The John W. Kuykendall Award for Community Service recognizes alumni who have provided extraordinary service to their community, demonstrating leadership through servanthood in the spirit of our 15th president. Monroe Gilmour has committed his life to fighting inequality, intolerance and discrimination through gentle and persistent messaging, outstanding organization and enthusiastic community-building.

Monroe grew up in Charlotte, where his parents instilled in their children the importance of fairness and community service. Those lessons resonated with young Monroe, who was given the School Citizenship Award in high school. In his application for admission to Davidson, Monroe wrote, “I desire some type of social welfare work...My ambition, to be with, and help people, is reconfirmed every day...”

At Davidson, Monroe majored in English, ran track and cross-country and committed himself to the local community. He volunteered at the YMCA, Davidson College Presbyterian Church and the Davidson Cornelius Day Care, enriching the lives of local children in myriad ways. Upon graduation, Monroe was presented the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award for his unselfish service to the people of Davidson.

Monroe then spent ten years in rural areas of India and Africa working with the Peace Corps and CARE International. These transformative experiences, combined with his earlier volunteer work in and around Charlotte and Davidson, reinforced his desire to create community, point out inequities, organize dissent and encourage compromise in an effort to improve our world. His selfless efforts have led him to activism on behalf of the environment; the disabled, homeless and hungry; women in crisis; LGBTQ and other targeted groups; and other causes in need of social justice reform. He organized Davidson Alumni Against Apartheid to advocate for the divestment of financial resources by US corporations in South Africa as a tool to defeat apartheid, frequently encouraging the Davidson College trustees and leaders of major US organizations to financially pressure the South African regime.

In 1992, Monroe was awarded the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation’s state-wide Nancy Susan Reynolds Award for personal service recognizing his environmental, community, and social justice activities.

On a more grassroots level, in 1991, he established Western North Carolina Citizens Ending Institutional Bigotry (WNCCEIB) which has worked for twenty-eight years to eliminate prejudice, discrimination and hate activity throughout western North Carolina. Living in Black Mountain, North Carolina, Monroe and spouse, Fern Martin, have raised three children, David, Aaron, and Sarah.

Monroe’s work as a full-time community organizer demonstrates the adage, “Think globally, act locally.” He has been a catalyst for positive change throughout Western North Carolina and beyond, encouraging his fellow citizens to be aware of and sensitive to injustice and to work together to make our communities the best they can be. One victim of a noose placed in his work space wrote that Monroe was “the gasoline in my tank, keeping me going through that ordeal.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, “The ultimate tragedy is not the brutality of bad people, but the silence of good people.” Because of Monroe Gilmour’s unstinting and generous commitment to our marginalized neighbors near and far, his courageous conviction that each of us can make a profound difference, and his steadfast refusal to stay silent in the face of injustice, the Davidson College Alumni Association is proud to present him with the John W. Kuykendall Award for Community Service on this 8th day of June, 2018.