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Spiritual enrichment

Furman University

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Testimonies features first-person narratives

IN A MOVE THAT PRESIDENT ROD SMOLLA describes as "reflecting the central place of Furman's commitment to the spiritual and moral growth of our students and members of our community," Vaughn CroweTipton, university chaplain since 2003, has been appointed vice president for spiritual life and university chaplain. Matta Smarr-Ry, who has worked in the chaplain's office as an intern since 2005, has been named associate chaplain. She holds a Master of Divinity degree from Duke University.

CroweTipton, who earned his Ph.D. at Baylor University, immediately takes charge of three new strategic initiatives: developing space and opportunities for multi-faith groups to flourish on campus, working with the music department to institute a Baccalaureate service at Commencement (beginning this year), and spearheading the university's commitment, announced by Smolla at Fall Convocation, to become involved in service efforts for the people of Haiti.

Spiritual enrichment

The Center for Vocational Reflection (Lilly Center) has published its second collection of essays, Testimonies of Vocation, which includes six "personal explorations and discoveries on the vocation of being human." Edited by William Rogers, Bennette E. Gray Professor Emeritus of Literature, the book features essays adapted from talks delivered at Furman by James Crenshaw '61, retired professor oftheology, and current Furman professors Carmela Epright (philosophy), Paula Gilchrist (associate academic dean), David Gandolfo (philosophy) and David Runke (religion).

The book's preface states that the title was chosen "with the idea of reclaiming a powerful concept — that of a public "testimony" to a personal truth. A testimony is a first-person narrative that speaks of a significant life experience with which others can strongly identify. The life experience, while authentic and obviously unique to the individual who narrates the story, is often also emblematic of a larger set of social, economic, and/or political issues. A testimonial writer thus engages the reader's sense of ethics and justice by telling a representative story that generally reflects concerns of a larger society. This understanding of testimony inevitably bridges many domains of thoughtful exploration."

The book sells for $9, which covers printing, mailing and handling. To order, send a check standing on the account of James Crenshaw, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613.

Entering 2012, Furman’s emerging partnerships with Greenville’s Peace Center for the Performing Arts and Upcountry History Museum, a new plan to bolster the fine arts program, and a Poinsett Highway beautification project promise to energize the university’s community ties and provide new learning opportunities for students.

Furman’s fine arts programs — art, music, and theatre arts — received a significant boost in December through a $2 million grant from The Duke Endowment. The grant is the largest single gift for fine arts programming in Furman’s history. Portions of the funds will be used to develop a partnership with the Peace Center and to support recruitment of fine arts students, an initiative that is included in the university’s recently adopted strategic plan. An estimated 20 percent of Furman students are involved in some aspect of the fine arts program.

The Peace Center is the centerpiece of the Upstate’s performing arts community. The complex, which features two theatres and an amphitheatre, hosts approximately 120 performances a year, from touring Broadway shows and concerts to children’s theatre productions.

Although details of the collaboration with the Peace Center are still in the formative stage, all of Furman’s fine arts departments are expected to be involved. Opportunities may include Furman performances and art exhibits at Peace Center venues, master classes with visiting artists, student internships, arts administration training, and educational outreach programs.

In tandem with The Duke Endowment grant, Furman has received $800,200 from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the hiring of three tenure-track professors in music and arts administration. The new faculty will bring expertise in musical theatre, musicology, and nonprofit business environments, such as arts administrations; they will support Furman’s efforts to increase enrollment in the arts and contribute to the university’s expanded community outreach.

Furman has also reached a three-year agreement with the board of directors of the Upcountry History Museum, a new plan to bolster the fine arts program, and a Poinsett Highway beautification project promise to energize the university’s community ties and provide new learning opportunities for students.

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As for Poinsett Highway, the seven-mile corridor that connects Furman to downtown Greenville, the university is working with government and business planners to rejuvenate the stretch of road and develop it as a "Poinsett District" that would attract small retail shops, restaurants and condensed residential housing.

The university plans to launch the project this spring with a clean-up of the area involving students, faculty and staff.

"It’s going to take years [to complete],” Smolla says of the project, "but there is a lot of energy behind it.”

Adapted from an article in the winter issue of Inside Furman, the university’s internal newsletter.

The museum, which opened in 2007, features a 100-seat theatre, four display areas, and seasonal meeting rooms. It is located on Heritage Green, the former site of the Greenville Woman’s College, which coordinated with Furman in the 1910s.

While the museum will continue to showcase Upstate history, President Rod Smolla says he is open to using the facility to support other functions, such as lectures and university receptions. Furman has initiated a national search for a director and formed a transition team to strategize operational changes.

“Want to create more engagement about the museum,” says Smolla. “That will give us an opportunity to connect to the community on many levels.”

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