

Greetings Newly Accepted Student,

Our names are Chad Gurley and Melanie C. Jones. Chad is a first year Master of Divinity (MDiv) student & Melanie is a second year MDiv student. Our purpose for writing this letter and sending this booklet is to help you learn more about Student Life here at VDS. Since receiving your acceptance letter, we suspect that your emotions have been characterized by either extreme excitement or intense contemplation. We know exactly how you are feeling at this moment.

Thank goodness...I got accepted to my first choice.

OR

Wow! I have been accepted into an amazing University, but is Vanderbilt Divinity School the best place for me?

We were at this same place not that long ago. On either end of the spectrum, both of these emotions are extremely normal. We hope to help bring clarity to your decision. We have identified a few suggestions for you to consider:

Be Informed. The discernment process of what school to attend is extensive, but it is certainly worth your time and energy. This booklet is designed to give you more information about student life events and activities that will nurture your academic and personal interests while attending VDS. We encourage you to read this document in its entirety, surf the www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity website to answer any additional questions about VDS, and feel free to email us. We have included our contact informa-

tion below for any additional inquiries.

Make a Visit. The best advice that we can offer you is to simply visit us. We cannot wait to meet you. Your decision will never be truly settled until you have walked the halls, sat in the renowned Benton Chapel, engaged the teachings of VDS's distinguished professors, and exchanged ideas with some of the most intuitive theological minds in the nation (a.k.a. our colleagues). To schedule a visit, contact the Admissions Office via telephone at (615)343-3963 or the Admissions Director, Katherine Smith, at katherine.smith@vanderbilt.edu.

Whether you have apprehension about your first semester here or are still weighing your options to join us, we hope that at the end of this guide your decision will be based on a full assessment of what VDS has to offer.

Sincerely,

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COMMUNITY

*We do not reflect on things within some kind of void
but rather we ponder over things in the light of our
encounters with real-life situations.*

- Bishop K.H. Ting

Our community here at Vanderbilt allows each of us to consider our individual responses to ministry and theological training in both an academic and spiritual context. The ecumenical nature of the academic environment nurtures not only a healthy learning community but also an honest exploration of an individual's own theology. The spiritual aspect of the community sustains and challenges us to pursue deeper ideas while embracing the spirit of ritual.

As students, we are in constant dialogue with professors and staff members who respectfully encourage spiritual questions to surface. These spiritual concerns help bring thoughts of reconciliation and theological revival to our school.

The level of engagement with not only the VDS community but with the larger Nashville area is what makes Vanderbilt a special place. Through our involvement with faith-based groups, government coalitions, and other non-profit organizations, VDS students work to build community with individuals who may feel marginalized or oppressed within the city.

Through our student worship, our academic lectures and our local discoveries of faith and justice, VDS students are becoming responsible theologians, ministers, and teachers in hopes of addressing serious needs of justice and community for others and for ourselves. We cannot wait for you join us in our journey.

The next few pages highlight some of our regular community events. More information can also be found on the **Divinity School Student Life Portal**:
<https://sites.google.com/a/vanderbilt.edu/vdsstudentlifeportal/>

WEEKLY COMMUNITY EVENTS

Weekly Activities: 10-11am - An Hour of Power

The unique thing about VDS is each Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10-11am, no classes are held. Instead of taking that hour to patronize the local coffee shop (and there are LOTS around Vanderbilt!), VDS offers these weekly opportunities for the community.

Monday Forum

Monday Forums enable VDS students to start the week engaged in deep and practical thought surrounding theological education. Faculty presenters are given the opportunity to candidly express their scholarly and/or faith journey with the VDS community. Outside ministries and agencies also enlighten students on issues that affect the Nashville metropolitan community.

Monday Forum contributors and topics include:

The Covenant Network of Presbyterians; Contemplative Pedagogy: Meditative Modes of Inquiry that foster holistic learning (mind, body, and soul) and attention; Religion and the Arts in Contemporary Culture; Tennessee Coalition against State Killing; Balancing School and Family Life; Professing the Professions: Faculty Stories of Vocational Exploration; How My Mind Has Changed: Funny things that happen on the way to a theological degree.

Community Worship (Wednesdays)

We seek to create a sacred space where tradition is honored, equality, justice and love are embodied, and the good news is lived. Worship is an exploration. It is

a time to reflect on the injustices that have been caused within and by faith groups while upholding and continuing the pursuit of a just communion. Worship is interactive and centered on strengthening community. Worship takes place in the *All Faith Chapel* each week at 10am on Wednesdays and provides a time of reflection and rest. Worship may serve as a time of rejuvenation from study or a resource for the challenges of spiritual formation. If you are interested in the worship community as well as how you can become involved, we encourage you to contact: Ben Anthony at benjamin.j.anthony@vanderbilt.edu.

Friday Coffee Hour

Do you love doughnuts, coffee, and good conversation? Friday Coffee Hours are some of the most impactful moments of the community experience at VDS. This weekly gathering is a time to share community information regarding campus and local events. It is also a chance to meet prospective students and fellowship with other VDS students, faculty, and staff.

Friday Eucharist

Each Friday at noon, an intimate Eucharistic service is celebrated in Benton Chapel. Services are led by ordained clergy from multiple different Christian traditions. All are invited to participate.

Al's Pub

Most Friday afternoons from 3-5pm, the student-led organization Al's Pub offers alcoholic and non-alcoholic drink options as a casual time of fellowship for students and faculty.

COMMUNITY LECTURES & EVENTS

The beauty of Vanderbilt Divinity School is the appreciation of balance in learning. When thinking in terms of learning spaces, it seems learning is mostly associated with the classroom. VDS community events expand the sphere of where and when learning can take place.

Antoinette Brown Lecture Series

The Antoinette Brown Lecture Series, held each year in March, brings to Vanderbilt distinguished women theologians and church leaders who address concerns relating to the ministry and study of religion. This series addresses gender, feminist and womanist interests and their relation to theological education.

Cole Lecture Series

The Cole Lecture, held annually in October during Reunion Weekend, is the most anticipated lecture series of the year. Historically designed “for the defense and advocacy of the Christian religion,” this series has welcomed the most distinguished scholars to the Vanderbilt Divinity School. This extensive list includes: Harry Emerson Fosdick, George Buttrick, Rudolph Buttmann, H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Walter Brueggemann, Elisabeth Schussier Florenza, James Barr, Gustavo Gutierrez, James Cone, Edward Farley, Don Beisswenger, Gene TeSelle, David Buttrick, Jim Well, Lamin Sanneh, Mark Noll, and Randall Balmer. The Cole Lectures are free and open to the public.

Community Breakfasts

Community Breakfasts enable one to begin the day with sound intellectual nutrition. Led by VDS faculty and other distinguished visiting lecturers, these regular morning gatherings critically engage world events and their theological and historical framework.

Relevant Religion Series

What good is religion that does not shape the community? The Relevant Religion Series is a public lecture held off-campus at local sites aimed at raising theological questions outside of the classroom and into the surrounding community.



INVOLVEMENT

To be alive is to be involved in events, some of which take their rise uniquely in the individual's experience and some of which flow into the life, apparently without rhyme or reason. To accept all experience as raw material out of which the human spirit distills meanings and values is a part of the meaning of maturity.

- Howard Thurman

VANDERBILT DIVINITY SCHOOL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Black Seminarians: The Black Seminarians organization, begun in 1977, reflects and embodies the unique context of black Americans in a predominantly white educational framework. Membership includes all black students in the Divinity School and the Graduate Department of Religion, though people of all racial classifications are welcome and encouraged to participate in our programs and discussions. For information, visit: www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/seminarians.php. Student contact: dianna.n.watkins@vanderbilt.edu

GABLE: The Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns is dedicated to addressing the issues of homophobia and heterosexism in religious life, society, and the academy. The Office suggests ways in which the Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion can fulfill their commitment to confronting homophobia in our society. For more information visit: www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/gable.php . Student contact: laura.a.rossbert@vanderbilt.edu

Office of Women's Concerns: The Office of Women's Concerns seeks to encourage the discussion of women's issues, provide opportunities for women's personal and professional growth, increase awareness of the contributions of women to religion and theology, and create opportunities for community among women within the Vanderbilt community. For more information, visit: www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/womensconcerns.php. Student contact: emily.h.denton@vanderbilt.edu

Economic Empowerment Coalition: EEC works to educate and raise awareness about issues of poverty, economic and social injustice, workers' rights, and labor issues in the Vanderbilt and greater Nashville communities. For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_eec.php. Student contact: andrew.l.shepherd@vanderbilt.edu

Eco-Concerns: Eco-concerns seeks to empower those in the divinity school community to think and act theologically as well as ethically about environmental issues through educational opportunities, such as local action, guest speakers, and dialogue with other student organizations. For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_ec.php. Student contact: eric.burton.krieger@vanderbilt.edu

PAN (Political Action Network): PAN exists to foster and encourage student understanding of and involvement in issues that affect our community, our city, our state, our nation and our world. For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_pan.php. Student contact: tara.a.lentz@vanderbilt.edu

Translation: Translation is a student led group designed to discuss the detailed question of "How does a call to ministry translate into Vanderbilt Divinity School and outside into places of ministry?" For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_translations.php. Student contact: elizabeth.a.coyle@vanderbilt.edu

The Society of Cornelius: The Society of St. Cornelius welcomes Catholics (active, inactive, past, and future), along with their spouses and partners, who are associated with Vanderbilt Divinity School or the Graduate Department of Religion. The Society's purpose is to support and enhance the religious lives of its members through making the resources of the Catholic Church available to the Vanderbilt community.

For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_soc.php.

Student contact: elizabeth.a.coyle@vanderbilt.edu

The United Methodist Student Association: The United Methodist Student Association at VDS exists to provide opportunities for United Methodist students by facilitating interaction, providing avenues for mutual support and spiritual formation, connecting to the structure and organization of the UMC, promoting social activism in the Vanderbilt and Nashville communities, and coordinating events for fellowship and fun.

For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_umsa.php.

Student contact: b.blacksten@vanderbilt.edu

Presbyterian Student Association: The Presbyterian Student Association exists to provide community for Presbyterian students in the Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion. It provides opportunities for leadership development, building relationships with other Presbyterians within the VDS community as well as in the Nashville Metro Area.

For more information, visit: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/sl_so_psa.php.

Marginalia: Marginalia seeks to uphold the a tradition that bears witness to the needs and experiences of the Nashville homeless community through educating both the VDS and the community about issues surrounding homelessness in Nashville, and seeking social justice for the homeless community.

For more information, visit:

www.nashvillemargins.org

Mosaic: Mosaic seeks to bring together individuals from any and all religious traditions in order to create a mosaic where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Mosaic includes cultural, social, educational, and service-oriented explorations aimed at bridging gaps and creating understanding among religious traditions. For more information, visit: <https://sites.google.com/a/vanderbilt.edu/vdsstudentlifeportal/student-organizations/mosaic>

Student contact: anthony.fatta@vanderbilt.edu



EXPLORATION

Theological reflection is the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living.

- Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer

OTHER PROGRAMS

Kelly Miller Smith Institute on Black Church Studies (KMSI)

www.vanderbilt.edu/kmsi

The Kelly Miller Smith Institute targets VDS students to re-enliven the African American church praxis.

KMSI offers a Certificate in Black Church studies to VDS students to broaden their understanding of the church and theology in the Black Church. Kelly Miller Smith Institute hosts various lectures and seminars aimed at strengthening the Black church and community. KMSI is also a partner with the African American Lectionary (www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org).

Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender and Sexuality

www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/carpenter

The Carpenter Program focuses on a continuous dialogue surrounding gender, religion, and sexuality. The program is not partisan in theological outlook or political orientation, nor is it focused solely on the academic community. The Carpenter Program also offers a certificate program for VDS students, Vanderbilt Graduate students, and College of Arts & Science students.

Turner Center for Church Leadership

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/tccl/>

In cooperation with Vanderbilt Divinity School and the Nashville Episcopal Area of the UMC, the Turner Center serves the development of clergy and lay leadership in the regional church, as well as funding several full-tuition scholarships for Vanderbilt students pursuing ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church.

Cal Turner Program for Moral Leadership in the Professions

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/ctp/>

The Cal Turner Program is designed to help students and the community balance leadership and ethics. The program holds professionals - doctors, lawyers, ministers, etc. - to a level of high accountability while focusing on the need for collaborative work among professions to properly address social issues.

Center for Latin American Studies

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/clas/faculty-and-staff/>

Beginning in 2011, Divinity students are eligible to complete a certificate in Latin American Studies as part of their MDiv or MTS degree. Students interested in completing the certificate should consult with the Divinity School Registrar upon matriculation and course registration in the Fall.

Religion in the Arts and Contemporary Culture

<http://www.religionandarts.com/>

Enabled by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, this program seeks to create future leaders for ministry who understand and can harness the creativity of the arts for theological reflection and contemporary worship. Religion in the Arts and Contemporary Culture offers regular events and exhibits throughout the year to explore the theological context and religious dimensions of the arts.

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