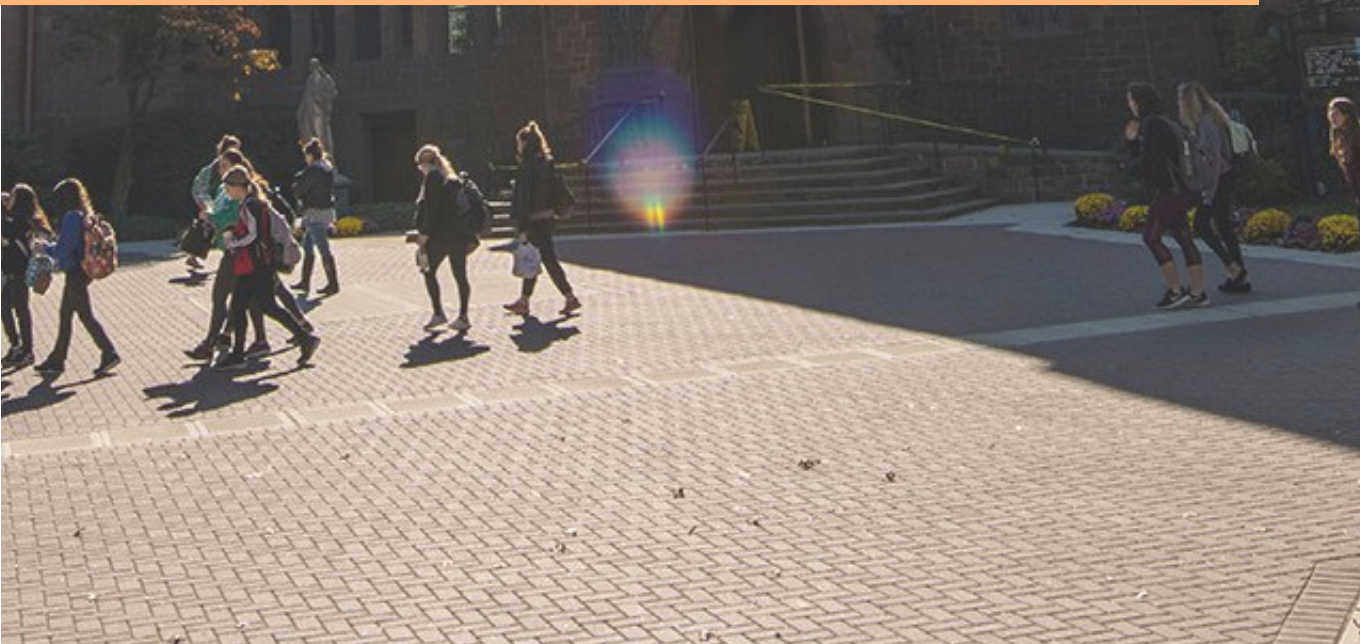

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THE HEART OF THE HALL



The student publication for the Office of Mission and Ministry

Editor's Note

The end of summer is a time of transition. As the air turns cooler, students return home from vacations, wrap up summer jobs, move back to school dorms and begin their adjustment to the semester's new routines. This year, as Seton Hall University makes the switch back to in-person learning after a whole year online, the energy and excitement on campus is palpable. Transition is re-invigorating; it has the power of reminding us who we are.

Likewise, "The Heart of The Hall" is now entering a transition period of our own. Our wonderful Editor-in-Chief of Layout, Bridgette Favale, is stepping down from her position to begin training a new cohort of design editors. We can't thank her enough for pouring her talents and creativity into "The Heart of The Hall" these past three years.

This coming semester will also be my last as Editor-in-Chief of Content. I am endlessly grateful for the opportunity to lead and learn from such a hard-working, dedicated team. Nevertheless, I am equally excited to pass on the torch, confident that "The Heart of the Hall"'s mission to express the beauty and relevance of the Faith to Seton Hall students will continue to unfold.

To complement the spirit of transition within our own publication, the summer 2021 issue highlights the core values that will always remain even amid change. The pieces in this edition take us back to our roots, reflecting on how the Catholic worldview, no matter where it is

found- at a University, on a mission trip, or in the pages of a memoir- practically impacts the people immersed in it.

First introducing this theme is our very own Ben Jaros, founder of "The Heart of The Hall" and a recent Seton Hall graduate. With his new perspective as an alumnus, Jaros offers his response to the question of what sets Seton Hall apart in terms of the real effects its Catholic mission has on the lives of its students.

Isabel Condon conducts an interview with Msgr. Anthony Ziccardi, former Vice President of Mission and Ministry, Secretary Designee of the Board of Regents, and professor of Biblical Studies. In discussing his own vocational path and encouraging students to explore Theology regardless of their major, Msgr. Ziccardi gives his insight into the unique value of a Catholic education.

Next, I share my experience participating in a mission trip to Appalachia, Kentucky, this summer with Seton Hall's FOCUS chapter (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). From start to finish, this trip taught me that cultivating fellowship is crucial for living out the faith, and led me to appreciate the many avenues by which we as Seton Hall students can grow together in our seeking to know and love the Lord.

James Unciano writes on the fleeting nature of time and our all-too-human tendency to let precious moments, meant to be treasured, slip by unawares. In light of the many future moments with loved ones now lost to the Covid-19 pandemic, Unciano's poem calls us to live in the present, trusting God's divine plan without regret for a past we cannot

change.

Finally, Christina Murphy reviews Bryan Stevenson's memoir "Just Mercy." Murphy reflects on how the author's definition of justice and clemency coincides with Catholic teaching, and how we and those around us can choose hope and mercy in the face of brokenness in the world and in each other.

We hope you enjoy this late summer issue. While its tone is retrospective, its content is timeless, examining the concrete difference that a Catholic identity, wherever we encounter and build it up, can make in our day to day lives.

Be well and God Bless,

Emma Newgarden
Editor-in-Chief of Content



Contents

3 **What Difference
Does a Catholic
University Make?**
Ben Jaros

4 **Interview with
Fr. Ziccardi**
Isabel Condon

7 **On Mission in
Appalachia**
Emma Newgarden

9 **Present>Future**
James Unciano

10 **Just Mercy**
Christina Murphy

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What Difference Does a Catholic University Make?

by Ben Jaros



"Do you think that the mission of a Catholic University has any impact on its students in the long run? Is there a meaningful difference that attending a Catholic University makes?"

When I look casually at my peers, the Seton Hall Class of 2020, I might assume that the Catholic mission of our school had little relevance in their lives; many, if not most of my classmates never outwardly practiced any faith tradition, and many of them openly and vocally advocated for positions and policies that would be detrimental to a meaningful practice of religious belief in this country. Yet, to a large extent, this would be mischaracterization. That Seton Hall's mission as a Catholic University is indeed reflected in the lives of her students has become evident in the wake of COVID-19. To me, their outlook on unprecedented circumstances set SHU alumni apart.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way many of my peers evaluated the success of their college careers. In previous years, it would have been easy for us to fall back on our individual accomplishments: earning our degrees, maintaining a high GPA,

or securing a job in our desired career field. But in 2020, many of these monetarily defined achievements could not be relied upon. Irrespective of GPA or degree credentials, employment prospects for the class of 2020 remained dim. Post graduation, many of my friends from Colorado- those who attended "Generic U" (University of Colorado, CSU, DU, etc)- were left wondering whether their four years of study had even been worth the time and investment.

My friends who attended CU and had found themselves unemployed felt that their school had failed them. Within the strict lockdowns, I noticed that they were looking for communion and companionship yet had found little (or at least certainly far less than I had) in their four years at the large public school. They were longing for a fulfillment they couldn't quite name- what St. Augustine might call the yearning of a restless heart. But, not finding it in their surroundings, many suffered deep bouts of depression that led them to become even more isolated.

On the whole, however, my Seton Hall peers were different. They also faced the cancelation of commencement, and the same bleak employment prospects. Yet, I

noticed something peculiar in their reaction to the situation: more of my peers possessed a deep sense of hope about the future. Many of them rediscovered a community of faith, and not of one, within Seton Hall to fall back on. In the first two months after our final semester ended, over thirty of my classmates who I had considered more acquaintances than close friends, reached out to catch up via email or social media. Some were working, and others were not, but the common theme among them is worth noting: in their loneliness, they did not turn inward. They reached out.

There have been few events in my life thus far that I can truly say humbled me to my core. Cumulatively, these peers reaching out is now one of them. It is the truest reflection of Seton Hall's Catholic mission alive in our Class that I have seen since we have graduated. It shows that Seton Hall is much more than just an educational institution. It is a community of people devoted to the pursuit of universal knowledge and, for many members, growing within the love of Christ and His

Church. Though those members may not have realized their impact, I believe the spirit they cultivated served as leaven which our whole class could lean on during this time of insecurity.

This spirit was palpable while I was at SHU as well. On countless occasions, peers would ask me serious questions about my faith: why it matters to me and to so many other students, and beyond that, why it matters to the school as a whole. I answer now with the guiding vision I always referred to when I wrote for "The Heart of The Hall", from St. John Henry Newman's "Idea of a University": "When the Church

founds a University, she is not cherishing talent, genius, or knowledge, for their own sake, but for the sake of her children, with a view to their spiritual welfare and their religious influence and usefulness, with the object of training them to fill their respective posts in life better, and of making them more intelligent, capable, active members of society."

It may not always be perfectly enacted, but this ethos is certainly present at Seton Hall, in its goal of connecting what we learn in class to the animating spirit of a University, devoted to pursuing the love of God and his Church. That mission makes all the difference.



..... INTERVIEW WITH



Msgr. Ziccardi

Former President for Mission and Ministry

by Isabel Condon

Condon: Many young people are struggling to discern their vocations, both personal and professional. What did you plan for your life before you entered the seminary? How did you arrive at Seton Hall? How did you discover your vocation and were there any struggles along the way?

Ziccardi: I had planned to follow my interests and talents in the field of science. I was going to become an engineer because I was very good at science, especially physics. I discovered my vocation because there was an ad over the intercom at school for a retreat that I then attended. It was a retreat for possible religious vocations. I met some

fellows from the seminary who seemed interesting and excited about doing this work. However, the seeds of my interest in a vocation were planted long ago in my family background and in my experience. My family was quite religious, as Italian families often are. We lived across the piazza from the Church, so the life of priests and sisters were not strange to us. I also had a very saintly pastor, a fellow who had been in the parish for thirty-five years. He was a good example to me. All these seeds already existed, but what precipitated my vocation was just a call to go to a retreat when I was eighteen. After that, I had put in my applications for some engineering

schools. The guidance counselor had helped me through the process, and when the advisor read my essays for engineering schools, he noted that I didn't sound convinced that it was what I wanted. I told him that I had been thinking about something else as well. He encouraged me to explore that idea and suggested I go to Seton Hall, so I applied to engineering schools and Seton Hall. I was accepted with scholarships everywhere which made my decision harder because I could go wherever I wanted and if I blew it then I blew it. What didn't help was that my mother was not pleased with the idea of me becoming a priest. She thought I was making a mistake and

that I would come to regret my decision. She remained unhappy about it the whole time I was in the seminary, eight years. I know she was only motivated by the best intentions; she just didn't believe I could be happy without a spouse or a family. That was a struggle for a long time and is a struggle for a lot of priests and religious.

C: Would you have any advice for young people who experience similar situations where their families are less supportive?

Z: They need to ask themselves whether their decision would be any different if their families approved. They should not let themselves be influenced in this decision one way or the other by approval. When I was trying to decide I had to be careful that I was not deciding to become a priest intentionally against my mother's wishes. I had to do it because it was what God wanted. They should sit quietly in prayer and try to discern what the Lord wants and what we want. Sometimes what God wants is not what we have planned.

C: What made you choose your concentration in Biblical Studies, after studying sociology in undergrad? Do you believe your academic experience has shaped you beyond your professional career?

Z: I studied sociology because I wanted to pick a major I thought would help me in the seminary. I wanted to do a social science. I had a fabulous teacher at Seton Hall in a general education course. She was a real rebel; she used to question everything about everything. I enjoyed it and was quite surprised by it. She made you rethink things you had always assumed. She was so good at showing how sociology impacted people. I really enjoyed her class even though I disagreed with her a lot of

the time.

Biblical Studies was not a concentration for me, even in the seminary, it was one of the many areas I studied. I always had an interest in the Bible because I was the generation of the Second Vatican Council. In grade school after the council, the sisters put out this huge Jerusalem Bible that none of us could lift. It always intrigued me, and in high school I spent one summer reading my way through chunks of it because it was interesting. When I went to college, I was asked to study ancient languages, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, in preparation for the seminary. Obviously, this helped my interest in the Bible since one half is written in Greek, the other in Hebrew. After I finished in seminary, because I knew the languages I was recommended to the bishop as someone who should study the Bible in more depth. Later when I was in the parish in Holy Trinity in Hackensack, I decided to start a Bible study. The pastor said sure but told me I would probably only get a dozen or so people. Instead, I got about eighty people; I think it was because I enjoyed it so much. I would show them things they thought they understood in a new way. This came to an end when I was sent by the archbishop to study more in Rome.

C: Would you recommend students explore Biblical Studies, even if it lies outside of their career path? Why?

Z: Absolutely. The materials that are within the Bible were written over a thousand-year period. There were different cultural influences, linguistic influences, and it is a really rich and complex document. Besides the fact that Christians consider it the word of God, there is something to be gained from learning what people were like back then. I think it can help us to see that the human experience is much broader and richer than what we know today. We can assume that the way we live today is normal and the best, but if you read the Bible, you can see that other people had other ideas that they were convinced of and that those ideas worked for them.

Besides the primary reason for reading the Bible which is that God uses it to speak to us, I also think it is useful because it is so strange. Some parts of it are three thousand years old, and that can really open your mind and encourage you to think about the world differently than you do now. Studying the ancient world helps us to see that they were not "primitive" as we may be inclined to believe but were in many ways better off than us. We have this idea from the Enlightenment of this onward march of progress and evolution, that we are only making onward leaps in thought, and I believe this can be a very destructive way of thinking. I think that's why we need universities; we tend to think of them as places of innovation and places of discovery, which they are, but they are always building on what has come before. If we come to despise what was said before or disregard it, we are in dangerous territory. What makes the human so unique from other animals is culture. Culture is transmitted, new ideas emerge because what people have understood in the past. In universities we can stand with tradition and see what was right and wrong about it. To forget the past is to repeat the mistakes made in the past and to set yourself up for failures in the future.

C: The price of college education is skyrocketing, and for more families and students private Catholic college seems unrealistic. What value comes from attending a school like Seton Hall, that wouldn't be available at a public or private non-Catholic institution?

A: I think that Catholic colleges, overall, tend to look upon education as something more holistic than it is looked at in other places. In other places education is something the student constructs by picking from courses, and it is much more focused on the present and the student's career goals. These are not bad things, the only thing we have is the present so we should be focused on it, and the student should be able to be employed and be able to contribute to

society. However Catholic colleges tend to be more focused on forming the whole student and giving them a pathway through a larger body of knowledge. I think Catholic colleges will always consider God as an object of study and put some seriousness into that. The big problem at secular colleges is that they have no problem providing courses in religion, which are about what people believe or do in different religions. Theology is not about people's religious practices or beliefs, as much as it is about God. It is the study of God. This presumes that there is a God, He can be studied, and that turning our minds to the study of God is important and helpful for our lives. This is a huge distinctive in Catholic colleges. What public colleges don't offer is the ability to study God, you can discuss anything else but not God. This is also important for teaching and discussing ethics. Without God, ethics are nothing more than a person's own code of how to act. Clearly morality is not about individual standards, it is about social standards. It is about how I treat you and you treat me. Ethics taught at public or even private institutions where there can be no consideration of what God has commanded will always produce a very weak sort of ethics. With the God of the monotheistic faiths of the West, comes a set of ethics. God who is good has given us a way to live. Ethics and religious practice are combined in the monotheistic faiths. I think these ideas are at the heart of what Catholic colleges are all about.

Z: The culture today turns the individual into a product. All through high school and college students are told to make themselves more marketable and to develop their personal "brand." Faith can become low priority since it has no home on a resume. What advice would you give to students who struggle to find time in college to make their relationship with God a priority? How can taking the time now, in college, to create a

foundation of faith, be beneficial in the short and long term of their lives?

Z: It is beneficial because faith in God grounds our sense of self, of our life and our life's trajectory. We need to have all those things so as not to lose our way; we must have a road map; we have to have a plan. Without God we go through life like animals staring at one patch of ground and not looking up. It gives us a sense of the larger view of life. Many young people are becoming successful very quickly, but their personal lives are not as secure. Marriages are crumbling, families don't stay intact, things like that. I think this comes from losing sight of the larger picture of their lives. There's no other way to say it: for young people in college, while they are building their resumes, they don't stop eating, they don't stop bathing, they don't stop sleeping because these things are basic. When something is basic you make the time for it. While taking the time to pray and build a relationship with God is not something that lends itself to a resume, it is something that is as essential as those other activities. We can make time for it by spending ten minutes less in the gym and spending ten minutes more in the chapel. A little can go a long way in the long term.

C: The Gospel of John says, "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you," (Jn 15:18-19). The Church was born into persecution and Christ openly accepts and embraces it. Do you see persecution for Christians today? How so?

Z: There is hard persecution and soft persecution. Hard persecution is when you are put into prison, or martyred. I believe there is another kind of persecution, soft persecution: "You are different, too different. You are unacceptable. What you think and what you do is of no value. You are weird."

Of course, this isn't the same as being put in jail, but the persecution is coming from strong social forces to take out of public discourse the distinctives of Christianity. Ideas that have been held and continue to be held in Christian communities are no longer allowed because they are dangerous, and therefore not to be tolerated. It's a very odd situation because our culture is supposed to be built on free speech and toleration of other points of view, but it doesn't seem to act that way.

C: I understand you were instrumental in setting up "The Heart of the Hall." Can you tell me more about your role in our publication's beginnings and why you believe it is necessary?

Z: I was happy to support "The Heart of the Hall." Ben Jaros, a former student, had tried to write pieces for "The Setonian" and other papers on campus. He found that the editorial policies of those publications meant that whatever he wrote was not going to be in the publication because he came from a religious point of view. He thought, where can students who have religious beliefs and want to speak those ideas do it? His idea was to create a venue for this. I was happy to help him along and get it off the ground. He and other students really came up with and made the whole thing. All I had to do was bless it and help get a few donors and argue for the publication. There was some resistance to another publication being made; people believed that the forum for student discussion was "The Setonian". Of course, it is the official student paper, but this doesn't mean it is the only paper that can exist. As an academic institution we should be interested in people expressing their opinions, and if those opinions are imposed upon then there was a need for a new publication. I was able to help get that started.

On Mission in APPALACHIA

by Emma Newgarden

When I first said yes to FOCUS' Appalachia mission trip back in December, I had no idea what to expect. I had never been on a mission trip before, but this one seemed relatively short - just nine days total in mid-July - and relatively close- taking place in Louisa, Kentucky, as opposed to a whole summer overseas. Jess Brinker, my Seton Hall athlete Bible study leader and a FOCUS missionary, was leading the trip, and she said we would be helping to build houses for the poor and needy. I tossed around the idea for a day or two, figured, I can spare a week, and signed up. Now, remembering my haphazard thought process, I can only laugh and thank God for whatever arbitrary inclination it was that guided my decision. It certainly wasn't an inkling of the experience He had in store: humbling, authentic, and full of wonder.

There were about thirty trip-members altogether, made up of missionaries and students from four different universities around the country. Having first met up at a Louisville retreat center, we drove three hours to our home base for the

mission, a guest house off the highway in mountainous Louisa, called "Padre's Place." We quickly settled into the work week routine. Every day started with Mass at the nearby church. From there, each work group (we were split into four teams) would bundle into a car and drive to our respective work-site. My group was repairing the decrepit house of an older couple, Bonnie and Harold, who had moved in when their old home was flooded. After work, we would drive back to Padre's Place for adoration, followed by dinner (each group took turns cooking) and some fun activity, like a campfire and s'mores or a giant game of "Mafia". Lastly, before closing in Night Prayer, we always performed a FOCUS ritual called "high, low, God moments." I was already familiar with this exercise from Bible study; it meant going around in a circle sharing some instance of the day that made each of us happy, sad, or especially aware of God's presence.

I confess that the first night of "high, low, God moments", I had to suppress a groan: we're going to do this ALL week? I had no patience to listen to a bunch of strangers talk about their days, and I was pretty sure none of them wanted to hear about mine, either. It took me by surprise

when, only a couple days in, I caught myself starting to look forward to the group sharing. In praying, working, and playing together, we were developing genuine friendships that made "high, low, God moments" come naturally. Knowing that we all were joined in one mission not only for this week but in the long run- learning to love and serve the Lord- eased any insecurities I had about sharing my own ups and downs.



Likewise, I truly wanted to know my fellow mission-goers' updates, so that I could be with them in their hardships and take joy in their good

Friendships within the group were not the only relationships strengthened throughout the week. Bonnie and Harold opened up to us more and more every day, and soon they were joining us in prayer and offering intercessions. I was amazed at the wisdom and gratitude of these people who by the world's standards had nothing. Through all the hardships of physical poverty, their spiritual wealth shone through in child-like trust. By Friday we had completed construction on a deck, siding, and underpinning for their house. It felt good to build Bonnie and Harold something concrete that would make their lives just a little bit easier. But they had also built something with us- a relationship, and that changed what could have been simply an assigned project into a true work of charity, a labor of love. It enabled me to leave work that last day with a deep sense of fulfillment and peace.

If I want to hold onto this peace, I know something needs to change permanently in my life- namely, keeping Jesus- the Way, the Truth and the Life- front and center as He was for this trip's nine-day span. Going into the week I had been consumed by outside anxieties and pressures that were holding me back from a wholehearted desire to serve. But being able to rest in His presence through daily adoration gave me the grace to carry out the mission; it is only by growing in love for Jesus that we shake off selfishness and grow in love for the rest of humanity. It's easy for college students to become so overwhelmed and busy that we forget life is a gift neither earned nor deserved, and any glory achieved in ours goes not to ourselves but to our

Creator. Recognizing this truth takes the pressure off us and invites us instead to lay our burdens at His feet. At Seton Hall, Mass and adoration are held almost as regularly as we participated in them while on the trip; all we have to do is make time to spend with Jesus our greatest lover, allowing Him to transform our hearts.

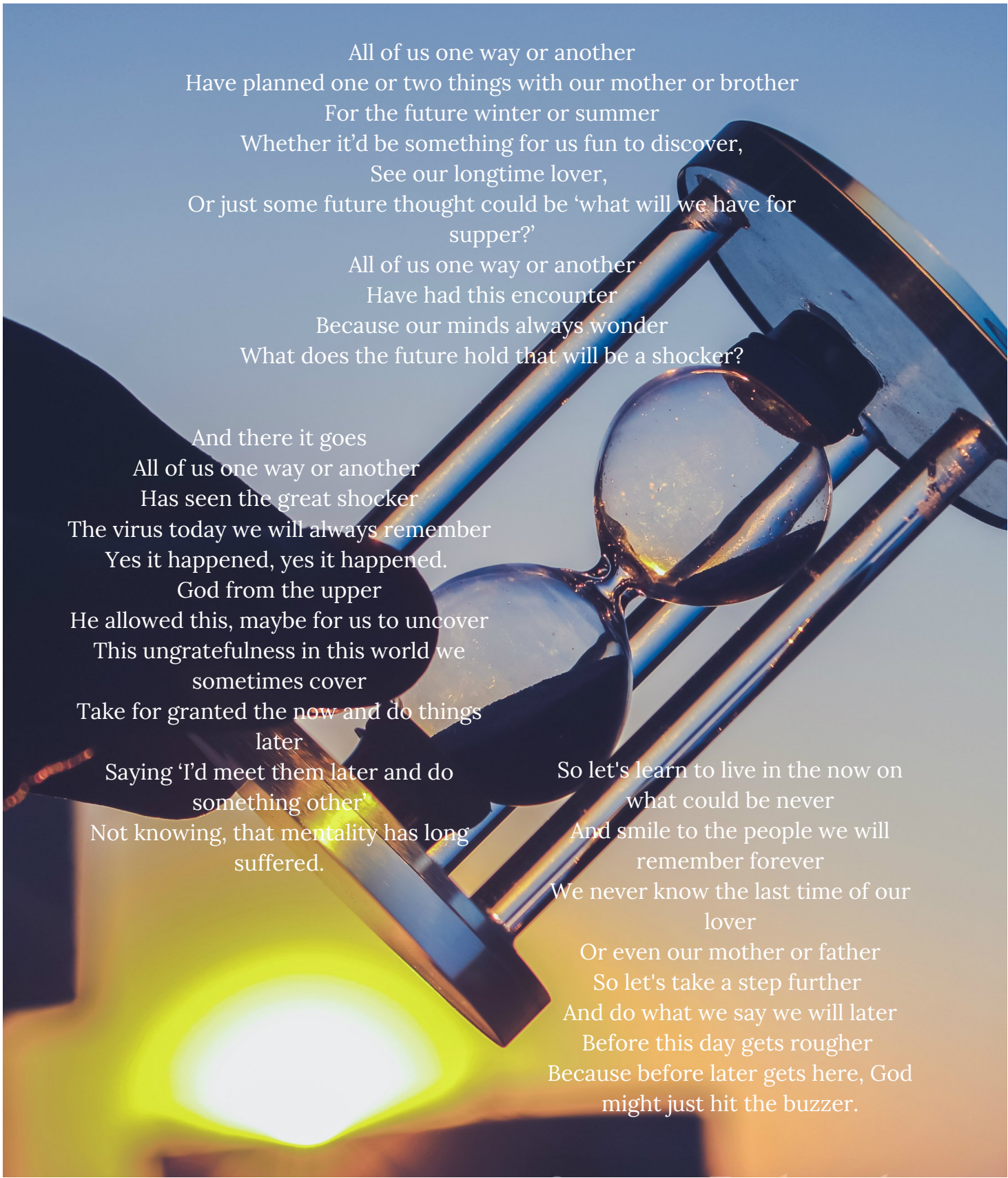
Making Christ the center of your life is easier to do when surrounded by a strong faith community- people who encourage each other to grow in faith, build each other up and run alongside you in this race for God's kingdom. While I will dearly miss all the friends I made in Appalachia, it's comforting to know coming home that I can find such support and fellowship right re at Seton Hall. This trip made me realize what a blessing it is to attend a Catholic university with a vibrant campus ministry, a robust missionary presence through FOCUS and SPO (St. Paul's Outreach), numerous faith-based student organizations, and two degrees in Catholic matters open to all undergraduates: Catholic Theology and Catholic Studies. We are not alone in our striving and seeking, and we don't have to do it on our own.

Of course, the solidarity of the Catholic faith stretches far beyond campus connections. Wherever we are on earth, the Universal Church is there also, doing God's work- the salt and light of the world. This should give us confidence to share our joy and show that light within us to everyone we encounter. One final highlight of this mission trip was listening throughout the week to what the missionaries called "testimonies"- short speeches by each participant outlining our path to following Jesus. Some met with tears and others with laughter, but every story was beautiful, showing God's activity in a single human life, and together they filled me with overwhelming hope. It's okay not to have all the answers concerning our faith- we never will, at least in this life. Yet, when called upon to give reason for our hope, we can do so just by telling others the truth about our personal encounters with the Lord. We should not be afraid to tell the stories that give witness to Christ or underestimate the impact our own testimonies can have.



PRESENT>FUTURE

BY JAMES UNCIANO



All of us one way or another
Have planned one or two things with our mother or brother
For the future winter or summer
Whether it'd be something for us fun to discover,
See our longtime lover,
Or just some future thought could be 'what will we have for
supper?'

All of us one way or another
Have had this encounter
Because our minds always wonder
What does the future hold that will be a shocker?

And there it goes
All of us one way or another
Has seen the great shocker
The virus today we will always remember
Yes it happened, yes it happened.
God from the upper
He allowed this, maybe for us to uncover
This ungratefulness in this world we
sometimes cover
Take for granted the now and do things
later
Saying 'I'd meet them later and do
something other'
Not knowing, that mentality has long
suffered.

So let's learn to live in the now on
what could be never
And smile to the people we will
remember forever
We never know the last time of our
lover
Or even our mother or father
So let's take a step further
And do what we say we will later
Before this day gets rougher
Because before later gets here, God
might just hit the buzzer.



Just Mercy

BY CHRISTINA MURPHY

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This summer, Seton Hall selected Bryan Stevenson's biography, "Just Mercy", for the incoming freshmen to read. The book centers around Bryan Stevenson, a lawyer advocating for death row inmates, especially those unjustly tried and convicted. It also follows the establishment of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI).

Initially, I knew almost nothing about the biography, nor had I seen the movie. As I was reading, I knew that writing a review about such an important topic – the experiences of those on death row – would be a daunting task. Since the book highlights the stories of many, I did not want to miss important details while reading or writing. However, Stevenson weaves a common thread throughout the book. The title, "Just Mercy", highlights the overarching theme: how we can practice justice and mercy in a world that seems incredibly broken.

Stevenson stresses several points: how just mercy is given to those who seem the least deserving, that justice must be delivered through the lens of mercy, and the need for hope amidst pain and injustice. He defines just mercy as compassion that is, "rooted in hopefulness and freely given" (314). Just mercy is highlighted within the Christian tradition. Jesus understood the balance between justice and mercy,

as illustrated by His sacrifice on the Cross. He knew that there needed to be reparation for the world's sins (showing His understanding of justice), but He also was willing to suffer for humankind (illustrating His mercy.)

Stevenson upholds the Catholic belief that mercy is for those who seem the least deserving. He declares "The power of mercy is that it belongs to the undeserving. It's when mercy is least expected that its most potent..." (294). This point is further illustrated within the story of the adulteress in the Gospel of John. A group of people bring a woman to Jesus and ask Him whether they should stone her because she was caught in adultery. Jesus answers, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7). The verse notes that every person left, "beginning with the elders". Jesus' answer reminds us that no one is blameless; we have all made mistakes, and therefore should not punish others harshly without compassion. It is essential to remember that we have all needed mercy before, and more often than we may realize.

Furthermore, working at the EJI helped Stevenson recognize how damaging it can be to jump to conclusions and to believe that people can never change. For instance, Stevenson advocates for several minors who are sentenced to

death or life sentences without parole. He argues that as these minors mature, they can grow into better people, but giving them a death or life sentence is an assertion that they can never change. In the case of the adulteress, Jesus also recognizes this. He acknowledges her crime, but he also sees her potential – he gives her a second chance at living a better life. Many people assert that those on death row "deserve to die" due to the severity of their crimes. The crowd in the Bible thought the same of the woman who committed adultery. Although the story of the adulteress differs slightly from the biography since many of Stevenson's clients did not commit the crimes they were accused of, the importance of just mercy remains the same.

Jesus does not disregard the damage that crimes can cause, as he tells the woman caught in adultery to "sin no more" (8:11). However, he emphasizes that anger and violence heal neither those receiving punishment nor those giving it. Practices such as capital punishment only amplify the pain and brokenness of the situation in different ways. As horrifying as it is to be the person executed, it is also cruel to expect people to kill other human beings as "part of the job".

The act of capital punishment can force people to ignore their conscience and better judgment. For example, in "Just Mercy", the people working at the jail knew that Herbert Richardson's execution was wrong. Stevenson states: "Everyone I saw at the prison seemed surrounded by regret and remorse...It seemed that everyone recognized what was taking place was wrong. Abstractions about capital punishment were one thing, but the details of systematically killing someone who is not a threat are completely different" (90). As a society, we must not train people to harden their hearts and become insensitive to the dignity of human life. It is possible to both serve justice while practicing mercy and respecting human dignity.

At one point in the biography, Stevenson becomes overwhelmed with the brokenness of the world, and wonders whether he can continue advocating for death row inmates after all the suffering he has witnessed. He often has to give encouragement to the families of those on death row, and to many of the family members, he is a symbol of possibility and hope. However, he struggles with giving hope to others while also battling doubts about whether his clients will receive justice.

But after some thought, he recognizes that a primary cause of the injustice he was witnessing was that those who judged harshly had given up on fairness and hope. Instead of seeking to heal those who were broken, they punished them. Stevenson comments, "In their broken state, they [the convicted] were judged and condemned by people whose commitment to fairness had been broken by cynicism, hopelessness, and prejudice" (288). Justice without

mercy was the root of the hurt and brokenness that many experienced in the biography, and that many still experience today.

Stevenson proposes that compassion and just mercy are solutions to brokenness. He claims that "our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion. We have a choice. We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion, and, as a result, deny our own humanity" (289). It is easy to be afraid of others' brokenness. Acknowledging other people's pain requires vulnerability and empathy, which can be painful, as it requires us to recognize our own mistakes and hurt. We may even experience embarrassment if we owe apologies, for example. Many people, not just those in power, find it easier to disregard others than to acknowledge them with compassion. "Just Mercy" urges us to overcome this initial reaction and practice mercy and empathy instead.

Stevenson stresses the importance of hope in the face of brokenness. He states that hopefulness is an essential part of achieving justice and that hope is not "a preference for optimism over pessimism", which is how many people define hope (219). While people need to choose hope, some believe that it is merely a blind choice or feeling. To them, hope is convincing yourself that things might change for the sole purpose of making yourself feel better. Stevenson refutes this and shows that real hope strengthens people so that they can face hard realities and make a change, saying, "... [H]ope creates a willingness to position oneself in a hopeless place and be a witness, that allows one to believe in a better future, even in the face of abusive power. That kind of hope makes one strong" (219).

Hope allows us to tackle problems head-on and think of solutions, not just the problems that bog us down. It motivates us to move forward even when it seems like our efforts are not impacting those around us. Hope, not despair, is what fuels positive change.

While Stevenson struggles at times to overcome his discouragement about the injustice he sees his clients enduring, he ultimately finds fulfillment and hope through his work. For example, for most of the biography, he advocates for Walter McMillian (a man who is put on death row for a crime he did not commit), and he eventually frees him. The biography also notes the several other men and women who benefitted from his efforts at EJI. Most of all, Stevenson's work taught him to persist in serving those most in need of just mercy, despite the circumstances.

"Just Mercy" encourages readers to see mercy in a new light, which he calls just mercy. Just mercy is the balance between mercy and justice. It emphasizes giving compassion to those who seem the least deserving. Ultimately, Stevenson's biography reminds us that practicing just mercy can help us face the brokenness of the world with hope and determination.



Meet the Writers

The Heart of the Hall gathers a unique and driven group of student writers.

Along with our writers below, "The Heart of the Hall" would like to recognize the copy editors of this edition: **Ellen Mangan and Sarah Adam.**



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Please reach out to any of our staff if you are interested in joining our team.

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