Evolution
GOD’S PLAN OR SCIENTIFIC THEORY?
Amanda Fenkner ’08 turned her love of athletics into a career for the Washington Redskins, filling 83,031 seats in FedEx Field.  

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Campus Renaissance
Teaching, learning and performing arts spaces get a facelift

Love Your Enemies
Marie Dennis challenges readers

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God’s plan or scientific theory?

Reaching Out, Reaching Back
A story of survival and hope

Cuba
Leaving the past behind

Deep, Cosmic, Radical
Inside St. Francis of Assisi

Faculty Spotlight
Rosemarie Chinni helps students find the light

High Risk, High Reward
Student Profile: Abby Eby

Alumni Profile
Amanda Fenkner ’08

Alumni Class Notes

ON THE COVER: Can the timeless truths of the Bible regarding creation and scientific theory of evolution find common ground? COVER PHOTO: BRAD WALSON/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE, LEFT: THEOD ANDERSON
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President’s Message

Magic Moments. Every campus needs them. Special occasions that pull at the heart strings. Ceremonies where we rejoice in the success of our students, alumni, faculty and staff. Events where we fall silent in solemn contemplation or remembrance. Or burst with pride. Or celebrate a shared achievement.

Alvernia has had more than its fair share already this year. The Mass of the Holy Spirit. Marie Dennis’ Founder’s Day Lecture. The announcement of a major nursing grant (1 of only 11 nationally). Alina Fernandez’s moving story about growing up as Castro’s daughter. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracy Kidder’s account of Deo Niyizonkiza and the Class of 2015’s fundraising effort for his healthcare clinic in Kigutu, Burundi. The World Day of Prayer for Peace interfaith service and dialogue.

The magic was there too when we broke ground on our two newest Founders Village residence buildings. Along with apartments and suite-style living for students, the project includes an attached activities center with a large fitness center, a dance and aerobics studio, and a gracious campus “living room” with space for more than 100 students to study, enjoy programs, or just hang out with friends in front of the fireplace. When construction is completed next summer, we will have living accommodations for more than 1,000 students on campus, nearly double what it was just a few years ago.

Of course, the rededication of Francis Hall, Alvernia’s “Old Main,” was a highlight of the fall and had it all: poignant memories of our pioneering Sisters – Zygmunta, Pacelli, and many others; appreciation for generous donors; admiration for skilled architects and engineers who seamlessly blended contemporary features with the building’s historic character; awe at the beauty of the spectacular new outdoor plaza and entrance; enjoyment of the new Miller Gallery; heavenly singing by our chorus; and a provocative one-act performance by our theater students.

Magic moments are often private, especially for college presidents. Hosting gatherings of students, faculty, or alumni make me appreciate anew the talent on campus and the contributions of so many to Alvernia and their communities. Recent alumni excited to return for Autumn Blast, a new Homecoming tradition at the Vern.

Accomplished alumni proud of their alma mater and eager to give back to the special place that shaped them, personally as well as professionally. Faculty who have taught here 20 and even 30 years who are still passionate about their vocation. New faculty with high expectations for their students, their colleagues, and especially themselves. Peer mentors, tutors, and other student leaders devoted to assisting their fellow students. A crowded chapel full of student-athletes being “commissioned” at the beginning of their seasons.

Amidst all these moments, two were especially memorable. On the second day of first-year orientation, Helen and I stood on the plaza of the student center and waited to greet over 400 freshmen and orientation leaders as they streamed across the campus green to gather for dinner after a day of service in the community. They were hot, tired, and proud of what they had accomplished. I was proud too.

During Homecoming Weekend, among many deserving recipients, we honored two alumnae for 38 years of excellent work as high school mathematics teachers. Twin sisters Patricia and Michele Murphy, from the Class of 1973, are far too humble to have ever considered themselves worthy of such recognition. But legions of their former students surely did. As I listened to their acceptance remarks, it was clear to me that the Murphy sisters were a perfect choice as distinguished Alvernia alums and a fitting reminder that ordinary people are capable of extraordinary contributions.

There are lessons to be learned from these events. Magic moments like these don’t happen by accident. They take much unglamorous, unseen, and unsung work. They usually require many helping hands . . . and often selfless service.

Yes, magic moments. Every campus needs them. We are fortunate to have them frequently at Alvernia.

Thomas F. Flynn
President

Alvernia
President
Thomas F. Flynn
and Student
Government
President Marissa
DeLucia cut the
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President
When a massive earthquake hit Haiti in 2010, Junior Bernard saw death and destruction firsthand. A Haiti native, Junior wrote about the devastation and how he believed God had saved his life. He emailed his story to many, including Americans he met during their mission trip to Haiti. One of these volunteers shared Junior’s story with Robyn Schultz, Alvernia’s assistant director of student activities. Schultz contacted Junior and encouraged him to apply to the university. Now a freshman studying business management and tutoring other students in French, Junior plans to become the first member of his family to graduate from college, thanks to his scholarship.

“If I only had my own funds to rely on, I would never be here and have this hope for a bright future,” says Junior. “All this is possible thanks to Alvernia and its donors. I am grateful for everything. I truly hope I can be helpful to our beautiful Alvernia someday.”

More than 97% of full-time undergraduate students at Alvernia receive financial assistance. Gifts to The Alvernia Fund, our annual giving campaign, support students by providing scholarships, cutting-edge technology, library resources, athletic equipment, service opportunities, and much more! For more information on how you can support The Alvernia Fund, contact Thomas C. Minick ’98, director of development, at 610-790-2862 or thomas.minick@alvernia.edu.
Campus News

The Who, What and Why of Alvernia University

For more news, visit alvernia.edu/news

Campus renaissance continues; historic Francis Hall rededicated

Alvernia’s campus has been undergoing a transformation during the past year, much to the delight of students who are enjoying and taking full advantage of enhanced teaching, learning, and performing arts spaces. Following the 2010 renovation of the Francis Hall auditorium, which turned the space into a modern theater and recital hall, work this past summer further enriched the performing and visual arts programs, with improvements to the music suite and creation of rehearsal spaces.

A striking new campus-side entrance to Francis Hall was added that includes a spacious lobby, the Miller Gallery, and adjoining courtyard. Additional renovation of the third floor added a suite of offices for the arts. The building was rededicated during a special ceremony in September attended by members of the campus and regional communities.

Bernardine Hall also received a face-lift in a several areas. The new Educational Technology Center features video, sound, editing, and production equipment that allows for student and faculty productions as well as instruction. In addition, the Bernardine Hall Lecture Hall has become fully video interactive, thanks to some new technology that provides a key component to our distance education efforts.

The new Educational Technology Center in Bernardine Hall features state-of-the-art multimedia equipment for production and instruction.
Campus News

Students pray with Pope Benedict XVI

Eight students joined Director of Campus Ministry and University Chaplain Fr. Kevin Queally and Campus Minister Jo Pressimone in Madrid, Spain, to participate in World Youth Day with Pope Benedict XVI. Celebrated every three years in a different country, World Youth Day is a worldwide encounter with the Pontiff. Students who made the trip included Meredith Beavers, Lynn Boyer, Myron Boultz, Jessica Hardinger, Mark Molchany, Katherine Roesch, Jorge Rosario and Brittany Weidenhammer.

The trip allowed these Alvernia students to deepen their faith by means of prayer and the sacraments, together with hundreds of thousands of other young people who shared their interests and ambitions. Many generous donors helped to underwrite the costs of this extraordinary experience for Alvernia students.

Pedals from heaven

Bernardine Franciscan Sisters from around the world converged at the order’s Reading Motherhouse earlier this year for the congregation’s General Chapter meeting. During the meeting, which is held every six years, the Sisters review and discuss the congregation’s progress and chart a course for its future, including electing new leadership. Pictured above, several Sisters enjoy a spin around the Motherhouse grounds, thanks to bicycles on loan from Alvernia faculty, staff and students who volunteered the two-wheelers to help visiting Sisters get around campus during their stay.

Leaders named to advisory council

Alvernia has selected 21 distinguished leaders to be part of its newly formed President’s Advisory Council. Membership is comprised of alumni and friends of the university from within the Berks and Mid-Atlantic regions and beyond. A diverse group professionally, the council includes former university presidents and leaders in other fields who will gather twice a year to contribute their expertise and provide advice and perspective on major issues facing the institution.

Council members include Robert Balthaser ’91, Jerry Greiner, Mike Heimbach ’88, Angel Helm, George Irish, Steve Koons ’05, Jennifer Krow ’03, Rachel Maher ’94, Bob Miller, Kevin Murphy, Sean Murphy, Gerry Nau, Chris Pruitt, Paul Roedel, Judy Schwank, Vaughn Spencer, Doug Tiemen, Mike Toledo, Bob White ’91, Colleen Woodard ’68 and Tom Work.

The Council will be responsible for reviewing, analyzing and recommending strategies that are necessary and appropriate in order to achieve overall institutional goals.
Three honored at President’s Dinner

Alvernia hosted its annual President’s Dinner in October, honoring organizations and individuals who have made a significant impact on the university and its surrounding community. This year’s recipients were Marlin & Ginger Miller (Franciscan Award) and Berks Catholic High School (Pro Urbe Award). The event was attended by more than 250 local business and community leaders, university trustees, faculty, and administrators.

Presented to Marlin and Ginger Miller, the Franciscan Award honors individuals who selflessly give their time, talents, and resources to serve Alvernia, the community, and their profession. Longtime supporters of the community, the Millers are committed to encouraging wide-ranging appreciation for artistic expression. The dynamic Miller Gallery in Francis Hall acknowledges and celebrates the Millers’ dedicated support of the arts.

This year’s Pro Urbe (which translates to “for the city,”) Award was given to Berks Catholic High School and its predecessors, Reading Central Catholic and Holy Name High Schools, for providing opportunities for Berks County young people to experience a challenging curriculum and extracurricular activities that promote intellectual, spiritual, emotional, social and physical growth, all rooted in the Catholic tradition.

Students inducted into honor society

Alvernia’s Occupational Therapy program hosted the inaugural induction of 25 students into the national honors society of Occupational Therapy – Pi Theta Epsilon. The society is a specialized honor society for occupational therapy students and alumni that recognizes both the growth of Alvernia and the quality of its students.

Night out with the neighbors

Alvernia University student-athletes took a break from varsity competition and hosted games in the middle of their fall season that were geared not toward self-improvement, but instead toward improving neighborhood relations. Students hit the Kenhorst streets — Broadway and Commonwealth Boulevard to be specific — handing out flyers and inviting the local residents to what they hope will be an annual tradition of Night Out With the Neighbors.

More than 100 people packed the Kenhorst Playground for the event. The entire men’s soccer team, along with Student Athlete Advisory Committee members from each team were in attendance. The event was planned by the Good Neighbor Committee, consisting of Alvernia’s Student Government Association, Kenhorst neighbors, and Alvernia staff members.

Anyone living in the local community was invited to come out with the kids for an evening of fun. In addition to raffles and photos with the Crusader mascot, the Student-Athlete Advisory Council planned games and activities for neighborhood kids.
Faiths pray for peace

Representatives from throughout the region were welcomed to Alvernia’s campus in October as part of the World Day of Prayer for Peace interfaith celebration. Participants represented congregations and denominations from a broad array of faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, non-theistic traditions, and others.

The event commemorated the 25th anniversary of the original event called by Pope John Paul II in 1986 and coincided with a global event being hosted by Pope Benedict XVI in Assisi, Italy, birthplace of Saint Francis, who founded the Catholic Franciscan order. Events were attended by Alvernia students, faculty, staff and alumni, as well as many from throughout the region who gathered to pray for world peace.

The celebration included an opening session and interfaith prayer service as well a presentation and discussion led by Rabbi Hirsch and Bishop Hanifen from the Center for Christian-Jewish Dialogue in Colorado Springs.

Blessing of the animals

Each year around the Feast of Saint Francis, Oct. 4, it is customary for Alvernia to host the Blessing of the Animals. This ceremony is conducted in remembrance of Alvernia’s patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi, and his love for all creatures. Community members were invited to bring their pets to be blessed by Father Kevin Queally, Alvernia campus chaplain and director of campus ministry. Two dozen or so dogs of all breeds, a cat, a rabbit and a guinea pig were all gently sprinkled with holy water as they received the sacramental spritz with dignity, and an occasional howl!
Two tapped for board roles

Two area leaders have joined Alvernia’s Board of Trustees: Stephen Najarian, president of the Dewey Land Company, and Timothy Dietrich, managing partner at Barley Snyder SSL.

Najarian is a graduate of the Fugua School of Business at Duke University and is past chairman of the Olivet Boys and Girls Club of Berks County. He also serves on the boards of the St. Joseph Regional Health Network, Lancaster Country Day School and the Berks County Chamber of Commerce.

Dietrich is a graduate of The Dickinson School of Law. He is a community cabinet member of United Way of Berks County, serves on the Board of Directors for the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce, and is a solicitor for the Reading Civic Opera Society.

“Both Steve and Tim are strong additions to our board who bring with them a wealth of experience that will be valuable to helping advance the university,” said Alvernia President Tom Flynn.

Partnership expands study abroad options

Alvernia has teamed up with The College of Global Studies at Arcadia University to offer students expanded opportunities to study abroad while working toward their degree.

Through the unique partnership, beginning in spring 2012, Alvernia’s students can study in locations that range from the United Kingdom, Ireland and Italy to Spain and South Africa, with programs in additional countries in development for the future. Students can also participate in internship programs in London, Sydney and Dublin, including an option to intern at the British or Irish parliaments.

“This really expands options for our students and gives them international experience that will be valuable once they graduate,” said Jen Dalton, the study abroad coordinator. “Study abroad opportunities were always available to our students, but the Arcadia partnership offers access to an internationally recognized, top-rated array of programs that makes it easier to participate while gaining exposure to quality learning programs in countries all around the world.”

Study abroad programs for many different majors are offered, including the physical and social sciences, arts and humanities (including an intensive language study option in Spain), communications, business, education, and others. Most student financial aid will apply to these study abroad programs. Also, students can apply for limited, need-based scholarship assistance to help with travel expenses.

Senior Emily Rabadi spent her fall semester studying in London (pictured here in front of the famed London Bridge), where she held a marketing and public relations internship with E! Entertainment and Style Network.

Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn speaks with new board members Stephen Najarian, left, and Timothy Dietrich, right.

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Sister on a ‘mission’

Sister Roberta A. McKelvie, OSF, Ph.D., has been appointed special assistant to the president for mission and joined the president’s cabinet this fall. A member of the Alvernia community for many years, Sr. Roberta will work with Alvernia’s vice presidents to develop mission integration plans for each division of the university and will also chair a campus-wide leadership group that will coordinate mission-centered initiatives. She will work closely with Father Kevin Queally, Alvernia’s chaplain and director of Campus Ministry, who is assuming responsibility for new mission education programs.

In her role, Sr. Roberta will draw on the expertise of Dr. Kevin Godfrey, executive director of the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities, and Sr. Margaret Carney, president of St. Bonaventure University and an Alvernia trustee.

“We are so fortunate to have someone with Sr. Roberta’s expertise to lead our campus mission efforts,” said President Flynn. “She has been a leader on our board and is an accomplished scholar with considerable expertise in the distinct spirituality and intellectual tradition of Franciscans.”

Sr. Roberta holds master’s degrees in English and Franciscan Studies and a doctorate in Historical Theology, in addition to her undergraduate degree from Alvernia.

Founders Village construction begins

Ground was broken this fall on two multi-million dollar additions to the Founders Village residence halls. The new state-of-the-art facilities will house 185 students beginning in fall 2012 and help provide on-campus living for the nearly 1,000 students who will be residing on campus. Adding to the excitement is the addition of a new 18,500 square-foot student activities center and recreation wing that includes a two-story fitness center, a spacious campus “living room” that can accommodate more than 100 students, and a dance/aerobic studio.

Nursing program wins grant

AU joins Duke, Texas A&M, and Maryland as recipients

Alvernia is one of 11 institutions nationwide to win a competitive federal grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Other schools receiving the grants include Duke University, Texas A&M, and the University of Maryland, among seven others. Part of HRSA’s Nursing Workforce Diversity program, the research-based grant of $330,000, distributed over the next three years, will be used to expand and strengthen vital nursing training through scholarships, stipends, programming, and retention.

“Similar to changes that are taking place on the national scene, there are important challenges all around us,” explained Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn.

“Our population is aging, our workforce is becoming more diverse, and the healthcare system is under enormous financial pressures. Not surprisingly, the critical need for and demands on highly trained registered nurses are rising and becoming ever more complex,” Flynn said. “Healthcare professionals everywhere increasingly require greater levels of training.”

The grant funding will support development of Alvernia’s Success project — a program that blends existing campus resources with discipline-specific mentorship strategies to enhance student retention.
Travis A. Berger presented a paper, “Laying the Foundations: Three Experiential Learning Opportunities that Engage Students, Develop Leaders and Build Relationships with Alumni and Business Professionals,” at the Business Professor Teaching Summit at Drexel University.

Rosemary McFee moderated a workshop session entitled “Federal Incentives: Myths and Facts” at the Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association’s annual conference in Atlantic City, N.J.

Judy Warchal participated in the Fourth International Symposium on Service-Learning at the Ningbo Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University, China. She was a co-author on two presentations: “Long Term Impact of Service-learning on Alumni Volunteer Service Activities” and “Reflections on Connections.”

Anne M. Fink presented “Systemic Lupus Erythematosus: Nursing Care of ‘The Wolf’ “ as a keynote speaker for the alumni association of The Reading Hospital and Medical Center.

Kathleen Muzevich, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor of Education

Kathleen Muzevich presented her research “Evaluating the Writing of Our Youngest Learners: An Assessment Tool for Early Childhood Teachers” at the International Reading Association’s 56th Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida. More than 150 educators attended her session.

Rosemary McFee, M.Ed.
Instructor of Criminal Justice

Rosemary McFee moderated a workshop session entitled “Federal Incentives: Myths and Facts” at the Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association’s annual conference in Atlantic City, N.J.

John A. Rochowicz, Jr. published the research paper “Bootstrapping Analysis, Inferential Statistics, and EXCEL” in the international peer-reviewed electronic journal Spreadsheets in Education.

Di You, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology

Di You recently co-authored “Gender Differences in Moral Sensitivity: A Meta-Analysis” with Yukiko Maeda from Purdue University and Muriel J. Bebeau from the University of Minnesota. The article appeared in the journal Ethics & Behavior.

Rosemarie Chinni, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Chemistry

Rosemarie Chinni was part of the Society for Applied Spectroscopy National Speaker Tour and presented a talk entitled “Applications of Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) for Uranium Detection and Field Portable Instrumentation” at Bruker Daltonics in Boston, and Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Ana Ruiz, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology

Ana Ruiz participated in the Fourth International Symposium on Service-Learning at the Ningbo Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University, China. She was a co-author on two presentations: “Long Term Impact of Service-learning on Alumni Volunteer Service Activities” and “Reflections on Connections.”

James Siburt, MA
Adjunct, Humanities


Spencer S. Stober, Ed.D.
Professor of Biology

Donna Yarri, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology

Spencer S. Stober and Donna Yarri presented a paper entitled “Interdisciplinary Teaching: Confessions of a ‘Biologian’ “ at The Third International Science in Society Conference held at Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

Jodi Radosh, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Communication

Jodi Radosh moderated two debates on BCTV — one for Reading mayoral candidates and another with the Berks County Commissioners. Her co-moderator was Kevin Murphy, president of the Berks County Community Foundation.

Elizabeth Matteo, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology

Mary Ellen Symanski, Ph.D., RN
Associate Professor of Nursing

Elizabeth Matteo and Mary Ellen Symanski presented “A Collaborative Approach to Women’s Health Research in a Leadership Focused Ph.D. Program” with doctoral student Rebecca Hartman at the 25th Annual Women in Educational Leadership Conference at the University of Nebraska.
It is well known that government economic indicators typically report on the time-interval changes in job placements, unemployment benefits, and job losses or gains. Economic analysis of local, state, or national levels rarely include the immediate and long-term impact on the affected individuals or community. In addition, negative economic conditions have unrelentingly affected some cities or regions that have struggled from previous economic downturns. These cumulative economic conditions create severe strains on community and residents by producing a status of chronic poverty.

As a newcomer to the city at the time, I remember reading a bumper sticker that said, “pray for me I work in the city of Reading,” and it started me thinking. I immediately became curious about the impact of the label “distressed city” on the residents and people who work in the City of Reading. If we form a strong sense of identity with our community — how does a negative label affect one’s identity?

At a Council on Social Work Education in Texas that fall, I met with a colleague from Fordham University and asked him if he would collaborate with me on a research project. The project, “Labeling Effects on Resiliency and Empowerment of an Economically Distressed City” became a reality when we applied for and received an Alvernia University Teaching Excellence Grant, which involved the use of focus groups. We wanted to know what the overall effects of living in a city that has been labeled as distressed might be. So we used focus groups to obtain data on the impact of being identified as an economically distressed city on social efficiency, coping resources, health, and wellbeing of its residents. Labeling does affect different social sectors, including professionals in education, civil service, healthcare and residents. The focus groups voiced their concerns on the negative effects on the dominant discourse on their city.

Participants talked about two Readings: the present and the past Reading, the haves and
Miller Gallery opens its doors

As a key element to recent renovations in Francis Hall, Alvernia opened the doors to the long-awaited Miller Gallery in the fall. The gallery is named after local arts patrons Marlin and Ginger Miller. Longtime supporters of the community, the Millers are committed to encouraging a wide-ranging appreciation for artistic expression.

The Miller Gallery will showcase art created by local artists and works developed by Alvernia students.

“Marlin and Ginger support many worthy causes, demonstrate a passionate commitment to higher education, and have made a special impact by investing in the cultural life of our city,” said Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn. “They understand the importance of the arts to the quality of life for individuals and their communities. We are so grateful for their support that has enabled the creation of the Miller Gallery at Alvernia.”

Through a unique partnership, the Reading Public Museum is providing gallery management and consultative services for the gallery. The Miller Gallery’s inaugural exhibit showcased “The Beauty of Berks,” featuring the work of renowned local artists. The exhibit highlighted historic 19th and 20th century Berks County landscape through original watercolor paintings, oils, and limited edition prints.

In January, “Masters of American Photography” will open and feature works from the Reading Public Museum’s recently acquired collection of photographs representing America from the 1880s through the 1980s.
This spring, Alvernia is inviting members of the campus and regional communities to dream, be inspired, and discover the arts and culture events on campus like never before. Whether through visual and performing arts, cultural experiences, dynamic speakers, or theater performances, the arts are thriving at Alvernia!

Two visually stimulating art shows will be showcased in the new Miller Gallery. The gallery will feature a mix of artwork from The Reading Public Museum’s extraordinary collection, as well as Alvernia students.

In addition to art shows, many cultural events will be hosted in the Francis Hall Theater and Recital Hall. These cultural events range from a Jewish a capella group (January), to a storyteller and instrumentalist (April) and an Alvernia student concert (May).

A spring lineup of speakers will highlight topics of national importance and regional interest. Jack De Bellis, John Updike professor in residence at Alvernia, will discuss the famous author and his works in “Rabbit at Rest in Shillington” in February. And don’t miss the annual Hesburgh Lecture in March, which promises to again delve into a topic of great societal importance.

Visit the new Francis Hall Theater and Recital Hall as it comes alive with entertaining performances. In February, Circo Comedia, a rag-tag duo from Montreal, will amuse audiences with a special combination of comedy and magic. In March, a showcase performance from Alvernia’s Student Theatre will grace the stage.

Alvernia’s arts and culture events provide outstanding access to incredible learning experiences. Everyone is welcome to participate in these extraordinary events hosted throughout the spring.
Marie Dennis brought a daunting challenge with her in September when she delivered the annual Founder’s Day address.

When internationally known peace advocate Marie Dennis was on campus this semester, she spoke on lessons from 9/11 and her message was a poignant one — to love your enemies. Dennis is a recognized leader among Catholics committed to peace, social justice, and ecological integrity. She is currently director of the Maryknoll Catholic Missioners’ Office for Global Concerns and also president of Pax Christi International, the global Catholic peace movement, a position she shares with Bishop Kevin Dowling from South Africa. Her work has been recognized with numerous accolades and awards, including the 2008 Peacemaker Award — previously presented to Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King.

**Alvernia Magazine**

What are some of your memories of 9/11?

**Marie Dennis**

My sister was a medical doctor working at St. Vincent’s Hospital, the closest hospital to ground zero. She told us about thousands of other generous souls who immediately filled the streets around St. Vincent’s offering to help or to donate blood. And for a year after September 11, 2001, the New York Times published what I think was a most unique and wonderful collection of obituaries — you may remember them — page after page of sacred stories about ordinary lives — vignettes of humanity that often highlighted the qualities of character — even the spirituality — of the many who lost their lives on that fateful day.

**AM**

How do you think acts of that day impacted us as a country?

**MD**

Because people around the world could see photos of the destruction on September 11 — it shocked the entire world and evoked an outpouring of solidarity and sympathy. For a very brief period of time, we glimpsed what some would call the “universal human,” the bonding of humanity across divisive and destructive borders and boundaries, be they political, racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, etc. There was no doubt that the United States had enemies that day, but we also had friends on every continent and an unprecedented opportunity to chart a dramatically new course for our country and, perhaps, for the world.

**AM**

How do you think the United States could have reacted differently to the attacks?

**MD**

At that time, a friend of mine had a wonderful idea: What if the United States launched a massive “Listening Project?” In place of sending troops, what if we had recruited 10,000 college students or other interested volunteers in a revolutionary new kind of Peace Corps. In addition to being well trained in active listening, they received intensive training in intercultural sensitivity, active nonviolent conflict resolution and basic survival skills and were sent to several areas of the world where people seem to hate us Americans. What if they lived and worked among the people for a year, listening for wisdom about what people think about the United States, about terrorism, about their own security and well-being, about social justice. What if they were afforded the same honor and benefits now bestowed on soldiers and were expected to return home to begin an unprecedented national debate about how to shape U.S. relationships with the rest of the world — about what makes for security in the United States and overseas?

What if, instead of launching a war in Afghanistan, the United States had announced that, as far as we were able, no Afghani child would go hungry and immediately began collaborating with the family of nations to make that a reality. What if, instead of dramatically increasing our budget for war, we dramatically increased our budget for human needs?

In the weeks after the attack, I wrote “Every step we take from now on as a people and a

Continued on page 58
Love your enemies

Learning new lessons from a national tragedy
Evolution
GOD’S PLAN OR SCIENTIFIC THEORY?
By Heather Wax

Can timeless truths of the Bible regarding creation and modern scientific theory of evolution comfortably coexist?
Many major Christian organizations, including the Catholic Church and even some Jewish denominations, today accept what’s often called “theistic evolution,” — the idea that biological life developed gradually over time but God in his divine providence guided the entire process. For these groups, evolution is how God created life. On these terms Darwin’s major thesis expressed in his Origin of Species (considered the foundation of evolutionary biology) is not in conflict. Many in the scientific community bristle at such thoughts which are unsupported by empirical data and historical evidence. However, a small and growing movement is gaining traction that embraces both scientific and religious perspectives and offers hope for common ground.
In April of 2009, Dr. Francis Collins, the geneticist who led the Human Genome Project, held a small dinner party at the Capital Hilton in downtown Washington, D.C. He had invited a couple of his colleagues and a number of high-powered evangelicals, and as they sat at the table, he made an announcement. Over the past year and a half, he had quietly launched a nonprofit organization called The BioLogos Foundation to “help believers, skeptics, scientists, pastors, and lay leaders in the Church to better understand how science and faith can be friends and not combatants.” And he was ready to make it public.

Collins had long been interested in the relationship between science and religion. In his 2006 best-selling book *The Language of God*, he had shared how he found harmony between his scientific and spiritual world views. Now, with BioLogos, he wanted to address the country’s culture war between science and faith and clarify how traditional scientific views of evolution fit.

Just a few months later, Collins was confirmed as the director of the National Institutes of Health, and he left BioLogos. Nonetheless, his faith commitments sparked a firestorm. “It is interesting that so many people seem to be enraged by Francis Collins,” says Karl Giberson, a science and religion scholar who helped develop BioLogos. “Instead of being somebody that is a marvelous mediator — a helpful bridge between people that are at war with each other — everybody shoots at him.” A number of his fellow Christians were upset because they felt that Collins — who favors both evolution and stem cell research — drew attention to beliefs that were at odds with their own. Many scientists were equally unhappy.

“It’s not that I think that there should be a religious litmus test for public science administrators, or that being a devout Christian is a disqualification. But in Collins’ case, it is not a matter of private belief, but public advocacy.” Harvard University psychology professor Steven Pinker told a reporter. Others, however, saw his public defense of religion and discussions of faith in a positive light. “Collins is not just a scientific leader, he’s a Christian role model,” Steven Waldman, the co-founder of Beliefnet, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*. “He shows that being a believer doesn’t mean checking your brain at the church door, that people of faith have just as much intellectual heft as seculars and, most important, how faith and science can happily co-exist.”

In essence, this difference in opinion is the divide that exists in the ongoing debate about how to view the proper relationship between science and religion more generally. At one end are religious fundamentalists, who think their faith is incompatible with certain scientific ideas, which they reject. At the opposite end are those who think science is the only true way of gaining knowledge about the world and its methods are inherently incompatible with the revelations and blind faith of religion, which they actively oppose.

“I think the theological community understands the importance of science and embraces both it and the challenge it brings to previous theological assumptions,” said Jerry Vigna, associate professor of theology at Alvernia. “We have in many ways moved far beyond the Enlightenment’s hostility between science and religion, and Christian theology has realized the importance of the most advanced science in understanding God’s work in beginning and continuing the world.”

An example — the Roman Catholic position on the theory of evolution, has changed over the past two centuries, although it remains controversial for some who seek to interpret it broadly. The Church’s position states that faith and scientific findings regarding theories of evolution are not in conflict, and that the existence of God is required to explain the spiritual component of man’s origins.

Vatican officials have said that Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution should not have been dismissed by the early Church.
and that it is attuned with the Christian view of Creation. In fact, in 2009, the Vatican hosted a conference on the 150th anniversary of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* to discuss the compatibility of Darwin’s theory of evolution and Catholic teaching.

At that conference, Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, expressed his belief that while the Church had been hostile to Darwin’s theory in the past, the idea of evolution could actually be traced to St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Father Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, from the Pontifical University in Rome, added that St. Augustine had never heard the term evolution, but “knew that big fish eat smaller fish” and forms of life had been transformed “slowly over time.” Aquinas made comparable observations in the Middle Ages.

Ethicist and Alvernia alumnus Father Mark Swope ’84, believes that “science can be promoted through religion, and there is room for religion in discussions of scientific studies.” In other words, “science and religion should work and can work in conjunction with each other.”

In an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1996, Pope John Paul II spoke to the Church’s position to accept evolution of the human body. “In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII has already affirmed that there is no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of the faith regarding man and his vocation, provided that we do not lose sight of certain fixed points.

“Today, more than a half-century after the appearance of that encyclical, some new findings lead us toward the recognition of evolution as more than a hypothesis. In fact, it is remarkable that this theory has had progressively greater influence on the spirit of researchers, following a series of discoveries in different scholarly disciplines. The convergence in the results of these independent studies — which was neither planned nor sought — constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of the theory.”

This is the place on the spectrum that Alvernia biology professor Spencer Stober and theology professor Donna Yarri occupy. In 2009, they co-wrote the book *God, Science, and Designer Genes*, which looked at genetic technologies like stem cell research and cloning, and the moral and theological questions these technologies raise. They are now working on a second book called *God, Darwin, and the Origins of Life*, based on an honors course they are currently teaching that focuses on the science behind evolutionary theory and different Christian theological responses to it over the years.

“There always have been and there still are people today who believe that science and religion are in conflict,” says Yarri. “But we operate more on a dialogue model, where we want to respect the boundaries of each other’s discipline but engage in a dialogue that moves us to a kind of new place of inquiry where our perspective is informed by the other discipline. Because we believe that dialogue is so...”

“We have in many ways moved far beyond the Enlightenment’s hostility between science and religion...”

Jerry Vigna
important, we’re really saying that we shouldn’t even think of them as conflictual.

“But we want our audience to be able to weigh the evidence and to still think ethically about it. I mean, you can understand how stem cell research works and still be either opposed to it or for it. So we want them to understand the science — the things that are factual, material causes — but we also want them to think critically about these issues as well.”

There are areas, of course, where Yarri and Stober don’t see eye to eye — God’s role in the process of evolution is one; limits on scientific inquiry is another. At the same time, says Stober, they show that “the disciplines are compatible in that we can all communicate with each other and as we come to respect each other’s way of knowing and as we move forward, then we have more information to inform our interpretation of things we observe.” Yarri goes on: “It’s having a respect for another view even if you think it’s wrong. It’s having respect for at least the people who hold it.”

They use the word “biologian” to describe people like themselves — biologists or theologians who contribute to an open and engaged dialogue between the two fields without compromising or transgressing their own. “We think it’s important that you have two different perspectives but that you remain true to your discipline so that we don’t dilute the disciplines,” Stober says. “Instead, we have a really effective dialogue between biology and theology because they each have different methods of understanding and trying to develop the knowledge base in their disciplines.”

In a recent study of scientists at the top U.S. research universities, Rice University sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund found that only 15 percent thought science and religion were always in conflict; 70 percent thought they were only sometimes in conflict, while 15 percent said they were never in conflict. Scientists who hold the “no conflict” view tend to fall into one of two camps, Ecklund notes. The first sees a firm boundary between science and religion, with science being a “far superior form of knowledge,” she writes. For those in this camp, she explains, the two realms were “so irrelevant to one another that they were not even in conflict.”

Those who espouse the idea of nonoverlapping magisteria view religion and science as inherently dealing in different kinds of truth, with science grounded in empirical truth and religion in meaning. They therefore had a hands-off approach to religion.” Those in the second camp, she says, believe science and religion are both valid and valuable ways of knowing what can’t be fully compartmentalized. In fact, they tend to go so far as to think science and religion can inspire and enrich one another. “Individuals professing this view were generally religious,” Ecklund points out, “but came from a broad range of religious perspectives, including traditional Catholics as well as Unitarians.”

Collins is one of a number of high-profile scientists who belong to this group. So is Guy Consolmagno, a planetary scientist at the Vatican Observatory and the curator of the Vatican meteorite collection. Consolmagno sees both science and religion as “fascinated by puzzles, by mysteries. Religion embraces mystery, ‘pondering mystery in one’s heart,’ loving mystery because it is a sign of the ineffable,” he says.

“Science explains things previously not understood in order that, in the process, it may uncover and appreciate newer and deeper mysteries.” In his view, “a really beautiful theory is not one that explains everything away, but rather one that clears away the simple mysteries in order to reveal the deeper mysteries underneath them.”

Then there’s Kenneth Miller, a biology professor at Brown University and a practicing Catholic. Miller is well known for publicly opposing the religious ideas of creationism and “intelligent design,” and in 1999, he published Finding Darwin’s God, a book to show others of faith how a scientific understanding of the world can be compatible with...
belief in a creator.

“The way I would explain it to a Christian is that the first duty of a Christian is to the truth. So your first question about evolution ought not to be: Does it contradict my understanding of the book of Genesis? Is it contradicted by one of Paul's letters? Your first question would be really simple, and that is: Is it true? And once you’ve answered that question, then it’s perfectly okay to say: Can I understand this in a context of faith?” says Miller.

“What I try to argue is that science really is the best way that we have to find out how the natural world works. But science is not an answer to why there is a natural world to begin with or to why the natural world should yield to our own powers of intellect. It just doesn’t have anything to say about that. And I think ultimately, for me, it’s my faith that does

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Deogratias “Deo” Niyizonkiza was a young refugee who fled his home in the war-torn African country of Burundi in 1993. After six months alone and on the run in his country and neighboring Rwanda, he arrived in New York City with $200. Disoriented and alone, he carried one suitcase. He spoke no English. He knew no one.

Those who briefly encountered Deo on the street could not know the story he harbored within. They could not see the horror experienced by the young medical student in his homeland as he ran and hid, trying only to survive a brutal civil war that eventually left 800,000 dead and more than 2 million homeless.

For a long time Deo did not speak of the atrocities; rising smoke that meant entire villages were being burned to the ground, or thick swarms of flies foreshadowing human massacre beyond comprehension. He dared not whisper of the carnage he had witnessed: the running dog that clenched a severed human head in its mouth; the infant cradled securely in its dead mother’s arms as she lay motionless against a tree; the baby silently crying out for help with a fixed gaze to those who passed near.

To those who saw Deo as he delivered groceries in New York, or struggled to learn English, or sought shelter at night in Central Park, he was just one more homeless immigrant in a big American city trying to make it through the day, wondering how he fit in, and sometimes wishing he would die.

“It was terrible,” Deo said, recalling that time during a recent interview. “It was extremely uncomfortable because I couldn’t communicate with anyone. I didn’t know how I was going to survive here.”

While he grew up in Burundi under very difficult circumstances, Deo said he never encountered the shame there that he felt as a homeless person in New York City. “I grew up poor, but I was not poor because I had parents who loved me,” he said. “But here, I was alone. There was a lot of shame and humiliation around the situation I was in.”

Eventually, Deo did tell his story — recorded by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracy Kidder.
“It can be very hard to do good, but giving up or doing nothing is not an option.”

Deogratias
“Deo”
Niyizonkiza
in his book *Strength in What Remains*. The work, which relates Deo’s story of terror and triumph, (he eventually attended Columbia University in pursuit of his medical degree) has inspired many since it was published in 2009. That includes the Alvernia class of 2015 for whom the book was selected as their summer reading project.

“Deo’s story is punctuated by humility, collegiality, peacemaking, and service – the values we hold so dear at Alvernia,” said Susan Guay, assistant professor of English and Communication. “His was an ideal story to help illustrate the impact of Franciscan values when they are put into action.”

Members of Alvernia’s faculty and staff selected *Strength in What Remains* for freshman reading because it had the potential to raise student awareness and incite action, said Dean of Student Success Claire Berardini.

“The book challenges the reader to confront global issues of poverty and violence, and to not only read about what has occurred, but to ask why,” she said. Not surprisingly, when Kidder appeared on Alvernia’s campus in October to discuss his novel as part of the university’s Literary Festival, he had more than a captive audience. His remarks drew attention to the need to share real-life stories such as Deo’s and the profound opportunity to repay goodness with goodness.

“Stories are one of the ways in which we understand the world,” Kidder said. “They are not the only way, certainly, but I think that, as humans, we are built to tell and hear stories about other people and the things that happen to them.”

Everyone, Kidder said, can learn from Deo’s story.

“I hope that Deo’s story would open our minds to Burundi, and also to the parts of New York City that are kept hidden,” Kidder said. “After I met Deo and heard his story, I hoped that I would never again look at anonymous faces the same way.”

While Deo’s story is compelling, it is not unique. When he arrived in New York alone and on his own, he joined the 104,000 other foreigner visitors who enter the United States every day. Most are tourists, students, or businesspeople. About 3,100 arrive with immigrant Visas, as Deo did, that allow them to settle here and become naturalized citizens after five years. A small number seek asylum from persecution in their countries. The rest
are undocumented aliens – people who sneak across the border to enter the country illegally or violate the terms of their visitor visas.

Once here, some immigrants enjoy the finest accommodations, while others are grateful just to share overcrowded, substandard housing, often with people they don’t know. Those without even that option are forced to live on the streets, seeking shelter wherever they can find it.

Such was Deo’s case. After arriving in New York, he lived in abandoned tenement buildings with others who were homeless, eventually finding a low-paying job delivering groceries. He worked for 12 hours a day, six days a week, at $15 a day, hoping for tips from well-heeled residents.

Sometimes he would sleep under the stars in Central Park, reminding him of his home in Burundi. He began to study and eventually master English, and figured out how to use New York’s subway system. Gradually, he learned to overcome his pride and accept help from kind strangers who recognized his potential and took extraordinary measures to assist him.

With that help and through his own ingenuity, Deo was eventually able to enter Columbia University, where he studied biochemistry and philosophy. He went on to audit classes at Harvard University’s School of Public Health, where he met Dr. Paul Farmer, a physician and anthropologist who in 1987 founded Partners In Health, a nonprofit organization that provides healthcare to Haiti’s poorest residents.

Deeply influenced by Farmer and feeling called to pass along the help and kindness he had received, Deo returned to Burundi in 2005 to assess the situation and determine how he might help. Conditions in his homeland were horrific. Extreme poverty, hunger, and disease were the norm — the results of the terrible 13-year civil war between Hutus and Tutsis that had not only killed hundreds of thousands of people, but also ruined the country’s economy.

“It was hell on earth,” Deo said. “I knew the country had suffered so much, but I didn’t know exactly how bad it was. People were sick and dying at the hands of witchcraft doctors.”

Deo decided the best way to help would be to start a medical clinic to serve the people of his homeland. In spite of skepticism from his fellow Burundians, he enlisted the help of villagers — both Hutus and Tutsis — to work together to build a clinic in Kiutu, the rural village in which he’d grown up. Such an effort would be risky, Deo knew, as strong feelings from the war remained. Still, he was willing to take a chance.

“I was afraid, frankly,” he recalled. “These were neighbors who had killed neighbors. But I challenged them. I asked them to come together and make bricks for something that would benefit all of them, and they did. It was something that brought them

Students support Health Works

While *Strength in What Remains* recounts the terrible struggles of Deogratias “Deo” Niyizonkiza, a young refugee who ended up in New York City after fleeing his home in the war-torn African country of Burundi in 1993, it also is a triumphant testament to the strength of the human spirit, the power of forgiveness, and the joy found in giving.

That joy was brought to life by first-year students at Alvernia who joined together to develop fundraising projects to support Village Health Works, a health clinic Deo founded in Kiutu, the rural village in which he’d grown up. Since opening in 2007, Village Health Works has treated more than 55,000 patients.

Their efforts, said Dean of Student Success Claire Berardini, reflect Alvernia’s Franciscan-inspired mission, bringing attention to global issues and encouraging others to respond. “Deo faced circumstances that we cannot imagine,” Berardini said. “His story really speaks to our mission in a way that connected with students.”

Each freshman seminar class developed a fundraising project to support Village Health Works. Projects include a range of approaches, including painting house numbers on curbs, selling student-designed T-shirts containing a Deo quote, and establishing Mr. Alvernia Penny Wars, a system of collecting coins developed by Alvernia’s Student Government Association and officers of the freshman class.

In addition, ticket sales from Alvernia’s annual October masquerade were donated to Village Health Works, and a yard sale is being organized this spring, with a portion of proceeds donated to the cause.

As part of the project, students and faculty were invited to participate in a “gift of spirit” by recording messages for Deo and Village Health Works staff members and providing footage of their projects for a video diary. More information about Deo’s work and the Village Health Works is available at [villagehealthworks.org](http://villagehealthworks.org).

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Alvernia first-year students learned firsthand about the poverty and violence in Burundi during their orientation in August. That’s when Deo’s younger brother, Asvelt J. Nduwumwami, 23, a junior at Williams College in Massachusetts, visited campus to share his experiences of growing up in war, living in constant terror of what was to come, and never being sure of who to trust.

Burundi is one of the poorest nations in the world, according to Nduwumwami, with more than half of the population living on less than a dollar a day. The average life expectancy in his country is 47 years for a woman – 42 for a man. It is his challenge, and theirs, Nduwumwami told students, to follow the lead of his brother and work to bring hope and healing to the places and people who need it the most.

“He has experienced things far beyond what any person should have to endure…”

Jarred Merriweather

Jarred Merriweather, a 19-year-old freshman majoring in communication, said he was profoundly affected by *Strength in What Remains*, and even more so by an opportunity to speak privately with Nduwumwami as they were working on a service project during orientation.

“He has experienced things far beyond what any person should have to endure, and yet he is very humble and acted almost like he had been unaffected by it all,” Merriweather said. “Like Deo, he is willing to put bad memories behind him and move on.”

Speaking with Nduwumwami and hearing his story prompted Merriweather to examine his own circumstances. “We talked one-on-one, and he assured me about how fortunate I am,” Merriweather said. “As an African-American myself, I was reminded that it’s important to appreciate all that I have.”

Merriweather said he intends to continue his involvement in community service.

“Reading this book has made me reflect and think about my decisions to give back to my community,” he said. “I have been fortunate for my entire life, and it makes me want to stay involved in giving back.”

Students also met Sharon McKenna, a former contemplative nun who took an interest in Deo after they met when he delivered her groceries in New York City. Descriptions of McKenna’s determination and kindness were featured prominently in Kidder’s account of Deo’s plight. It was through her generosity and compassion that he was able to find a home, which eventually paved the way for his admission to Columbia University, setting Deo on a path out of poverty.

“It’s not enough to think about pursuing a common goal or serving others,” McKenna said. “You need to step up — to reach out a hand to someone. That’s real freedom, and real joy.”

Many students on campus have been

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A child awaits treatment at The Village Health Works as Deo, in blue, consults with another patient.
When Alina Fernandez spoke to an overflowing crowd at Francis Hall in October, she poignantly recalled her life in Cuba as the daughter of one of history’s most infamous dictators, Fidel Castro. The wounds of her memories now almost healed, her story is one that looks back on a childhood lost, and forward to a nation struggling toward rebirth.

By Ernest Beck
“Havana was a cosmopolitan city. There was comfort, space, and sunlight. Cubans exchanged their effortless laughter for a destructive frenzy and began to be dragged into hystera by this man.”

Alina Fernandez
Alina Fernandez has a story to tell about Cuba, one that harks back to her youth there and memories of a country, culture, and a famous father she left behind almost 20 years ago. But her story is also about the Cuba of today, a place that, as everyone knows, lies just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. “We are so close to the U.S. and the people are struggling to survive on a daily basis,” says Fernandez, who is a daughter of Fidel Castro, Cuba’s legendary revolutionary figure and now former long-term totalitarian ruler. “Cubans need all the solidarity and help they can get — spiritual and material and political.”

In 1997 Fernandez wrote an illuminating book about her unusual experiences growing up as Castro’s illegitimate daughter and her cloak-and-dagger escape from the island nation, Castro’s Daughter: An Exile’s Memoir of Cuba (St. Martin’s Press). She also often speaks at colleges and universities, including Alvernia this fall, as part of the 2011 Greater Reading Literary Festival, to reach out to young people to inform them about what is happening in Cuba.

“I want to remind people that Cuba is still there,” Fernandez explains. “If you ask young people in the street, they don’t know about Cuba or Castro,” she adds. “We have to make people aware that he is still there. If young people are listening and they get curious and look at Cuba on a map, then I would be happy.”

What we do know about Cuba and Castro — and now Castro’s brother, Raul, who succeeded him in 2008 as chief of state, president, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces in what appears to be an extension of dynastic rule of the country — is often vague, distorted, and fragmentary. Information is refracted through the ideological battle lines of ongoing tensions in U.S.-Cuban relations, as well as the draconian measures imposed on Cubans by its repressive one-party government.

They range from complete control over the mass media, including the Internet, to restrictions on free speech and public assembly as well as travel abroad. Surveillance of citizens is pervasive, and so-called dissidents are regularly abused and jailed as political prisoners. “Cuba is a totalitarian state headed by General Raul Castro and a cadre of party loyalists (who) assumed power by force on January 1, 1959,” the U.S. State Department bluntly writes in a background report.

In 2001, Scott Ballantyne, associate professor of business at Alvernia, saw firsthand the repression endured by Cuban nationals. He and Spence Stoer, professor of biology and dean of graduate school at the time, led a contingent of 23 students on a trip to explore the business environment in Cuba.

In Cuba, a vintage car passes a Castro poster with the slogan “Socialism or Death.”
“Our translator/guide for the program was a middle school teacher who was very proficient in English. He was young, maybe 28, and married,” recalls Ballantyne. “When we left Cuba, I was able to stay in touch via the Internet. Our communication was limited but occurred on a regular basis, until one day when he no longer responded. I don’t know why our communication was cut off. I don’t know what ever happened to him. He was a Cuban proud of his homeland, with a thirst for knowledge about the world.”

We do of course see glimpses of another Cuba, especially its cultural achievements and numerous dance groups, which have been allowed to visit the United States recently under exchange programs. And there are the classic images of vintage American cars with huge fins cruising the streets of Havana, and beautiful but dilapidated colonial-era buildings in Havana featured in coffee table books about architectural preservation.

There are also reports from foreign correspondents and news agencies out of Cuba — it’s not exactly like hermetically sealed North Korea — but the news that does come out can be tough to parse. Earlier this year, for example, we learned that Raul Castro had launched a new economic platform intended to spur growth, complete with some market mechanisms.

He declared that the deteriorating communist command economy had been based on what he called in a speech “unworkable math,” after decades of preaching its miraculous achievements. The legalization of the right to buy and sell property was also announced, which as the New York Times noted, “strikes many Cubans as jaw-dropping” because it has been drilled into them that private property is, of course, “the nucleus of capitalism.”

Victoria Williams, associate professor of political science at Alvernia, believes as most economists do, that Cuba needs to join the world economy in order to prop up its ailing standard of living. “That means obeying certain principles of economic exchange, most of them based on capitalistic ideas as embodied by the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund,” says Williams.

“While Cuba has made steps toward market liberalization in the past year, it is still a long way from being a free-market economy,” says Williams. “It was one of the most tightly controlled centrally planned economies in the world. The experience of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union shows that the transition from a centrally planned economy to one more based on free market principles can be devastating for the lifestyle of many people.”

According to Williams, history shows that economic transitions, like political ones, do not always benefit everyone, especially in the short term. “But Cuba may not have a choice. With Fidel out of power, the ideology driving economic choices has weakened, and poverty is rampant.”

While Cuba remains cut off, it is difficult to glean what ordinary Cubans are thinking. We do know that life is hard, with food rationing and consumer goods, gas, and electricity in short supply for the country’s 11 million population. Juan Antonio Blanco, visiting assistant director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University in Miami, says Cubans today are frustrated and alienated.

“The majority of people don’t see the possibility of changing things in Cuba, and so they leave,” he explains. “The young want out. Before it would raise eyebrows to abandon your homeland, but now even the older generation supports it. They understand there is nothing that looks like a decent future.”

That is echoed by the courageous 36-year-old Cuban writer and blogger Yoani Sanchez, whose writings and musings on daily life in Cuba on Generation Y regularly attract up to 14 million viewers a month — in addition to the scorn of Cuban authorities. The New York Times reported that Fidel himself has denounced her as the leader of a group of “special envoys of neo-colonialism sent to undermine” his rule. Her recent book Free Cuba, was impounded by the authorities because it “transgresses against the general interests of the nation,” according to a document posted on her blog.
In 2009, the government barred Sanchez from traveling to New York to receive Columbia University’s Maria Moors Cabot Prize for Journalism that advances inter-American understanding. “We Cubans are like small children who need Father’s permission to leave the house,” she said in a video recording that was smuggled out of Cuba and played at the award ceremonies.

Her writings are not political screeds or calls to arms, but deeply felt and beautifully composed personal observations and social commentary. For example, when the American swimmer Diana Nyad tried but failed to swim the Florida Straits last August as a gesture of friendship between the two nations, Sanchez recalled the many Cubans who had died while trying to desperately flee the country on makeshift rafts.

“I would have preferred that the Gulf currents would be swum by someone who knew the pain sheltered in these waters and who would dedicate their gesture to the “unknown rafter” who died in the mouth of so many possible sharks,” she wrote in a post, translated into English, titled “The Narrow Width.” Commenting on the 16 denials she has received for a foreign travel permit in just four years, Sanchez noted bitterly “for too long the ability to leave and enter the country has been a method of political coercion.”

For her part, Fernandez’s book looks back on a life in Cuba that disappeared after Castro overthrew the widely despised Batista dictatorship and seized power. She recalls in her book, “Havana was a cosmopolitan city. It had gaiety and nightlife... There was comfort, space, and sunlight.” But after Fidel’s march into Havana, this magical city, with its verandas and porches and outdoor cafes cooled by tropical breezes, “began a regression into the past.” Before long, Fernandez recounts in her book, “Cubans exchanged their effortless laughter for a destructive frenzy, and began to be dragged into hysteria by this man.”

According to Ballantyne, Castro’s uprising was made possible by a population that felt mistreated by the government. “Upon Fidel’s rise to power, many Cubans believed that their lot in life would improve substantially,” he said. “For some it may have, for others it has not, but the question remains, do the people of Cuba have the will, support, and process to effect change in the present time?”

Today Castro is an ailing 85-year-old seen sometimes in his fatigues or a tracksuit but without his customary cigar, always ready to rally the nation to stay steadfast on the road to socialism. But Fernandez remembers another side of the man. The rebel leader was also fond of French culinary delicacies and fine leather boots. He enjoyed swimming and at times was a doting (but largely absent) father. Castro, who was married at the time, would often talk about the revolution on his visits to the house where Fernandez lived with her mother, with whom he had a long relationship.

Compared to most Cubans in post-revolutionary Cuba, Fernandez and her mother led what amounted to a pampered life in homes secured through the government and other privileges. Her mother had jobs in state organizations, and Fernandez later also secured work in public relations and as a model (there was in fact a Cuban fashion house). While she was growing up, Castro would pop by for a visit, but these interludes became more infrequent over the years. “I have been too busy these past two years. I have no time for anything,” Fernandez quotes Castro as saying one day, while lying on her bed with his boots on. “It’s very difficult to keep a revolution alive.”

Fernandez, who has never been back to Cuba since she went into exile, portrays Castro as a steely, determined leader who was preparing to rule the country for some time. “He was a genius that way,” she says in an interview. But when it came to his
emotional and family side, he was a “peculiar” person. “For him, emotions meant vulnerability. He is a tough person that way.

“Castro’s greatest strength was that he recognized exploitation and the unfair system that existed in Cuba prior to the revolution and that he tried to do something about it,” said Alvernia’s Williams. “I believe he would say that he achieved his vision for Cuba — a socialist state where everyone was taken care of, where human rights as defined by basic social needs — housing, food, education, medicine — were met by the state, and where independence from capitalist exploitation (in the form of the United States and American corporations), was achieved. But Castro also took away freedoms, abused human rights, tightly regulated access to information, squelched political dissent and debate, and created policies that isolated him from the United States and its potential economic aid and trade relations, thereby dooming Cuba to poverty.

“Obviously, as Americans we find the trade-off between achieving those social needs and preserving people’s individual political and economic rights unpalatable.”

As the years went by, life changed so much in Cuba that Fernandez felt compelled to leave. Human rights abuses were widespread, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the continuing U.S. embargo, damaged the economy and made life miserable, even for someone with a connection, if unacknowledged, to the Commandante. “The whole city smelled like one big dunghill,” Fernandez writes of that time, noting that people had started keeping chickens and pigs at home for food.

Although she was Castro’s daughter, Fernandez says she was put under surveillance by state security, due in part to her outspoken criticism of the regime. “When you think differently you become the enemy, and that is why I left,” she explains. “When they don’t like what you are doing then you are the enemy. I was scared.” In her book, Fernandez, now 55, wrote that in 1993, “our main purpose in life was to choke down our anguish. Soon
after she left the country, in disguise, and later was granted political asylum in the United States (Her daughter followed soon after.)

For over a half-century, tens of thousands of Cubans have taken a similar route. In 1980, an estimated 125,000 Cubans fled in what became known as the Mariel boatlift, a mass exodus caused in part by a downturn in the country’s economy, which led to Castro announcing that anyone could leave — including prisoners and patients from mental health facilities.

Among those who fled from the earlier generation right after Castro took over was Andres Valdespino, a lawyer and professor in Cuba at the time of Castro’s ascent to power and the maternal grandfather of Marissa DeLucia, a 21-year-old senior at Alvernia who is also the Student Government Association president. Valdespino at first supported Castro, thinking that what he offered Cuba “would be great,” DeLucia says. But after being arrested by the new government and having his classroom invaded by soldiers trying to arrest him, he fled the country and eventually managed to get the rest of the family out too. DeLucia never met her grandfather, but stories about his life and bravery have been handed down to her generation of Cuban-Americans, along with his spirit. “He was a rebel,” DeLucia, a psychology major, says. “He stood up for what he believed in, and what he believed in was freedom and family.”

DeLucia, who grew up in Connecticut, feels a deep connection to her family’s past and homeland. Her grandfather’s life and journey have inspired her to get involved in student government. The lesson, she says, was to “always pursue your dreams and never give up on anything, even if they tell you it is wrong.” Although she doesn’t speak Spanish and has never been to Cuba — “our name is not welcome there and I would feel concerned to go,” she offers, adding, “I wouldn’t go to Cuba until Castro is gone” — DeLucia hears about life in Cuba through friends and relatives. “People don’t understand how bad it is,” she says. “It is a Third World country, impoverished.”

Yet whether political and economic change will come to Cuba in the future remains uncertain. While Raul Castro did manage to win approval from party hacks of proposed major economic reforms — including property ownership, licensing private economic activity, and encouraging foreign investment — whether they are implemented and what long-term impact they will have on the stagnant economy isn’t clear, analysts believe.

Hanging over everything, of course, is the tangled and oftentimes bitter U.S.-Cuba relationship, analysts say. While the Obama administration at first promised “a new beginning” and has eased rules on travel and financial remittances, after decades of the embargo and pressure from competing interest groups, relations remain largely frozen. The United States has deployed the economic embargo and diplomatic isolation as weapons, with some thawes now and then, while Cuba has shifted between intransigence — railing against the power and influence of its Big Brother to the North, and blaming all the country’s troubles on the embargo — and small, but meaningful steps toward reform, like releasing some political prisoners.

At the same time, however, some experts figure there is potential for easing tensions, increasing people-to-people contact and accelerating trade. “The U.S. was always our main relationship, and that may happen again,” points out Rafael Hernandez, the editor of Temas, a Cuban social science publication, and currently a visiting professor at Harvard University. Speaking recently at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, Hernandez said he was optimistic because the framework of relations is very different now than the past, with the end of the Cold War, an increase in U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba, and more contacts between visiting Americans and Cubans. “We have very strong connections,” Hernandez adds, listing among them baseball, music, art, dance, and religion.” Those connections are felt intensely by the...
younger generation of Cuban-Americans. Says DeLucia, the SGA president: “I say I am Cuban and love my Cuban heritage and couldn’t be more proud,” she declares. “It is totally in my blood. It is the fire in me.”

The question many people are asking is whether democracy movements like the Arab Spring — which swept away entrenched authoritarian rulers in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya and is threatening the Syrian government — can also happen in Cuba.

Much depends on the availability and use of social media, which fueled the rebellions in the Middle East. Blanco, of the Cuban Research Institute, maintains that the small but vocal opposition groups and the fledgling dissident movement remain “isolated from the population” because of the total control by the government of media and the Internet and information from the outside. Moreover, he says that Cuba’s government is “more totalitarian than the dictatorships of the Arab world,” making it harder for an opposition movement to flourish.

Blanco points out that misery isn’t always enough to spark a revolt. People have to believe there is an alternative to the status quo; otherwise they won’t risk something for nothing. In Cuba, there was always a so-called social deal that kept people happy despite the lack of human and civil rights: they received benefits such as free education and good healthcare and a job for life. But now, with the economy in dire straits, this government can no longer provide this, and the accommodation by the masses is fraying. This could lead to a turning point “in which something explodes somewhere and is visible to many people and starts a chain reaction,” Blanco says. Will this happen in the near future? Unlikely, Blanco responds, but adds “Never say never.”

Another factor in the United States is a new generation
Soldier, sinner, Christian luminary and beloved icon, Francis was a surprising saint who founded a way of life that has transformed souls and changed the world.

A Disneyfied version of St. Francis of Assisi exists that is all sweetness and light: Lover of animals; ‘Green’ before green was politically correct; a gentle, “almost-hippie,” who preferred living in the woods to a commune in town. You might call this the “birdbath” version of St. Francis. The Francis most of us were introduced to as kids, and never got to know any better.

But there is another St. Francis — a deeper, cosmic, mystical Francis whose absolute devotion to Christ crucified and commitment to living a pure Gospel life was radical and far-reaching, disturbing, yet joyful. More challenging to understand and interpret for our own lives, it is this St. Francis who catalyzed a movement that today makes up the largest religious group in the Roman Catholic Church and whose ideals inspired formation of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters who founded Alvernia University.

The Poor Little Man from Assisi (1182-1226) is also venerated by the Church of England, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Evangelical Church in Germany.

“...his single-minded devotion to Christ inspired or influenced, sometimes indirectly and unintentionally, great enterprises in evangelism, exploration, philanthropy, learning, art, and, in the persons of Dante, Jacopone da Todi, and Roger Bacon, poetry and science. He has been called ‘the real founder of the Italian Renaissance,’” writes Edward A. Armstrong in Saint Francis: Nature Mystic.

“From the earliest Franciscans, the name ➔
brother or sister was not a title. It was a role description,” says Sr. Margaret Carney, president of St. Bonaventure University (a Franciscan institution) and Alvernia trustee. “It names what is my most fundamental way of doing my work in the world.”

Such an attitude was shocking in the early 13th century, when medieval life hung on the rusty hinges of hierarchical orthodoxy. Civilization was strictly stratified with nobility on the top, prosperous merchants a distant second, and everyone else left behind to fend for scraps. Corrupt church clergy made themselves rich by selling salvation, often accumulating land like the nobles. The spiritual message fed to the masses: God is way “up there” out of reach.

Along comes Francis, whose take on reality was joyful and connected. He was filled with wonder and gratitude for everything he saw around himself in the natural world.

“…his attitude was always that of an unworthy guest and immensely privileged participant amid the miracles of beauty by … which God is constantly manifesting himself,” writes Armstrong.

So who was this man who so radically changed the world by giving up everything material in it and following Christ so unabashedly? He was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant in Assisi. In his youth he was a bon vivant with money, charm, and a fun-loving personality. He loved fine clothes, poetry, lavish feasts, troubadours, and the romance of becoming a soldier. He loved all things French. He was baptized Giovanni de Bernardone in honor of Saint John the Baptist, but his father Pietro took to calling him Francesco (the Frenchman) because he could speak and sing French fluently. His mother, Pica, was from Provencal.

Assisi molded Francis. He was born into a time when the walled town on the western slopes of Mount Subasio was threatened by its neighboring towns of Perugia, Urbino, Milano. Assisi’s location, about halfway between Florence and Rome, on the hill overlooking the roads from Foligno to Perugia, made it strategically important.

In the latter part of the 12th century, the feudal system was on the verge of collapse and a new class of craftsmen and mobile merchants took its place.

“…there is a wonderful bond based on following Christ the same way St. Francis did.”

Father Kevin Queally

Los Angeles artist John August Swanson is noted for his finely detailed, brilliantly colored paintings and original prints. His works are found in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History, London’s Tate Gallery, the Vatican Museum’s Collection of Modern Religious Art, and the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

www.JohnAugustSwanson.com
(like Pietro Barnardone) were creating a new market system fueled by the hunger for wealth, goods, and power. Peasants revolted. The bourgeoisie rioted against the nobility. A 16-year-old Francesco was probably involved in the mayhem.

Though wealthy — and possibly wealthier than some of their noble neighbors — the Barnardones, being merchants, had less social caché. Knighthood might help them ascend the social ladder. Francis dreamed of becoming a knight. At 20, he fought in the opening battle of a war Assisi waged against Perugia and was taken prisoner. He was chained for a year in a cold, filthy underground dungeon until his father was allowed to pay a ransom for his release.

A year later, physically recovered, he set out on yet another military expedition, this time to southern Italy where Emperor Frederick II and Pope Innocent III were warring over Sicily. But on his journey south he had a strange experience.

While at Spoleto, in the twilight between waking and sleeping, Francis heard a voice that asked if he was going to war in Apulia, and then it queried, “Is it better to serve the Lord or the servant? Then why do you serve the servant?” The voice told him to return to Assisi, which he did after giving away his horse and new armor to a battered, battle-weary knight he met on the road.

Francis withdrew from friends and family and began to spend time alone, asking God for enlightenment. He slept in a cave. He prayed in the woods. A turning point in his conversion concerned lepers.

Francis had an abhorrence of lepers and leprosy, and it so happened that two leper hospitals were on the plain outside Assisi. Lepers in the region were required to ring bells as they neared others, to warn them of their approach. One day while riding in the countryside, Francis stopped to embrace and kiss a leper. “He faced his fear,” explains Sr. Roberta McKelvie, special assistant to the president for mission at Alvernia. “The spiritual interpretation is that it had been Jesus appearing as a leper.”

Francis himself had this to say about the encounter: “When I was in sin, the sight of lepers nauseated me beyond measure, but then God himself led me into their company, and I had pity on them. When I had once become acquainted with them, that which previously was bitter to me became a source of spiritual and physical sweetness to me. After that I did not wait long before leaving the world.”

He began nursing lepers. On a pilgrimage to Rome he exchanged clothes with a beggar and panhandled for alms outside St. Peter’s Basilica. Some time later, while praying prostrate before a painted Byzantine cross in the abandoned and partially destroyed old church of San Damiano outside Assisi, Francis heard a voice call him by name and tell him to “go →
Following a Franciscan lifestyle

Saint Francis’ example was often a hard one to emulate. He insisted that his followers embrace poverty as Jesus Christ did. “Nothing belongs to us except our vices and sins,” he wrote. He wanted friars to own nothing but the robes on their backs and be free to wander and preach wherever and whenever the Spirit moved them.

Father Kevin Queally, director of campus ministry, Alvernia chaplain and a member of the Franciscan Third Order Regular, explains that Francis taught his followers to live a life that honored and served poverty and gave witness to justice, peace, and reconciliation.

“There is a wonderful bond based on following Christ in the same way as Saint Francis did,” said Fr. Kevin.

“Franciscan ideals call us to have a spirit of peace and justice, strive to revere life in all its forms, to treat all with dignity and respect, and to work for justice within our society and our world. We work to build up God’s people everywhere, to reconcile, and to act as instruments of peace in the communities we serve.

“Peacemaking is at the heart of being Franciscan, while humility and poverty are the legacy of Francis of Assisi,” Fr. Kevin said.

“His spirituality advocated a denial of power in a world that hungered for power.”

After his death, Francis’ poverty requirement became a thorny issue for his Order. The interpretation of it caused conflicts and a splintering among his followers. “What did Francis intend by being so doggone poor?” asks Sr. Margaret Carney, president of St. Bonaventure University — a Franciscan institution — and an Alvernia trustee. “Over the centuries that commitment to living poorly became an end in itself, divorced from the context where he made that commitment. It became a stumbling block. Some believed the only way to be an authentic Franciscan was to be economically, culturally and physically deprived.”

“Francis was basically saying we are going to opt out of a system that uses money to put another part of society in permanent bondage to us. But times change,” says Sr. Margaret. “…Franciscans need to study the times they are in to see the contemporary version of that commitment.”

“His spirituality advocated a denial of power in a world that hungered for power.”

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“He takes (the message) literally and begins to beg for stones to repair the church and literally repairs the church,” says Sr. Roberta. “He has to go up to Assisi and …he makes a choice that the family does not understand and approve of.” He sold a horse and cloth from his father’s shop and gave the money to the priest at San Damiano. The family was aghast.

According to the Legend of the Three Companions, Francis hid from his father for weeks, and when he finally walked into town looking dirty and emaciated, his father, ashamed and angry, grabbed him “with many blows and dragged him home” and locked him in the store’s basement. He kept him there for weeks trying to “bend his son’s will, to drag him back from the path he had chosen.”

His mother eventually let him out of the basement. Pietro Barnardone was so angry that he denounced his son as a thief and brought him before the bishop in legal proceedings. Francis disrobed in the public square in front of the bishop’s residence and returned to his father the clothes he had bought him. He denounced his father and his patrimony. For the next two years Francis repaired churches in the countryside surrounding Assisi, including the Porziuncola (“the little portion”), a chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, a favorite place that became the center of the early Franciscans.

In 1209, a year before his movement became a papal-approved religious order, Francis’ life changed again. He finally found his calling in a sermon given at Porziuncola about Matthew 10:09, in which Christ exhorts his followers to go out into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven at hand, but to do it without taking money, walking stick, or shoes.

Again, Francis chose the literal interpretation. He would preach repentance and own nothing but a full heart. He chose to wear a rough garment shaped like a “T,” or a tau, the ancient symbol for life and resurrection. He cinched his robe with a rope and went out into the world barefooted. Soon a fellow prominent Assisi resident, jurist Bernardo di Quintavalle, joined him, and within the year he had 11 followers.

The fraters minores (lesser brothers in Latin, a phrase used to acknowledge that they were not priests)ymisted the Umbrian mountains singing songs, greeting people cheerfully, and preaching the Gospel. In his youth, Francis had been inspired by the romances of French troubadors. “He thought of himself and the other friars as joculatores domini,” notes Armstrong in Saint Francis: Nature Mystic. “We are the minstrels of the Lord,” he used to say, and he asked, ‘What are the servants of the Lord but his minstrels who should raise the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy?’”

“Francis was fascinated with a God who is fascinated with humanity.”

Kevin Godfrey
The Regula Primitiva or Primitive Rule for his friars was simple: “To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps.” Pope Innocent III was reluctant to admit the new order into the Church but, according to legend, a dream changed his mind. In it, St. Francis was holding up the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the cathedral of Rome, the very seat of Christendom. In 1210 he gave his blessing to Francis and his companions.

A noble woman, Clare of Assisi, followed Francis’ calling (as did her cousin, mother, and two sisters) and in 1211 she and Francis established the Order of Poor Ladies, later called the Poor Clares. Francis then inspired the Third Order of Brothers and Sisters of Penance, a movement for lay people who could not leave their homes but wished to follow his calling.

Known for severe self-discipline and contrition on the one hand, and ecstatic love of nature and devotion to God on the other, Francis was as complex as any human being. He had a temper. He could be difficult. There is a story of him angrily ripping off the roof of a house the friars had built in his absence, so upset was he that they owned a building.

His life was not without its frustrations. He left for Jerusalem, but was shipwrecked on the Dalmatian coast. The same year he set out for Morocco, but an illness forced him to end his trip in Spain. He wanted to preach in France, but was advised against it. Finally, during the Crusades in 1219, he and another friar succeeded in crossing the Saracen lines outside Damietta, Egypt, to preach to the Sultan Malek-el-Kamil.

Francis wanted to convert the Muslim Sultan or die a martyr trying. Neither happened, but the Sultan was so impressed with the zealous young man that he invited Francis to be his guest for several days so they could discuss their views on God. Legend says that Francis offered to prove the truth of his Gospel by walking into fire, so certain was he that he wouldn’t be burned. The Sultan declined the offer.

Kevin Godfrey chooses to view the Sultan story through another prism: “Francis is really a community builder, a gatherer of people. He brings them together around a common purpose. He takes people who live at the margins and gives them hope. And when he goes off to see the Sultan it is one more opportunity to build that sense of community.”

By 1220, the Franciscan Order had grown so large so quickly that it needed more organizational structure than Francis wanted to deal with. The purity of his vision was hard to maintain as more people from different walks of life joined. After crafting a Second Rule that set regulations for discipline, preaching, and entry into the order, Francis handed over governance to another friar and took to the road, preaching throughout Italy.

In 1224, on the wooded peak of La Verna, as he prayed amid the few huts and small chapel there, Francis received the stigmata. According to Brother Leo, his traveling companion at the time, the wounds were heralded by “a vision of a seraph, a six-winged angel on a cross.” His last two years were plagued with intense suffering. Besides the painful stigmata wounds, he had an eye disease, probably glaucoma, the treatment for which at the time...
When associate professor of chemistry Rosemarie Chinni arrived at Alvernia eight years ago, she brought with her a vision for students rooted in her own college experience.

“As an undergraduate student, I landed an internship with the Department of Energy and went to Los Alamos National Laboratory,” explained Chinni. “That’s where I worked under an accomplished physicist named David Cremers and learned about laser-induced breakdown spectroscopy.”

Chinni says the experience was transforming and allowed her direct access to extraordinary equipment like lasers, spectrographs, photodiode array detectors and oscilloscopes. “It really piqued my interest in instrumentation and gave me a chance to see how important those tools are in science and to applying them professionally in the field.

“I learned that the answers to all of our problems, whether they are medical or environmental, can be solved through scientific research and development,” said Chinni.

Chinni wanted Alvernia students to have the same type of experience as well.

She soon began working to acquire the very best instrumentation for Alvernia students, eventually leading the university to seek funding for equipment that would give students exposure to the same level of technology that she had access to at Los Alamos. Thanks to federal funding and grants, in spring 2010 Chinni’s vision became a reality. That’s when a state-of-the-art laser lab and additional research analysis instrumentation was installed in the O’Pake Science Center.

“We now have a laser lab unlike what most undergraduates would ever see,” Chinni said. The equipment can be used in research, at both molecular and atomic levels, in situations that range from testing mercury levels in water to the simple detection of lead paint on walls or children’s toys. When it comes to forensic science, the lab is well equipped for a range of activities, including identification of pesticides and drug compounds to explosive analysis and DNA fragmentation.

“Our students need to compete with other students when they apply for jobs or go to graduate school,” Chinni said. “Having access to state-of-the-art instrumentation gives them valuable experience, makes them more competitive with students graduating from other institutions, and helps to build their resumes.”

Students in Chinni’s classes get to engage in hands-on research projects using Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) and Cold Vapor Atomic Absorption Spectroscopy (CVAAS). Using these techniques, they have the ability to analyze a broad range of materials, including paints, water, air, and soil.

“It helps demonstrate to me that there are more techniques to determine the identity of a particular element in a given sample or substance,” said junior biochemistry and chemistry major Dan Kwasniewski of the laser lab. “It’s also increased my awareness and knowledge of how to safely and properly use instruments in the lab environment.”

Recent graduate and senior scholar Lauren Kurek ‘11, who is currently pursing a master’s degree in chemistry at Villanova University, wrote her honors thesis with the assistance of Chinni on the topic of research using LIBS instrumentation. She describes
Though Chinni teaches a variety of subjects, including Fundamentals of Chemistry, Physical Science and Physical Chemistry, Analytical Chemistry, Instrument Analysis, and Spectroscopic Methods of Analysis — her area of expertise is Analytical Chemistry and Spectroscopy.

Chinni has served as a consultant for Applied Research Associates in Albuquerque since 2006. She has been performing research with ARA to develop field-portable instrumentation for fissile material detection using Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy. She is currently working on several projects with some upper-level undergraduate students using LIBS for various analyses.

Jen Kaucher '13 is an Alvernia student majoring in communications.

Rosemarie Chinni, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Chemistry

B.S. King's College
Ph.D. University of South Carolina

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It was 8 a.m. on her very first day of college. Abigail Eby found a seat in the half-filled nursing class and all she could think to herself was, “I am never going to be able to do this...what am I getting myself into?”

But in her heart, she knew she was in the right seat. Nursing had been her passion since she was a little girl. “My mom is an EMT and an active volunteer with our local ambulance station; when I was in 5th grade I got curious and asked to go on a ride-a-long to see what it was all about,” explains Eby. From that point on, she was hooked.

That very first experience sparked a passion for health services inside Eby. For six months during her sophomore year of high school, she took courses at night to obtain her EMT and CPR certifications so she could start to chase her dream of caring for others. Achieving those initial certifications led her to attain still others, which allowed her to drive ambulances, assist paramedics, and even teach CPR courses. In fact, to this day, she continues to volunteer with her local ambulance station every week.

“I love getting to know my community,” says Eby. “Many people will walk up to me in the grocery store and thank me. It’s rewarding to know that I am able to give something back to them.”

Being a member of the ambulance station had a serious impact on how Eby lives her life. She remembers her first trauma call when two seniors from her high school were in a car accident involving use of drugs and alcohol. “One student was killed and the other badly injured. The scene was so violent looking — the engine was found a quarter mile down the road. The accident impacted me to the point where I don’t drink or do drugs, and I get very bothered when people around me do.”

A year after her first class at Alvernia, an Army recruiter visited her sophomore nursing class to discuss the opportunities for students. It sounded like the right kind of challenge for Eby. “About six months later I signed a three-year scholarship letter and committed to the Army.”

The eager cadet got a taste of Army life, and life as a nurse, this past summer. In June, Cadet Eby left her family and identical twin, Katy, for the first time in her life as she flew solo to the Leadership Development Assessment Course (LDAC) at Base Lewis-McChord in Washington. It was one of the toughest things she had ever done. Katy, a business management and communication major at Alvernia, is not just a sister. She is Abby’s lifelong roommate and best friend. “We’ve always shared a room, and still do,” explains 22-year-old Katy.

But once at the LDAC, Eby didn’t have much time to miss her twin. Cadets from around the country gathered to complete a difficult four-week capstone evaluation and training course that is held each summer. They are given a series of tests in fitness and land-navigation. Cadets are then evaluated in various roles, including leading the entire squad. It’s a trying ordeal, just the kind of experience that Eby seems to enjoy.

“We slept in 15-person tents for two weeks, under the stars in our sleeping bags for about a half of a week, and for the remaining time we slept in barracks,” explains Eby. “In the last week I calculated that out of 83 meals, 63 of them were MREs (meals ready to eat). This time was especially rough because I was only able to send and receive letters.”

After the LDAC, it’s typically time to head home for most cadets, but for Eby it was time to hop a commercial plane to Alaska, where she had arranged to meet a complete stranger — who would take her to the Nurse Summer Training Program for an entire month.

Once in Alaska, Eby spent 180 hours working as a nurse in the Bassett Army Community Hospital on the maternity floor. “I was also able to spend a few days in the [operating room] where I saw a bunch of ear, nose, and throat surgeries; tonsillectomies, and ear tube surgeries.”

By Denise Elliott

Continued on page 99
Abby Eby finds her niche

High Reward
Last year, Alvernia men’s tennis coach Larry Zerbe ’88, was inducted into Alvernia’s Athletics Hall of Fame. But even though Zerbe is a tennis pro and was recently named the United States Professional Tennis Association Middle States Pro of the Year (for 2010), Zerbe’s first taste of coaching began with the men’s cross-country team. Still an undergraduate at Alvernia when he began coaching, Zerbe was a natural from the start. He led his cross-country team to a national championship appearance in 1987. Last year, the entire team returned to Alvernia to be inducted into the Hall.

These days, in addition to coaching tennis at Alvernia, Zerbe also serves as the director for the City of Reading Tennis program (COR). COR Tennis provides a safe place for inner city children to gather while increasing wellness and self-esteem. The program aims to teach life skills that its participants can carry over to their everyday lives.

Zerbe is always looking for new and different ways his program can teach tennis and life lessons to kids in city schools. He coordinates a monthly television show called “Reading City Tennis” on BCTV that promotes local tennis and helps get his message about what tennis can do for Reading youth. A recent episode featured a number of Alvernia tennis student-athletes demonstrating drills and techniques. Women’s basketball senior Allie Toczylowski joined the tennis players, talking about her experience with COR Tennis outreach programs.

“The women’s basketball team has had an incredible annual event with City Tennis,” explained Zerbe. “And the men’s tennis program has impacted multiple elementary schools. Whenever there are needs, the students are always at the ready.”

Zerbe teamed up with women’s basketball coach Kevin Calabria to launch the Alvernia Tennis Jam three years ago as a community service outreach. He makes sure to keep the event energetic and competitive. Last year’s team competition ended with a tie-breaking dance-off between Calabria and one of COR Tennis’ finest.

“Zerbe’s individual accolades with the U.S. Professional Tennis Association is just another testament to the impact that he is having in the local community,” said Alvernia’s Athletic Director Bill Stiles. “Two years ago his program was honored as a National Junior Tennis and Learning Chapter of the Year.”

“As with any individual award, behind the scenes lies a team, and this is no exception,” admitted Zerbe humbly when asked about his recent honor. “In that team the Alvernia family is well represented.”
Four members were inducted into the Alvernia Athletic Hall of Fame this fall. The Class of 2011 included Theresa Bray ’01, Jeff Kantner ’89, Eileen Pronek-Neff ’84, and Dave Samsel ’80.

Theresa Bray ’01, a member of the cross country, field hockey, and women’s basketball teams, filed most of her numbers on the hardwood. She ranks fifth all-time in scoring, with 1,339 career points and is the career record holder for three-point field goals made (203) and attempted (588). Bray is seventh all-time in points per game, averaging 12.4 points in 108 career games from 1996-2000, and is tied for seventh in games played.

Jeff Kantner ’89 was a standout catcher at Reading High School and was drafted by the Mets as a high school senior in 1983. But fate took a hand, as Kantner tore a rotator cuff before his professional career could get started — and he enrolled at Alvernia. Kantner played four years for the Crusaders. He batted .360 over his last three years with 10 career triples, including a single season record six as a senior. The Crusaders went 55-44 in his four years and qualified for the NAIA District 19 Playoffs each of his last three seasons. Kanter was a member of the first 20-win team in program history in 1988, when head coach Yogi Lutz guided the Crusaders to a 22-9 finish.

Eileen Pronek-Neff ’84 was a founding member of Alvernia’s athletics program. As a member of the women’s tennis team, she put together back-to-back undefeated seasons on the court in 1981 and 1982, winning three conference championships in the Keystone Athletic Conference (KAC). She led Alvernia to the KAC title in 1982.

Dave Samsel ’80 was the first 1,000 point scorer in Alvernia basketball history. He reached the milestone in a victory over rival Cabrini College during the 1978-79 season. At the time of his induction, Samsel is sixth all-time in scoring at Alvernia, with 1,643 career points. He still holds the record for most points scored in a game, with 52.

With the class of 2011’s induction, the Alvernia Athletics Hall of Fame now includes 20 individual members and three teams.
Alumni Profile

Amanda Fenkner ’08 discovered her dream job in the most unexpected of places: the stands of a college basketball game.

It was there, while watching a Temple Owls match with her round-ball teammates from Tamaqua High, that she was plucked from the crowd, destined for greatness, to participate in a fan challenge. The task — make three shots, a three-pointer, foul shot and a layup, all in just 30 seconds.

As it turns out, it wasn’t the competition that piqued the point guard’s interest. It was the chance to corner the woman who selected her from the stands so she could learn about career opportunities.

“We were waiting around for awhile for a time-out,” Fenkner recalls. “I got to interview her on the sidelines. ‘This is great! You’re just hanging out watching the game. How do I get this job?’”

That encounter proved to be fortuitous and led the three-sport athlete, raised to cheer for all the Philadelphia sports teams, to Alvernia’s popular sport management program, where she excelled. Fenkner added another major in marketing.

Now she uses both majors as manager of business operations and ticketing for the Washington Redskins, a storied National Football League franchise that plays near the nation’s capital.

She’s in charge of filling the 83,031 seats at FedEx Field during each home game. She also manages the list of season-ticket holders and organizes the details behind special events, like December’s Army-Navy Game.

Fenkner credits her mother, Sheila Davison, with her aptitude for business. She observed Davison’s negotiating skills and was in awe of her ability to secure resources for Access Services, a nonprofit organization for which Davison is a regional vice president. In high school and college, Fenkner would read about business deals and question why they ended up as they did.

Women’s basketball coach Kevin Calabria was glad Fenkner came to Alvernia. He’d followed her basketball career since she was a 9th grader, impressed with her skills and smarts. She played guard for Calabria until her senior year, when she left to focus on her studies.

“When anyone decides what they really want to do, it’s time to focus on it,” Calabria says. “She had the maturity to be able to realize what she needed to do to advance in the sports management world.”

That’s not an easy world to break into. Fenkner learned about different parts of a professional sports operation by getting as much experience and meeting as many people as possible. “I would send people emails just to have lunch with me,” she says.

Fenkner’s first internship was with the Reading Express indoor football team, where her duties serendipitously included choosing spectators to take part in events during game breaks. She also interned in the Philadelphia Eagles ticket office and behind the scenes during Reading Raiders basketball games.

Shortly after graduating in 2008 she landed a job in the sales office for the Philadelphia 76ers. Months later she abandoned her allegiance to the Eagles when the Redskins hired her in their ticket office.

“I do not bleed green anymore,” Fenkner says. “I’ve taken the Redskins into my heart.”

One challenge she faces is that many fans are buying home entertainment systems instead of football tickets. “They’d rather just invite their friends over, watching it on the big-screen TV,” she says. “A lot of people don’t want to pay the money, deal with fighting the traffic.” Still, the Redskins benefit from a loyal fan base, and in phone calls Fenkner conveys the excitement of seeing a game live.

“The biggest thing about Amanda is her enthusiasm,” her mother says. “It’s contagious.”

The Redskins practice in Virginia, about an hour’s drive west of their stadium, so Fenkner spends little time with the players. She sees them during events like player meet-and-greets with premium season ticket holders.

For events like concerts, she has to study a map marking every single seat. When country singer Kenny Chesney performed at FedExField in June, the Redskins staff learned 48 hours in advance that Chesney’s stage would be moved 20 feet. Fenkner’s staff had to find new seats for about 50 fans.

She can put in 60 or even 80 hours of work a week when a home game is coming up. If a player’s friends or relatives are coming to a game she handles their special requests, like arranging a seat near the stadium entrance. After each game she sends a report to the NFL detailing what the Redskins earned from ticket sales so the revenue can be split among all the teams according to a prescribed formula.

Fenkner holds a rare job for a woman in sports. ‘When I tell people what I do — ‘I work for the Redskins’ — they say ‘Oh, are you a cheerleader?’ Do you work in retail?’”

Overcoming those stereotypical roles, she plans to work in different areas of team operations, ultimately landing a job as the chief operating officer of a sports organization.

“I don’t like to be idle,” Fenkner says. “I challenge myself to learn.”

Rebecca VanderMeulen is a freelance writer based in Downingtown, Pa. Her work has appeared in Keystone Edge, Berks County Living, The Philadelphia Inquirer and various higher-education publications.
Ticket to Success

For Amanda Fenkner, success has come by filling one seat at a time

By Rebecca VanderMeulen
**1960s**
The entire class of 1961 (all four of them) celebrated their 50th anniversary during Commencement with the spring class of 2011.

**1970s**

Mary (Frink) Shade ’75 graduated with an MSN in Nursing Education at Walden University.

Ronald Uczynski, Jr. ’75 was featured in an article in the Reading Eagle about his retirement from the Central Berks Regional Police Department and receiving his unofficial badge that includes his years of service to the department.

Stephen J. Kruchko ’76 is a Senior Security Advisor for the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C.

Danny L. Clark ’77 is a fifth grade teacher in the Ephrata Area School District. He is also the Director of the Theatre for the school district’s middle and intermediate schools.

Georgette (Beaulieu) Krick ’77 and her son Alex participated in Dancing with the Reading Stars, benefiting the Yocum Institute for Arts Education. In addition, Georgette was named the Private Banking Officer at Fleetwood Bank, and will lead the newly formed private banking division for high net-worth individuals.

Judge Linda (Mowson) Ludgate ’77 received an award in her name from the Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB). In the future, the Linda K. M. Ludgate CJAB Excellence in Leadership Award will be bestowed each year to a CJAB member who exhibits Ludgate’s brand of commitment to making the criminal justice system work more efficiently for everyone involved.

Sr. Jean Jacobchik ’77 was featured in the Reading Eagle for a course she is teaching at Alvernia University’s Seniors College on Unlocking the Mysteries of Mysticism. Sr. Jean hoped to offer a journey of understanding of what mysticism is.

Alvernia’s Fab Four offer ‘Wild Hope’

Last May, the four members of Alvernia’s first graduating class, the Class of 1961, celebrated the 50th anniversary of their graduation — along with nearly 400 members of the graduating Class of 2011. The group — Marie Nowakowski (Doc Marie), Helen Archer, Theresa Pierce and Sister Mary Joseph Tirpak — are the genesis of Alvernia’s now thriving alumni community.

As her classmates listened from the stage, Doc Marie spoke to the new graduates, offering them some compelling words of wisdom. Below are excerpts from her remarks:

I’d like to bring you some thoughts stemming from the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the noted Jesuit theologian and anthropologist. He said, “But in fact how many of us are genuinely moved in the depth of our hearts by the wild hope that our earth will be recast?”

Was it ‘wild hope’ that prompted Francis of Assisi to rebuild a Church that had moved away from the Gospel message?

Was it ‘wild hope’ that moved the men and women of a loosely knit group of colonies on our eastern shores to say to England ‘the width of an ocean does not wash away our rights as British citizens’?

Was it ‘wild hope’ that caused an 11-year-old Polish girl, my grandmother, to leave her village, sail the Atlantic in steerage with no other family member, and make her way to a small town in Pennsylvania’s anthracite region to work in her brother’s store?

Was it ‘wild hope’ that inspired a young African American, raised by a single mother and grandparents, to seek the office of president of our country?

Was it ‘wild hope’ that strengthened several women who, 50-plus years ago, said to their religious superiors, “Yes, we can start a college here in Reading and we’ll call it Alvernia”?

Reacting to Chardin’s question about ‘wild hopes,’ Bishop Robert Morneau of Green Bay penned these lines, and we leave them with you: “Do you have any wild hopes, or tame ones for that matter? Wild hopes! That all creation will learn the dance of joy. And all humanity might taste the wine of peace. And that our loving God will become transparent through love. Recast the earth, O Lord, and move our hearts...your hearts...with wild hopes.”
while focusing on some well-known mystics such as Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Charles R. Broad '78, M'06 was featured in the Reading Eagle’s Faces in the News for his work as Executive Director of Reading’s Downtown Improvement District.

Frederick R. Stubbs '79 passed away on April 7, 2011. Frederick is survived by his wife Rebecca and his children Dionne M. Stubbs '88, Dwayne Stubbs, and stepdaughter Tara Dayd-Williams.

Kevin L. Rudy '80 became Police Chief at Penn State Berks on August 1, 2011. Kevin is responsible for the overall operation, management, and administration of campus law enforcement and safety services, including the enforcement of national, state, and local laws, and university regulations through investigation, apprehension, and prosecution of violators.

Roxanne C. Fricker '80 passed away on July 28, 2011.

Steven Kristovensky '80 was awarded a regional certification award from the American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS) International Professional Certification Board (PCB). ASIS International is a preeminent organization for security professionals and is dedicated to increasing the effectiveness and productivity of security professionals, by developing educational programs and materials that address broad security interests. As an award recipient, Steve’s name will be featured on the ASIS International website, in the certification newsletter and ASIS Dynamics. Steve has been employed by Hershey Entertainment and Resorts Company for 26 years and is currently Director of Safety and Security for Hershey Lodge. He resides in Lebanon with his wife Lisa and two children, Laura and Adam.

Deborah Geiger '83 recently accepted a teaching position at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa.

Kathleen Kleppinger '83 received one of the 2011 Take the Lead awards from the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania. The award recognizes some of the region’s most notable women of courage, confidence, character and exemplary leadership.

Fr. Richard Brensinger '86 is the Chaplain at Kutztown University’s Christopher House.

Dr. David A. Zanis '87 died in an unfortunate mishap Saturday, April 9, 2011. He is survived by his wife Tina and his children Adalie, Lorne, and Ella.

Richard L. Graver '88 is President and Chief Lending Officer at Victory Bank in Limerick, Pa.

Catherine (Cipar) Chila Weist '88, M'91 earned her designation as a Certified Fraud Examiner from the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners in Austin, Texas. Cathy is also a member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners and has recently been made part of its Scholarship Committee. She is the Executive Director of Berks Earned Income Tax Bureau, responsible for the collection of local taxes for 18 school districts and municipalities in Berks County.

Wendy (Brittingham) Finan '89 was promoted to Director and Global Head of Quality Assurance working for QPS, LLC — a contract research organization supporting pharmaceutical research and development worldwide.

Cyril J. Pisanick '90 is a Project Estimator for Garman Builders Inc. in Ephrata, Pa.

Eleanor Ambrose '91 earned a certificate as a General Office/Computer Clerk.

Lisa (Kreider) Keller '91 is a quality assurance scientist at Bayer Healthcare.

Catherine (Feher) Feller '93 received one of the 2011 Take the Lead awards from the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania. The award recognizes some of the region’s most notable women of courage, confidence, character and exemplary leadership.

Joan Varilek '94 passed away on February 3, 2010.

Marty Korecky '95, M'06 and his son Brian Korecky '07, were featured in the Reading Eagle’s Fitness Profile section on the importance of exercise in their life.

Mary E. (Iswalt) Moyer '95 was named St. Joseph Family and Women’s Care Office Manager at St. Joseph Medical Center. Mary will be responsible for handling provider schedules, financial reports, and grant writing and oversight.

Stephanie (Dunkelberger) Barron '96 is the Vice President for the Sexual Assault Resource & Counseling Center (SARCC).

Eric B. Turman '97, M’03 has been named the
Mary (Haines) Seip ’97 married Toby Seip on May 7, 2011.

Mary Ann Heydinger ’97 relocated to North Central, Ohio, in September 2011.

Kristin (Swierczewski) Eck ’98 is the Administrative Assistant at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Berks County.

Debbie (Walker) Smolnik ’02, M’05 has been promoted to Manager, Recruitment and HR Support at VF Outlets. Debbie will be responsible for overseeing recruitment strategy, life cycle talent acquisition, and providing guidance to hiring managers. In addition, she will continue to provide human resources support to the stores.

00s

Brian Keeney ’01 is engaged to Sherry L. Clark. A June 30, 2012 wedding is planned in Napa Valley, Calif.

Melissa Bortz ’01 and Adam Uhniat are engaged.

Sam Marciano ’01 and his wife, Nicole, had their first child, Matthew, in 2010.

Dana (Bachman) Stank ’02 graduated from the Leadership Berks Program on June 9, 2011.

Dorothea (Howell) Miller ’02 was featured in the “In Our Schools” section of the Reading Eagle. Dorothea is Principal at 13th & Union Elementary in the Reading School District.

Robert Kovacs ’02 and his wife, Sandy Veresink, welcomed their first child in June.

Lisa Anne (Mason) Minnich ’04 passed away on March 31, 2011. She is survived by her husband Kerry and her two sons Andrew and Steven.

Jasmine (Ramulus) Suarez ’04, M’10 graduated from the Leadership Berks Program on June 9, 2011.

Onelia (Alvarado) Timmons ’04 had a baby boy, Francisco, on May 17, 2011. Francisco weighed 6 pounds, 9 ounces.

Anthony Recker ’05 had his contract purchased by the Oakland Athletics. He will take a Major League Baseball position.

Mark Your Calendar!

2012

January 29
Shabbaton A Capella Group

February 17
Circo Comedia

March 21
Alvernia Career & Internship Fair

April 19
Storyteller & Singer Charlotte Blake Alston

July 1-7
Disney World Trip

Visit Alvernia’s online calendar for more information: www.alvernia.edu

Join Alvernia on Facebook Just another way to stay connected
roster position with the Athletics as catcher. Anthony was hitting .287 with 16 home runs and 48 RBIs in 99 games with Sacramento. He was an 18th-round pick by Oakland in 2005.

Chevonne (Kama) Hawkins ’05 is attending Ottawa University in the Masters of Professional Counseling Program with a concentration in trauma, abuse and deprivation. Chevonne will be graduating in May 2012.

Christian Morar ’05 graduated from the Reading Police Academy on June 17, 2011. He has been hired by the City of Reading as a Police Officer.

Heather Williams ’05 and Michael Hall ’09 were married on March 26, 2011.

Jamie (Danner) Sonon ’05, M’06 and her husband Kevin Sonon ’05 welcomed their son, Jackson Miles, on January 12, 2011, at 1:54 a.m. Jackson weighed 8 pounds, 3 ounces, and was 20.5 inches long.

Jeffrey Hahn ’05 and Heather Hebb ’05 had a baby boy, Mason Arthur, on November 10, 2010. Mason weighed 9 pounds, 14 ounces and was 21.5 inches long.

Joseph Kmetz ’05 and Kerry Higgs ’07 were married on March 12, 2011, during an intimate ceremony in Key West, Fla.

Justin J. Loose ’05 was named the Director of Berks County’s Information Technology Department.

Amy Flannery ’06 was featured in the Reading Eagle for instilling the value of hard work in her students at Mount Penn Elementary Center in the Antietam School District. Amy, who is the Principal at the school, uses her love of music and playing the violin to help the students learn how to be leaders. She said, “A leader doesn’t have to be a certain thing. I can be a violinist and be a leader for them. They have the potential to take it as far as I did.”

Andrew Dornes ’06, M’10 is a Mutual Fund Accountant for SEI in Oaks, Pa.

Eric Bonds ’06 is a Physician Assistant at Hanover Orthopedic Associates.

Heather Smolnik ’06 gave birth to Evelee Sephina on Friday, June 3, 2011, at 2:45 p.m. Evelee weighed 7 pounds, 13 ounces and was 20 inches long.

Keith Rose ’06 is a Security Officer for Stad Enforcement.

Tammy Hughes ’06 was featured in the Reading Eagle, discussing her job as a school nurse and the motivation that helped her earn a Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing and obtain a post-graduate school nursing certificate. The article also discussed a Senate bill that would allow school districts to disregard current requirements for school nurse certifications.

Tiffany R. Grove ’06, M’09 and Timothy Stein were married on June 6, 2010, at French Creek Golf Club in Elverson, during an outdoor ceremony.

Ashley Hubbard ’07 gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Kasey Cynthis Lynn Cotto, on January 24, 2010.

Brian Korecky ’07 was featured in the Reading Eagle with his father Marty Korecky ’95, M’06 in the Fitness Profile section, where the two answered questions about exercising.

Dominic Pirrone ’07 and his wife Lauren had their first child, Zachary Michael Pirrone, on May 15, 2011.

Grant Thomson ’07 has been employed as a Corrections Officer for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, at Fort Dix, N.J., since August 2007.

Kelly Manwiller ’07 is engaged to Chad Wilcox.

Lynn (Donohue) Miller ’07 passed away on Monday, August 15, 2011.

Melanie Gernert ’07 is engaged to Timothy Seyfert.

Michael Brokaw ’07 is a Mid Accountant for Penske Truck Leasing Company.
Susan Kane '07, '09 completed the Master of Science in Library Science on May 7, 2011, from Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

Amy B. Sikorski '08, M'09 married Joe Klatt on July 22, 2011. Amy is the Marketing Coordinator at Herbein + Company, Inc.

Daniel Laws, Jr. '08 received the 2011 Greater Reading Entrepreneurial Excellence Award from the Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Daniel is President and Chief Executive Officer of DaBrian Marketing Group, in Reading. He was chosen for creative marketing, response to adversity, contribution to the area’s quality of life, service to the community, and innovation in products or services.

David Eggert '08 recently started in a new position as a public safety officer at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pa.

Debra Allen '08 is the Director of Finance for the Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church in West Lawn, Pa.

Johanna Orellana '08 was recently hired as an Acute Pain Management Service Nurse in the Anesthesiology Department at a hospital in Texas.

Kathryn Martin '08 is employed at First Sealord Surety, Inc.

Michael Senick '08 is engaged to Holly Kowalski.

Michelle (Houser) Kissinger M'08 is enrolled in Eastern University's Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership program, with a Business Concentration. She is Director of Business Development at Kissinger Associates, Inc. in Centerport, Pa., a privately held business management software value added reseller (VAR), software development, technical support, and business consulting services firm.

Shannon Higgins '08 is currently teaching first grade at Chesterbrook Academy Elementary School in Phoenixville, Pa. She recently received the school's "Educator of the Year Award" for the 2010-11 school year and became a finalist for the Nobel Learning Communities, Inc.’s "National Educator of the Year" honor.

Ryan Rutherford '09 is the Social Media Director for Lux Performance Group, a Portland, Oregon company that specializes in engineering and marketing for the automotive and motorsport racing industry. He specializes in keeping Dodge Viper Cup ACR-X Celebrity Driver fans informed and connected through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Brett A. Sneeringer '09 graduated from the Reading Police Academy on June 17, 2011. He has been hired by the City of Reading as a police officer.


Brian Dorety '09 is the MR Support Coordinator for Service Access Management, Inc. in Reading.

Peter Cirard '09 is a Recruiter for Global Employment Services in Bala Cynwyd, Pa.

Ryan Schlegel, M'09 has been named Portfolio Director of Corporate Strategy and Development for Mosaic, Inc.

Annemarie Campo '09 and Joseph Camillo tied the knot last June.

Melissa Masone '09 graduated with honors from George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., with a Master of Arts in Strategic Communication on May 19, 2011. She began a new career in Student Affairs as the Assistant Director for Student Government in the Office of Student Involvement at George Mason University located in Fairfax.

Jay W. Worrall M'09 has been named Director of the Holleran Center for Community Engagement at Alvernia University. Previously, Jay made headlines as the Executive Director for Habitat for Humanity of Berks County.

Josh Kriebel '09 is an accountant for Cambridge Lee Industries.

Ryan Schlegel, M'09 has been named Portfolio Director of Corporate Strategy and Development for Mosaic, Inc.

Save the Date
Margaritaville — May 3, 2012
Live music and good times with alumni, faculty and staff make this a favorite event each spring.
Visit alumni.alvernia.edu for details on all alumni events.
Loan Officer in Commercial Lending for TD Bank in Exton, Pa. A vice president, he is responsible for assisting in managing a portfolio of commercial loans as well as administrative lending matters, credit administration, and risk management.

**2010s**

**Becky Eshbach '10** graduated from the Leadership Berks Program on June 9, 2011.

**Bradley M. Dengler '10** was named a community commercial relationship manager at VIST Financial Corp., in Spring Township. He will be responsible for developing commercial and industrial loan relationships within Spring Township, maintaining an existing commercial loan portfolio, and soliciting new business.

**Cesya Cuono '10** is author of *Elemental Reality*, published in August 2011.

**Dane Noecker '10** and his wife Tamara welcomed Caeli Aurora into the world on July 20, 2011. Caeli weighed 7 pounds, and was 18.5 inches long.

**Donna Hinkle '10**, and her husband Shawn, welcomed Carter Mitchell Hinkle into the world on August 9, 2011, at 1:41 a.m. Carter weighed 8 pounds, 11 ounces, and was 21 inches long.

**Julie M. Johnson '10** married William J. Lurwick, Jr., on September 17, 2011, at Stoudt’s Black Angus Restaurant, Adamstown, Pa. She is a registered nurse at the Reading Hospital and Medical Center.

**Maureen Plover '10** was interviewed for an article by *American Catholic* magazine as a follower of St. Francis. Maureen said that, “St. Francis spent his life in action, from building churches to spending time with lepers. Unfortunately, although there are a lot of bad things in our world today, each person on Earth can do something, can change something and thus make a difference in the world. We all have different talents and gifts. We must use them and work to make the world a better place, using words only when necessary.”

**Molly Crosby '10** is engaged to Joshua Lee.

**René Berkhammer '10** is a Secondary Life Skills Teacher and Transition Coordinator for the John Paul II Center for Special Learning in Shillington.

**Steven Perrotto '10**, an Air Force recruit, graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

**Tammy Halon '10** is a registered nurse at Geisinger Medical Center.

**Thomas Stilwell '10** is a shared services specialist for AlliedBarton Security Services.

**Brian Pawling '11** is the Purchasing Manager for the West Chester Area School District.

**Jason Kline '11** is a financial services professional for M.P. Butterworth & Associates/Mass Mutual in Reading.

**Kristin Prokop '11** passed away on June 5, 2011, after an automobile accident.

**Laura (Ciferri) Carzado '11** is a registered nurse at The Reading Hospital and Medical Center.

**Nicole Richards '11** is engaged to Austin Keller '11.

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Alvernia presented awards to several outstanding alumni during the Annual President’s Dinner in October. The Distinguished Alumni Award, which recognizes the contributions of Alvernia alumni to their professions, communities and the nation was presented to siblings Michele and Patricia Murphy, both class of 1973.

For 38 years, the Murphy sisters have been educating students in mathematics. Michele began her career in 1973 at St. Pius X High School in Pottstown, Pa., and is currently a teacher at Pope John Paul II High School in Royersford, Pa. Students have been inspired by Michele’s teaching, creating the “Math is Fun: Ms. Michele Murphy Appreciation Group” on Facebook, honoring the woman the students consider a teacher, a legacy, and a hero.

Patricia Murphy has also been educating students in the Catholic school system for 38 years beginning at Holy Name High School in Reading (now named Berks Catholic). She currently teaches Honors Pre-Calculus, Honors Algebra II and Algebra II.

The Ellen Frei Gruber Award was presented to Theresa McCormack, Class of 1983. It honors an alumnus who embraces Alvernia’s core values of service, humility, peacemaking, contemplation, and collegiality and demonstrates exceptional commitment to her or his alma mater.

Inspired by the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters and Alvernia, McCormack has dedicated her life to God, her family, and serving her community. Over the course of her career, she has been employed as a social worker at the Children’s Home of Reading, Reading School District and the A. Michael St. Peter Center. Additionally, she served the Lewisburg Area School District as a Social Service Support Specialist and Girls Tennis Coach, and was the physical education teacher at St. Monica School.

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nation should be built upon this instinct and on the gospel mandate articulated in Luke 6 ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.’

AM Do you think we have the opportunity to change how we approach war and acts of violence?

MD I believe now is time to flesh out a new Catholic paradigm for a Just Peace to replace the Just War Theory. Such a paradigm would always act on the belief that every human life is sacred — the lives of Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, and the children of Afghanistan or Iraq are as precious in the eyes of God as the lives of our own loved ones.

AM Where do we go from here?

MD Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching call us to redefine security in terms of basic human needs, rights, and responsibilities. It seems to me, however, that we will have to go much deeper than the usual policy debate and advocacy efforts to make a real change — and that the role of faith communities and educational institutions is key in this regard. The dominant U.S. culture, our value system, world view, and lifestyles undergird the present counter-terrorism approach. To move in a radically new direction toward the universal human will require a vast renovation of how we are as a people.

the have-nots, the whites and the Latinos, the invested and the transients. We found that there are pockets of community and in these pockets are several communities, each with its own identity. In each community there is a strength and resilience.

We discovered that residents have a sense of pride in their community, but they made references to being in a “survival mode.” The strength and resiliency of the Reading community is that there is a strong family dynamic. This dynamic is a combination of extended family in the context of a faith-based community. The city is rapidly changing, with mixed ethnic groups replacing a white community, and unfortunately, the rapid pace isn’t allowing for the type of support that would provide a less stressful transition. It’s clear that negative labeling of the city, compounding persistent economic down-shifts, has adversely impacted how residents view themselves, as well as how others view them and the city of Reading.

But there is hope. The themes of resiliency and transition resonated throughout every discussion and were shared across every group. I found it impressive that resiliency resonated in spite of the pejorative labeling of a distressed city. But as the economy continues to dive, our research continues. The next step includes building on the themes of resiliency and strength. Last year, I invited members of the focus groups to serve as panelists for the Alvernia Social Work Community Conference. This spring, the conference will focus on children and poverty. I believe that advocacy and research go hand in glove and with that in mind — I will continue with my research interests.

Susan McDonald, assistant professor of social work, worked with Paul Duong Tran from Fordham University on a research project titled, “Labeling Effects on Resiliency and Empowerment of An Economically Distressed City.” Their study explored the effects of negative economic conditions on the social and psychological statuses of community residents in Reading, Pa. The pair presented findings to peers in New York and Sarajevo, and plans to present them in Oregon in March 2012.
Since the hospital staff was small, Eby was able to gain experience that she typically wouldn’t have an opportunity to until she was a practicing nurse. She assisted in drawing blood, starting IVs, suturing wounds, and even incubating patients.

Bassett Hospital, located in Fort Wainright, is specifically for individuals in the Army or Navy and their families. Since it is a small hospital, it does not have an emergency ward, which would have been Eby’s first choice of placement.

While Alaska’s long hours of daylight were different and a bit confusing for the cadet, she did enjoy herself and traveled when she was not on duty in the hospital. “I went to Santa’s home at the North Pole, Denali National Park, Chena Hot Springs, and a few other places around Fairbanks,” she said.

Fast-forward three years from Eby’s difficult first day at Alvernia to find her a confident student, one semester away from graduating, and part of an elite group of individuals serving our nation as cadets in the Army ROTC.

“I’m looking forward to beginning,” she says. “I have been preparing for the past two years, and I’m ready to get my time started with the Army.”

Although nothing is set in stone, Eby hopes to work in the emergency room of the world-renowned Walter Reed Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. “I like the faster pace and the changes that occur with the ER,” she explains. “I like seeing different things and working with a variety of patient populations.”

Keeping with her love of high-pressure situations, Eby would eventually like to take her career to the next level as a certified Helicopter Flight Nurse. Flying is another passion of Eby’s. “When I was younger I took three short flying lessons to see if I liked it, but it was very time-consuming and expensive.”

Medical school may also be in Eby’s future.

After graduating from Alvernia this spring with a bachelor’s degree in nursing, Cadet Eby will be commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corp, where she has already committed to serve eight years. Helping people when they are at their worst seems to be when Eby is at her best. Her life as a caregiver is only just beginning.

Denise Elliott ’11 is a graduate assistant at Alvernia University, studying for her Master’s in Business Administration. She received her Bachelor’s degree in computer information systems and communication in 2011.
included cauterizing the eyes with a red-hot iron. He also probably had tuberculosis of the bone, or tubercular leprosy.

When told he only had a short time to live, Francis stretched out his hands and said, “Then be welcome Sister Death.” He asked to leave the world lying on the ground, stripped naked, with his arms outstretched like a cross. By then he was blind, unable to see the beauty that had entranced him. And he who had served others for so long was left totally dependent on them.

He died on October 3, 1226. Two years later, Pope Gregory IX pronounced him a saint. Today, animal lovers and environmentalists consider him their patron saint, but as Godfrey suggests, Francis is also a role model for people who are sick, elderly and facing death. “He lets us know that suffering and sickness is meaningful and that God is present in those moments of death. He is a role model for being present to others in their need, as well as for what it means for others to take care of you in your need.”

Francis liked to keep things simple. “Sanctify yourself,” he said, “and you will sanctify society.”

Peggy Landers, a former Editor with the Philadelphia Daily News, is an award-winning journalist who specializes in writing about religion, food, fashion and travel.

REACHING OUT, REACHING BACK | Continued from page 28

deeply impacted by Deo’s story and have felt the call to give back. In fact, each first-year seminar class developed a fundraising program to raise money to support Village Health Works. Supporting the health center that Deo founded brings the process of giving and learning full circle for Alvernia students, said Vice President for University Life and Dean of Students Joseph J. Cicala.

“We saw the magnitude of what happens when someone like Sharon McKenna reaches out to a homeless boy,” Cicala said. “We can all be like Sharon McKenna as we work to make a difference. It’s the reach out and the reach back that is most important,” Cicala said. “When we form these kinds of relationships, we establish community. When we get involved and give back to our communities, then we accomplish learning. In order to learn, you have to do.”

In some ways, Cicala said, Deo’s story mirrors that of every student who has arrived on a campus as a stranger, out of his element and unsure of where to turn. With help from upperclassmen, faculty, and staff, however, students become acclimated and are able to begin learning.

“A hand reaches out and a relationship is formed,” Cicala said. “The student becomes a member of a community and is freed up to go on and pursue an education.” That cycle, Cicala said, works best when it’s repeated — time and time again. And sometimes, he said, unlikely counterparts must work together toward a common goal, much as Deo called on the members of his village to do.

“My brother did a great thing in our country,” Nduwumwami said. “He made us (villagers) see that, even though we had been enemies, we could work together to accomplish something important and good. I didn’t really think we could do it. But I think we quickly found something bigger than all those mistakes we made. We all understood that we were working together for a common goal.”

The Alvernia community will continue working throughout the academic year to assist Village Health Works, furthering both Deo’s mission and its own values of service and peacemaking. “I have learned so much from the patients I serve,” Deo said. “I see myself and my life through their lens. It can be very hard to do good, but giving up or doing nothing is not an option.

Whatever work you do, do it out of love.”

Susan Shelly has written more than 30 books and is a frequent contributor to area newspapers and magazines. She lives in Shillington, Pa.
For more than 50 years, Alvernia has offered opportunities to adult learners as well as first-generation and traditional students seeking to develop personally and advance professionally. While many things have changed throughout those years, one constant has been our commitment to remaining a Franciscan institution dedicated to developing ethical leaders with moral courage. Thanks to the generosity of many alumni and friends as part of the Values & Vision Campaign, we have been able to continually enhance the quality of an Alvernia education through improvements to living and learning environments, including recent renovation work at historic Francis Hall, upgrades to Bernardine Hall, and the creation of Founders Village, to name but a few.

Our progress has been built one brick at a time, but there is much work yet to do. Plans include the renovation of both the wings of Francis Hall, which originally opened in 1926. You can support the continued renovation of Francis Hall, and as a sign of your commitment, your name or the name of a loved one will be etched into Alvernia history and into a brick in the new campus entrance. For more information, including other naming opportunities in Francis Hall, contact Thomas C. Minick ’98, director of development, at 610-790-2862 or thomas.minick@alvernia.edu.

Engrave your name into Alvernia’s history
provide those answers and put science in a context where it makes sense.”

In 2007, Pope Benedict met with clergy in Italy and told them “on the one hand, there are so many scientific proofs in favor of evolution, which appears to be a reality we can see and which enriches our knowledge of life and being as such. But on the other, the doctrine of evolution does not answer every query, especially the great philosophical question: Where does everything come from? And how did everything start which ultimately led to man?”

The following year, he addressed a meeting on “Scientific Insights Into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life,” sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. “My predecessors Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II noted that there is no opposition between faith’s understanding of creation and the evidence of the empirical sciences,” he reminded the group.

Perhaps few have done more to try to change the nature of the science and religion discussion than Michael Zimmerman, the founder and director of The Clergy Letter Project. Zimmerman initiated the project in 2004, and it was a sensation. The goal was to carve out a niche for, in his words, “the large number of religious individuals who were in the middle ground — who weren’t fundamentalist, who care deeply about religion.”

Since then, more than 12,750 Christian religious leaders have signed his letter in support of evolution and the compatibility of science and faith, and he has started Evolution Weekend, an annual February event that encourages congregations to discuss — in a way that is civil and meaningful — how science and religion can coexist. The weekend, he says, is designed to counter the “loud voices” of those who assert that people must choose between the two.

His view is that when “religious leaders and scientists come together in this fashion, the world begins to recognize that the battle that has been portrayed as being between religion and science is actually a struggle between one narrow religious perspective and all other religious traditions.”

Not everyone is convinced. There are still many people who see fundamental, philosophical incompatibility between science and faith of any sort. And there remains real divide between those who think religion and science are able to be truly reconciled and those who do not. “I don’t believe the debate is ever going to be ended,” Zimmerman says.

“But I think the existence of 13,000 clergy members in the United States who have signed one of our clergy letters has helped move the pendulum a little bit to a different portion of the spectrum. I don’t have to be the sole voice of rebuttal when people say: ‘Well, they’re just religious; they can’t accept evolution. Or: All religious leaders are anti-science. There are others now.’”

Heather Wax is a journalist who covers issues at the intersection of science, religion, and culture, and she runs the blog Science + Religion Today.
The Bernardine Franciscan Sisters are the founders and sponsors of Alvernia University. We put our Congregational name, our identity, and our commitment behind Alvernia. While the physical presence of the Sisters on campus may be diminishing, our spirit is not. We look to the faculty, staff, students, and alumni to continue the Franciscan identity and to journey with us in building the mission.

I have watched Alvernia grow since its conception. St Francis Orphanage gave way to a high school, then a college, and now a university, and it was not just any university, rather one that is among the finest institutes of higher education in the Franciscan tradition. We can all be proud of that.

I marvel at the changes on the campus and the growth in many areas, including the Franciscan identity, education programs, and service to the community of Reading and beyond.

As I viewed the face-lift of Francis Hall, the signature building of Alvernia, it surfaced many memories of the humble beginnings and the sacrifices of our pioneers. They had a dream, and that dream soon became a shared dream. I watched the workers at Francis Hall tear down that which had lain there for many years, heaps of visions, hopes, and fears. Then brick by brick, they began to rebuild. In addition, I recalled the words of Christ to Francis: “Francis, rebuild my church.” Then I heard a faint echo deep within myself: “My people of Alvernia, rebuild my Church.”

We are standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Zygmunta and Pacelli Halls in Founders Village stand as a reminder of all the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters who laid the foundation for this great institution. We also carry memories of others who had journeyed with us as part of the Alvernia community and now are enjoying their heavenly reward. Their lives are not forgotten.

Now it is our turn to walk the journey entrusted to us, remembering that those who follow us will be standing on our shoulders. Each of us contributes our part as carriers of academic knowledge and Franciscan values. We are the leaders and we are the learners. We are building a better tomorrow together, each contributing our piece, brick by brick.

We share common ownership of the five core values of Alvernia: service, humility, peacemaking, contemplation and collegiality. We strive to model these values and impart them to others, for this is an integral part of Alvernia’s education for life. Our Franciscan heritage proclaims that to be Franciscan is to respect the dignity of each human person and all creation; to sustain right relationships; to be open to the world and its diversity; and to seek peace through justice.

When graduates of Alvernia take with them a piece of this Franciscan heritage, we know that we have done what is ours to do.

Two Franciscan scholars, Bill Short, OFM, and Ilia Delio, OSF, in their book The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition said, “Who else if not us? When else if not now?” These statements remind us that our Franciscan tradition has a word to speak today, one that responds to deeply felt needs in our Church and in our world. The Franciscan tradition can help to articulate a viable way of being Christian in the world today. It becomes crucial for us to understand the next steps, which will bring the tradition into dialogue with today’s questions in regard to Christian faith, the life of the Church, the world of science and culture, and the needs and longings of the human family.

The Bernardine Franciscan Sisters are grateful for the collaboration between the university and the Sisters. We can do much more together than any one of us can do alone. God has shed his grace on Alvernia. Alvernia is on the map, and all of you have helped to put it there!

Sr. Madonna is the immediate past Congregational Minister of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, a position she held for more than a decade. [Excerpted from her remarks given at the annual State of the University address in Fall 2011.]
TEN YEARS AFTER...
Global peace advocate Marie Dennis reflects on what we’ve learned from 9/11.
Read the full story on page 16