elbows forgetting nights
You stole all the sheets,
Feet remembering touch
From the left side of bed

In the early morning;
I drowned in the sky.
Quiet and blue?

4:43 a.m./god
JESSIE BLOUNT ’13
Perhaps the gold, orb-like glittering from the Dome of the Rock mosque caught her eye during that fateful trip to Jerusalem in 1976. The metallic Dome—marking the spot where Muhammad ascended to Heaven—reigns high above the expanse of ivory, stone buildings scattered along the holy land of the Temple Mount. When Rebecca and her mother traveled to Israel, she thought she might unite her Jewish heritage with a genuine faith in Judaism. But when she walked around the old city knocking on doors and asking native Jews to help her understand how Judaism could reach her heart, they turned her away. Soon afterward she found herself standing outside the gates of that glowing, mysterious dome. “There was this ancient old man standing there in a turban,” she recalls, “and he essentially handed me Islam. It was like this man was put there to talk to me when every other door was closed.”

Thirty-four years later, Rebecca sits with me in her office, her petite frame barely sinking into her bulky, black rolling chair. With legs crossed, she speaks with a hurried rhythm reminiscent of her fast-paced Brooklyn upbringing. Instead of a long burqa, her turtle neck and ankle-length skirt ensemble hides her body from the neck down. Gray hiking socks snuggled into brown Birkenstock clogs conceal what remains below the hem of her skirt. Veil-less, her silver hair gathers loosely upon her shoulders. Orange translucent beads dangle from her ears. Except for a few Arabic prayers pinned on the bulletin board behind her, Rebecca doesn’t display any noticeable marks of her Islamic faith.

In response to the confusion others often show when they find out she is Muslim, she retorts, “I’m not going to wear hijab and look like a Saudi because I’m not Saudi.” Just because she found Islam while in the Middle East doesn’t mean she must adopt the culture of that region—and even if she did, which specific culture would she choose? “I’m American, I grew up in New York City, I converted to Islam when I was twenty-nine… and I still very much have an identity as an American.” Instead, she bases her faith on what she understands of Qur’anic law, which is “to display modesty.” “You’re not going to see me walking outside in a jogging bra… But I’m also not going to cover up my face with a veil.”

Before her trip to Jerusalem, she considered attaining a spiritual connection to the merely “cultural” religion she had grown up with. “I really felt somehow—even though my mother certainly didn’t understand it—a need to express a faith that I felt internally, but had no outlet for. I had no language; I had no way to pray.” Little did she know, the language of her future prayers would be in a foreign tongue. When the “ancient old man” showed her around the mosque, explaining its significance, he “planted a seed” that “kept coming back” to her months after she returned to the States. After a year of reading about Islam (and acquiring a special interest in Sufism, the mystical extension of Islam), Rebecca moved to Indiana with her younger brother, where together they joined a Sufi order. For the first time in her life, she discovered internal peace. “I felt like I now had a way to speak to God, to learn. And I saw in the people [of the order] a brotherhood, a community that was there for mutual learning.”

Despite constantly facing misconceptions that many Americans have about Islam and her identity as a Muslim woman, Rebecca remains steadfast to her adopted faith. “Islam is very magnetic,” she remarks. “It has a certain allure to it because its rituals are so deep… And I see Islam as a very beautiful thing. It’s definitely not to be hidden; it’s not to be apologized for.” She doesn’t live offering apologies for not being what people expect of her. “I’m a counselor, I do yoga a few nights a week, my husband and I bicycle ride on the weekend—and I’m a person! But that’s sort of the mystery, and that’s what the West is still very confused about.” Before I leave, I hunch over her—what feels like towering even though I’m hardly five feet four—to give her a hug, and she says, “My Arabic name is Rahima. You can call me that if you like.”
Season’s End

Vincent Weir ’13

Rest like a falling leaf I find
Peace not in the ground but in release from the branch
I wish for that fall is this Lord all that you have given me your hand
Is soft like a wing I pray to find it strong calling like an open sea to a shipman
Dressed for the gales and lonely nights that unlike home will teach me how to love with
Changing seasons not the warmth of a bed what you have sent far and said to the end of these lands
Alone in every starry sand of earth that I if I leave can find again in the name your towering call commands
Saloniotiko Sunset
John Papadopoulos '14