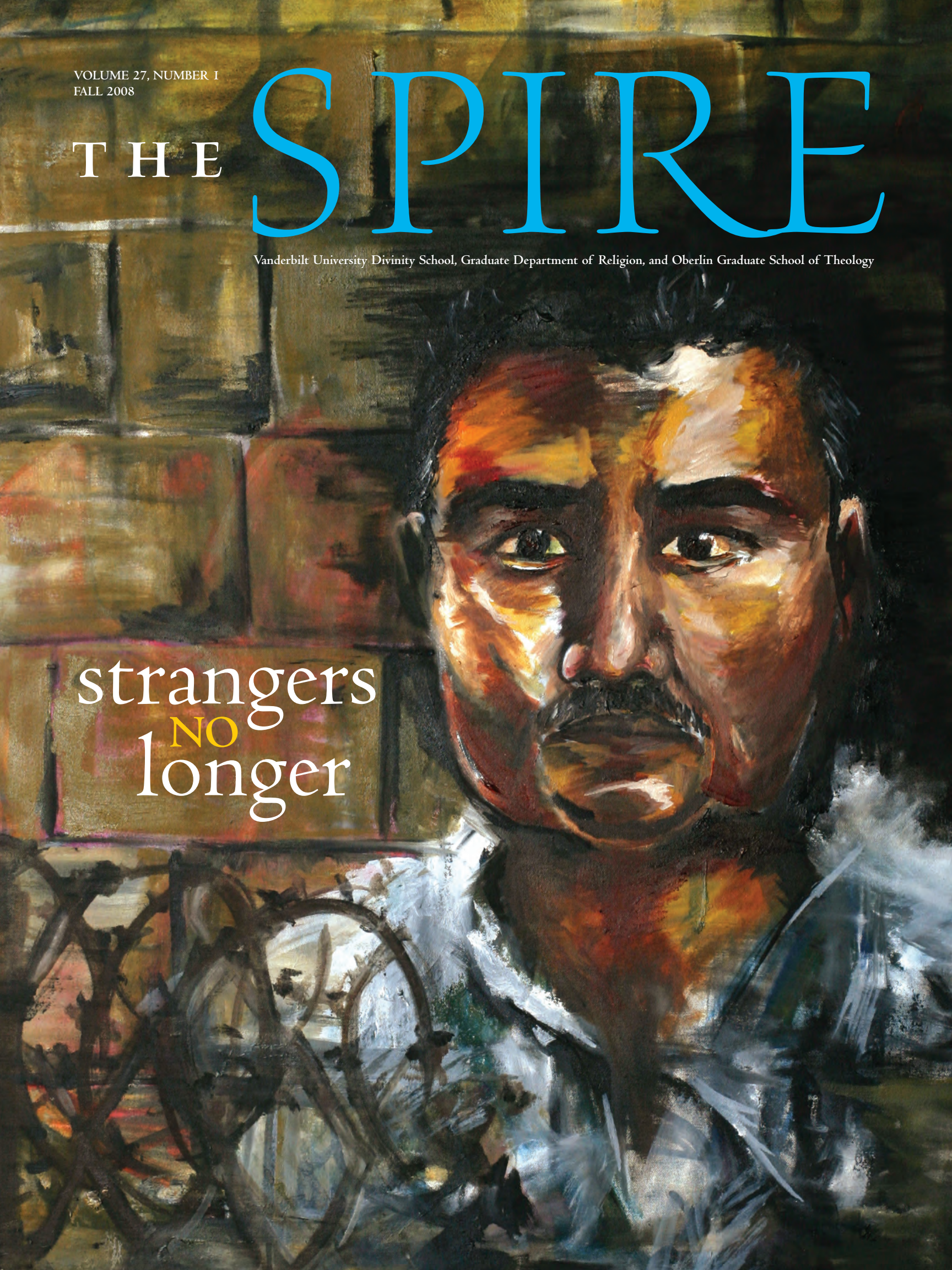


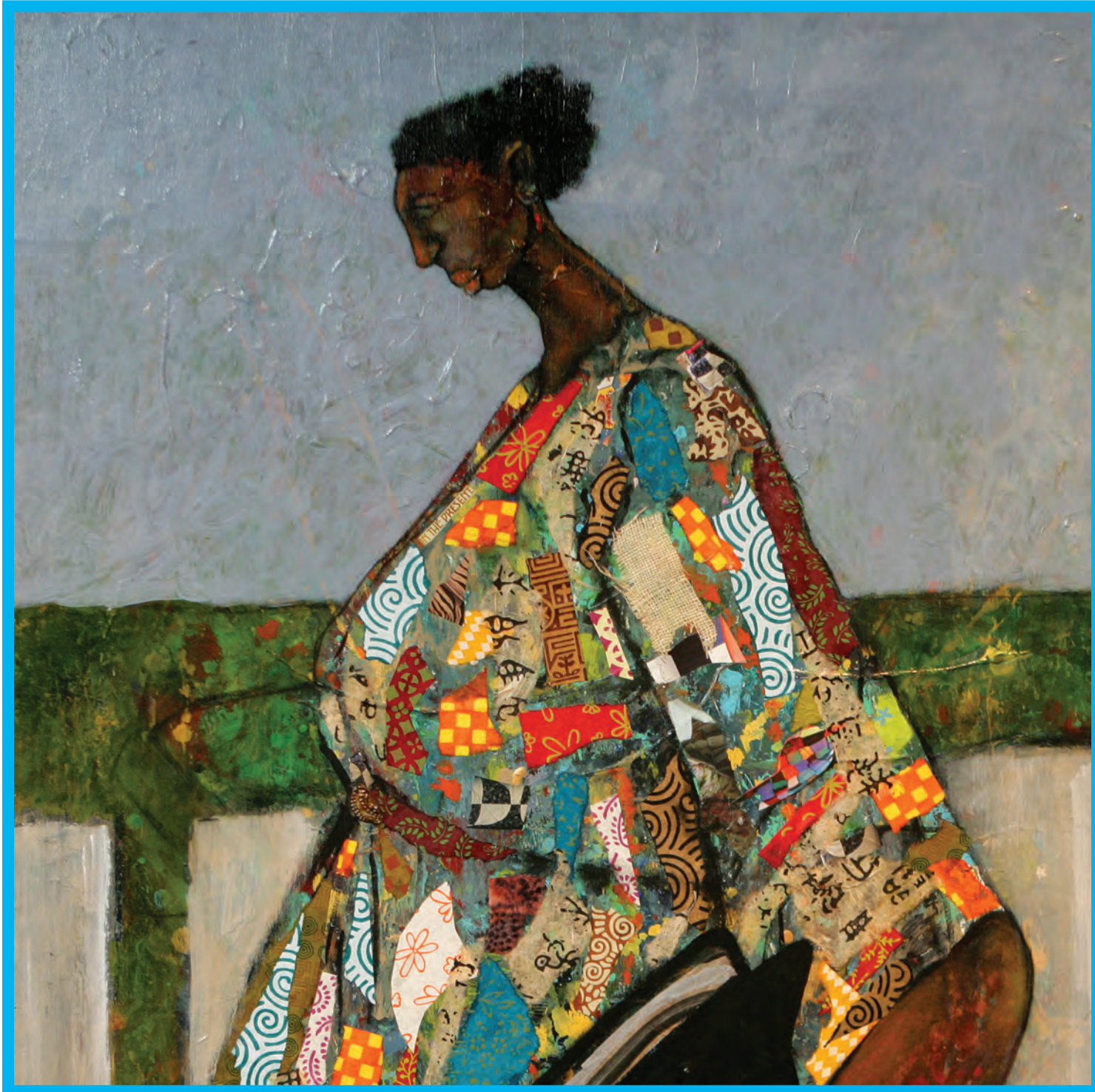
VOLUME 27, NUMBER 1
FALL 2008

THE SPIRE

Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Graduate Department of Religion, and Oberlin Graduate School of Theology

strangers
NO
longer





My Soul Looks Back In Wonder
2006
by April Harrison
American
(born 1957, Greenville, South Carolina)
mixed media collage on wooden panel
48" x 48"
Vanderbilt University Divinity School

photographed by Daniel Dubois

"I began painting in 1991 after my mother's death. I am self-taught and merely a vessel for narrative. Why I have been chosen, I know not; nonetheless, I am humbled by this gift."
—from the artist's statement

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A Sacred Merger

In recognition of the fortieth anniversary of the merger between the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology and Vanderbilt University Divinity School, student essayist Michael Alexander Lehman explores the controversies surrounding context and memory.



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Water Brings Life

Reflecting upon her "water-walk" in India, alumna Nancy M. Victorin-Vangerud invites readers to ponder the question, "In a world of growing water scarcity, can we reclaim water as a deep symbol of the Christian tradition?"

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Strangers No Longer

Recent graduates Mark Steven Miles and Emily Kate Snyder encourage us to excise the word "stranger" from our lexicon.



From the Dean

My Immigration Story, Yours, and Ours

My mother's family came to this continent as part of the great English Puritan migration in the seventeenth century. In their case, they arrived on someone else's land without deeds, passports, or visas in 1636 and helped found New Haven Colony. My father's family started arriving from Saxony in the 1830s as a younger son sought economic opportunity in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. Immigration in that side of family concluded in 1852 after the failed revolutions beginning in 1848. I have those documents, but I am also close enough to the boat to have heard the stories of choosing to give up the language of the old country. My own grandmother told me of the painful episode in the 1950s when my mother's Anglo family was talking out loud about whether they should allow their daughter to marry a German.

So there you have my immigration story. In my family you have people who came to this land as religious seekers, economic opportunists, and political refugees. And even in my apparently WASP background, ethnic suspicions have been part of our familial experience. I will wager that most of you reading this column could tell similar stories about self and ancestors. My purpose in evoking these histories is to recognize that the current immigration debates and the forces that give rise to the migration of people are nothing new. Even so, here at the Divinity School, the issues surrounding migration and global poverty are constantly on our hearts and minds these days.

Immigration is older than the Bible. People have been on the move for political, religious, military, and economic reasons for eons. We treat the movement of individuals and nations as exceptional, perhaps because being tied to a particular place feels natural to us as creatures who are always seeking a home. But the Bible is full of stories of people on the move. Abram and Sarai go forth on a journey to a place that God will show them,

a land that already has Canaanites on it. Jacob's move to Egypt is a story of a move forced by famine. The Exodus precipitates wandering in the wilderness and military battles under Joshua to retake the land. The Babylonian exile was another forced move. So, too, was the flight to Egypt of Mary, Joseph, and their infant Jesus.

The daily newspaper and the Bible often provide different perspectives to human phenomena. From the viewpoint of the centuries, we need to adjust to the migration of strangers and to the ways our lives, too, may be uprooted by change. From the Torah we learn that God expected the ancient Hebrews to treat immigrants in their midst well, decreeing, "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:19) Jesus, history's most famous refugee, continued the practice of hospitality, talking to Samaritans and casting a demon out of a Syrophenician gentile's daughter. In this season of xenophobia,

...current immigration debates and the forces that give rise to the migration of people are nothing new.

I cannot help but feel our context needs to be rid of a few demons as well.

The church knows something the world forgets. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers more than our border's keepers. Still, you may be asking, what does all of this concern have to do with the work of preparing people for ministry? This is the work of ministry for our new century. In the midst of global climate change, human poverty, and resource depletion, people in the twenty-first century either will find ways to share the planet and treat each other with dignity and even love, or fail in their basic obligation to love God and to love neighbor as self.



As you read the pages of this issue of *The Spire* I hope you will see that preparation for the ministry of our future is going on in a wide variety of ways. Students are working in internships to help congregations welcome sojourners in their midst. Our students and faculty are working with the Owen Graduate School of Management here at Vanderbilt to explore better ways to eliminate poverty at the grassroots through microfinance and social capitalism. Our global education program is so key to helping us understand the one world we live in that we must travel in order to learn how we travel through the academic years. Next summer Divinity School students will return to the Arizona-Sonora borderlands again to understand more deeply how the migration phenomenon is reshaping our context for ministry. In this and all our work we aim to do what schools of divinity have, at their best, always done. We aim to respond to new situations with the deep wisdom of our faith traditions.

Our Featured Artisan

Canvassing the Great Commission

BY VICTOR JUDGE, EDITOR

On the afternoon Anna Russell Kelly, MDiv'08, accepted the commission to conceive and create the cover for this issue of *The Spire*, she arrived at Vanderbilt Divinity School having met earlier with another commission—the diocesan committee charged with the sacred responsibility of guiding the young artist and student of theology as she discerns her calling to service in the Episcopal Church. As she reflected upon the questions from her initial interview with the prelates, she inclined her head and remarked, "I just babbled."

When the alumna of Lake Forest College was asked by one of the commissioners to explain how a baccalaureate in studio art had prepared her for theological education at Vanderbilt Divinity School, she had responded, "I cannot articulate a conclusive answer. Whether I am standing before a canvas or reading for Professor John Thamanil's lectures on Buddhist and Christian Dialogue, I am aware that painting and studying are efforts not completely of me. I believe I can develop artistically, intellectually, and spiritually when I allow myself to become a conduit or a medium, like the oil paints."

The firm handshakes she received after the interview suggest the commissioners think Anna Russell to be capable of more than mere babbling, and as she begins to exchange with me her ideas for illustrating the feature essay "Strangers No Longer: Faithful Voices for Solidarity," one hears in the voice of this unassuming conduit a sensitivity that exceeds the borders of any canvas.

"I want to create a portrait that expresses the dignity and the faithfulness of the Hispanic men who stand each day near the underpasses on Sixth Avenue, South, and Lafayette Street and wait for contractors to offer them a day's work," she says with the confidence of one who has experienced an epiphany.

"I believe I can develop artistically, intellectually, and spiritually when I allow myself to become a conduit or a medium, like the oil paints."

The countenance for the portrait would not be inspired from research but from the artist's ministry to these gentlemen for whom she prepared meals each Wednesday at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, the site of her field education practicum. After helping cook and serve the meal, Anna Russell developed her homiletic skills by delivering a sermon to the men who came for food because they were unable to secure work

for the day. The image of the man who stands alone between a stone wall and a barbed wire fence represents a composite of the men she observed waiting at the underpasses or with whom she broke bread in a church dining hall. Although her treatment of light and color suggest influences from her extensive studies in the portraits of the seventeenth-century Dutch Baroque painter Johannes Vermeer, the respectful poignancy



Anna Russell has captured in *Strangers No Longer* is rendered, or incarnated, from the praxis of her theological education.

Reminiscing upon the two decades she has been painting, Anna Russell remembers waiting her turn at the easel when she was a five-year-old kindergartner at Overbrook School where she painted a Nativity scene for her parents' annual Christmas card. Her first public exhibition was at Green Hills Mall where her painting of a cow was mounted with works by her first-grade peers from the Ensworth School. As a student at Harpeth Hall, a college preparatory school for young women, Anna Russell studied with Rosemary Paschall who challenged the high schooler's identity as an artist by asking her, "Do you realize the gift you have?"

The Spire remains grateful for the opportunity to present this manifestation of the artist's gift.



Anna Russell Kelly, MDiv'08

Around the QUADRANGLE

Supporting the School of the Prophets





Benefactors of Vanderbilt University Divinity School were guests for a dinner at the home of Sandra and Alex Steele, chairpersons of Schola Prophetarum, the School's major donor society. Among those who attended were Bette Halverstadt, Dean James Hudnut-Beumler, Lucille Cole, Ed and Jean Jenkins, and Shirley LaRoche, MTS'98.



Divinity School patrons Ann Roos and Charles E. Roos, Vanderbilt professor of physics, emeritus, converse with the Reverend Doctor James Lawson, D'60, Distinguished Visiting University Professor and guest speaker for the evening celebration.



Members of the Divinity School community who continue to support the institution's mission include Frank Gulley Jr., PhD'61, professor of church history, emeritus; Shirley Forstman, Anne Gulley, Jack Forstman, dean and the Charles G. Finney Professor of Theology, emeritus; and Randy Smith, BA'84, MDiv'88, executive associate vice chancellor for development and alumni relations.


 The community of
 Vanderbilt University Divinity School
 congratulates the
 Reverend Doctor Brad Braxton,
 Associate Professor of
 New Testament and Homiletics,
 upon his appointment as the sixth senior
 minister of the Riverside Church
 in New York City.
 

Building on the Carpenter Legacy



Ellen Armour, PhD'93, was installed as the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Associate Professor of Feminist Theology and as the director of the Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality on September 27, 2007. Armour, who also has an appointment in the University's department of philosophy, succeeds Sallie McFague, Carpenter Professor, emerita, who was the first member of the Divinity School faculty to hold the professorship. Dean James Hudnut-Beumler presided at the installation which was attended by the Reverend Ann Day, MDiv'78, president of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.

Through the generosity of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, three members of the Vanderbilt University Divinity School faculty hold professorships bearing the Carpenter name. Shown with the Reverend Ann Day are Amy-Jill Levine, the Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies and first director of the Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality; Ellen Armour, the Carpenter Associate Professor of Feminist Theology; and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, the Carpenter Professor of Pastoral Theology.



A Congregational Celebration



Jennie Mills and David Buttrick, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics, emeritus, welcomed members of the Mills-Buttrick Society during a reception to honor the congregations who support theological education at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. The donor society commemorates the legacies of Liston Mills (1928-2002), the Oberlin Professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling, and Professor Buttrick.



The Reverend K.C. Ptomey, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee; and the Reverend Carol Tate, MDiv'00, founding pastor of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Nashville, were among the clergy attending the reception for the Mills-Buttrick Society. Professor Buttrick (left) taught homiletics for eighteen years at the University before his retirement in 2000.

Honoris Causa

The Reverend Donald Beisswenger, professor of church and community, emeritus, has received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Macalester College where he earned his baccalaureate in 1952. When bestowing the honor upon Beisswenger, Macalester President Brian C. Rosenberg remarked, "Throughout your distinguished career, you have lived your life and served your community in accordance with the principles of your faith and with your deep sense of justice. You have described your calling as working on the global war against the poor, and you have sought to obey God instead of humans."

For his act of civil disobedience in protesting the practices of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas, Beisswenger was sentenced in 2004 to six months in the Federal Correctional Institution in Manchester, Kentucky. His incarceration is documented in his autobiography, *Locked Up: Letters and Papers of a Prisoner of Conscience*, published by Upper Room.



Heeding a Different Battle Cry: "No More of This"

In commemoration of the bicentennial of the abolition of slave trade in the British Empire, Brad Braxton, associate professor of homiletics and New Testament, delivered the Bray Lectures in Ghana and England. He also preached on Luke 22:47-51 for the Sung Eucharist Service in Westminster Abbey. In his homily titled "The Battle Cry of a New Revolution," Braxton proclaimed, "As we celebrate the bicentennial of the abolition of slave trade in the British Empire, we remember with remorse the African holocaust of slavery and colonialism; and the Jewish Holocaust; and

the atrocities of South African apartheid; and abused migrant workers in South America and Asia; and victimized women and children around the corner and around the globe; and we remember the many maimed and murdered in the military misadventure of Iraq, where the "coalition of the willing" has spread more death than democracy. To our obsession with violence, Jesus says, 'No more of this!'" Standing outside Westminster Abbey with Professor Braxton is his wife, Lazetta.



A Collaboration of Pulpits

John S. McClure, the Charles Grandison Finney Professor of Homiletics and chair of the graduate department of religion, (center) traveled to Seoul, Korea, to deliver a lecture series at Presbyterian College and Theological School and at Yonsei University. During his presentations titled "Sermon-Sequenc-

ing: A Homiletic Method" and "Collaborative Preaching," McClure met with professors and students of homiletics. "I gained a strong sense of the South Korean church and the institution's crucial sense of mission in relation to China. A significant number of students are eager for more instruction in

homiletics, and I am hopeful they will consider seeking admission to Vanderbilt," remarked McClure, who also preached at Seoul's Kangbukjeil Presbyterian Church with a membership of fifteen thousand.

Two Poems by Ann Street

A Cautionary Tale

Or, the woman whom Thou gavest . . .

Lucifer lay his head along the limb;
“Ssweetie,” he said, “come closser sso you’ll hear.
I can sscarcelly hiss above a whissper,
bessidess, my dear, who wantsss to talk to *Him*?”
So Eve exposed her pink and shell-like ear
as she drew nearer to the ardent lisper,
one rotating hand, palm forward, in the air,
her swaying hips a snare to bait a snare,
moving to the beat of an unborn drummer
she glanced around the Garden, murmured, “Bummer.”

The serpent flicked an apple to her toe.
“Thiss iss delicious, but you sshouldn’t tasste it,
it will reveal what you don’t know you know.
If I were you I wouldn’t care to wasste it.”
(The warning hit its mark, she promptly bit it;
a crime from which she never was acquitted.)
“Now give ssome to that dork who walks with Him;
he really comess off like a proper fool.
He might be better fun were he less dim.
Eve, are you lisstening?”
“Yeah, Man. Cool.”

(Well, as they say, the rest is history;
God’s motive is the Christian mystery.)
So Adam ate the apple and it lodged
midway down his disobedient throat
providing him with undigested knowledge,
eviction papers, and a lasting scapegoat.

(Readers will recognize the poet’s name,
Ann Street, A’49, as the signature on the
official portraits commissioned by the University.)

Communion of Saints

They are gone now.

Dark in earth or in their urns
Lie most I loved—and loved the most.
Gone to worms,
gone into ghosts
that wait and wait . . .
who left with hope,
with promises from
the pulpits of childhood.
Will they receive?
Do they remember
dim naves, stained light on lips repeating,
I believe . . . ?

By what slim bonds of
blood and circumstance,
what arrogance,
do we petition
that such brief communion
move into perpetuity?
That these once events,
defined by evanescence,
be empowered to affect
the cosmic course
and recommence
their flawed alliances?
These tentative
identities renew
once more in unimagined
mansions of immensity?

Oh, pray they do!

A Sacred Merger

BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER LEHMAN, MDV3

The academic year 2006–2007 marked the fortieth anniversary of the merger between the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology and Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Many students who converse in the halls of the Divinity School and who study fervently in the classrooms are vaguely, if at all, familiar with this important event in the Divinity School’s rich history. Such a merger is significant in a number of ways, many of which reflect the current commitments and causes of faculty and students.

The Oberlin Graduate School of Theology in Oberlin, Ohio, known from 1844–1904 as the Oberlin Theological Seminary, was a nondenominational graduate school deeply committed to the inclusion of women and minorities. In fact, Oberlin College was the first institution of higher learning in the nation to admit students irrespective of color or gender. Most notably was Antoinette Brown, the first woman ordained to Christian ministry in the United States and whose memory is celebrated at Vanderbilt with an annual lecture bearing her name.

Developing at a tremendous rate throughout the nineteenth century, Oberlin Theological Seminary became deeply committed to missionary work, reflecting the college’s commitment to service. Funded by the American Home Missionary Board, Oberlin Theological Seminary prepared ministers to work successfully in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and China. (Oberlin College Archives 2003). Although the seminary thrived well into the twentieth century, the school struggled eventually to maintain a steady enrollment. Oberlin College President William Stevenson claimed that the institution was becoming a financial drain on the college and that its academic program had outlived its usefulness on a campus becoming increasingly secular.

In 1965, the board of trustees of Oberlin College voted to discontinue professional graduate instruction in theology at Oberlin. (Oberlin College Archives 2003). In September of 1966, six faculty members and twenty-two students joined Vanderbilt Divinity School as part of a merger agreement, thus ending Oberlin’s 130-year commitment to the training of ministers.

(Oberlin College Archives 2003). While many at Vanderbilt hoped that the merger would bring increased visibility to the School as well as an increase in financial support and enrollment, this, for the most part, did not happen. (Johnson 2001). Within a few years of the merger, the Oberlin students were graduated, and three of the six faculty members left to take other positions. (Johnson 2001).

An Ethos of Learning and Labor

While visible evidence of the 1966 merger scarcely exists, there are some examples. For instance, Divinity School faculty member Fernando Segovia serves as the Oberlin Graduate Professor of New Testament, and John S. McClure holds the title of Charles G. Finney Professor of Homiletics. Finney was the United States’ foremost revivalist during the nineteenth century and one of the first professors of theology at Oberlin Theological Seminary. He later became the president of Oberlin College from 1851–1866. Other evidence may be found at the northeastern entrance of Vanderbilt Divinity School facing 21st Avenue, South. Just outside to the right of the door there is a plaque which

Oberlin College set itself apart in its formative years through its unique commitment to service, social activism, abolitionism, equal education, and evangelism.

reads “John Frederick Oberlin Divinity Quadrangle.” This plaque commemorates the merger of the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology with Vanderbilt and names the beautiful grassy area which spans from the Divinity School to 21st Avenue, South, and from the library to the Owen Graduate School of Management.

John Frederick Oberlin (1740–1826) was a pastor who served an impoverished parish in the mountains of northeast France. He was committed to educational programs, training teachers, establishing schools, and reforming agriculture. Although he was never involved with Oberlin College directly, his commitment to service was its founding ethos, and the college was named after him. (Oberlin College Archives 2007). Since its founding in 1833 by two Presbyterian ministers,

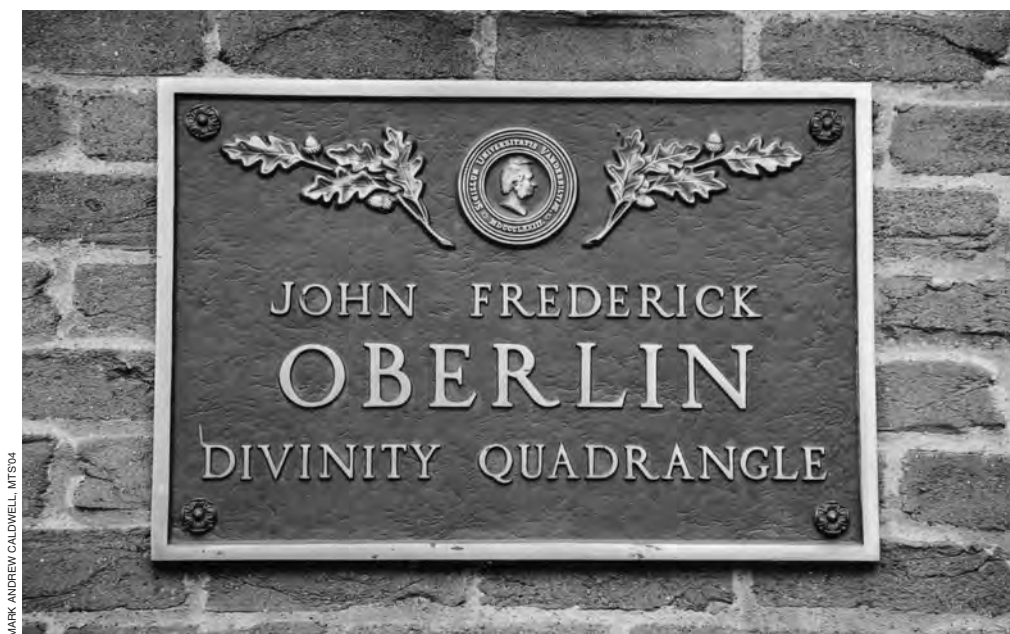
John Shipherd and Philo P. Stewart, Oberlin College has been committed to the service of others. The initial vision of its founders was to start and support a school that would train Christian pastors, teachers, and missionaries for service in the region of Ohio and surrounding states. The motto of the college became “Learning and Labor,” which remains in effect to this day. Oberlin College set itself apart in its formative years through its unique commitment to service, social activism, abolitionism, equal education, and evangelism. While many today consider evangelism outdated or associate it with conservative or fundamentalist Christians, evangelism in the nineteenth century, as interpreted at Oberlin, was considered quite progressive.

The seminary, in particular, fervently trained missionaries for service abroad in foreign countries. Missionaries who were graduated from Oberlin began serving across the United States and the world. One group of missionaries in particular is extremely significant to Oberlin’s history. This band of missionaries, most of whom were Oberlin graduates, was killed during the Boxer Rebellion in the Shansi province of China in 1900. On the west side of Oberlin’s campus stands the Memorial Arch constructed as a tribute to those who lost their lives. This single monument has been the source of immense conflict and debate

among students and faculty since its dedication in 1903. The debate still exists today. But why such a controversy over a memorial which stands as a tribute to Oberlin’s own fallen? A brief historical sketch of the events which led to the arch’s construction should first be understood.

Martyrs and Devils

In 1882, Oberlin began its relationship with China and sent its first group of twelve missionaries to China’s Shansi Province. While they worked tirelessly to convert the Chinese to the Christian faith, this was only one goal of the missionaries. The Oberlinians and others who eventually came to work there were intent on establishing schools for China’s poor and orphaned as well as provide refuge and recovery opportunities for opium addicts,



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rial which stands as a tribute to Oberlin's own fallen? A brief historical sketch of the events which led to the arch's construction should first be understood.



The Memorial Arch commemorating the deaths of thirteen missionaries and five children of the Shansi Mission was dedicated on May 14, 1903, during the inauguration of Oberlin College President Henry Churchill King.

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Martyrs and Devils

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door for missionary work in China beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, causing tensions and anti-foreign sentiment to grow. Many countries including France, England, Germany, and Japan had laid claims in China by the time of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, but the missionaries were seen as a much more serious threat to the Chinese and their way of life.

Arthur H. Smith, a missionary who had dedicated fifty-four years of his life to work in China, explains how these feelings developed. He first points out that because the missionaries' work took them far into China, the missionaries became the most visible and accessible members of the foreign community, a prime target for anti-foreign sentiment. (Tucker 1991). The Chinese had long resented the territorial demands of the West, and in turn a missionary became the hated symbol of foreign power and aggression. Secondly, the Chinese took great offense to the missionaries' claim to the ultimate truth and their strong convictions that China was spiritually empty and morally corrupt. (Tucker 1991). Many persons of China's upper class

were particularly annoyed by this aspect of missionary activity because they were believers and practitioners of Confucian values and ideas. (Tucker 1991). In fact, many Chinese persons from all classes came to resent the missionary community's degradation of long-standing Chinese customs and traditions such as ancestral worship and *feng shui*, or the belief that within localities forces exist which affect the well-being of the living and the dead. (Tucker 1991). Lastly, Smith points out that the special toleration which was given to the missionaries and their converts by the Chinese government was the spark that started the Boxer Rebellion. He states, "Tenants involved in land disputes often converted to Christianity and then complained to the missionary community that they were the victims of religious bias. The missionary, in return, would protest to the local magistrate in the name of religious toleration, and the miscreant well knew that a magistrate who refused a missionary ran the high risk of removal from office." (Tucker 1991). Thus, the missionaries came to be perceived as



"I feel that studying at Vanderbilt has been a continuation of my time at Oberlin," says essayist Michael Alexander Lehman, MDV3.

Thousands more lost their lives as Allied forces came in to disperse the Boxers and rescue any foreigners, missionaries, and native Christians that remained.

The Arch of Controversy

One can only imagine the shock and horror that the Oberlin community must have felt upon hearing the news of the massacre. Rev. J.I. Atwood, the sole male survivor of the Shansi Mission wrote in the *Missionary Herald* in November of 1900, "The staggering blow is too recent and too appalling to allow one to write with equanimity of the loved ones who, if report proves true, have gained the martyr's crown." (American Board

of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 1900). Indeed, the Oberlin College community was deeply grieved. The Board of Foreign Missions selected Oberlin as an appropriate site to erect a monument to the missionaries and their children who had lost their lives. (Baumann and Jacobs 1991). Faculty and students agreed. The cornerstone for the Memorial Arch was laid on October 16, 1902, and was finally dedicated on May 14, 1903, as part of the

and friends. (Oberlin College Archives 2003). For decades, students and faculty alike found the arch a fitting tribute to those they understood as martyrs and those who ultimately gave their lives in service to others. It became a tradition at graduation for students to file in procession through the arch and into Tappan Square, a large park-like area which is one of Oberlin's main centers for campus activity.

The arch's original symbolic significance began to change by the 1950s and became a full-fledged debate by the 1970s. Students questioned what the action of walking under the arch at graduation meant for them and whether it was an appropriate gesture. For decades since its dedication, the traditional interpretation of the arch symbolized Oberlin's deep commitment to its missionary work and heritage and the desire of its students to work for the betterment of those all over the world. For many in the Oberlin Shansi Memorial Association, a group founded in 1908 to commemorate the Oberlin educators and to continue educational exchanges with China, walking under the arch symbolized the service-oriented and progressive traditions of the college. They were astute to point out that many secular causes in their own time were approached with the same religious zeal that the missionaries had shown. While some agreed, for others, the arch came to represent Oberlin's, and indeed all of the West's intervention in China and other third world countries. Even the missionaries who were killed there were deemed imperialists, intent on imposing their views on the Chinese at the expense of sacred traditions of Chinese culture and religion. Still others pointed out that the arch only memorialized the American Christians who died in China while failing to recognize the thousands of Chinese Christians and native Chinese who were victims of the Boxers and Allied forces as well. By the 1990s, students called for a monument which would honor the Chinese Christians who lost their lives in the Boxer Rebellion. (Baumann and Jacobs 1991). While some students insisted that a plaque be added to the arch itself, Mark Carr of the Shansi Association, claimed that "To add to, change, or even destroy the memorial would be to tinker with history in the most dangerous of ways. We are responsible for

the past and cannot change it by changing the monument." (Carr 1990). Instead, he called for a completely separate monument to be built. A plaque was finally created to honor all of the Chinese who were killed and was donated by the class of 1994. Rather than a separate monument, however, the plaque was permanently fixed on the Memorial Arch.

Graduating students aware of the arch's rich history and the debate surrounding it often face deeply personal dilemmas when deciding whether or not to walk under the arch at graduation. An Oberlin publication called *The Collective* published a statement in the spring of 1989 from the Asian American Alliance which called upon all Asians and Asian Americans to walk around the arch at commencement to "memorialize the countless victims of imperialism." They claimed that the one-sided portrayal of the Boxer Rebellion by the arch is a "blatant example of Oberlin's ethnocentricity and institutional racism." (Asian American Alliance 1989). Some students agreed with this interpretation while others recognized it as hypocritical. Commenting on an exhibit of the arch that was sponsored by the Oberlin College library in May of 1990, one student observed, "Colonialism has been a universal phenomenon. It has been as much a part of Western European history as it has been a part of Asian history; China has a history of colonization that extends for thousands of years. Japan, too, has not been able to escape the greed of colonialism. Mongolia had the biggest colonial kingdom in the history of humankind! It is elitist to blame one group while ignoring the other groups' mistakes. We are all human, after all." (Baumann and Jacobs 1991).

The reasons that students give for walking around or through the arch are indeed many. One student walked around the arch simply to "protest white imperialism." (Raphel 1989). Other students since the 1950s have come to identify the arch with a host of events and injustices including the Korean and Vietnam Wars and apartheid in South Africa. Students have protested these historical events and movements by walking around the arch. Carl Jacobson, Executive Director of the Oberlin Memorial Shansi Association, believes that the arch is a memorial to Oberlin's "long and rewarding relationship with China." Oth-

ers have decided to keep the tradition and walk under the arch because they see and identify it as a memorial to some of Oberlin's own who were brutally murdered. These students have pointed out that memorials which commemorate the lives of those who are tragically killed exist everywhere. While Carr of the Shansi Association says that he will never believe that the Vietnam War was right, he still recognizes the power of the Vietnam War Memorial which stands as a tribute to those thousands who perished "in a war which threatened to tear the nation apart, a war which many considered immoral and unjust." (Carr 1990). He points out that while the wall fails to memorialize those thousands of Vietcong soldiers and innocent civilians who perished as well, it is still most fitting that the Americans who died in the conflict there be memorialized, despite the misguided and twisted politics which sent them into battle. (Carr 1990). For him and for many, the arch was never meant to denigrate the deaths of the Chinese Christians who died in the Boxer Rebellion, but rather to remember appropriately those of the "Oberlin family" whose deaths were most profoundly felt and who were to be remembered." (Carr 1990).

While the debate over the arch and whether one should walk under or around the monument at graduation still exists today, the Shansi Association and others on Oberlin's campus are intent on encouraging students to learn and know the history surrounding the events which led to the arch's construction and what it might mean for today's college community. Jacobson has said, "The arch is a guidepost to us, both to be inspired by and warned by. It is a pole for us—it tells us where we have been so that we can get a better notion of where we are going." (Carr 1990). Oberlin is indeed a school distinct in its commitment to fighting for the justice for all. Each graduate is encouraged to leave with a willingness to serve others and to face the noble cause to which one is called and believes deeply. Whether seniors walk through or around the arch at commencement, "they might do well", in the words of Carr, to remember "that they may err in

spite of their best intentions, and in the knowledge that despite that very real potential for harm, we all must stand for what we believe." (Carr 1990).

To Walk, or not to Walk?

It is difficult for me to believe that it has been two years since I walked under that arch myself at Oberlin's commencement ceremony in 2006. Like so many other students in my class that day, I was completely ignorant of the history and debate which surrounded the piece of architecture where I had shared so many meals, conversations, and fun times with friends. I often wonder if I would have walked under the arch if I had known the possible implications. My response now would be, "Yes, I would have." While I recognize the valid objections that so many in the "Oberlin family" have raised which have led them to walk around the arch, I view the arch as an appropriate and fitting response to the awful events that transpired in Shansi, China, in 1900 and a truly meaningful tribute to those who were so dear to the Oberlin College community. One could only imagine the horror we would feel at Vanderbilt if a comparable tragedy were to happen to our beloved community. Whether or not one sees the actions or even the whole endeavor of the Oberlin missionaries as a form of imperialism, one must remember the rich and progressive missionary heritage of the college. That these missionaries were willing to board a ship and relocate their families half way across the world just to share their faith and to promote education which improved the lot of so many Chinese must stand for something and must be admired. If only everyone who claimed to be ministers in any capacity today would dedicate such fervor and passion to their own beliefs and ministries, the world would surely improve in new and awesome ways.

My Oberlin College experience was life-changing and continues to shape me. I spent four incredible and challenging years at Oberlin as a member of the Conservatory of Music majoring in percussion performance. To study at one of the most respected music institutions in the world was truly an honor. I had one of the finest percussion teachers in the nation and was surrounded by students whose passion and talent in a variety of musical disci-

dishonest political agents.

By 1900, tensions reached a climax, and a secret society of peasants known as the "Boxers," or the Fists of Righteous Harmony, began a violent uprising against the foreign presence in China. China's Empress Dowager sided with the Boxers and issued an imperial command which read, "Exterminate the Christian religion! Death to the foreign devils!" (Tucker 1991). The Boxers targeted all Westerners, their

"The arch is a guidepost to us, both to be inspired by and warned by. It is a pole for us—it tells us where we have been so that we can get a better notion of where we are going."

sympathizers, and in particular the missionaries. In the end, the Boxers slaughtered 188 Protestant missionaries (159 of whom were part of the Shansi Mission), 30,000 native Chinese Catholics, and 2,000 native Protestants. Of the 159 who were killed in the Shansi Mission, eighteen had come from Oberlin. Ten of them were graduates, five of them were their children, and three others were affiliated with the Oberlin Mission. They were all decapitated in the summer of 1900. (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 1900).

inauguration ceremonies for new college president Henry Churchill King. The architect chosen to create the arch was J.L. Silsbee of Chicago. Constructed from Indiana limestone, the monument features two bronze plaques that bear the names of the thirteen missionaries and their five children who were killed in Shansi. The majority of the financing of the arch was given to Oberlin by New York philanthropist D. Willis James, and the rest was provided by small contributions from Oberlin students

CROSSING THE BAR

In Memoriam *Harmon Wray, MA '85*

NOVEMBER 10, 1946 – JULY 24, 2007

I felt Harmon Wray's presence keenly on July 30, 2007, at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution when I attended the final class meeting of a summer course taught by Amy-Jill Levine, the Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. The class met on the prison grounds as part of a unique educational initiative established by Harmon in 2003 when one course each academic term was held at Riverbend. Prison inmates, Divinity School students, and community members comprised each class. Attending this last meeting were Professor Levine, the Reverend Donald F. Beisswenger, Vanderbilt Divinity School professor, *emeritus*, who had been incarcerated in a federal prison in Manchester, Kentucky, for six months for an act of civil disobedience; author John Edgerton; Lipscomb University history professor Richard Goode, and Methodist minister Janet Wolf, who helped Harmon to establish the Riverbend program; numerous leaders in both men's and women's prison programs; Vanderbilt students who had participated in the Riverbend classes; Judy Parks, Harmon Wray's life partner of thirty-five years; and inmates who had known him for as many years. Harmon had died six days earlier, but everyone sensed his presence in the room.

In the preceding days, Harmon's death had been mourned and his life celebrated at a crowded visitation at Edgehill United Methodist Church and at a full-to-capacity memorial service at Belmont United Methodist Church. The men at Riverbend had met with Judy Parks on the night when Harmon died, holding their own memorial service. Still, many people came to the last class meeting of Professor Levine's "Women in the Gospels" course, submitting to a pat-down and the emptying of pockets before passing through the steel locking gates and walking across the hot compound to the classroom building.

There the circle of friends watched the video-recording of Reverend David Rainey's humorous and evocative tribute to Harmon from the memorial service. Warm memories of Harmon's personal life and his lovable quirks drew all of us closer together. Judy

Parks shared some memories of her life with Harmon and the many pets who had adopted them. Two inmates who had known Harmon for nearly thirty-five years read moving tributes to him, calling him their "brother." One of Harmon's colleagues recounted being locked up with Harmon for protesting the death penalty. Finally, because this was a course in the New Testament, we turned to our text. The Scripture helped to open up our hearts and minds to the grace of Harmon's selfless life.

Professor Levine proposed that we end our class with a discussion of the story of the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-25, for as she pointed out, a woman may have been present in the company of travelers. As she prodded the class for interpretation, we found ourselves somewhat tongue-tied. I can only offer my own reasons why this passage of Scripture was relevant to us. Like the disciples, we had lost a good friend, a leader, in fact, although no one thought of him that way when he was with us. One revelation during class was that in talking about Harmon's life, we were able to see him in a new light. He was a humble man, one who could connect people and make events happen. He was our friend, one who was there for us when life dealt us harsh blows. He persuaded people to act simply by creating in them the desire to do what was right; he also made doing the right action attractive and even fun. He never backed down from his convictions; he was a man of less than moderate means who did what he wanted to do.

We could also begin to piece together our own roles in picking up where he left off, to foster understanding between the prisoners and the free, to learn about the inherent injustices in the criminal justice system, to understand prisoners not as throwaways but as persons who might want to make a positive change in their own lives and if possible, make reparation to those they have harmed and repair the breach between themselves and society.

One doctoral student recalled the class discussion of the previous week, when we talked about the "woman who loved much" who poured out costly ointment on Jesus' feet. Harmon was like this, she said, one who

unselfishly poured himself out for others.

An inmate cited Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." He pointed to the history of those before Harmon, and to Harmon himself, working for good in the world, and spoke optimistically about the work to be taken up by Harmon's colleagues and students. Student discussion in this class was no different from those of other classes in our open queries into the truth. Hearing this inmate, I felt the kinship that comes from the intellectual camaraderie found in classroom discussions, when one student's perspective resonates with one's own.

One inmate, just when class was about to end, cited Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." This verse, he pointed out, summed up Harmon Wray's life.

Later on, I would recall the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote in his essay "Self Reliance," "Do your thing, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself." Still, it was Emerson's friend Henry David Thoreau, naturalist and author of "Resistance to Civil Government" (known as "Civil Disobedience") who took this imperative to its logical conclusion, going to jail rather than paying the poll tax supporting the United States' war with Mexico. Harmon did his work when he addressed social justice through his books, lectures, prisoner advocacy programs, and his own willingness to go to jail for his beliefs.

I myself did not see Harmon clearly until he was gone from this life. Somewhat fooled by his unassuming nature, availability, and the fact that he was always so much fun to be with, it was only later that I saw the wonder and splendor of his life blazing before me. Harmon made it his life's work to love goodness and do right and walk humbly before God. Those of us who remain can only strive to follow his lead.

—Patricia Lynn Myrick, MTS'08



Restorative justice advocate Harmon Wray, MA'85, in the last photograph taken of him

"Harmon was a missionary to Vanderbilt Divinity School and was called, patiently and repeatedly, to explain that John Wesley was not speaking in allegory. He was the pastor of the Criminal Defense Bar, ministering to those of us in crisis and softly chiding those of us who neglected those needing acute healing. He became a conscience of the Church, lighting the oft-preferred darkness of justice. He was our friend, welcomed in our corridors of courtrooms and carrels. He taught by word, by example, and by presence. He supported us during literal and figurative trials. He loved those in our care. Harmon made us better."

—J. Michael Engle
Assistant Public Defender
Metropolitan Public Defender's Office

"Harmon challenged and inspired us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. He gave us a picture of the contrast between the old world of greed, exclusion, vengeance, and exploitation and the new world of justice, hospitality, restoration, and peace. In a world that relegates God to privatized piety and self-indulgent ritual, Harmon trusted the words of Jesus: 'I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'"

—United Methodist Bishop Kenneth L. Carder, DMin'80

"Where Harmon placed his trust is no mystery: he trusted in the power, the love, and the grace of Jesus Christ. His trust was mirrored again and again in the compassion he showered upon others and in the unconditional love he brought to every relationship. Harmon held firmly to the conviction that each of us can help lessen the misery of another person. I am absolutely convinced my brother of thirty years, Harmon Wray, met his Pilot, face to face, when he crossed the bar."

—Tom Warren
Riverbend Maximum Security Institution

Crossing the Bar

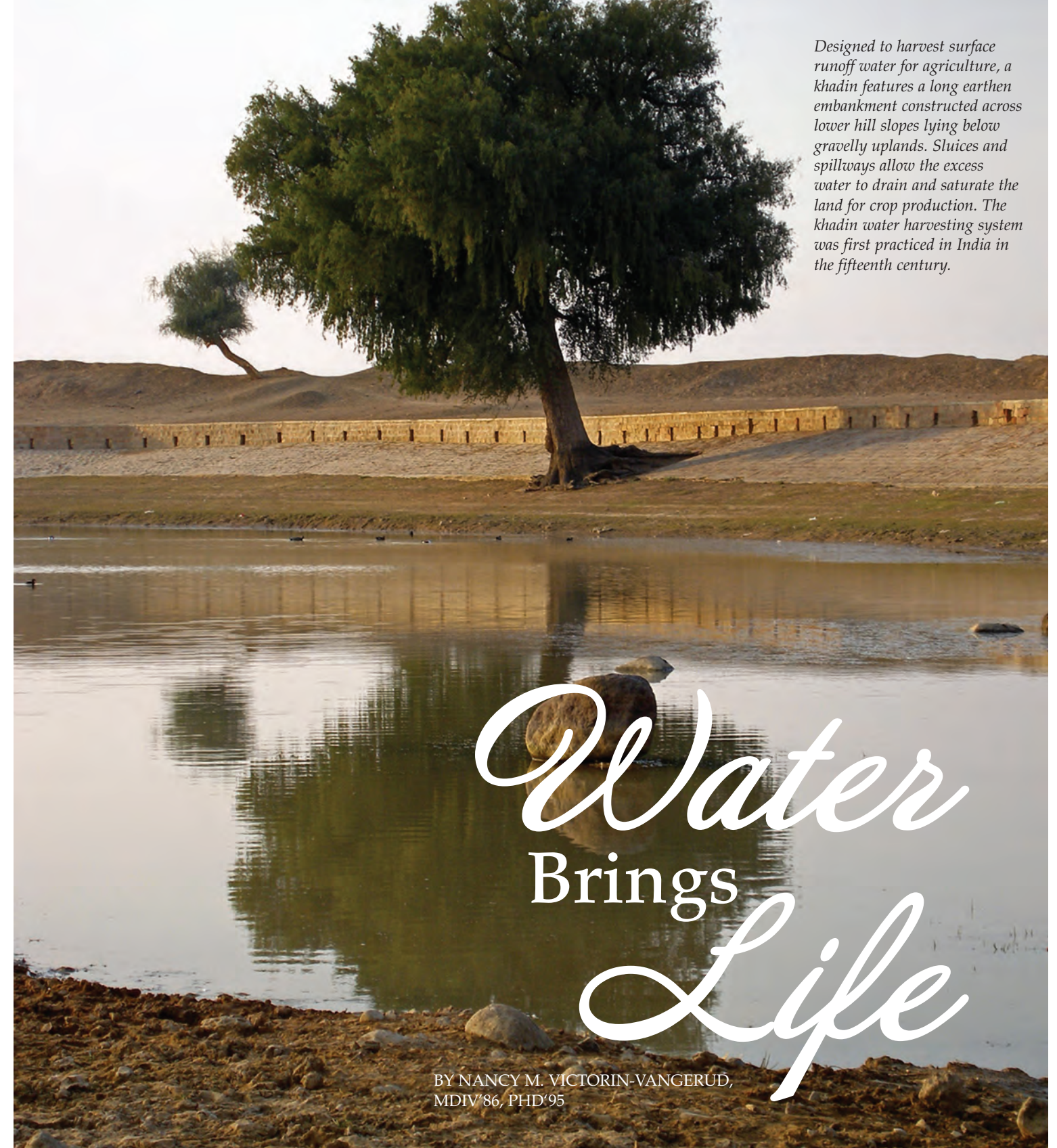
Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning
of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving
seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from
out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness
of farewell,
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne
of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson
(1809-1892)



Designed to harvest surface runoff water for agriculture, a khadin features a long earthen embankment constructed across lower hill slopes lying below gravelly uplands. Sluices and spillways allow the excess water to drain and saturate the land for crop production. The khadin water harvesting system was first practiced in India in the fifteenth century.

Water Brings Life

BY NANCY M. VICTORIN-VANGERUD,
MDIV'86, PHD'95

“Sacred waters carry us beyond the market place into a world charged with myths and stories, beliefs and devotion, culture and celebration. These are the worlds that enable us to save and share water, and convert scarcity into abundance.”

—Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars*¹

Fonts of Blessing

Every Sunday throughout the world, people gather in churches around their common wells—only these wellsprings are called baptismal fonts. Parents bring their children; adults and youth step forward; precious names are called out before the congregation, and soft flesh is bathed in the “living waters.” The Triune name of God is usually invoked, and a child of God is received, blessed, and incorporated into the Beloved Community.

But in a world of growing water scarcity, what are to become of our fonts of blessing? Can we reclaim water as a “deep symbol” of the Christian tradition?² Might the baptismal blessing of God’s “living waters” find renewed connection with our emerging need to sustain water abundance throughout the world?



Top: In her scholarship on ecology and theology, feminist theologian Mary Grey explains that the need for water represents the dominant desire in the lives of the women of India. "As we ask groups about their longings for health, education, and income, without fail one of our group will comment, 'It all comes back to water.'"

Left: Taankas, underground cement cisterns, improve living standards in areas that lack a groundwater resource. Without a taanka, women have to walk long distances twice daily to fetch water. Taankas also are proving to be a stimulus to community development with the formation of village development communities and women's self-help groups.

Wells of Salvation

In January 2007, I had the chance to join the annual *pani-yatra*, or water-walk, sponsored by the British organization, Wells for India.ⁱⁱⁱ Wells was founded in 1987 by Mary and Nicholas Grey, along with their colleague, Ramsahi Purohit, in response to the terrible drought in Rajasthan, India. Ramsahi helped initiate the *Bhoodan* or land-gift movement, which passed four million acres of land from landowners to the landless throughout India. By 1987, access to fresh water also had become a critical issue. For twenty years, the Greys have been leading groups of donors, friends, and activists through Rajasthan to learn how Wells' eighteen-partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are "bringing water security and dignity to the poorest communities of rural Rajasthan." For the 2007 *pani-yatra*, a friend and I joined as the American delegation, and we quickly discovered, as Nicholas Grey proclaims, "From water, everything begins!"

With fifty-six million citizens, Rajasthan is the second poorest state in India. Forty-three million people live in rural areas, with fifteen million people living below the United Nations' poverty guideline. Wells for India is

based in Udaipur, but their partners work throughout the Aravalli Hills to the southeast and the Thar Desert, to the west, along the border with Pakistan. Rainfall in the Aravalli Hills amounts to 300-500 mm per year, while in the Thar, the monsoon brings only 100-300 mm each year, usually within a brief one-hundred-hour period. Climate change in Rajasthan, which many attribute to global warming, has brought more intense times of drought and flooding. Agriculture in the region is extremely vulnerable with four out of every ten years on average meas-

How can we recover and construct what Ellen Armour calls "elemental theologies," reconstituting ourselves as creatures of water, earth, air, and fire?

uring as drought years, yet the Thar Desert, curiously, is one of the most densely populated arid regions in the world.

For desert people, water-scarcity is one of the most pressing concerns.^{iv} It extends across all groups, castes, and classes. Sometimes villagers spend more than half their income on obtaining water. In periods of drought, prices

skyrocket, supplies plummet, and water insecurity becomes a dangerous fact of life. The context is complicated by the government's practice, begun in the colonial period, of centralized water management and reliance on great capital-intensive projects such as dams and bore-wells to meet the demands of industry and agriculture. Thus, rivers are being polluted and exhausted, and groundwater levels are becoming exploited beyond their recharge rates, disrupting the country's hydrological system. Farmers who cannot compete are despairing, in some cases, even taking their lives.

Water-scarcity is a great struggle for women and girls, who walk long distances several times a day to transport water. Impacts of deforestation, desertification, and economic globalization all complicate the daily availability of water.^v Women's lives suffer from inadequate health care and lack

of educational opportunities, and their lives are full of sorrows. But they have longings, too. As feminist theologian Mary Grey explains, "One thing dominates their desire, and that is water. As we ask groups about their longings for health, education, and income, without fail one of our group will comment, 'It all comes back to water.'"^{vi}

With water-security as the founding mission, Wells for India and their partners also build schools for girls as well as boys, educate women in basic medical knowledge, and empower men's and women's self-help groups towards income production and micro-loans. Ancestral lands are cared for once again because adults no longer need to leave the villages for exploitative labor in the mines. Throughout the work of the NGOs can be seen the Gandhian principles of *sarvodaya*, meaning "all rising, but the last person first," as well as *ramraj*, meaning "all is well in the village"—human and natural resources together.

Keeping Wisdom Alive

In contrast to the government's massive water projects, Wells' partners are recovering the "dying wisdom" of the desert where communities held responsibility for water in common.^{vii} With the monsoon arriving for such a short and intense period, traditional water harvesting means collecting the rain in simple structures to last during the long months of dryness. Rainwater harvesting, therefore, becomes everyone's business, with a new approach to governance as well—a participatory form of governance rather than a top-down bureaucratic one.^{viii} As Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain of the Center for Science and Environment explain, "Water has been harvested in India since antiquity... Some of the answers to this crisis may lie in our own traditions, in the hands of our communities, and at a pretty low cost."^{ix}

A paradigm shift is occurring in Rajasthan as people recover the small-scale, local water harvesting practices. Emerging evidence shows that community management of traditional systems ensures the basic minimum requirements of all village members can be met. The old desert wisdom focuses on small natural watersheds, collecting rainwater where it falls and then conserving it carefully. In Rajasthan, rainwater is not just a resource, but a sacred gift, so every drop flows with blessing. Starting up in the hills, small stone gully-plugs retain the rain, which then seeps into the soil and recharges the aquifers and wells. These moist plots can then be planted with indigenous mustard or other less water-intensive crops (than green-

revolution species). Farther down the watershed, larger stone structures create pools that foster tree-restoration and new habitats for animals and birds. In the Thar Desert, the NGOs help communities de-silt the *naadis* or village ponds, build *khadins* across the lower ends of fields, and install underground cement cisterns, or *taankas*, for each village family. Fortunately, no longer is the dying wisdom of the desert, dying.

The Sorrowing Spirit

As the rest of our group continued walking, Shashi Tyagi and I sat down at a resting place half-way up the immense sand dune. The Thar Desert air was clear and so good to breathe compared with the smoky dust of Jodhpur. After a morning of visiting villages in the Pabupura District, it seemed right to take a quiet moment of reflection. The sand was warm and slid easily off my fingers. Shashi remarked how special the sand was in the desert, that it was so soft and could be used to wash and dry things because the grains do not stick.

We looked out over the horizon, at the paucity of trees and bushes, and at the number of small white *taankas* grouped together throughout the sloping terrain. Shashi explained that the government considered this landscape to be barren-land, fit for no one but the landless people.

GRAVIS, the Gandhian organization founded by Shashi and her late husband, Laxmi Chand Tyagi, helped build the *taankas* in this area specifically as a water-commons for people without any other access.

I asked Shashi how she felt about this landscape—in one sense so stark and sad, yet in another sense, so beautiful. She looked down, tracing a large swirling figure in the sand. She said the Thar Desert is known for four S's: sand, sun, serpents, and sorrows. When she looked at the land, she felt sorrow. I tried to imagine looking at the land with the eyes of people to whom the Tyagis had worked so hard with over the years to bring dignity and hope. After several years of drought and the recent death of her husband, Shashi knows sorrow. But she also knows hope. She sees it in the faces of women who are "stepping into existence."^x

We saw the face of hope that morning in the village of Ramchilla, where we had stopped to visit a women's self-help group.

... rainwater is not just a resource, but a sacred gift, so every drop flows with blessing.

The women and their daughters gathered at the home of their leader who was teaching embroidery. Their finely-stitched pillow cases reflected earth-tone shades of the desert. No longer having to spend large portions of their day walking for water, the women could learn



For the people of India, the effects from the scarcity of water extend across all groups, castes, and classes.

*“With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation!”*

—Isaiah 12:3

this craft, and their daughters could attend the newly opened school.

Through someone’s invitation, a girl-child, seven years old, stood up to sing a song she had learned in school. From the moment we saw her first graceful gesture, her skillful hands and clear voice clearly captivated us. She sang and danced as though she knew she existed—and not only existed, but had a gift, a beautiful gift. In a landscape of sorrow, her song of hope caught the air.

Through the partnership between GRAVIS and Wells for India, *taankas* are built; skills are learned; and girls go to school; consequently, over time, community capacity-building grows. Amazing what something as basic as access to clean water can do.

Watching the faces of our group, I thought I saw Shashi smile.

I was smiling too. No wonder water is such a central image of hope in the heart of the Jewish and Christian wisdom traditions. Remember the song on the lips of the covenant people, wearily walking home from exile: “Oh, everyone who thirsts, come to the water” (Isaiah 55:1). Think of the yearning of John from the island of Patmos: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift” (Revelation: 22:17).

From water, everything does begin—including hope. The sorrowing Spirit takes flesh in this world, singing songs of hope for a global water commons. To think of these sacred longings as something about another world seems audacious in the light of this desert-day.

Sand, sun, serpents, and sorrows.
Singing, sewing, self-help, and Shashi.

By Water and the Spirit

Looking at Earth from space gives us the impression that water-security could never be a problem for human beings. But of the vast waters covering Earth, only 2.5 percent is consumable as freshwater, and of that, seventy percent is currently inaccessible in the form of snow, glaciers, icecaps, and permafrost. We may be a “blue planet,” but according to the United Nations, nearly 1.2 billion people live in regions without access to clean drinking water.^{vi} By the year 2025, the U.N. estimates that as many as two-thirds of Earth’s people will be living in conditions of serious water shortage, and one-third will be living with absolute water scarcity. As envi-



A young girl from the village of Ramchilla sings a song she has learned at school. “From the moment we saw her first graceful gesture, her skillful hands and clear voice clearly captivated us. She sang and danced as though she knew she existed—and not only existed, but had a gift, a beautiful gift. In a landscape of sorrow, her song of hope caught the air.”

ronmental activist Vandana Shiva claims, “The water crisis is the most pervasive, most severe, and most invisible dimension of the ecological devastation of the earth.”^{vii}

Now I have come back from the *pani-yatra* and stand again with my congregation around our font of blessing. The water I splash across the forehead of this child comes from the Mississippi River, and before that, the great rains and snows of northern Minnesota. Before that? I remember the green-growing watersheds of Rajasthan and I wonder—can Earth’s people restore the divine ecology of grace between the well-springs of our spiritual communities and the hope of a global water commons? How can we recover and construct what Ellen Armour calls “elemental theologies,” reconstituting ourselves as creatures of water, earth, air, and fire?^{viii} Gathered around the font of blessing, we speak the words of sustainable hope, yet now this ritual has become a congregational practice of sustainability. By water and the Spirit, we baptize this child into the Shalom of God, immersing her in the covenant of life’s flowing abundance. May we live into the hope of a world where all may come and drink.

The essayist serves as chaplain and director of the Wesley Center at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and is an alumni/ae council representative for Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

i Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2002), 139.

ii Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1996).

iii For more information, see the Website, www.wellsforindia.org.

iv Hayden Kantor, *Sitting on One Carpet: A Study on Community-Based Organizations in the Thar Desert, India* (Jodhpur, Rajasthan: Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti, 2006), 51.

v Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrow: Nature, Power and Memory in Rajasthan* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002).

vi Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 37.

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STRANGERS NO LONGER

Faithful Voices for Solidarity

BY MARK STEVEN MILES, MTS'07, AND EMILY KATE SNYDER, MTS'07

For their service to congregations and community agencies, the essayists received the 2008 Nella May Overby Memorial Award in Field Education at Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

In the summer of 2006, we traveled with a group of students and professors from Vanderbilt University Divinity School to the United States–Mexico border. The trip allowed us to observe the tragic consequences of an immigration system that has grown increasingly ineffectual.

Conversations with border patrol agents, immigration lawyers, environmentalists, political activists, and factory workers revealed a situation on the border that continues to be chaotic and unsustainable. In a discussion with Rick Ufford-Chase, founder of BorderLinks, the organization in Tucson that arranged our trip, we learned about the effects of NAFTA and other economic and political factors that drive migration from the South to the North. On a hike in the sweltering heat of the Sonoran Desert, we were told about the increased number of deaths occurring on the border as migrants attempt to cross the harsh and desolate wasteland of what is known by locals as El Camino del Diablo or the Devil’s Highway. We talked with workers in the maquiladoras—factories

owned by multinational corporations that produce goods for export—about the struggle to survive when earning only four dollars a day. We visited a center where detained children waited for the authorities to contact their parents. At a courthouse in Arizona, we witnessed a sentencing hearing for migrants who had been unable to elude the clutches of the U.S. Border Patrol. Each of these experiences was revelatory, but our last night in Mexico proved to be especially transformative.

We stayed at a Catholic shelter in the dry heat of Altar, a dusty town that has become a gathering place for migrants about to embark upon the perilous journey through the desert. The shelter provides migrants with necessities such as food, water, clothing, and lodging, as well as education about the dangers of the desert. We spent that last evening in Mexico with a group of migrants who were preparing to cross the border the following morning. We ate dinner, played soccer, and listened to their stories. Many were farmers who had traveled from southern Mexico after their crops had been destroyed by a natural disaster. The migrants told us that jobs were scarce, and the cost of food was

increasing everyday. They were crossing because they had to find a way to feed their families; others were crossing in hopes of being reunited with family members in the United States.

During dinner, we asked some of the migrants if they were scared. We asked them if they knew about the spiders and the rattlesnakes, the scorpions and the poisonous cacti. We asked them if they knew how far they would have to go, if they had proper shoes and enough food and water to last through the journey. We knew that over 3,000 migrants had died in the desert since

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1994. It seemed that many did not realize the risk they were taking in crossing the desert. Others expressed an admirable courage; however, their eyes betrayed their fear. Some were clearly anxious about the journey they were undertaking. We tried to share with the migrants our concern for their safety, but we knew that our protests were futile. They

were determined to cross because they were desperate. For them, it was not a question of volition. Tragic economic and environmental circumstances had disallowed the possibility of real choice. The life-threatening situations in their home countries had forced them to move in order to survive.

We awoke early the next morning hoping to say good-bye to our new acquaintances, but they had gotten up hours before, packed their belongings, and set off on the dangerous trek through the Sonoran Desert. Our minds were heavy. We prayed quietly to ourselves as we thought about the migrants hiking in the blazing heat of the desert sun. Would they survive? Would they be apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol? If they succeeded in crossing the border, would all their hopes and dreams be realized, or would they continue to suffer as they had before they started their journey? These questions lingered in our minds as we sat in the refreshing comfort of the air-conditioned van, passed uneventfully through the border checkpoints, and reentered the United States. The ease with which we crossed the border was disconcerting as we contemplated the unimaginable difficulties faced by the migrants.

After everything we had learned about border-crossing and the risk of death, imprisonment, starvation, and abuse, we could not shake the images of those with whom we had played, laughed, and cried. Our personal encounter with the distress of the migrants instilled within us a deep concern for their struggle. The relationships that we formed that last evening in Mexico awakened a desire to make others aware of the desperate conditions that drive the movement of people into the United States and challenged us as people of faith to act on behalf of immigrants here in Tennessee.

My Neighborhood and My Language

After returning to Nashville, we were devastated to learn that the suffering experienced by immigrants continued even after they had escaped the economic deprivation of their home countries and had withstood the dangers of the desert. The plight of immigrant peoples was worsening as anti-immigrant sentiments were becoming more prevalent and hateful actions against immigrants were



Emily Snyder and Steven Miles founded "Strangers No Longer: Faithful Voices for Solidarity" to deconstruct the walls enclosing The Other and to construct bridges between faith communities and immigrant communities.

increasing. A man in southeast Tennessee was indicted on charges of building pipe bombs that he planned to put on buses carrying Hispanic workers. Several Hispanic women were fired from a fast food restaurant in Nashville after complaining of being sexually harassed by their boss. Rocks had been thrown through the windows, and swastikas spray-painted on the walls of a Mexican store near Knoxville. In southern Kentucky, a Hispanic family had awakened one morning to find a burning cross on their lawn and a sign that read, "In my country, maybe. In my neighborhood, never." At an anti-immigration rally in Williamson County, the crowd erupted into cheers when a right-wing talk radio host suggested that the U.S. should just shoot anybody caught crossing the border illegally.

While these are extreme examples of bigotry, the anti-immigrant movement in Tennessee has not been limited to the actions of a few hateful individuals. Bills began to be drafted in the state and local legislatures that were specifically designed to cause hardship for the immigrant community. An *alumnus* of Vanderbilt University introduced a bill into the Metro Council that would require all

communications and publications produced by the state government to be in English. Members of an organization known as Nashville English First contend that eighty-three percent of Nashvillians believe the city government's official language should be English and are attempting to amend the Metropolitan Charter on November 4, 2008, to ensure that "no person shall have a right to government services in any other language." Another bill was introduced that would require landlords, real estate agents, employers, and even neighbors to report someone if they "looked" illegal while another would confiscate all earned wages and benefits from workers that entered the United States without documentation. Much of this legislation is targeted specifically at the undocumented immigrant population; nevertheless, it affects all immigrants, regardless of their status—guest workers, asylum seekers, refugees, legal permanent residents, and even citizens of the United States. These bills inflict suffering on a segment of our society that is already under duress. At the same time, bills like these make it clear that many do not view immigration as an issue that requires a moral response.

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Transformed by our experience on the United States–Mexico border and distressed by the prevalence of anti-immigrant sentiments in Tennessee, we began to reflect ethically and theologically on the immigration issue. We believed that as people of faith our reflection had to begin by engaging the concrete realities of human suffering. Our awareness of the injustices experienced by people on both sides of the border began to shape our thinking about the issue. In Mexico, we had encountered immigrants whose survival depended upon leaving their homeland and entering a country where they would be forced to live in the shadows, disconnected from the dominant culture and existing in a perpetual state of fear. Here in Tennessee, we spoke with a young Guatemalan man whose eyes brimmed with tears as he told us about how he could not understand why people here in Nashville would not smile or say hello to him in the grocery store. A little girl in the first grade admitted to being scared of the police because they "might send her daddy away." These instances of suffering continued to shape our position on the immigration issue. As Dana Willbanks, professor of Christian ethics at Iliff School of Theology, asserts, "Encounter with the personal presence of migrants is primary. The cry of the migrant for protection, assistance, or admission is the central moral question."

Members of the Household of God

We believe that as people of faith we have a moral responsibility to welcome the stranger. When we touch the hand of the stranger, we touch the hand of God. When we meet people willing to cross hundreds, even thousands of miles on the back of a train or trudge through the sand under the crushing heat of the desert sun, we remember the God who delivered the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. When we open our arms to those among us who speak a different language,

perhaps we are welcoming an angel in disguise. We believe that in these moments of hospitality to the stranger, we are living out the love that our faith requires. It is for these reasons that we founded Strangers No Longer. We wanted to build bridges between faith communities and immigrant communities in our city. We wanted to see people who believe in a God of justice and hospitality extending that very same mercy to some of the most rejected people of our time. Moved by the power of our experiences and dismayed by the demoralizing treatment of immigrants in our city, we began our ministry. Our hope was nothing less than to bring the hands of the people of God together with the hands of the stranger.

We have been astonished by the unpredictable and serendipitous way in which this

initiative—a project that was started as a field education placement—has grown and developed. As part of the curriculum for the master of divinity degree at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, students are required to participate in three semesters of field education. After meeting several times with Professor Viki Matson, the director of the field education program, we decided to begin working together on a project that would address the immigration issue with communities of faith in Nashville. Because this was the first time the Divinity School had allowed two students to start an initiative as a field education placement, Professor Matson suggested that we work with three advisors: Reverend Sharon Howell, the director of the Scarritt-Bennett Center; Sister Kathleen Flood, O.P., a Dominican nun and the director of Still Point; and Harmon Wray, director of the Vanderbilt Program in Faith and Criminal Justice and a long-time activist in the Nashville community and whose recent death represents a profound loss for the Divinity School.

With a strong commitment to justice,



A bridge connects Mexico to the United States in this crayon drawing by fourteen-year-old Zyanya who was tutored by Divinity School student Deanna Froeber, MDiv3. Students who enroll in the course Latino/a Religion and Culture, taught by Professors Elena Olazagasti-Segovia and Fernando Segovia, are required to participate in service-learning projects with families in Nashville's Hispanic community.



equality, and racial reconciliation, the Scarritt-Bennett Center seemed the appropriate place to begin our placement. Reverend Howell allowed us to use office and meeting space at Scarritt-Bennett; but most importantly, she provided us with invaluable pastoral guidance and a profound understanding of our ministry as it relates to the church. Harmon had worked on justice-related issues in the South for over thirty-five years, so his insight into the struggle of addressing a volatile topic was indispensable. Sister Kathleen asked us difficult theological questions and helped us maintain balance in our spiritual lives. Each of our advisors had a valuable perspective to offer, and we remain deeply grateful for their wisdom and counsel.

We began our placement by meeting those already involved with the immigration issue in Nashville. Our goal was to familiarize ourselves with the issues and to discover ways in which we could create change. Deciding on the particular steps to take in building our organization was time-consuming and often frustrating. For several months, we struggled with identifying the direction we wanted to go. It seemed an inordinate amount of time was spent in discussions about what to do and when to do it. As the angry voices of intolerance grew louder in Nashville, we felt a deep sense of urgency to act, but we felt as if we were accomplishing little. Frustration continued to build, and during this difficult time, we realized the importance of naming ourselves, of defining an identity. After much deliberation, we decided upon Strangers No Longer: Faithful Voices for Solidarity. The name is based on Ephesians 2:19; "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." We felt the name reflected our desire to welcome all people as part of

this community and God's Creation. As allies with immigrants in their struggle for justice, we believed it was important to express our hopes for faithful solidarity between immigrants and non-immigrants. The name seemed not only to define our identity, but also to help in the clarification of our organization's mission. Not long after taking this important step, we received our first opportunity to discuss faith and immigration issues at a church in Nashville.

One of the objectives of Strangers No Longer is to provide opportunities for education and dialogue about immigration. During the last year we have given presentations about our trip to the border, taught Sunday school classes, and led Wednesday night Bible studies on faith and immigration. Our goal in offering these educational opportunities is not only to provide information, but also to challenge people of faith to reflect on immigration through the lens of theology—to ask how our faith affects the position we have taken on the issue.

In these presentations, we have used the Bible as our primary source for a theological and ethical understanding of the immigration issue. For Jews and Christians, it is through the narratives and teachings of the biblical texts that the individual and the community come to know God and understand their moral responsibility in relation to God and the world in which they live. There is, however, always the possibility that the Scriptures will be read to suit the interests of the dominant culture. In order to avoid such an effect, we believe that the Bible must be read with openness to new possibilities of interpreting the texts. This can occur when one reads the text and listens carefully for the voice of the outsider. Knowing that the experience of immigrants is most often that of an outsider, our reading of Scripture has been grounded in

an attempt to take seriously their powerlessness and disenfranchisement and account for the very real possibility that traditional interpretations of the text have discounted the suffering of displaced persons.

The Hebrew Bible provides us with dramatic insight into the biblical mandate to treat the migrant person with respect and dignity. In the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded to "love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:20). Likewise, they are told, "You shall not deprive a resident alien...of justice" (Deuteronomy 24:17), and "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land...because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). These passages emphasize that God is concerned about the well-being and survival of migrant persons. God demands that they be treated justly and fairly, with love and with compassion. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus states that the commandment to love one's neighbor is second only to that of loving God. In Matthew 25, Jesus indicates that offering hospitality to the stranger is one of the ways by which the individual is granted entrance into the realm of God. If we take seriously an interpretation of Scripture that listens to the voice of the outsider, then we cannot dismiss these passages and their relevance for the contemporary issue of immigration in the United States.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, stories about sojourners and strangers are granted a particular place of honor. We call to mind the suffering experienced by the Hebrews as foreigners in the land of Egypt and remember that God delivered the oppressed migrants from slavery. Christians recall the New Testament story of Jesus' birth. Like the immigrant, Jesus was born outside of his homeland. Like the refugee, Jesus and his family were displaced by political and religious persecution. In our presentations, we have asked, what is the importance of these ancient stories for us today? How is our understanding of these narratives revealed in our position on immigration and in our treatment of the immigrant?

Too often, the narratives and teachings of Scripture are ignored when it comes to discussions of immigration. In our work with

local congregations, we have found that the majority of participants are evaluating immigration as primarily a political and economic issue. Viewpoints on the issue are derived through a calculated analysis of costs and benefits. People want to know how immigrants are going to benefit or burden our society. Immigrants are assessed according to their value, whether it is economic, political, or cultural. While we recognize that it is important to consider the societal ramifications of an influx of newcomers into the United States, we argue that determining an ethical position on immigration should not be limited to the widely varied and often disingenuous claims of economists and politicians. As people of faith, we must employ the wisdom of our religious traditions as we attempt to construct a viable stance on the issue.

Handshakes and Slammed Doors

We believe that the biblical texts can positively shape one's moral perception of immigrants as well as provide the grounds for an appropriate ethical response. In our presentations, we have argued that people of faith cannot settle for perspectives on immigration that do not take into account our moral responsibility to love and welcome the stranger. Economic and political arguments are not sufficient for a faithful dialogue on the issue of immigration. We have suggested that we cannot dehumanize migrant peoples by subjecting them to a utilitarian calculus. We must begin with the recognition that immigrants are persons created in the image of God, loved by God, and related to all of us as members of God's global community.

Making such claims has initiated varied responses; some are supportive and encouraging while others are hostile and antagonistic. We have been approached with handshakes, hugs, and admonitions about our responsibility to continue the fight against oppression and injustice. We were surprised to hear one woman say that our work had renewed her faith in the church. On several occasions, however, we

have been stunned by the indifference and resistance we have encountered.

We taught a Sunday school lesson to a progressive congregation in Nashville last autumn. The topic was the increased number of migrant deaths occurring on the border between the United States and Mexico. During a conversation about the possible passage of new laws that would make the assistance of an undocumented person a crime, we asked how a person of faith might respond if an immigrant were in need of help. One individual scoffed, "If a Mexican immigrant is dying at the border, it's not my responsibility. Everyone dies, you know."

During a Wednesday night Bible study several months later at another church, a discussion arose about theological responses to the presence of Latino gangs in the city. One man leaned back in his chair and nonchalantly informed us that he believed that gang members were not worthy of a Christian response. We asked him to clarify his statement, and he very calmly stated that gang members deserved to die. "It's quite simple and that's all there is to it," he said, with a satisfied expression on his face. On yet

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another occasion, during a question and answer session in a church, an individual became so angry with our assertions about the theological implications of the issue that he stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

What causes this disturbing conduct? What conditions or circumstances promote thoughts, words, and actions that seem to disregard the moral teachings of our religious traditions? While we have been dismayed by such callousness and animosity, we are reminded that each one of us is capable of this kind of behavior. It seems that there is a prevailing human tendency to identify closely with groups of which we are a part; conversely, we are suspicious or fearful of those belonging to unfamiliar groups. The strangers among us are often feared because they are unfamiliar. This fear of the

other is especially present with regards to the immigration issue in the United States. Enhanced by misinformation and media sound-bites, this fear has become predominant in some parts of the country, especially in the South. Tennessee has seen dramatic changes in demographic composition over the last decade. Middle Tennessee is home to residents of more than 80 different nationalities including the largest concentration of Kurdish nationals living outside their homeland as well as a growing population of immigrants from Africa and the Ukraine. The Hispanic population is among the fastest growing, having increased by over 400 percent between 1990 and 2000. While these demographic shifts undoubtedly present challenges, it is absolutely unacceptable to allow them to result in increased anger, hostility, and even violence towards immigrant persons in our state.

The contentious reactions of the congregants reveal the unquestionable need for a more fully developed moral discussion. While unsettling, these experiences have helped us to understand the perspective of many people in area congregations and have given us much-needed insight into their thoughts on the immigration issue. As founders of Strangers No Longer, our hope is to create avenues for dialogue

and to offer a calm and pastoral presence when discussing a topic that seems to become increasingly volatile with each passing day. We believe that participation in reasonable and civil conversations about immigration can begin the process of eliminating intolerance and anger. What is most important in the facilitation of a dialogue is respect for one another, even in the face of stark disagreement. Conflict is inevitable, especially when debating an issue as heated as immigration, but perhaps this exchange can result in the growth of a community that is compassionate and thoughtful rather than reactionary and combative.

Learn, Act and Pray

Last fall, we began working with Clergy for Tolerance—a coalition of community organi-

zations, individuals, and religious leaders—to organize a series of breakfasts inviting clergy and laypersons to reflect upon what their respective faith traditions have to say about welcoming the stranger. The goal was to mobilize religious leaders to engage in edifying and theologically sound conversations in their congregations on the topic of immigration, as well as take a firm stand against intolerance, discrimination, and injustice in our community. We believed these breakfasts could provide religious leaders with inspiration and resources to address the immigration issue in their congregations.

In our conversations with clergy persons from many different backgrounds, we learned that they recognized the need to take action; however, many of them said that while they understood the importance of the topic, they did not feel they had enough information to take a definitive position. Others said that they were not sure how to address this very emotionally charged and divisive issue in their congregations.

We decided to compile a curriculum for clergy to use in their churches, synagogues, and mosques. In developing the curriculum, we felt we could provide the necessary resources for clergy to begin or continue having this conversation in their congregations. Included in the lesson plans were sample sermons, Scriptural references, prayers, and a section on myths and facts about immigration. We also included denominational statements and creative possibilities for incorporating the issue into the liturgy. Finally, we composed a list of actions that were focused on options for learning, acting, and praying.

We are positive about the future of Strangers No Longer as it continues to grow with the help of our many supporters. We have recently agreed to work with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) as a program of their Welcoming Tennessee Initiative. This partnership will enable us to learn more about the daily operation of a non-profit organization, as well as to create more opportunities for presenting our ideas in a variety of settings. By contributing to the coalition's Web site, www.tnimmigrant.org, we hope to provide access to resources for discussing the issue from a faith perspective, as well as information regarding current local and

national legislation, human rights and border issues, and cultural and political events involving the immigrant community. Our intention is to include various expressions of faith and immigration by archiving links of relevant news articles, poetry, short stories, film reviews, photography, and art. We also

The walls that are most dangerous in our society are those that disconnect us from our own humanity and from the humanity of others. Building these walls is a sin against the God of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger.

will post regular theological reflections on the immigration issue and provide space for discussion on those reflections.

Our immediate goal is to continue providing opportunities for theological education on immigration in the community. Having recognized that there is very little communication among groups from differing religious backgrounds, we would like to develop more avenues for cross-denominational and inter-religious dialogue on this issue. We are working again with the Scarritt-Bennett Center to develop a series of community discussions on immigration as part of their Diversity and Dialogue program. We hope to continue working with the Clergy for Tolerance group on addressing ways in which clergy can actively respond to issues related to faith and immigration. With the recent failure of comprehensive immigration reform in the Senate, we know that state and local governments will feel pressed to address the issue by resurrecting anti-immigrant bills from the previous session and creating new bills to restrict the rights of immigrants. We urgently want our community to be aware of the unintended consequences of anti-immigrant bills on American citizens and immigrants. We plan to increase our efforts to help faithful people understand the effects of the legislation on our immigrant neighbors. In the future, we hope to invite Vanderbilt Divinity students interested in faith and immigration issues to work with us as part of their field education placements. We also hope to expand our ministry into western Tennessee in the coming months.

In a discussion about the involvement of religious communities in the struggle for human rights, Harmon Wray suggested we read Philip Hallie's book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, the story of Le Chambon, a small

Protestant town in southern France. Under the courageous leadership of the local pastor, André Trocmé, Le Chambon's citizens and clergy organized and risked their lives to save thousands of Jews from death during the four years of the Nazi occupation of France. Inspired by Trocmé's teachings on

the non-violent witness of Jesus and a belief in the preciousness of all human life, the villagers of Le Chambon were willing to jeopardize their own lives to protect the imperiled lives of the Jewish refugees. For the people of Le Chambon, the decision was not a difficult one to make. They simply did what they believed was right. When asked about their actions on behalf of the Jewish people, one villager responded, "Things had to be done, and we happened to be there to do them. It was the most natural thing in the world to help these people."

As immigrants in our communities are subjected to increasing discrimination and violence, we are inspired by the exemplary actions of André Trocmé and the citizens of Le Chambon. We believe that religious leaders here in Tennessee have the capability to effect change in the minds and hearts of faithful people and to inspire respect for the dignity of all human life. We see these leaders in the role of André Trocmé, providing the members of their churches, synagogues, and mosques with a foundation of moral strength and courage that will enable a resistance to the racism, prejudice, and hatred that too often surround the issue of immigration. We believe that people of faith will respond, as did the villagers of Le Chambon, by taking action on behalf of the suffering and extend hospitality to the strangers in our midst.

An Architecture of the Imagination

Last summer, on our trip to the border, we passed through a hot and dusty Mexican city called Nogales. In downtown Nogales, there is an ominous steel wall that slices through the city and separates it from U.S. territory.

On the wall, scrawled in blue spray paint, were the words "Las paredes giradas de lado son puentes." In English, the phrase translates, "Walls turned sideways are bridges." Hanging near these painted words were white crosses, bearing the names of those who had died while attempting the dangerous journey through the desert. These unfortunate travelers are the victims of a war that rages in the dusty pueblos of northern Mexico and in the shining skyscrapers of Wall Street. They are the casualties of a battle that is being fought in the jungles of Chiapas and in the gardens of the Hamptons.

We stood there, staring at the message painted on the border wall. We tried to speak about everything we were seeing; about the wall, the crosses, the graffiti, but words seemed hollow and irreverent. We were stunned because the person who painted these words on this foreboding metal wall had hope—hope for the possibility of change.

Discussions about building or reinforcing walls at the border are commonplace, but we believe the walls that are the greatest cause for concern are not limited to physical barriers. They are not limited to the steel walls that cut through the urban landscapes of Mexico and the United States or to the barbed wire fences that appear sporadically in the burning sands of the Sonoran Desert. The walls that we have constructed in our own minds are much more dangerous than these. They are the walls that divide the rich from the poor, the haves from the have-nots. They are the walls that block our vision of the poverty and degradation of the other side, that shield us from the tragic reality of those living in the shadows in our own country, that separate us from people of different races, classes, and cultures, that disallow communication with those that do not

share our opinions. They are the walls that separate us from our selves, from others, and from God.

The walls that are most dangerous in our society are those that disconnect us from our own humanity and from the humanity of others. Building these walls is a sin against the God of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. It is our hope that those walls that have been constructed out of hatred and intolerance will collapse. We hope that in their place, bridges can be built that will transform divisive arguments into reasonable discussions. We need dialogue, and this dialogue should take place among others inside and outside of our churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques. Through loving the neighbor and welcoming the stranger, we will turn sideways the walls of fear and prejudice. We must have hope—as did the one who spray-painted



Underscoring a row of memorial crosses on a border wall constructed from leftover scrap metal from Desert Storm, the message "Las paredes giradas de lado son puentes." may be translated in English as "Walls turned sideways are bridges."

the message on the border wall—that walls will become bridges as we recognize that each person is a child of God and deserves to be treated as such. We must take the chance, no matter how risky it may seem, and step out onto these bridges. If we fail to recognize this opportunity, the walls of sin

will continue to rise until we can no longer see the hopeful vision of a future where the humanity and dignity of all people is respected and cherished.

To receive a copy of the curriculum for Strangers No Longer, please send your request to divinityspire@vanderbilt.edu.

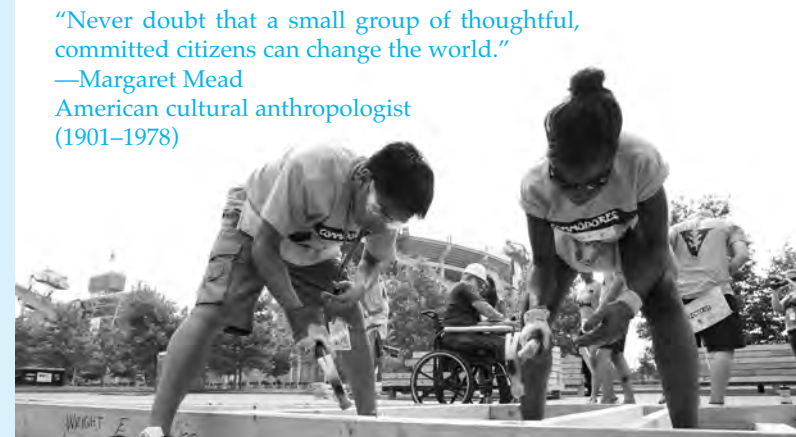
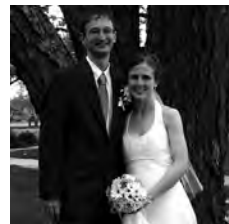
Mark Steven Miles was born and reared in Richmond, Virginia, and received his baccalaureate in religious studies in 2002 from Virginia Commonwealth University. He and his wife Amanda spent eight months working at a nutrition center in El Progreso, Honduras, assisting in the rehabilitation of severely malnourished children. This experience deepened his understanding of the tragic and impoverished conditions in which most Latin Americans live and helped him to understand why so many choose to migrate to the U.S. Upon returning to Richmond, Steven began working with the Latino/a immigrant population, aiding them in the daily struggle of living in a foreign country. He also began volunteering with Catholic Charities, helping refugee families from Liberia resettle in the United States. His personal experiences with immigrants and refugees inspired in him a compassion for displaced peoples and a strong desire to assist them in their struggle for justice.

Emily Snyder was reared in Deland, Florida, and earned her baccalaureate in religious studies with a minor in oboe performance at Stetson University. Before matriculating at Vanderbilt Divinity School in 2005, she worked in the Florida office of the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM), a non-profit organization that works with farm workers as they struggle in the fields for fair wages and human rights. Her compassion for the plight of migrant workers continues. During her studies at the Divinity School she coordinated two visits to Nashville by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers during their Taco Bell and McDonald's Truth Tours as they struggle for fair wages. Helping to promote solidarity between the church and farm workers with the NFWM, as well as her experiences at the border with fellow Divinity students, are the primary and formative experiences that continue to nurture her passion for the ministry and work of Strangers No Longer: Faithful Voices for Solidarity. She now resides in Memphis, Tennessee, where she works to expand Strangers No Longer to western Tennessee while pursuing a certificate in teaching English as a second language.

Alumni/ae Class Notes

Please note: Class Notes appear only in the printed version of this publication.





“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.”
—Margaret Mead
American cultural anthropologist
(1901–1978)

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Administration, Faculty,
Staff, and Friends

James Barr, of Glasgow, Scotland, Vanderbilt University Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible, *emeritus*, on October 14, 2006, in Claremont California, at the age of 82. Prior to his tenure at Vanderbilt University Divinity School from 1989–1998, Barr served as the Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture and as the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University. His most influential work is *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, published in 1961, in which he exposes serious problems with the linguistic theories and exegetical methods prevalent in Biblical scholarship. In addition to his philological scholarship, Barr also criticized the Christian fundamentalist approach to Biblical interpretation as irresponsible. He will be remembered by his colleagues and *alumni/ae* of the Divinity School and the Graduate Department of religion as a gracious gentleman, scholar, and educator of the highest calibre. He is survived by his wife, Professor Jane Barr; a daughter, Catherine; and two sons, Allan and Stephen.



photograph by Steve Green

Monroe J. Carell Jr., BE'59, member of the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust and namesake of Children's Hospital, on June 20, 2008, in Nashville, Tennessee, at the age of 76, from the effects of cancer. The former chairman and chief executive officer of Central Parking Corporation, he provided strong leadership for Vanderbilt initiatives and



other charitable causes throughout the community. "I cannot overstate the impact he has had on Vanderbilt's past, present, and future," said Vanderbilt Chancellor Nicholas S. Zeppos. "Through his philanthropic generosity, Monroe established one of the finest children's hospitals in the country and created scholarships that changed the lives of students. He led Vanderbilt's

Shape the Future campaign with a vigor and passion that only he could possess, and he challenged us to reach higher in our goals for this great university."

photograph courtesy of Vanderbilt University News Service

William Carrington Finch, dean of Vanderbilt University Divinity School from 1961 to 1964, on June 13, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee, at the age of 97. Dean Finch's tenure at the Divinity School began after the expulsion of student and Civil Rights Movement leader James Lawson. "It is very hard for us today to appreciate the difficulty and tension the Lawson affair produced at Vanderbilt," states **Frank Gulley, PhD'61**, professor of church history, *emeritus*. "Bill Finch came at a time when it was crucial to win the support of the faculty and, at the same time, hold the support of the administration for the Divinity School. He was able to do that in fundamental ways. He was very tall, an elegant human being," remembers Gulley. "He very much looked the part and was a superb administrator who inspired confidence." Finch's other accomplishments, as documented in *Vanderbilt Divinity School: Education, Contest, and Change*, edited by Dale A. Johnson, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, *emeritus*, include establishing stronger connections with the Methodist Church, securing support for a chaplaincy position at the University's hospital, and assisting in the creation of the University chaplaincy. Finch is survived by his wife, Lucy Bedinger Finch, and sons William Tyree Finch and Richard Carrington Finch.



photograph courtesy of Vanderbilt Register

Marguerite Jones Folkerth, of Birmingham, Alabama, on August 29, 2006, at the age of 102. Thirty years ago, she and her husband, Jesse Holland Folkerth, BA'24, established two trusts for educating men and women preparing for parish ministry. Sixty *alumni/ae* of the Divinity School have been the beneficiaries of their generosity. Mrs. Folkerth's passion for music was evident through her service as organist for the congregations at Ensley Presbyterian Church, the Sixth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and Kirkwood by the River Chapel.



Helene Frances Gregory Patterson, of Tupelo, Mississippi, on October 4, 2006. She endowed the Gregory-Patterson Scholarship in memory of her father, an *alumnus* of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, and her husband, whom she described as a "minister by avocation." During the Service of Death and Resurrection to commemorate the life of Ms. Patterson, who devoted her life to education, **Jack Reed Jr., BA'73**, eulogized her by remarking, "As a teacher, she raised the bar—told us we were bright enough to jump over it—and so, time after time, we did—because she *said* we could. In her eyes, all her children were smart and capable—we just needed the confidence and encouragement to believe it, and that encouragement came first, and always, from her. But eventually the confidence began to come from within, and that, perhaps, is her greatest gift to us, her students: she helped us to find ourselves. She enriched our lives by the arts, language, and literature, and because we have traveled with curiosity and continue to this day to have an appetite for learning, we are hopeful we have brought the honor to her she deserves."

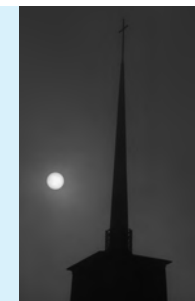
photograph courtesy of Julian Carroll, *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*

David K. "Pat" Wilson, BA'41, of Nashville, Tennessee, on May 20, 2007, at the age of 87. Former chairman and life member of the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust, Wilson played a significant role in every major University fund-raising effort in the past four decades. "It would be impossible to overstate Pat Wilson's impact on Vanderbilt and on Nashville," remarked former Chancellor Gordon Gee. "His commitment to the University



touched, literally, every corner and every aspect of this campus, from buildings to scholarships to faculty chairs." Among the professorships endowed by the Wilson family is the Anne Potter Wilson Distinguished Professor of American Religious History currently held by James Hudnut-Beumler, dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School. The endowed chair is named in honor of Wilson's first wife who died in 1986. "Pat Wilson gave wise counsel to generations of Vanderbilt chancellors and board chairmen. He connected Vanderbilt with the community and the community with Vanderbilt," stated Martha R. Ingram, current chairman of the Vanderbilt Board of Trust.

photograph courtesy of Vanderbilt Register



The members of the administration, faculty, and staff of Vanderbilt University Divinity School extend their condolences to Theresa McGee Hook, R.N., a staff member of the School of Nursing school-based clinic program, and **William (Bill) John Hook, PhD'92**, director of the Divinity School library and professor of theological bibliography, upon the passing of their daughter, Samantha Kathleen Hook Barwick (December 3, 1981 – November 25, 2007).

In the next issue of

THE SPIRE

Robin M. Jensen, the Luce Chancellor's Professor of the History of Christian Art and Worship, researches and interprets a curious painting that students see from a stairwell in the Divinity School.

Musician Julie Delane Hight, the 2008 Founder's Medalist of the Divinity School, explores spirituality among Americana women.



Turner Scholar Matthew Charles Horton commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of Benton Chapel.

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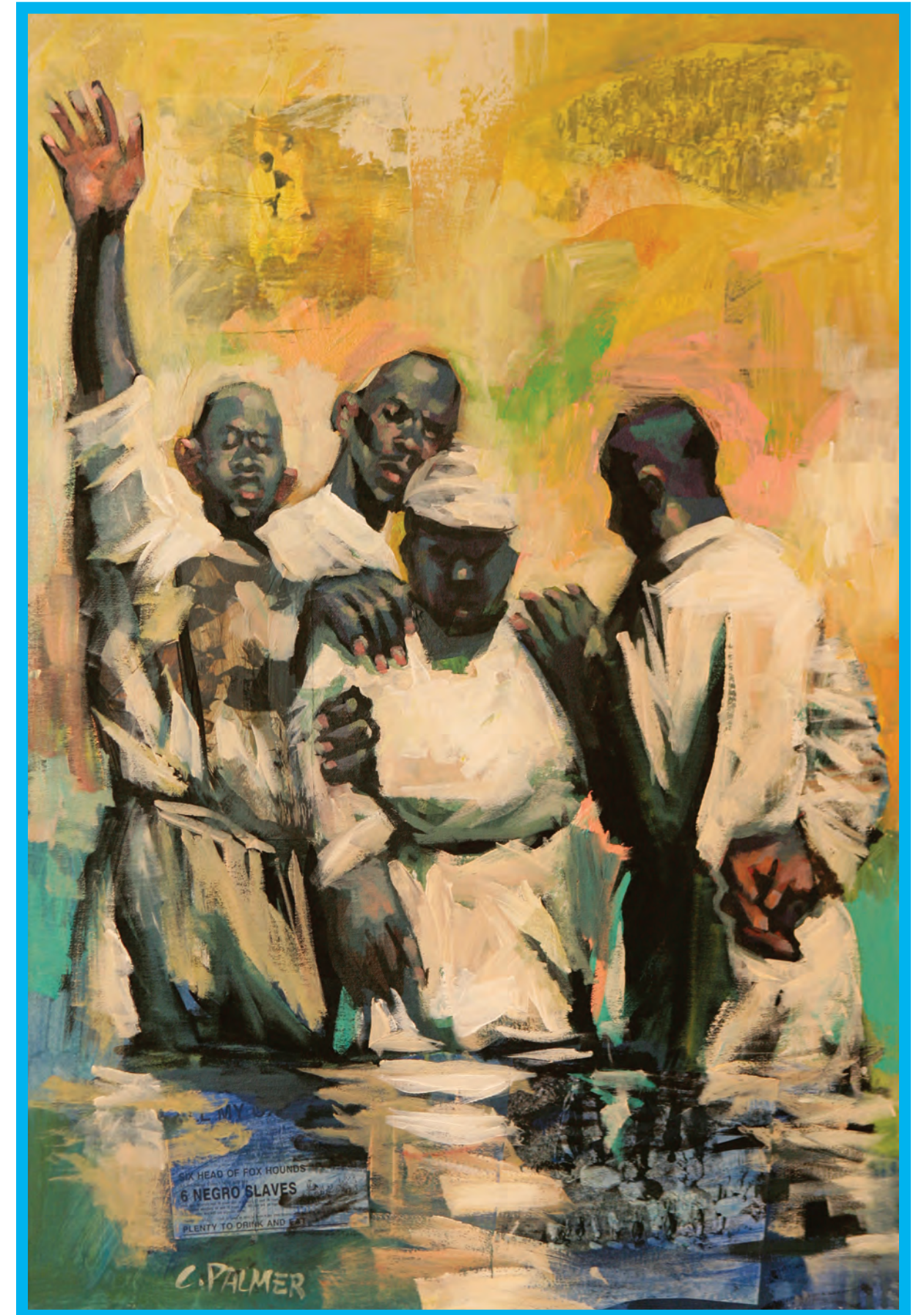
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1927 Baptism
2006
by Charly Palmer
American
(born 1960, Fayette, Alabama)
mixed media collage on canvas
36" x 24"
Vanderbilt University Divinity School

photographed by Daniel Dubois

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from “The Commencement Address to the Class of 2008”



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