Prophetic Diversity
The Tree of Life Quilt

"Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on God's law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in season, and their leaves do not wither."

—The Psalms, 1:1-3

"Those who believe and act righteously will be admitted into gardens through which streams flow, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

—The Revelation to John, 22:1-2

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with twelve kinds of fruit, producing fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

—The Qur'an, 14:24-25

"And the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowed from the throne of God and of the Lamb."—The Psalms, 1:1-3

"Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread of life will give life to the world."

—The Gospel of John, 6:35

"And he will slay the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He took his throne and his throne was cast into the lake of fire."

—The Revelation to John, 20:2

"It is written, and they say, 'He who believes and acts righteously will be admitted into gardens through which streams flow, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.'"

—The Qur'an, 14:24-25

"The tree is not moved when rivers flow from the earth, nor by the blustery storms, nor by the heavy showers."

—The Psalms, 1:1-3

"And there shall be a tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

—The Bible, Genesis 2:9

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with twelve kinds of fruit, producing fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

—The Revelation to John, 22:1-2

The Tree of Life Quilt was conceived and created by Meredith Maxwell Myers, MDiv, for her course project in Christian Religious Education, Imagination, and Creativity taught by Lloyd R. Lewis, assistant professor of the practice of ministry. A native of Raleigh, North Carolina, and member of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Myers began quilting when she was 16 years old.

"I designed The Tree of Life specifically for All Faith Chapel with the hope that generations of students representing a variety of faith traditions will find meaning in the imagery," explains the quilter, who employed such traditional iconographic elements as stars shining from a celestial background of airy clouds and the four rivers of Paradise flowing from the earth.

The artist was graduated in 1997 from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where she earned a baccalaureate in fine arts and religious studies. Before enrolling at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, she worked in Heidelberg, Germany, as a graphic designer for the United States Army’s Department of Defense. Myers commenced in 2001 as a second lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve and currently has the status of chaplain candidate. For her clinical pastoral education requirement at VDS, she served during the summer of 2002 as a chaplain intern at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Upon earning her master of divinity degree, Myers hopes to be called to ordination in the American Baptist Church.

"The Tree of Life Quilt is 42” x 32” and is made from cotton and gold metallic thread. The Tree of Life was created by Meredith Maxwell Myers, specifically for All Faith Chapel. It was completed in 2002. The artist was graduated in 1997 from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where she earned a baccalaureate in fine arts and religious studies. Before enrolling at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, she worked in Heidelberg, Germany, as a graphic designer for the United States Army’s Department of Defense. Myers commenced in 2001 as a second lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve and currently has the status of chaplain candidate."

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In his commencement address to the members of the class of 2002, Vanderbilt University Chancellor Gordon Gee charged the gradua-
tes to embrace the Jewish conception of tikkun olam, "to repair the world," as they departed West End Avenue and began to practice their lives.

"Tikkun olam means to haul, to repair; to restore what has been torn, to work always toward
restore what has been shattered, to mend
departed West End Avenue and began to
derm has contributed to her revised under-
standing of perfection.

- We also pay tribute in this issue to Professors Howard Harrold and Loston Mills, two influential professors whose lives have motivated Divinity School students to adopt the praxis of tikkun olam. When our alumna, the Reverend Dr. Riggio E. Earl, Jr., professor of ethics and theology at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, learned of Professor Harrold's retirement from teaching at VDS, he composed a letter grafted "a student"
. In the letter he describes his first encounter with the teacher he would later acknowledge as one whose life reflected a radical appreciation for the human worth of marginalized people and from whom he would learn the art of listening:

"It was the decade of the mid-1960s at Vander-
tivist Divinity School, a time of national political
and social upheaval, and I was one of a handful of
students interrupted and inquired in a tone
of suggestive intellectual scoreboard. "Professor Mills, don't you think religion is just a crutch
for unenlightened southerners?"

His response to the uninitiated question—
I later would learn from a Roman Catholic
priest and one of Professor Mills' graduate
students—was indicative of the pastoral way
he responded to any student who sat before
him. He was not offended by the interruption
nor by the reference to unenlightened south-
erners. With his signature smile, he answered
calmly, confidently, but not patronizingly, "A
teaches the Bible?"

I find Howard Harrold’s role not only in the objec-
tification of the female gender but of all creation. In her autobiographical essay, she offers a feminist
critique of the violent message paganists convey and explains how a theological edu-
cation has contributed to her revised under-
standing of perfection.

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erners. With his signature smile, he answered
calmly, confidently, but not patronizingly, “A
person, regardless of one’s region, who makes religion a mere crutch will remain unenlightened.” And then Professor Mills, by employing the Socratic method, engaged the student in a series of questions that guided everyone at the table from a generalization on southerners and their religious sensibility to universal observations about fallible humans and mystery. For a novice high
school teacher, that winter afternoon in Tillett Lounge prompted a memorable lesson in the-
discourse as well as in Socratic pedagogy and in
patience. —VJ

Correspondence from the VDS Founder’s Medalist of ’48

Congratulations on the 2002 winter issue of
The Spire. The layout, design, articles, and
photographs combine to make the issue tastefully
done. The content of the articles is substantial, stimulating, and worthy of the
level of a graduate school of religion. I am
speaking out of decades of reading the pub-
llications of Vanderbilt Divinity School.

I entered Vanderbilt Divinity School in the
fall term, 1944. It was located in the old
Wesley Hall where the parking garage is
now. In succession I earned the B.D., M.A.,
and Ph.D. degrees. I was on campus during
the Lawson Affair, and Langdon Gilkey was
my major professor. I was never so proud to
be a Vanderbilt graduate.

I am favorably impressed with the current
doctoral students. Dr. James Huddart-Braun.
My sense is that the Divinity School is entering
a new period of quality education and takes seriously its responsibility to the Judeo-Christian theological tradition.

Hubert William Morrow, BD’48, MA’59, PhD’65
Russellville, Arkansas
Professor of Theology and Academic Dean, emeritus
Memphis Theological Seminary

Revisiting the Lawson Affair

I read the captivating article on the Lawson
Affair in the winter 2002 issue of The Spire
and would like to read more. (Jim is a good
friend of mine here in California.) Lou Silberman’s part of the article is inspiring and moving,
except that I guess I object to thinking of
Vanderbilt as a “finishing school” when I was
a student there. But never mind that; the
Lawson affair was a major turning point for
the Divinity School and for the University.
James A. Sanders, RA’48, Phil Bete Kappe, BD’51
Claremont, California

Recognition for an English Major

Thank you for sending the winter 2002 issue
of The Spire which features the essay, “A
Sanctuary Without Definition: Alumnae
Create a Place for the Spirit—Inside and
Outside the Classroom” by Leigh Pittenger,
who received her degree in English from
Middle Tennessee State University. Leigh’s
success and dedication are tremendous
virtues.

The Alumni Relations Office is always
proud of the accomplishments of our alumni,
and we appreciate hearing about their
continued success.

Dottie Cugger
Director of Alumni Relations
Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Reflection on The Tentmaker

“The Tentmaker: A Portrait of the Minister as
Theologian” (Volume 23, Number 1, Winter
2002) is a good story, uncommonly well told.

Kudos!
Pat Bartun
Nashville, Tennessee

Relevant Religion Lecture Series
at the Scarritt Bennett Center
“The Rise and Fall of the
Imperial Church”
J. Patout Burns
The Edmund Malkey Professor of
Carroll, Indiana
Monday evenings
January 27–February 3, 10, 17, 2003

“What do the Dead Sea Scrolls have to do with the Bible?”
Alice Hurt
Associate Dean and Lecturer in Hebrew Bible
Tuesday evenings
March 10, 17, 24, 31, 2003

To make reservations for the Vanderbilt Divinity School community breakfast at the University Club, please call 615/342-5994 or register on-line at library.vanderbilt.edu/caf/evv/evv.html
Prophetic Diversity
A Vision for Heirs Through Hope

BY CHRISTOPHER K. SANDERS, MDIV’95
Director of Alumni/a and Development

“Prophetic Diversity” might be just the phrase that evokes the meaning of Vanderbilt University Divinity School’s mission. It is unforgettable that the word “diversity” often carries associations of sensitivity training seminars that are part of the human resource strategy of many workplaces. To some critics, diversity is also a euphemism for quotas. Once again, the obvious connection to diversity relates to employment. Prophetic diversity avoids these dead ends by locating diversity within a vision of life instead of locating diversity within a program or a particular sphere of life.

Prophetic Diversity names the insight that the human family’s amazing variety and all the complicated networks of life in creation are a foundational gift of God worthy of honor and destined for renewal. In that sense, this vision is truly prophetic because the prophet sees the reality that is, despite appearances and shadows, and sees the new reality that will be. Such a vision makes those persons who see it “heirs through hope,” in the words of The Book of Common Prayer.

The vision is compelling, but the way to its realization will continue to be painful. If diversity in the workplace has been slow in coming, how much more difficult it will be to achieve prophetic diversity as a way of life! It is sobering to remember that any vision of diversity worth pursuing must also include an analysis of power that offers an understanding of the forces that hinder progress. Vanderbilt University Divinity School has long been a place where faculty and students have gathered to do the work of prophets. Two recent books provide a helpful understanding of the School’s engagement with prophetic diversity, so much energy to continue its realization will continue to be painful. If the realization is the hope that religion can encompass all of life. Nevertheless, religious leadership plays an important role in propa gating the vision. For 127 years, Vanderbilt Divinity School has been preparing progressive religious leaders of congregations, service agencies, and the academy. Your support makes it possible for the Schola Prophetarum, the School of Prophets, to minister, serve, and make efforts to persuade others to see that new vision. The Divinity School’s ecumenical spirit embodies the first part of a university’s mission. The statement of commitments is evidence of the second part.

Prophetic Diversity is not just an ideal for divinity school faculties and theological students. If diversity becomes a practice akin to an eleventh commandment, then it is no better than a sensitivity program at work. It must encompass all of life. Nevertheless, religious leadership plays an important role in propa gating the vision. For 127 years, Vanderbilt Divinity School has been preparing progressive religious leaders of congregations, service agencies, and the academy. Your support makes it possible for the Schola Prophetarum, the School of Prophets, to minister, serve, and teach in pursuit of the renewal of creation in all its marvelous variety.

The editors of Arte Al Dia describe Aki moto as one who “visualizes the fluctua tion of the inner and outer worlds through biomorphic pencil drawings which allow him to express the beauty of monochrome and line and who “translates subjects from the abstract world into concrete, organic pictures.” Akimoto was graduated in 2001 from Radford University in Virginia where he studied philosophy and religion under Professor Victor Anderson. The first part of a university’s mission. The statement of commitments is evidence of the second part.

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David Adams and Carole Adams

David Glasgow and Van Pond Jr.
Frank Gaffey Jr. and Anne Gaffey
William Hook and Theresa Hock

On the Cover

Prophetic Diversity
2002
by Kazya Arai Akimoto
Japanese painter (born 1965)
water color, graphite pencil, and water soluble color pencil on paper
10 1/4” x 14 1/4”

The original drawing hangs in the Office of Alumni/a and Development at Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

To learn more about joining, Schola Prophetarum, please contact Christopher K. Sanders in the Development Office at 615/322-4205 or at christopher.sanders@vanderbilt.edu.

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What the world is round or that the world is flat?

The young teacher replied, "I can teach it round or flat."

Have you ever noticed that some of the same people who want to see the Ten Commandments posted in the courthouse are the first to seek vengeance through the death penalty?

I charge you to seek the truth, however complicated that truth may seem. And then I charge you further to address with integrity whatever questions, issues, and situations you face. At Vanderbilt Divinity School, we call ourselves a school of the prophets. I hope you have learned how prophets work; they see circumstances that others cannot or will not see, and then they tell what they see. By such prophetic visions, new realities emerge. The Scriptures remind us that while foxes have their dens and birds of the air their nests, those who see as God may call themselves a school of the prophets. I hope you face. At Vanderbilt Divinity School, we have the capacity to make a difference. Whatever you encounter, go in good faith, discern wisely, and act as though faith and discernment will make a difference.
“There is a season for everything, 
a time for every occupation under heaven…”

—Ecclesiastes 3:1

A Time for Protesting

Right: Keri Ann Ehninger, MDiv’03, looks pensively at motorists on 21st Avenue South, where she and other Divinity School students joined members of the Tennessee Coalition to Abolish State Killing (TCASK) to protest the execution of inmate Abu-Ali Abdur Rahman. Formerly known as James Lee Jones, Abdur Rahman was sentenced to death in 1987 for slapping Patrick Daniels, a Nashville marijuana dealer. The United States Supreme Court issued a stay of execution on Monday, April 8, 2002, exactly 56 hours before his scheduled execution. Linda G. Manning, director of the Margaret Cuninggim Women’s Center at Vanderbilt University, serves as spiritual advisor to Abdur Rahman.

Far Right: Sixteen-year-old Steven Clontz, a junior at Buckhorn High School in New Market, Alabama, and his 12-year old brother, Phillip, (partially hidden by his sign) served as witnesses against the death penalty with their mother, Sherill Clontz, MDiv’03, associate pastor of Epworth United Methodist Church in Huntsville.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PEYTON HOGE

A Time For Dancing

Vanderbilt University Divinity School students celebrated an evening of dinner, dancing, and diversity during the 2002 spring gala. Officers of the student government association selected the question, “Can’t we all just dance together?” as the theme for the annual gathering of students and faculty. Guests were encouraged to wear attire representative of their cultural backgrounds.

Upper left: Pennsylvania met Kazakhstan when Scott Fritz, MDiv’02; Danna Ermekovna Balafova, MA’02; Kurt Scheib, MTS’02, MA’02; and Saida Batalkhanovna Apenbajieva, MA’02, attended Gala 2002. The two students from the former constituent republic of the U.S.S.R. attended the University as Bolashak Scholars (the equivalent of Presidential Scholars) and earned graduate degrees in economics.

Above: Carpenter Scholar Melissa Peterson, MTS2, and Hyde Scholar Tricia Gardiner, MDiv02, were among the students who enjoyed the festivities.

Far left: With cap, toothpick, big hair, and a lemon meringue pie, Lee Mitchell, MDiv’02, and Katy Scrogin, MTS2, momentarily transformed the VDS refectory into a truck stop during the 2002 spring gala.

Left: Annette Grace Zimondi, known to her peers as “Annie Grace,” donned attire from her native Zimbabwe for the spring gala. The Divinity School alumna from the class of 2002 currently is enrolled in the University’s Graduate Department of Religion.

GALA 2002 PHOTOGRAPHS BY PEYTON HOGE
A Time for Critical Inquiry

Above Left: To inaugurate a cross-cultural dialogue on global health care issues, Ugandan AIDS activist Noélina Namakatu traveled to Nashville for 30 days in April to discuss how treatment intervention has helped to reduce the rate of HIV infection in her country from 30 percent to 8 percent. The founder of Meeting Point Kampala—a non-governmental organization in the Namwogo district of Kampala City, Uganda—Namakatu is recognized as a leading authority on the anthropological implications of disease and specifically of HIV/AIDS. To counter the effects of illiteracy, the volunteers, social workers, and health care providers at Meeting Point teach about health care providers at Meeting Point teach about HIV/AIDS. To counter the effects of illiteracy, the volunteers, social workers, and health care providers at Meeting Point teach about

Above Center: The Reverend Dr. Mona West signs a copy of the book she edited with Robert E. Cross, Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible, for Diana Pepper, MTSc, in Colbykirk Bookstore at VDS. Pastor of spiritual life at the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, the world’s largest LGBT bookstore at VDS. Pastor of spiritual life at the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, the world’s largest

Above Right: Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and historian David Halberstam delivered “The Media and Professional Expert” during March in Flippin Auditorium at the Law School. In his lecture, sponsored by the Cal Turner Program in Moral Leadership for the Professions, Halberstam stressed that the desire for making a profit in the media industry has resulted in “trivial journalism,” citing as an example Disney’s decision to discontinue the broadcasting of Nightline after two more years.

Above: Of the Children, which documents the lives of eight civil rights activists he met in 1960 as a reporter for The Nashville Tennessean, Halberstam also emphasized that “diversity is a form of political protection against the tyranny of a culture.” While illustrating his argument, he alluded to one of the pivotal events in the history of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, the Lawson Affair, when a local newspaper publisher launched “a personal jihad based on unaided judgment against the University.”

Left: The influences of scientific advancements in genetics upon the moral and ethical landscape were examined by theologian Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite in the 29th annual Antoinette Brown Lecture at the Divinity School. In her presentation titled “Adam, Eve, and the Genome: Feminist Theology Looks at the Human Genome Project,” Thistlethwaite explored the relationship between feminist theology and genetic determinism and argued for the protection of vulnerable populations from abuses that could result from the capacity to code each person’s genetic material. The president of Chicago Theological Seminary and professor of theology and culture, Thistlethwaite based her lecture upon a course she taught at Austin College and at Anderson College where she was a professor of current VDS student, Tricia Gardner, MD(D).

A Time for Appointments and Retirement

Nicholas S. Zeppos, J.D., Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Vanderbilt University, has announced the appointment of Dale S. Johnson, Doctor of Theology, as the Druftilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History at Vanderbilt University.

Above Right: Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and historian David Halberstam delivered “The Media and Professional Expert” during March in Flippin Auditorium at the Law School.

James Hadnut-Beumler, Ph.D., Dean of the Divinity School, announced the appointment of Dale S. Johnson, Doctor of Theology, as the Druftilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History at Vanderbilt University.

Above Left: After ten years as administrative assistant in the dean’s office, Alisa Kenward retired from the Divinity School in June and moved to McMinnville, Tennessee, for her retirement years. Ms. and Kenward will remember her as the publisher of the School’s weekly newsletter, The Communicator.

Upper Left: After ten years as administrative assistant in the dean’s office, Alisa Kenward retired from the Divinity School in June and moved to McMinnville, Tennessee, for her retirement years. Students and alumni will remember her as the publisher of the School’s weekly newsletter, The Communicator.

Upper Right: The 2002–2003 academic year marks not only the tenth anniversary of Kaye Murphy’s role as assistant to the dean at the Divinity School but also her recent appointment as budget and financial aid officer for VDS. She will be responsible for managing the School’s financial transactions and for applying to students’ accounts the scholarships awarded by the financial aid committee.

Lower Left: Pat Daniel has assumed the responsibilities of activities coordinator for the Divinity School’s Office of Alumni and Development. She previously served as an office manager for Vanderbilt University’s Medical Center.

Lower Right: Sherry Willis, who served for six years as activities coordinator at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities and for eight years as administrative assistant in the Law School’s legal clinic, has been appointed administrative assistant to Dean James Hadnut- Beumler and Associate Dean Alice Hunt.
Bridge Over the Ravine: The Legacy of Liston Mills

BY H. JACKSON FORSTMAN,
The Charles G. Finney Professor of Theology and
Dean of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, emeritus

In my unbiased judgment, Liston Mills, our
Divinity School colleague, friend, and counselor,
bridged the gaping ravine between human psy-
chology as counseling and Christian faith better
and more substantively than anyone else in his
generation. Those of you who have not lived and
worked within the historically received and con-
tentious division in schools that want to prepare
women and men for Christian ministry may not
have grasped the weight of this statement.

What Liston’s generation and mine
inherited in theological education
was a curricular split. The one
side was called “academic theology,” the
other “practical theology.” Both terms are
prejudicial. If one part of the faculty under-
stands itself to be engaged in “academic the-
ology,” the implication is that the other part
is non-academic. On the other side, if the
other part understands itself to be engaged in
“practical theology,” the implication is
that the one part is impractical. It is a mas-
sive misfortune for the churches that these
biases infiltrate the consciousness of students
and affect to no good the internal dynamics
of faculties.

Liston, in his thinking, in his teaching,
and in his presence in the Vanderbilt Divin-
sity School faculty, obliterated that distinction.
He mastered both the psychological theories
and the practices of counseling, but he
sought always to shine how his substantive
struggle to understand Christian faith and its
implications for human persons, the church,
and the world grounded and gave a critical
perspective on those theories and practices.

Consequently, Liston was not a minor
player in the astonishingly collegial effort of
our faculty to devise a curriculum and a way
of life in our teaching and research that
showed promise and, at Vanderbilt, no little
fulfillment of overcoming the malaise of the-
ological education that I have described. For
some years that achievement of the Vander-
bilt Divinity School faculty was, so to speak,
the talk of the town in theological schools in
the United States and Canada.

Again, from my unbiased perspective, the
Ph.D. program in Religion and Personality,
of which Liston was the architect, is utterly
distinctive. This program embodied Liston’s
comprehensive view. His heritage with its
integrative commitments is today alive in
graduates of his Ph.D. program in theologi-
cal schools and other institutions throughout
the country.

Liston was a colleague in the Vanderbilt
Divinity School for 36 years. What can I say
but that all of us thought of him as our good
fortune, our esteemed colleague, and our
friend. But he was also an esteemed col-
league in the University as a whole. Over the
years he established more substantive con-
tacts with other colleagues in the University,
I think, than virtually any other professor in
our School. Liston's public accomplishments
and his University citizenship brought him
several of the most distinguished named
awards that are given to Vanderbilt professors.
His election as chair of the Faculty Senate
of the University is testimony to his valued
colleagueship by professors throughout the
institution.

Beyond that, Liston established close con-
tacts with the finest persons working in
human care, especially in Nashville, but also
across the country, and one of his crowning
achievements was his instrumental role in
the founding of the Pastoral Care Centers of
Middle Tennessee. Liston’s circle of col-
leagues was astonishingly broad.

I believe it is correct also to say that in a
deep and intimate sense “colleague” is an
appropriate term for Liston’s relationship
with the church school class he directed for
so many years at the Immanuel Baptist
Church. Members of that group have the
stamp of Liston on their souls, and they are
grateful.

I am bold to speak for all of Liston’s col-
leagues. As best we can, we have grieved,
and we continue to grieve with his wife, Jen-
nie, and their daughter, Sarah. At the same
time, with deepest gratitude we celebrate his
life. Our lives have been enriched by Liston’s
work with us, by his remarkable humanity,
by his enduring friendship, by the astonish-
ing way he struggled with the power of
death and for so long, looked death in the
eye, and more ... much more.

(Dean Forstman delivered this eulogy on
the occasion of Professor Mills’ funeral conducted
on Saturday, May 4, 2002, at Immanuel Baptist
Church in Nashville, Tennessee.)
A Neighborly Wink
BY HELENE HARMON
I stood pouring out the kitchen window that faced the river-stone driveway of the house next to ours. Our new neighbors, an attractive young couple, were surveying their home. Rumors describing new owners always precede their arrival; the neighborhood buzz reported he was a Baptist minister connected with Vanderbilt Divinity School and that she was a librarian at Hillsboro High School. My initial impression was, “How lucky can we be?”

Our house contained seven children, five of whom were teenagers. Life never was sedate with seven-year-olds running in and out of the driveway night and day, loud rock music blaring in every room, basketball games at all hours, or the younger children taking shortcuts by dashing across the neighbors’ yards. Goody-goody religious neighbors, no doubt, would condemn and frustrate the lives in my household.

How mistaken I was in my perception. Forty years have passed since Liston, Jennie, and Sarah joined our gang. Together, we have survived births, graduations, weddings, visits from relatives, arrivals of new puppies and kittens, moving to new homes, and yes, deaths. Liston’s passing spread a pall over my family because we assumed he was invincible. His sense of humor, laughter, and quips always turned a daily crisis into “no big deal.” His ability to listen with interest, even to young children, had the effect of compelling a person to rise to the occasion, meet a challenge, and gain an unimaginable level of confidence. My son-in-law once observed, “Having a conversation with Liston becomes an opportunity to learn about yourself.” Yes, one could always learn from Liston.

I cannot remember hearing Liston speak uncharitably about anyone. Whenever a conversation showed any sign of becoming mean-spirited in tone, Liston would exchange a wry remark, and with his infectious laughter, he discouraged anyone from making comments one might regret later.

Although he and I never had intense theological discussions, Liston provided pastoral care during a critical moment in my life. As I entered the vestibule for the funeral procession of my husband, I hesitated, uncertain of my ability to remain a composed widow. And then I saw Liston, sitting on the back pew. With the wink of an eye and the wave of his hand, Liston’s gestures delivered a message, loud and clear: “To dignify; set an example for the mourners, or this situation will deteriorate into Pandemonium.” That was the message I needed.

I imagine Liston grinning as he makes his way through the pearly gates. My husband, with Marlboro cigarette in one hand and Liston’s pipe in the other, beckons him from a stone wall.

“Where have you been?” he’ll ask Liston as they sit down together.

Then the old friends will resume their favorite pastimes—talking and solving the world’s problems—as they did after cutting the grass on Saturday mornings.

Helene Harmon of Nashville, Tennessee, is a number of Retirement Learning at Vanderbilt University, a continuing education program sponsored by the Office of Community, Neighbor- hood, and Government Relations in the University’s Division of Public Affairs. Her tribute to Professor Liston Mills is based upon an assignment she composed for the seminar in autobiography offered during the fall semester of the 2000-2001 academic year.

A Double Share of Spirit
BY STATE SENATOR ROY BRASFIELD HERON, MD/98, JD/80

My first year of theological studies was in Scotland; then I entered the joint divinity-law program at Vanderbilt University. During my first year of law school, my father developed congestive heart failure; consequently, I was unsure whether I would continue attending the University. But a family kind in Belle Meade offered this struggling student a room in the home of their recently wid- oved father, an 84-year-old attorney. This was quite a change from a reach-injected five-hour off Music Row to “The Boulevard,” but I managed to adjust.

In the first Sunday after moving into my new living arrangement, I walked with my live-in landlord a few hundred feet up Belle Meade Boulevard to Immanuel Baptist Church. There to my surprise I found a Sunday School class taught by none other than the Reverend Dr. Liston Mills.

And the touch the class Liston did. He drew us into the discussion by ques- tioning us, provoking us, and inviting us to consider the Scriptures and their implications for our lives. Here was Liston at his pastoral and professorial best. I became an admirer of Liston Mills not only because today so few deserve that description. Liston Mills not only qualified for the description. He defined and personified the term for many of us looking for role models, teachers, pastors, and witnesses to the faith.

One Sunday during my first year at Van- derbilt, I missed Liston’s Sunday School class. Earlier that morning a caller from home told me the congestive heart failure had finally claimed my father. Two days later, a pastor no taller than Liston but who also was compassionate and knew Scripture, reminded us of the story from the second chapter of Second Kings. He re-told the story of the prophets Elijah and Eliaha.

The older Elijah knew that he was at the end of his time on earth and repeatedly tried to get Eliaha to leave him. But each time, Eliaha replied, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” Finally, after they had crossed the Jordan River and just before Elijah was taken up into heaven, he said to Eliaha, “Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you.” To which Eliaha replied, “I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit.”

As we remember Liston, that should be our prayer. We should pray, as Eliaha did, for a double portion of Liston’s spirit. For what a spirit it was! And it is up to those of us touched by Liston’s work and life to carry them forward.

The ministry and teaching of Liston Mills, his life and his love, will continue as long as we minister and teach—as long as we live and love—and as long as other children of God with whom we minister conduct their ministry and carry on that love in turn.

May that be forever.

A Democrat representing the 24th congressional district, Senator Heron of Dresden, Tennessee, was one of the first two alumnae to earn a dual degree in law and at Vanderbilt University. He is a partner in the law firm of Neese, Heron & Miller-Heron and is the author of Things Held Dear: Soul Stories for My Sons, published in by Westminster John Knox Press, and Tennessee Political Humor, coauthored with L.H. “Cotton” Joy and published by the University of Tennessee Press. During the fall semester 2002, the senator is co-teaching a course at Vanderbilt Law School with Professor Don Hall in legislative drafting.

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I had decided to complete a unit of clinical pastoral education during the summer after my second year in the master of divinity program. The Veterans Administration Hospital was the convenient local site, and Liston was the small-group facilitator. Plaguing my semester were case themes that I was not being taken seriously; I was not a student member of Liston’s inner circle; I was not someone he was interested leaving the program. I sought Liston’s guidance, and Liston listened to me and offered insight. As he stated those challenges to give my best effort to completing my studies at Vanderbilt, he knew it would. Making a difference in the world requires us to use our gifts as given—without economizing them. In his demeanor, even in his demeans, even as he stated those challenging words, so instead of leaving his office dismayed, I departed with a clearer sense of purpose and a determination to give my best effort to completing my studies at Vanderbilt.

Liston’s compassionate realism. During my first semester of graduate work I was becoming disenchanted and confused and was considering leaving the program. I sought Liston’s counsel one afternoon in his office. He listened attentively and patiently while I recounted a number of frustrating experiences and scoured around whether or not I belonged in the religion and personality doctoral program. He carefully responded to each of my concerns, for the most part reassuringly. Then he looked straight in the eyes, drew a puff on his pipe, squinted as he gazed at me through the blue smoke, and concluded: “Mr. Vaughn, you are a gifted young man. If you weren’t, you wouldn’t be here. But you have to understand that one condition we expect of persons in this program is that they grow up. We don’t hold students’ hands as they do in some of the other programs around the country. Now, what you must do is decide what you want in life, and whether what we are doing here serves that agenda.”

You might think as you read these words that I must have felt insulted, demeaned, or shamed. I had none of those feelings, for the respect and regard with which Liston held me had been obvious during the entire meeting and was evident in his demeanor, even as he stated those challenging words. So, instead of leaving his office dismayed, I departed with a clearer sense of purpose and a determination to give my best effort to completing my studies at Vanderbilt.

That conversation remains to this day one of the finest lessons in pastoral care I have ever received. Today I attempt to embody this same sense of compassionate realism in my own work as a pastoral counselor, as well as on those occasions when I am called upon to supervise or teach. When I attended Liston’s 65th birthday celebration, I told him of my appreciation for him and remarked that as long as I lived I knew he would be part of me. This was one of those verbal displays of affection that Liston must have found a bit too sentimental for his taste, for he demurred rather embarrassingly. But I meant what I said. I still do. I am proud to say he was my teacher.

Vaughn earned the master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, the alma mater of Professor Mills. Upon fulfilling the requirements for his doctorate in Vanderbilt University’s Graduate Department of Religion, Vaughn began his practice as a counselor and currently serves on the staff at The Turning Leaf Pastoral Counseling Services in Brentwood, Tennessee.

During this period of my academic career, I was determined to reinvent the 22-year-old long-haired Texan girl with the twang in her voice; on the day of laughter, however, I would be transformed. I pulled my hair back into a tight bun, retrieved from the back of my closet a brown suit with a straight skirt, and forced my feet into pumps—with heels. I looked seriously ministerial. As fate would have it, I slipped-dropped the hall of the VA Hospital at the exact moment Liston was stepping out of the chaplain’s office. He took one look at me and lost his composure. His amusement, at my expense, was hardly fleeting; no sooner than he would collect himself, he burst into laughter again. Finally, when he could look at me without cracking up, he suggested we unpack the “case.”

Twenty years later, this theme continues to replay itself, in various forms, as Liston knew it would. Making a difference in the world requires us to use our gifts as given—without economizing them. In his demeanor, even in his demeans, even as he stated those challenging words, so instead of leaving his office dismayed, I departed with a clearer sense of purpose and a determination to give my best effort to completing my studies at Vanderbilt, he knew it would. Making a difference in the world requires us to use our gifts as given—without economizing them. In his demeanor, even in his demeans, even as he stated those challenging words, so instead of leaving his office dismayed, I departed with a clearer sense of purpose and a determination to give my best effort to completing my studies at Vanderbilt, he knew it would. Making a difference in the world requires us to use our gifts as given—without economizing them. In his demeanor, even in his demeans, even as he stated those challenging words, so instead of leaving his office dismayed, I departed with a clearer sense of purpose and a determination to give my best effort to completing my studies at Vanderbilt.