

*Students
Form Bonds
and
Create
Memories*

by Darcy Coulter '14



CHRISTMAS IN CHRIST CHAPEL, 2012

Christmas in Christ Chapel has become a tradition at Gustavus Adolphus College incorporating three different choirs, the Gustavus Symphony Orchestra, the Handbell Choir, and dance ensembles to allow hundreds of students to showcase their talents to thousands of friends, family, alumni, and community members.

For the students who participate, the experience exemplifies Gustavus community and excellence. Rebecca Thompson '14 is one of these students and will perform in her third Christmas in Christ Chapel service this weekend. After singing with the Lucia Singers for the past two years, she will sing with the Choir of Christ Chapel this year.

"C in CC is one of my favorite Gustavus traditions. It encompasses a lot of what Gustavus is for me," she says. "It's an emotional experience for everyone because you put so much of yourself into your music."

Dan Burnett '13, also experienced Christmas in Christ Chapel as a singer for two years in the Choir of Christ Chapel, but was too busy with other commitments to participate in choir this year. Though he thought this would mean he would no longer be involved in C in CC, he was given the opportunity to participate

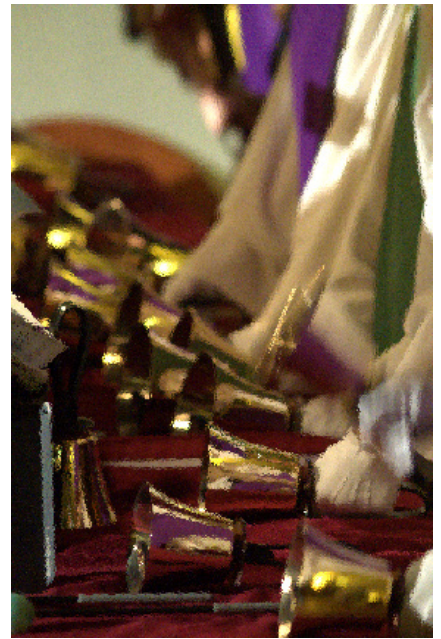
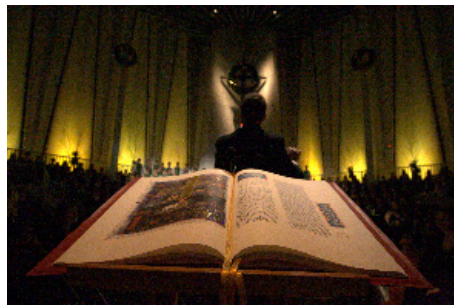
again. "I am going to be carrying the cross on Saturday night, which I'm pretty excited about," he says. "Kathy Chalhoub in the Chaplains' Office e-mailed asking if I was interested. Naturally I was, because otherwise I wouldn't get the chance to participate in Christmas in Christ Chapel."

Christmas in Christ Chapel includes hundreds of student performers, as well as dozens of others who work behind the scenes with logistics, lighting, and sound. Even those who don't participate directly are a part of the final product, says Ben Whalen '13, who will participate in his third year of Christmas in Christ Chapel this weekend by playing trombone in the Gustavus Symphony Orchestra.

"All of the other students and professors are really understanding and help make things work around your schedule. Even the people who aren't involved, the entire campus contributes in some way to help make it happen," Whalen says. "There's not time to do much else that weekend, but pretty much everyone recognizes that."

The performers also recognize the way the experience builds community among those who perform together. "It definitely brings people closer together as ensembles and as friends because you have the shared experience of putting a lot of time and effort into something and producing something bigger than yourself," Thompson says. "You're together when things are frustrating and you're tired of everything, and you're together when things are running smoothly and you get to see your hard work pay off. You're all in the same boat, and that brings you closer to people."







Burnett also recognizes the friendship-building aspect of Christmas in Christ Chapel. “It’s always a great bonding experience. You meet a lot of different people in other choirs, the orchestra, the dancers, and the handbell choir. They’re all in the long rehearsals and they’re all at the dinner in between services, so you get to meet fun people.”

These friendships are formed through the countless hours of rehearsals that bond the performers together. The singers begin practicing their Christmas music during rehearsals early in the fall semester. The main time commitment, though, is during the week leading up to Christmas in Christ Chapel weekend. “Rehearsals last three to four hours in the evenings the week of C in CC. Between that and then the five performances that weekend, it’s certainly a major time commitment,” Thompson says. “It adds to the experience though.”

A unique aspect of Christmas in Christ Chapel, as opposed to other holiday concerts, is the fact that it is a worship service. “The way that it’s structured is really unique, and I like that because it’s more focused on worship,” says Burnett. “There’s audience participation, and you really form a bond with the audience. It’s a really unique Gustavus experience.”

Every year, thousands of visitors come to campus to participate in the Christmas in Christ Chapel worship services as audience members. “I love having the chance to perform for so many people,” Thompson says. “I get to do one of the things I love most and share it with others. You can’t beat that!”

“Especially when we’re singing the hymns, having such a large audience is cool, for me it almost feels like they’re just as much a part of the service as we are,” Whalen says. “It adds to the emotional intensity of the experience that that many people are there, and it is a worship service. It’s just a really powerful experience because it’s something that so many people put so much time and effort into but also a lot of emotion. There are a lot of people who are really invested in it.”

Overall, students agree that Christmas in Christ Chapel is a fundamental Gustavus tradition that shapes their experience of community. “We spend so much time perfecting everything and the work we put in makes the whole experience very rewarding,” says Thompson.

Darcy Coulter is a senior studying English and religion. She is involved with Mosaic Interfaith, The Crossroads Program, Alpha Sigma Tau, and The Gustavus Choir.

This article was written about Christmas in Christ Chapel 2012.

Design and layout by Anna Franke '16