In this age of distrust of difference, being welcoming on the intrapersonal level is ever more important. When you speak with someone, perhaps for the first time or perhaps for times uncountable, it is equally important to metaphorically hold that person in a welcoming embrace. Even at Macalester where we learn to critically examine our internalized assumptions, racisms, homophobias and stereotypes, just to name a few, it is easy to slip back into a familiar mindset and shy away from difference. Difference is uncomfortable. It requires work, energy and more than a bit of vulnerability to look it in the face. How can we learn to encounter difference with compassion, integrity and a welcoming openness?

About a month ago, Macalester students, faculty and staff participated in the 2nd annual “Day of Change and Exchange,” a workshop on difficult dialogues.

I would like invite you to participate in a reproduction of the activity we did. Think to yourself of a time when you had a conversation with someone on a topic of which your views differed significantly from the views of your conversation partner, but in which you were able to maintain the humanity of the other person and embrace their views with compassion and openness. What sparked this discussion? What did this conversation feel like? Take a moment to identify specific themes or traits that enabled you to sustain this conversation when perhaps you have had others that did not go quite as well.

I would like to suggest that open conversation as well as being consciously open toward difference in general starts with the idea of hospitality. Hospitality takes on many forms and may be as simple as smiling at a stranger as you hold the door open for him/her. Hospitality allows us to recognize the individual within an unnamed and unknown body, to develop a sense of kinship even to the smallest degree.

Perhaps we need to supplement our critical analysis of life with something softer. At Macalester we seem to eat, breathe, live and sleep critical inquiry to the point where we focus on other people’s faults, rather than build off the good. At the “Day of Change and Exchange,” President Rosenberg suggested that we use appreciative inquiry, which focuses on the good in a situation, as a complementary process of analysis to critical inquiry, which generally focuses on what didn’t work or was done poorly. Both forms of inquiry work through de- and reconstruction, but by combining the two, we may be able to find the balance between analyzing the bad and building off the good, between safety and creative
discomfort.

It is in the hopes of learning to embrace a person’s views and beliefs as integral to whom s/he is as an individual that we embark on the journey of hospitality. However, such a journey takes practice. It requires skills including deep listening, empathy, compassion and an ability to push one’s own assumptions aside. Even more difficult, hospitality and openness require a certain amount of vulnerability.

Vulnerability is discomfiting at best and can be downright frightening. Being vulnerable requires you to relinquish control and allow the other person access not only to your fears, but also your passions, your insecurities, your prejudices, your loves. One-sided vulnerability is not enough to sustain a difficult conversation on a small or large scale. However, mutual vulnerability can only be achieved when someone makes the first move.

As Father Daniel Homan said in Radical Hospitality, “Hospitality is not an easy answer. It requires that we take a chance and we change. It requires us to grow. The moment we engage with another person everything gets messy…[but] because hospitality always involves giving something of ourselves to others, it is a spiritual practice. Spirituality is about relationships.”

Through this idea of spirituality being about relationships, we can use hospitality simultaneously as an anchor and a buoy. Hospitality gives us hope toward a positive outcome, a gained friend and a more enlightened worldview through sincere and compassionate interaction with difference. In this way we can learn to take the risk toward personal vulnerability and open doors to mutual vulnerability, eventually appreciating difference and identifying the power that evolves by uniting across difference.

K.P. Hong once asked a group of students, “What will you allow yourself to be eaten by?” This question resonates within the concepts of difficult dialogue, hospitality, vulnerability and openness, all of which require you to give something up to the other person. By taking a moment from our own almost constant consumption of food, people, ideas, knowledge and information, and allowing ourselves to be consumed by someone or something else in turn, we open up pathways for understanding and feelings of kinship across difference. So ask yourself, “By what will you allow yourself to be eaten?”

SITTING@MAC: A NEW STUDENT ORG
BY NEEDHAM HURST, ’11

Over the last year, a new student religious organization called Sitting@Mac has been taking root at Macalester. At the heart of our practice is a commitment to awaken—a commitment to step with clarity and direction into our life at college.

When I arrived at Macalester earlier this year, I was surprised by the absence of any Buddhist or meditation organization on campus. Fresh out of two weeks of silent retreat in my lineage’s head monastery, I felt a strong call to begin to build a Buddhist meditation community here.

By odd karmic coincidence, the new associate chaplain, KP Hong, also saw the need for quality meditation practice at Macalester. We met about a week before school began and forged forward with KP’s idea for Friday afternoon meditation practice.

The strangest part of this process (for me at least) was that people started showing up. Our first Friday brought in twelve students! I was stunned. As that number increased, and KP’s dharma talks kept getting better and better, Sitting@Mac began to develop a core group of students interested in making meditation a vital part of their lives.

As students have matured in their practice, Sitting@Mac has needed to expand programmatically in order to accommodate the increased interest in meditation. Now in its second semester, Sitting@Mac has expanded its meditation practice offerings seven-fold. There are now opportunities for group meditation every weekday morning in the Chapel, along with Tuesday and Friday afternoons. We recently became chartered as an official student organization, allowing us to receive funding for an off-campus meditation retreat on April 5th.

The upcoming retreat on April 5th will be an opportunity for students to experience meditation on a much deeper level. It’s a chance, as KP puts it, “to support students’ engagement with pluralism beyond the exoticism and popular consumption of ‘Eastern spiritualities’ prevalent in our culture.”

I think all of us in Sitting@Mac are looking forward to developing quality meditation and Buddhist programs here at Macalester in the years to come. I hope we will continue to be a safe place where students of any religious or non-religious background can participate in the intentional practice of meditation.
The Multifaith Council is a relatively new installment at Macalester, and for that reason, I was unsure what to expect upon applying for a seat. There are countless problems to take into consideration when approaching Multifaith dialogue. Being technically Lutheran, converting to Catholicism, but truly an agnostic religious studies major who lives in the Hebrew House, I was unsure what I could contribute. I knew, however, that these dialogues were needed on campus.

One of the council’s largest projects this year is “Religion at Macalester? Exploring faith in the ‘14th most godless campus,” an entire week devoted to questions of religion and an exploration of religious life on the Macalester campus. This week of religion, as it had been labeled prior to an in-depth discussion on a catchier title, was initiated last year with the opening of the new Center for Religious and Spiritual Life. It was intended as an opportunity for religious orgs to open their doors to students who might otherwise be unwilling or unable to attend meetings, services, or discussions. This year, however, the goal is much loftier.

As the title suggests, we aim to expose and debunk, discuss and debate, and eventually bring the greater Macalester campus to the conclusion that we as a council have come to countless times: Religious life has a deep and meaningful impact on Macalester students.

At our council meetings, we are often too bogged down with the bureaucratic nonsense that all orgs face to really get to the meaning of our presence there: good conversation. When we do approach dialogue, however, I am astounded to see the breadth of viewpoints represented. I am continually surprised by the ways in which faith (or lack thereof) and religious life affects students. It is in these rare moments of open reflection that I feel that participation on the council is a truly meaningful experience. The Multifaith Council continues to grow and find its place on campus amidst numerous organizations devoted to diversity, but we are slowly making a name for ourselves and making it known that religion in all its forms is a profound component of the Macalester experience.

RELIGION AT MACALESTER? CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sponsored by the Multifaith Council and the CRSL, with events sponsored by religious organizations, this week is meant to showcase the depth and diversity of faith on the Macalester campus. Each event is open to all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Catholic Mass, 11:00 am, Chapel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mac UU’s Open Meeting, 6:00-7:00 pm, Chapel</td>
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<td>Protestant Vespers, 8:30-9:15 pm, Chapel</td>
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<td>March 31</td>
<td>Heifer Project: Café Mac Meal Donations, During Lunch, Campus Center Basement</td>
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<td>April 3</td>
<td>Compassionate Conversation: “The Cross on the Chapel and Other Questions of Macalester’s Religious Affiliation,” 7:00-8:30 pm, CRSL. Sponsored by the Multifaith Council.</td>
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<td>April 4</td>
<td>Sitting @ Mac meditation and Dharma Practice, 4:45-6:00 pm, Chapel</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>Heifer Project Benefit Concert, 6:00-8:00 pm, Olin Rice Small Gallery. Sponsored by MCF. African Music Ensemble Gospel Concert, 6:30-7:30pm, Chapel</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8</td>
<td>Film Screening and Discussion: For the Bible Tells Me So – 8:00 pm; CRSL. Co-Sponsored by Q.U. and the Multifaith Council</td>
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Hot Catholics, a group within Mac Catholics that meets once a month to discuss topics related to Catholicism while enjoying snacks and hot chocolate, will hold a special meeting during “Religion at Mac?” week. Pictured (left to right): Federico Burlon, Marie Gray, and Fr. Jim Radde.
WHAT IS SERVICE? SOME QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

BY DAVID SCHMITT, ’08

What is service? Service is emphasized in the mission of Macalester College: “Macalester is committed to being a preeminent liberal arts college with an educational program known for its high standards for scholarship and its special emphasis on internationalism, multiculturalism, and service to society.”

The emphasis on service to society that is part of the mission of the college resonates with me. When I was in elementary school my parents and teachers urged me to learn in service of others. It was a seemingly simple instruction and I think it is part of why Macalester’s mission strikes a chord with me today.

I think it is apparent in some ways when members of the Macalester community are of service to society. For example, when a student voluntarily chooses to participate in or lead a student organization, that exemplifies service. Another example of service is when someone volunteers in a community organization. These are the examples of service that seem obvious to me.

However, Macalester also encourages students to think critically, and I think critical questions and considerations complicate a (seemingly simple) commitment to service.

Are there ways other than volunteering in some capacity that people are of service? For example, are people of service when they are paid for their work? Are people of service in the way that they relate to each other informally, such as in friendships and other relationships?

Is the idea of service helpful or harmful in contexts where servitude has involved degradation or oppression? Does service provided by upper classes to lower classes (i.e. philanthropy) reinforce class relationships?

What motivates people to serve? Does duty, joy, or religious belief motivate people to serve? Do different motivations result in different qualities of service?

As students continue to participate in the Macalester community or go on to other communities, how will students serve society? What is service? More to come......