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Diversity Center

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'Telling the Story from the Margins'

by Thia Cooper



Racism—one of the “isms” that we support indirectly in our daily lives. Do we want to? No. Would we prefer to think we don’t? Yes. But we do. And I hope we also struggle against it every day.

I teach in the Department of Religion and also courses for the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies program. The interaction between religion, politics,

and economics is my passion. A few years ago, the first course I developed was Religion and Politics in Latin America. I made a lovely syllabus filled with the interactions between the Catholic Church and Latin American governments, an important story to be sure, but one that only focused on those with power. And so now I try to also tell the story from the margins, from the point of view of the excluded: the indigenous and the Afro-descended peoples, those who still today do not hold political or economic power.

And when I teach I try to connect our story to our daily lives, through service-learning. Why should we care about Religion and Politics in Latin America? Why does it matter to a small liberal arts college in Minnesota? Let me give two examples we are focused on this semester: the ongoing war in Colombia and slavery (still occurring globally, although our focus is on Haiti).

Gustavus is partnered with Peace Churches in Colombia. Most Gusties don’t know this. Indigenous and Afro-Colombians rely on us to be their voice in the public realm in the U.S.A. as they struggle to survive and maybe even thrive, bringing peace to Colombia. If we ignore them, if we don’t use our voice to increase the volume of theirs, more people die.

And slavery? Didn’t that end more than 100 years ago? No. More people are enslaved today than during our infamous slave-owning years. How did we let this happen? Why aren’t we outraged? Because it’s hidden. It means we can buy a T-shirt for \$5 or less. We can have a chocolate bar for \$1 or less. And if we so desire we can have our choice of young women and men from countries around the world, including Haiti, to serve at our pleasure. And no one talks about it, no one condemns us for using slaves. My students are working to change this by bringing the slave trade out into the light of day with the “Not for Sale” campaign.

And so this is the kind of work I hope we will continue to do to build a just world. Racism, sexism, and many other “isms” are part of our daily lives. We support them indirectly every day. Will we struggle against them too?

OLAS

Orgulla Latino Association (OLAS) is a student organization designed to provide students of Gustavus Adolphus College, as well as the St. Peter community, a venue to learn about Latin American and Spanish cultures and to promote awareness and cultural celebrations while providing information and understanding regarding the historical background of Latin America. OLAS has used various activities and events throughout the year to develop awareness and promote the history of Latin American and Spanish countries through an interchange of cultures. You may have noticed the association's skull-decorating competition for Dia de los Muertos or the Tres Reyes celebration this past semester. And we are all looking forward to the Cinco de Mayo celebration.

The Chaplains' Office: Sacred Space

by Chaplain Rachel S. Larson



Need a quiet, peaceful place to relieve the stress of spring semester? Sometimes taking a good, long walk can help. The Chaplains' Office offers meditative walks on the Gustavus canvas labyrinth. An ancient symbol found in various forms in many cultures, the labyrinth is garnering renewed interest around the world. People of various religious and philosophical traditions engage in the spiritual practice of walking the labyrinth.

The most common form of the labyrinth is a circular pattern that contains a path that leads to a center. The labyrinth is different

from a maze. A maze has multiple paths meant to confuse and test critical thinking skills. In a labyrinth there are many turns along the way, but since there is only one path you cannot get lost. This frees you to focus on each step while you breathe deeply, release your concerns, and listen to the deep rhythms of your heart.

Perhaps you find personal prayer or seated meditation to be a frustrating challenge. It can be difficult to quiet distracting thoughts. Walking the labyrinth provides an alternative to calm the body, mind, and spirit. The physical movement on the path can echo the inner movements of your life. The labyrinth is a safe space for listening to the Spirit, seeking clarity, praying, meditating, and simply relaxing.

The best way to learn about the labyrinth is to experience it. The next labyrinth walk is Sunday, April 26, 8–10 p.m. during Sacred Space in Alumni Hall. If you would like Chaplain Rachel to facilitate a guided labyrinth walk for your group or office at another time, call x7450 or e-mail rlarson@gustavus.edu. ■

Asitha Dineth Jayawardena

student profile



“ I strongly believe that anyone, no matter where they come from, has the opportunity to make a difference in the world. ”

Hey everyone, my name is Asitha Jayawardena and I am a senior biology major from Mason City, Iowa. If you haven't seen me around campus, I am the short Sri Lankan-looking fellow running around campus pretending to be busy. You might see me with my Little Partner, Jacob Lamb, at meditation every Tuesday (you should come!). One thing that has definitely kept me busy during my past couple of years at Gustavus has been the Building Bridges Conference.

I can't make it any simpler . . . being involved in Building Bridges has had a huge impact on my life. I strongly believe that anyone, no matter where they come from, has the opportunity to make a difference in the world. I live my life by the ADIDAS quote, "Impossible is nothing." I believe that everyone should dream big, because you can get there if you work hard!

With that in mind, I hope to get my master's in public health and graduate from medical school, ultimately working for the program Doctors Without Borders. In the meantime, I am considering an opportunity to teach inner-city Minneapolis youth through the Teach for America program.

I'd also like to give a shout out to the D-Center! Since I arrived at Gustavus as an anxious freshman, the D-Center has helped give me confidence to be true to myself and my ambitions. The D-Center network has been with me through my hardest times at Gustavus and the most exciting times. As Sri Lankans say . . . Istuththi (Thanks!). ■

“I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do. ”

— Edward Everett Hale

Diversity Center Calendar

Every Tuesday | 7-8 p.m. | Linner Lounge
Meditation: the perfect study break and time to wind down

April 3 | 9-11 p.m. | The Dive
Cultural Dance Lessons

April 10 | Diversity Center
Diversity Awards Nomination forms due

April 17 | Diversity Center
Building Bridges Co-Chair application forms due

April 18 | 8 p.m. | Alumni Hall
Hip Hop Night

April 24 | 7 p.m. | Lund Center Arena
2nd Annual Pow Wow

April 25 | 1 p.m. | Lund Center Arena
2nd Annual Pow Wow

May 2 | 7-11 p.m. | Alumni Hall
Diversity Awards Banquet

College Calendar

Every Tuesday | 9-10 p.m. | Alumni Hall
Proclaim

April 4 | 5-11 p.m. | Nicollet Island Pavilion, Minneapolis
President's Ball

April 7 | 7-9 p.m. | Interpretive Center
"Holocaust Survivors To Tell Their Stories"

April 8 | 5-6:30 p.m. | Alumni Hall
Showing of *Invisible Children*

April 10-13
Easter Recess

April 14 | 7-8 p.m. | Interpretive Center
Kate Wittenstein: *"Race and Identity in the 2008 Presidential Election"*

April 15 | 7-8:30 p.m. | Olin Hall 103
Dr. Liping Wang: *"Women in China: Rural Violence, Urban Labor and the Promises of Communism"*

April 21 | 7-8:30 p.m. | Nobel Hall Wallenberg Auditorium
Dr. Harry Williams: *"King's Dream and Obama's Presidency"*

April 23 | 7:30-9:30 p.m. | Alumni Hall
Shane Claiborne Lecture

April 26 | 8-10 p.m. | Alumni Hall
Sacred Space

May 1-2, 8-9 | 8-10:30 p.m. | Anderson Theatre
The Impresario from Smyrna

May 3 | 2-4:30 p.m. | Anderson Theatre
The Impresario from Smyrna

World Watch and **Cultural Connections** are brought to you by Crossroads. Through their shared interest in world cultures, languages, and contemporary global issues, members work to develop a broader understanding of the world in which they live and contribute to the education of the College community as a whole. Think Globally, Act Locally—The Crossroads Program.

World Watch

Global —

While difficult for many, the state of the economy has made matters worse for those who struggle to find enough to eat and the responding aid organizations. In the Asian, African, and Latin American countries, well over 500 million people are living in what the World Bank has called "absolute poverty." Every year, 15 million children die of hunger.

Germany —

Hundreds of mourners attended the first funeral at Winnenden, Germany, in remembrance of a 16-year-old girl killed in a tragic school shooting that leaves the entire nation mourning. The gunman, 17 years old and also a former student at the school, killed a total of 14 individuals.

France —

Hundreds of thousands of French workers are expected to join the country's second nationwide strike in two months. Unions are protesting against President Nicolas Sarkozy's economic policies. Unemployment has reached two million and is expected to rise further.

South Africa —

South Africa has refused the Dalai Lama a visa to attend an international peace conference in Johannesburg. If the Tibetan spiritual leader and Nobel laureate attended the conference, the focus would shift away from the 2010 World Cup—the global soccer championship it will host next year. "We cannot allow focus to shift to China and Tibet," Masebe said, adding that South Africa has gained much from its trading relationship with China. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a fellow Nobel laureate, said he would boycott the event.

Cultural Connection

April 3 – Ram Navami (Hindu):

Celebrates the birthday of Rama, the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu.

April 7 – National Mourning Day (Rwanda):

Genocide Remembrance Day observance.

April 12 – Easter (Christian):

Celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

April 22 – Earth Day (International):

Earth appreciation day aimed at raising environmental awareness.

April 30 – Walpurgis Night (Sweden):

Annual feast of the witches. Huge bonfires are lit to scare the witches away as they fly overhead, headed for their annual Sabbath.