

**View From the Pew**  
*By Meredith Mackin Rilley*

It turns out that *doing good* and *doing good while questioning God's motives* for sending you down a given path of goodness are two completely different things. Doing good is good, but looking for the faith-filled perspective is *better*. That's transfiguring, in fact. As Msgr. Ryan explains it, "If I decide to go to an area to help people that has been struck by a natural disaster, I 'm doing a good thing! But if I ask the question, 'Why did God ask me to go?' the transfiguration is occurring in me."

Three college students, Andrea Dunham (NFHS '06) a pre-med junior at Holy Cross College, Christine Stewart (NFHS '06) a business marketing junior at Stonehill College, and Tara Moriarity (NFHS '05) an industrial relations senior at Cornell University are all St. Edward's Faith Formation Alumni who spent their vacation time in service for others and, somewhere along the way, had a shift in perspective where they saw transfiguring glimpses to the larger picture of the good they were truly doing.

Andrea Dunham's story took her to Kenya with IPM (International Partners in Mission), where her very first hours were spent touring the tin-roofed mud huts and garbage-covered ground of the country's largest slum, which is shadowed with poverty, hunger and illness. (*All of Kenya's garbage is shipped to one slum and it has become the literal foundation of their lives.*) Andrea also traveled to the mountains where people experienced the same poverty, hunger and illness as the cities. The cause of these common issues between the two vastly different regions is the lack of clean water, so the goal of Andrea's mission with IPM was to build a well with donated money. Their completion of this task does so much more than just provide water. In many cases, the clean water alone will keep illness at bay and permit now-healthy children to be educated. One summer Andrea additionally spent a week in Honduras with Medical Ministry International, where she set up a week-long health clinic in a remote area.

Andrea's first inclinations to participate in these missions were because of a want to travel and help serve and improve the lives of the less fortunate. As a child, she was always taught to give back. "I definitely believe God put me in these situations to help others and to learn from others' experiences. When I was in Kenya, especially the slums, I had a lot of questions on how God works through the lives of the people there, not only why God chose to have people live in such conditions, but also how people in such horrible and seemingly hopeless situations could have so much faith."

Christine Stewart had a similar experience. She chose to spend vacation time in New Orleans with an alternative spring break program, called HOPE (Honoring our neighbor, Organizing for Justice, Peace, Encountering) through a campus ministry. She and 35 classmates cleaned and gutted the homes of Hurricane Katrina victims who wanted to sell their properties because of difficult financial circumstances, and who could not even afford to have the necessary work done to sell their homes. "I didn't know what to expect. Katrina was in the media, but eventually went on the back burner. Seeing the families was eye-opening. One family we helped had a trailer in the front yard, two kids, no job and the dad left them. When we went on a tour of the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, we saw people living under the highway! And this is years later." Christine feels blessed to live a privileged life, having family, friends, an education and a roof over her head, but feels compelled to help those who aren't blessed the same way. "It touches you and weighs on your heart. You want to help in so many different ways. Each night after cleanup we would sit in a circle and talk about the days activities. The last night we were [asked to talk about each other] and I thought, 'I didn't know these people before and we were brought together by this trip.' It made me wonder why we were all there. We were all these different religions brought together for a common good, learning from each other. I thought, 'Is that why we're all here?'"

As a senior, Tara Moriarity's transfiguring experiences had an even more profound effect that significantly shaped her future. Like the others, Tara spent a spring break serving others. Her trip took her to Guatemala where she and her peers built basic wood stoves with chimneys for impoverished families. (The people of this area, having always cooked over open flames, would frequently go blind and/or develop lung diseases from the smoke of the fires.) Tara had also taken a trip to Appalachia with St. Edward's while a high school student to repair homes for the destitute elderly in poverty who couldn't do the work themselves.

The most poignant moment came to Tara while in the Guatemalan jungle. "We were out surveying the land in the jungle. When we returned to the house we were working on, [the woman who owned it] made us lunch even though she couldn't afford it. It was just tortillas and beans, but it was all she had and she pulled out all the stops because we were guests in her home. It was stirring." This was the moment God spoke to Tara. "I questioned the poverty there and knew that it just wasn't acceptable. I couldn't *not* do anything. I knew I had to use the gifts God gave me. I [was able to] go home to the American culture and these people had to stay in poverty. I didn't want anyone to forget them." This divinely inspired moment moved Tara to take the logical next career step to spend her junior year abroad in Geneva. She worked in the Multinational Enterprises & Social Policy Department, trying to promote just labor standards for large companies to prevent employee exploitation in third world countries and industrialized nations alike. "After finishing there, I realized that I didn't want to spend my time in a corporate

environment. I had all this vitality and wanted to be more active. This called me to want to be more hands on, so I re-routed my career path to be more in service.” Because of this, Tara will spend the next two years teaching in inner city Houston with Teach For America. Her ultimate goal is to then attend Law School and begin a career in Labor Relations. “I went into college not knowing what to do with my life. I chose to study Labor Relations, which turned [from a college major] to a calling for my life. My experience really puts proms and iPhones into perspective in this material world. One Guatemalan boy wore this shirt that said, ‘Future Harvard Graduate.’ I knew the context of [what the shirt said], but he was just happy to have a shirt.”

In speaking with these amazing, light-filled young women, I found myself hopeful for the future. While *my* junior year in Switzerland was spent studying French, chocolate and skiing, today’s youth has incredible opportunities to fill some of the many outstretched hands with their own opportunities. And, with enough young people looking at their own service with a faith-filled heart, the world will surely be in good hands.