Love
takes off the masks
we fear we cannot live without
and know we cannot live within

-James Baldwin

Reflections from
the Ursinus Community
The masses of men live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what [the Christian] religion offers to meet their own needs. -Howard Thurman
Commencement Citation

Charles Rice, as Chaplain of Ursinus College for twenty years, you fought courageously for justice on our campus and in our world. You reminded us of the words of Cornel West that “justice is what love looks like in public.” You were a tireless advocate for all students, but especially for students of color, to ensure that their histories and perspectives were given an equal voice in our classrooms, in our curriculum, and in our society.

Like Socrates, Jesus, and James Baldwin, you were a gadfly in the best sense of the word, always challenging Ursinus to be its moral best, and always pushing your students to be their best selves—intellectually rigorous, honest, and kind. Your legendary mentoring of students won you the prestigious H. Lloyd Jones, Jr. award last year at this very ceremony. At that time, one student said of you, “He sees diamonds where some others would see ordinary rocks.”

At Ursinus, you revitalized the Chapel program, raised the level of theological discourse, guided countless students in their vocational discernment, and took students for eleven consecutive years to Philadelphia, Mississippi and Chicago, Illinois, to explore the intersection of religion and civil rights in the African-American experience.

But, most of all, you were our dear friend who taught us how to confront life’s most persistent problems with moral clarity and good humor. You taught us that love was about “showing up,” and you celebrated with us in life’s greatest moments and comforted us in our moments of loss and disappointment. You loved us deeply.

President Blomberg, because of his indefatigable courage in the face of social injustice, and because of his unwavering dedication to our community, I am pleased to present the Reverend Charles Rice so that you may confer upon him the posthumous Honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Christian Rice
Charles Rice was an extraordinary human being, and we have suffered a loss of someone in our lives whose presence was so much larger than life. We have lost our Superman.

When I first met him twenty years ago, I was a skinny, relatively ignorant young man. I thought I was smart because I had succeeded in knowing and regurgitating certain facts, but I didn’t know what I didn’t know until I met him. He was a master teacher and interlocutor, always challenging me to provide evidence for my assumptions and always willing to call me out on my sloppy thinking. At the same time, his willingness to cut me down in an argument had the curious effect of inviting me in to a deeper conversation about religion, ethics, race, and politics. Like so many of us here, I don’t quite understand why he chose to invest so much of his time and treasure into my well-being, but he did and he was the most incredible mentor and cheerleader anyone could ever ask for. When others dismissed my dreams as fantasies, he dismissed their opinions. He saw something in so many of us that others simply could not see. When I was his student, he would tell me that he could see me as President of Ursinus and that someday, he would be working for me. But I remember thinking, if he thinks I could be president, well, then, how hard could it really be for me to be on the faculty here one day? He planted seeds in you like that and he never stopped watering them. And he taught me a lot about courage. He taught me that I shouldn’t worry so much about other peoples’ opinions and that I should never silence or sacrifice my fundamental moral convictions for the sake of niceness or prestige. For what profits a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?

This great and good man became, over time, my very best friend and very rarely did a day go by that we wouldn’t talk over the phone or spend time with each other in person. We were as thick as thieves. We would talk about everything and anything, from the virtues of James Cone’s theology to sports, our love of pub food, and Stickley furniture. We would often comment on how lucky we both were to marry such extraordinary women whom we knew were stronger and better than we were. But our most frequent topic of conversation—by far—was our students. We often shared students. It seems that once they found one Rice, the other was not far behind. He delighted in mapping out their futures and sharing his plans with me. Our conversations would often end with two grown men telling the other that we loved each other and I’m now so very glad that we did that. He was my brother—yes, my brother by another mother, as we so often joked—and we both took great joy in the fact that we just so happened to share the same last name. I stand before you this morning as a sad but lucky man. Twenty years ago, I met a man who believed in me. It just takes one person to believe in you like that for your life to be changed. He taught me how to think critically and love deeply, and I believe those are the two greatest and most liberating activities of the human spirit. I will always love you, my brother, always. We will meet again one day.

Christian Rice
Rev. Rice's impact on my life literally shaped who I am today. As the new chaplain on campus in 1997, I was his first student intern responsible for community service records under his responsibilities. During my senior year, I was diagnosed with Degenerative Disc Disease in my neck, requiring extensive surgery. Between dealing with my spinal surgery and debating my future plans, I was so overwhelmed and considered dropping out of college mid-way through the 1st semester of my senior year. He convinced me to finish my studies.... He told me "You will persevere... You will impact the futures of our future." Today I am a Spanish teacher, interpreter, and community service leader in the high school where I work.

I'll never forget those words of inspiration.... had he not spoken to me as I walked across the lawn to Corson Hall to talk to the Academic Dean, I probably would not be the person I am today as a result of finishing my degree. The Rice family, Ursinus and the world have lost a great man.... Rest in peace, Rev. Rice. It was an honor to be your first intern... Your impact on my life has been profound.

—Melanie Hoover '98
I have started and restarted this tribute five times. Mainly because how do I use words to describe the indescribable. How do I put into words the gratitude I have for the man that saw my path, purpose and true self before I recognized it? It all seems so inadequate.

I remember the first time I met Rev. I remember his long unhurried strides and how he was able have a conversation with you that even though it was just a few minutes, the weight of it stayed long after. I remember finally taking his course and it being one of the few courses that I fully committed myself to doing well in. I remember when he finally met my other half and holding my breath for his approval because it was so important to me. I remember being in awe of his knowledge, his kindness, his unyielding desire for change and social justice but most of all his capacity to love. Rev was a giant among men.

The day I heard that Rev had passed was the day that I lost a piece of my heart. Rev was easily one of the most influential people in my life. Although he is no longer here in the physical form I take solace in the fact that his works and his legacy will live on through all the many people and lives that he has touched.

“When I liberate others, I liberate myself.”

-Fannie Lou Hamer

Julania Hubbard ’01
When we think of Rev. Rice, the words teacher, mentor, academic and spiritual advisor, sage, counselor, and friend all come to mind, but no words truly encompass who he was and the measure in which he gave selflessly to us and to others around him. Though we have received many gifts from Rev. Rice, his greatest impact on us as students and mentees has been through his tireless work as an educator. One of the earliest lessons we learned as students was the purpose of education to transform human lives and to expand human potential. This means that if you were fortunate enough to take his classes, attend chapel services, sit in his office, or be welcomed into his home that you would not leave the same as you arrived. We were, without a doubt, changed in profound ways because of Rev. Rice’s costly and sacrificial investment in us as students and as human beings in which he saw inordinate value and worth. Amazingly, this investment did not end with our graduation from Ursinus but continued through our marriage, through multiple graduate programs, through the birth of our two children, who have been warmly welcomed into the Rice family and who deeply feel his loss as we do. Rev. Rice’s teaching, guidance, and gracious support for our family extended nearly 20 years and persisted across the distance as we moved further and further away from Collegeville, PA. Despite his passing, he is with us in the work that we do as a child advocacy attorney and as a professor of African American Literature—vocations that we discovered and made manifest through his teaching, guidance, and ongoing support. We strive to honor Rev. Rice’s vision by continuing to live lives shaped by radical hope. Perhaps his greatest gift to us is his understanding of hope as a way of being in the world, his belief that living freely in the world requires a tremendous faith in what’s possible anchored by a firm understanding of the realities of injustice in our past and in our present. Because of Rev. Rice, we have received these lessons and this wisdom as an intellectual and spiritual inheritance that enables us to live freely and hope-filled lives. So we honor his life in the best way we know how, by continuing this difficult work of transforming lives through teaching and advocacy for children and for young adults. We are so grateful to be a part of his ongoing legacy.

Tisha ’01 & Branden ’02 Brooks
I had the tremendous opportunity of meeting Rev. Rice when I was studying at Ursinus College. He made a tremendous impact in my life, specifically during my junior and senior year. I was unsure of what I wanted to do after graduation, so I went to meet him in his office. He always encouraged conversation. I was studying psychology and so he talked about the role of a counselor and the impact that I could make on helping our youth/community. Through this conversation and many others, I created a clearer vision of what I wanted to accomplish in my life. Over the course of a couple months he spoke to me about a master’s program in Counseling Psychology at Teachers College. He emphasized the focus on race relations and utilizing tools to help us understand ourselves to then understand others more effectively. I completed the application and Rev. Rice called Teachers College on my behalf. I ended up getting accepted into Teachers College and completed my Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology in 2005. Teachers College was the program I needed in my life. The focus on multiculturalism and identity was pivotal to my training as a counselor. Twelve years later I reflect on the impact that he had in my life and how much thought and care he paid to those he worked with. I absolutely love the work that I do as a School Counselor for alternative education youth. My work revolves around doing behavioral interventions and advocating for students in a school setting. Rev. Rice believed in me and took the time to make me feel valued. One of the main points that I took away from Rev. Rice is in being a person of action. It's in walking the walk. I considered myself blessed that I had the opportunity to meet him during my time at Ursinus College.

Preethy (Eddy) Jayant ’03
Rev. Rice exemplified the liberal arts tradition and added a much needed dimension to it with his spiritual guidance. He was a gifted preacher and teacher. Perhaps most importantly, he helped to make every student feel the love of the divine, regardless of how the divine was referenced. The Ursinus College community was fortunate to be guided by Rev. Rice.

Geoff Brace '03
My husband and I both went to Ursinus College. When the person performing our marriage ceremony canceled on us the day of the wedding, a friend suggested that we call Rev. Rice. He stepped in with half a day’s notice and performed the ceremony for us. It was simple and beautiful and perfect. I am and will forever be grateful for that kindness. He saved the day.

-Larissa Gordon ’03 and Matt Miller ’04
Sr. Rice and Family,
It saddens my heart deeply to hear of the loss of such a great man of God; however, my heart delights in having known Rev. Rice and to have been able to have many memorable and fond moments of him. Rev. Rice was such a valuable mentor and figure during my academic career at Ursinus and I will be forever grateful for the memories and opportunities that Rev. Rice extended to me. Rev. Rice was such a straight-forward man that would not allow anyone to make any excuses of what they could not do, instead, he empowered and inspired many to reach into their untapped potential and challenge themselves. Because of Rev. Rice, I was able to travel to Louisiana and participate in a faith-based conference that provided me with the opportunity to leave my comfort zone and be more open-minded. I am so thankful for the commitment that Rev. Rice had to ensure that there was a church service every Sunday in Bomberger Hall and how he allowed for the student population to contribute their own unique ability in each service. Having the presence of a church service when you are many miles away from your own church home is a blessing that not many college campuses provide to their students. This opportunity allowed for my faith to blossom and grow into what it is today.
Rev. Rice will be missed and I call upon the hands of God to comfort and shower over the entire Rice family.
Sincerely,
Chantell V. Johnson '05
I have so many memories of "The Reverend Rice" that I don't even know where to start. There are few people who come into your life that make such a profound difference, for me the Rev was one of them. I truly loved him and I along with the rest of those who knew him will miss him deeply. He was one of those people who just always seemed larger than life.

He challenged me from day one of my first semester of CIE with him and President Strassburger. He was that person that always made you think outside the box and would question your beliefs and never let you take the easy way out. I actually would choose him to grade my papers rather than President Strassburger if we had a choice even though he was the harder grader because I wanted to know what he thought of my work and of me, I valued his opinion and I wanted that elusive 'A' from him, because he didn't just hand them out (I think my highest grade was my Dante essay which I never finished reading, shhh-don't tell him).

Well Rev, I went back to school, not to med school like you wanted, but I work as an Operating Room RN keeping those surgeons in line including Dr. Eboni Woodard (UC volleyball team reunion!). So, thank you Rev for always expecting the most from me.

As I said, he was my professor freshman year, aka 2001-02. He was my professor when 9/11 happened. I had the experience of going to NYC with him and his wife to "work" ground zero overnight at St. Paul's Church while they were doing body recovering in the spring of 2002 with a group of Ursinus students. They found 2 "bodies" that night as I recall. I still don't have the words to adequately describe the experience of being on that "hallowed ground". It was a deeply humbling experience, I still remember all of the paper cranes lining the church, the stories the cops and workers told, the ghost of the towers, I remember. The Rev, he was a New Yorker... there was a memorable subway ride as I recall. I think Mrs. Rice suggested leaving a couple of students on the subway to see how they fared, in fact, I think the Rev married them a few years later.

The Rev would come to my volleyball games, he and my father were both Coast Guard Academy alum and we bonded over that and we kept in touch for years. Every time that I would come back to PA for a visit post-graduation I would call him for a lunch date and when he would answer the phone he would always ask, "are you getting married?" I always thought the Rev would be the one to marry me if it ever happened... I think he was always hopeful for another score for Ursinus's marriage record.

As he ended every class before the weekend "A tisket a tasket, a condom or a casket, and don't kill too many brain cells this weekend."

Erin O'Hara '05
Reverend Rice is a huge reason for the man I am today. During my first few years as a student, I would attend services with Reverend Rice on the weekends. During that time, he also became a faculty advisor for me. Between the meetings, lunches, and services he reminded me of my priorities and the need to take advantage of my education and opportunities.

Reverend Rice was my teacher for the Common Intellectual Experience class. During that time, he challenged me and helped me to see the world through a different perspective. The class expanded my understanding on the meaning of being human and the roles and tasks we should take in our society.

As the 2006 class president, I had the opportunity to speak at graduation. I had the distinction of sitting between President Straussberger and Reverend Rice during the graduation ceremony. Being seated on stage created a bit of an issue with how I would receive my diploma from the rest of my class. During rehearsals the dean announced my name and turned in the opposite direction of my class to face me as I walked from my seat. Unfortunately during the real ceremony, my name was looked over and I walked across stage as my name wasn’t called. I walked back to my seat, sat down in embarrassment and the first words out of my mouth towards Reverend Rice was “I graduated right?, I know I had senioritis, but I didn’t think I failed anything!” He laughed and told me that I did in fact graduate. He then got up, spoke to the dean announcing the names and fixed the situation. I was called up later in the announcements to receive my degree.

The most pivotal experience I had with Reverend Rice was the meeting when I was discussing my plans following my time at Ursinus. I had great uncertainty in my ability, knowledge and desire to pursue medicine. He recommended that I apply to a post-baccalaureate program and allow myself the opportunity to improve my application to medical school. Had it not been for that day, I would not have known about the program that shaped my life and allowed me to accomplish my dream of being an Orthopedic Surgeon. Because of Reverend Rice and his desire to help me when I was at my lowest, I have become a mentor and helped students to get into medical school. His patience, willingness to listen, debate, advice and sincerity is a huge driving force to my success. I am so thankful to have had him in my life.

Cristin John Mathew, DO, '06
I'm grateful for him praying over us in the football locker room before games. God Bless Rev. Rice
Frank DiMeglio ’08
I would not be a physician if it was not for this man. He was my pre-med advisor while I was at Ursinus, and he fought and advocated for me in ways you could never imagine. I am forever indebted to him and I am eternally grateful. I pray that he rest in the most perfect peace. Ursinus will never be the same without you. He truly was one of the greatest men I have ever known.

Sabrina Clark ’09
About ten years ago, I found myself standing next to Rev in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. The summer sun was out in full force that day and across from us lay the grave of Fannie Lou Hamer.

As I learned from Rev, Fannie Lou Hamer was a giant of the local Mississippi civil rights movement who spent her days crisscrossing the state, signing up folks to vote. And this was in Mississippi, where there were more lynchings in any given year than the rest of the country combined. There wasn’t just strange fruit swinging from the poplar trees in Mississippi. There were orchards of them. And when folks would remind Fannie Lou of this fact, of just how bleak her prospects were, she would listen, she would nod, and she would politely tell them what she told the good Lord every morning. She’d say, “Look, I’mma run towards justice. And when I can’t run, I’mma walk. And when I can’t walk, I’mma lean so that when I die, I’ll fall five feet closer to justice.” See, whether she ran or leaned, whether the world kicked or screamed, she was going to do what she could do to bring this world to where it ought to be.

To Rev, that was the very essence of faith. As he so eloquently put it, “Faith was assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen. It was the act of turning your dreams into deeds, of betting your life on realities unseen.” It was not a noun, a state of being, or a thing to behold. It was a verb, a state of doing, an action to be undertaken.

To Rev, faith was far more than optimism in a desired destination. Faith didn’t ask you to see the glass as half full. Faith asked you to believe the glass could be full and then do the work of filling it. And it is in this tradition – faith as the act of filling that glass – that the arc of Rev’s life comes into sharp relief.

As I think you would be the first the point out, that arc began with his mother. Born in the small town of Prichett, South Carolina in 1919, she was one of fifteen. At age 20, she moved to Brooklyn so that she could have a “better future and greater dignity.” Now you don’t need to be a historian or know much about South Carolina in 1939 to understand why that would be. Nearly twenty years later, she gave birth to Charles William Rice.

Few kids made it out of the Brownsville projects where he grew up. Drop out rates were high, college competency levels low. The few who did make it out, like Mike Tyson, were professional athletes. To change those odds, his mother emphasized the importance of hard work day in and day out and herself became involved in the push for integrated school busing. In time, every single one of the kids on that school bus made it out. Rev was one of them.

His mom and his experience impressed upon him early, that with hard work, we can do better by our children. Decades later, while working on his master’s thesis, he found himself sitting across the table in conversation with the author James Baldwin. And when Baldwin told him that “the greatest sin in this world is to betray a child,” Rev’s faith went full tilt. Bringing his head, his heart, and his hands together in the service of every child he met, one child at a time, in any way he could.

And so it’s no coincidence that his favorite lyric, popularized by Whitney Houston but – as Rev and Mrs. Rice would be the first to remind us – was best sung by their four-year-old daughter while jumping on her bed at midnight nearly thirty years ago:
I believe that children are our future,
Teach them well and let them lead the way,
Show them all the beauty they possess inside,
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier,

His unwavering faith in those words was as clear as day from the moment we met. I first met Rev when I was a senior in high school interviewing at Ursinus. I came to the interview thinking he’d ask me the standard fare - tell me your greatest strength, your greatest weakness, adjectives your friends would describe you. He did some of that.

And then he turned to me and said, “Aakash, what’s your take on abortion?” Well now, I knew Rev was a Reverend. And the only other religious figure 17-year-old Aakash knew, though not personally, was the Pope. I knew where the Pope stood on this. I knew where I stood on this. I didn’t know where Rev stood on this. I said, “All right, this is my take...”

And then he turned to me and said, “What about gay people?” And again, I thought of the Pope. I knew where the Pope stood on this. I knew where I stood on this. I didn’t know where Rev stood on this. But again, I said, “All right, this is my take...”

And then he turned to me and said, “Aakash, black and brown kids don’t do as well as their white and Asian counterparts in the classroom. Why do you think that is?” This time, I’m happy to report that I didn’t think of the Pope. Quite frankly, I didn’t think much of anything. And I said as much. I said, “I don’t think it’s through any fault of their own but, quite honestly, I know enough to know that I just don’t know. Tell you what though, I’d love to hear what you think and then have a conversation about it.”

What followed were the 90 most enlightening minutes of my life. And I remember leaving the interview thinking that I don’t think I’ve ever learned so much in an hour and a half. And he took that kind time when I don’t even go here. Imagine how much more I could learn if I was here for four years. And so I did, and I joined myself to his hip. He became a second father to me and Mrs. Rice a second mother. Over dinners with them, Robe, and Martin, trips to change the car tires, trips to get our haircut, I learned so much. And I did so because Rev and Mrs. Rice understood that learning comes from family, so to truly practice his favorite lyrics, to teach children well, requires that you treat them like family. They did exactly that.

And it didn’t end with graduation. When I finished medical school last May, Rev woke up in the middle of the night here in Collegeville, grabbed Dr. Lyczak, drove down to Philadelphia airport, flew to Providence, Rhode Island, and then rented a car and drove to Boston, Massachusetts, just so he could be at my graduation in solidarity. And even though he’d have to leave within just three hours so that he could get back to Providence in time to catch his flight, he came anyway.

It was ultimately, yet another example, of his faith in action.

Rev spent his life keeping that faith. My hope is that we all do the same. It doesn’t matter if we run or you walk or you lean. It just matters that we do. It’s what Rev would have wanted.

May God bless the Reverend Charles Rice and his beloved family.
Aakash Shah ’10
Rev believed in love. That sounds corny, but there’s nothing easy or cheesy about love, nor belief in love. Love is revolutionary, transgressive, sacrificial, world-changing—that’s Christian love, and that was the kind of love at the center of Rev’s faith and life. Rev was a cheerleader for eros-love as well as for agape-love; I spent every Sunday of my four years at Ursinus in chapel with Rev, and I think he would’ve tried to hook me up with some of the boys who went there, but his matchmaker’s eye was good enough to see that none of them were quite right. It took me three years after I graduated to find the right guy and figure out what Rev was always talking about when he talked in glowing terms about marriage—that same powerful magic he had with Tonya. I still treasure the two children’s books, with flyleaf inscriptions in his handwriting, that he gave me to read to my own hypothetical/potential children someday. One of them, Hope for the Flowers by Trina Paulus, contains one of the most important lessons a college student (or any human of any age) can learn about the meaning of life, the kind of wisdom that Ursinus itself stands for, the kind of lesson that can’t be taught but only discovered. In that book’s terms, Rev was a butterfly-maker. I’m certain that this memorial book will be full of stories from people he persuaded to leave behind the “caterpillar pillar” and to trust that “If I have the stuff inside me to make cocoons, maybe the stuff of butterflies is there too.” If you want to know about the kind of love Rev believed in and acted on in his life, faith, and pedagogy, read that book. And, if you want to honor Rev’s life and memory in the way that he himself would want you to, follow in his footsteps and fight for justice in the world. Rev’s commitment to justice of all kinds—racial, social, political, global—was an extension of his commitment to love; he believed that the Biblical ‘kingdom of heaven’ is our responsibility to create on earth. Now, with his loss, the fight for justice is short a warrior. He would want for all those he inspired step forward and take his place on the front lines—let us be his living memorial, his legacy. Rev’s signature benediction for chapel services was the kind of powerful, revolutionary prayer one seldom hears, so I’ll close my recollection here with his words: “In the name of the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Rachel, of Martin and Coretta... Amen.”

- Melissa Pankake Isaacs ’11
I never took a class from Reverend Rice, but I didn't need to. He was always teaching me something, giving me advice, knowing what I needed even if I felt so lost. My sophomore and junior year, especially, were tough beyond words and he let me go to his office and cry and scream and vent. He was the ear I needed and the advice I sought, even if I didn't realize it.

Reverend Rice supported me during my tenure at Ursinus: attending events that I participated in, and the exhibition I curated. He attended our senior night with President Fong, and spoke kind words about and for me. It's not about the words he spoke even, it's about how he spoke them: with kindness, warmth, respect, seeing the values and treasures in ourselves that as young, barely there adults, we couldn't see for ourselves. Thank you, Reverend Rice, for all that you were to me, and the imprints you've made on my soul and heart. "Now cracks a noble heart. Goodnight sweet prince: and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (Hamlet V.II.CCCLIX-CCCLX)

Michelle Ermatinger-Salas '12
It is rare that you meet an instructor that has a profound impact on your life. Reverend Charles Rice was one such instructor for me. His intelligence, friendly demeanor, and engaging teaching style inspired me (an aspiring secondary education teacher) to provide the type of engaging and thought provoking education that he gave to me.

At the start of my academic career at Ursinus, I had only a basic knowledge of the civil rights movement. Like many other Americans I believed the rudimentary narrative of the civil rights movement (that the movement was fundamentally non-violent, that Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were opposites, and that the church was an important ally to in the struggle) that all students are exposed to in elementary and secondary school. I took three of his classes over the course of my time at Ursinus (African American Religious Experience, Religion and the Civil Rights Movement, and the cross-disciplinary Introduction to Peace and Social justice class). Additionally, I went on his spring civil rights trip to Mississippi in 2010. In these classes, Reverend Rice utilized class discussion, anecdotes from his travels with civil rights activists throughout the country, and insightful commentaries on current events to challenge the simplified narrative outlined above. Students read the speeches and writings of King, Malcolm X, James Baldwin, James Cone, Manning Marable and other leading scholars of the movement to discuss the impact of these writers on the civil rights movement. On the class trip, we met with various religious leaders, activists like Ed King and middle school students at a predominantly black middle school.

One of his key mantras in class was: “Most people do not attend college to get an education, they attend college to prepare for a career. I am committed to providing you with the tools necessary for you to get an education.” Using primary sources and his study trip to Mississippi and other civil rights locations in the Deep South, Rev Rice exposed his students to a wide variety of viewpoints in the civil rights struggle. Students in his classes met or read and discussed the views of social justice activists, Klansman, high school students, and church leaders from across the political spectrum. He knew that many of us were tempted to dismiss the arguments posed by many figures we read or interacted with, particularly religious conservatives, white nationalists like Sam Bowers, or some of his own views regarding affirmative action, the Black Panthers and the role of the church in society. He welcomed our critiques and encouraged us to make up our own minds on these issues and to discuss our analysis after class, regardless of how late we stayed with him (although he did need to tell us to not forget about eating dinner at some point).

Far more important than the academic lessons I learned in his classes was the effort Reverend Rice made to get to know each one of us, attended meetings of the African American and Hispanic student unions and welcomed us to join him at local churches or his office to socialize after class. Whenever a racial issue happened on campus (e.g., racial slurs written on classroom walls, anti-gay rhetoric written on the sidewalk on pride day) he would be the first professor to offer to meet and discuss the event with us in private. He was always ready to say to a student he knew that “I could see you becoming,” and then provide a profession that he thought the student could excel in. This personal touch combined with his love of James Baldwin (a love that I now share with every student I meet) and the engaging conversations are the fondest memories of one of my best teachers at Ursinus.

As I prepare to undertake a career as a secondary school teacher, I remember a word of advice he gave to all his students. He told us: “Many white students who have taken my classes have been inspired to work with the African American community to fight for civil rights. While I applaud their commitment to work for social justice, I ask you to go back to your communities and inspire others to struggle for social justice as it seems I have inspired you.” Using the knowledge and experience I gained in class, I only hope I can do the same for my students.

Daniel Beneventano ’12
To whom it may concern:
Reverend Doctor Charles Rice.

In remembering Ursinus, it is impossible for me not to think of Reverend Rice first and last. He was the first professor that I interacted with during the summer Bridge Program. He immediately made us sit up straight and realize that college was not going to be a walk in the park. Contrary to some of our opinions, we had not yet succeeded, just because we were attending a celebrated college. This was the beginning of the collective ‘us’ understanding the responsibility that we had to make good use of our opportunity. An opportunity that was provided for us by our parents and other supporters, not something that we granted ourselves. It was during this short time in the summer that we all quickly shifted our thought process and began acting like adults.

However, that transformation does not happen overnight. Rev. Rice continued to educate anyone and everyone who would listen. He did this with me by offering me the job of Chaplain’s Assistant before my first semester started. I had no idea that this position, which I thought would only be good for some extra cash, was the beginning of my adult evolution. Being this close to the Reverend day-in and day-out would begin to mold me into what I can only hope would make him proud.

Reverend Rice is also the last person I think of when Ursinus comes to mind. Not only was he influential in my college education, but he continued to preside over me, as he officiated my wedding to the lovely Erin Dickerson. He was so happy that two of his closest mentees would join in life’s journey together, and we could not have been more proud to have him guide us along the way to marriage.

Although he is gone, his teachings remain. The humble man that he was, he made sure that his students remembered his instruction, and that of others, so that we could continue to enrich the earth through our love for our fellow man, respect for others, and empathy for those who are less fortunate. Many of us have gone on to fulfill callings that help advance this Godly love, and it is largely because of Reverend Rice’s dedication to his own calling.

I will not say that I cannot reach the same heights as Reverend Rice, because he would tell me that I can. The most important part, as he would say, is “Putting my seat in a seat”, and pushing forward with Godly purpose. I will continue to do this with his memory encouraging me along the way.

Gerald Glover III, Esq. ’12
Rev,

It's impossible to put into words how much your friendship meant to me. Your family welcomed me with open arms while I was at Ursinus and I can't thank you enough.

Some of the memorable things you've done for me:

- You gave me a job during my first year at Ursinus. I was lost, suffering culture-shock, and trying to adapt in a new environment and you gave me a purpose, a paycheck, and a key to the student office. That office became my refuge when I was dealing with roommate problems. And, when it got really awful and I was fighting with the housing office every day because I felt too scared to go back to my room to sleep at night, you fixed it. I still don't know exactly what you did but all of a sudden, I was allowed to change roommates.

- Your family invited me to New York for Christmas. My parents were out of the country and I had nowhere to go for Easter, so I got in the car with you, Tonya, and the kids and rode along to New York, where I met your mother and got to celebrate Easter at your church. I had so much fun that weekend. You always went above and beyond to help me feel welcome.

- You were my friend and mentor. In my most current job, I listed you as one of my references. Right after you got off the phone with my potential (and now current) boss, you told me "I believe she will make an offer to you"... and 15 minutes later, she did. I got the job! You always believed in me, supported me, and did whatever you could to help me follow my passions. Thank you.

- I introduced you to my boyfriend, this Japanese exchange student that I was crazy about, and you approved. You grilled him and joked with him and made him feel welcome at Ursinus too. And then, a year and a half later, when we decided to get married, you were completely on board. We were silly in love and still undergraduate students but you never said anything negative or told us we should wait. Instead, your boys were our ring bearers, your wife walked me down the aisle, and you performed the ceremony at the chapel across the street - with every pew filled with the people we loved. That was one of the best nights of our lives.

My heart breaks from this loss. You unwavering support and kindness made my time at Ursinus truly special. I'm so thankful we got to see you and go out to eat with your family last September during our trip in the US.

As always,

Love,

Grace Buchele Mineta ’14
Rev was and lives on to be my “in-spiration,” one who inspirited me, causing within me a kind of spirit to be and move, a fire to be fueled, and a hunger to be fed. He was the key impetus in driving me to seek the living God and the purpose for myself, firmly grasping His ways of life and His truth that sets men free. It was alongside the mentorship of Rev as my Reverend, professor, counselor, and impromptu campus-father that I became enthralled with the seeking answers as to what it meant to be human and what our purpose was here on this earth. And it was nothing short of the miracle of his heart for love that I continued in company with Rev as I transitioned from an agnostic to an atheist to a Christian, from a Biology major pursuing medicine to a Religious Studies major pursuing Jesus.

Rev inspired me to look beyond the text of a book and to think critically about what it means for the world today. He had figured out a synthesis between idealism and pragmatism like no other teacher I’ve known. He set the expectations and hopes high for this world and his students and our abilities and yet never failed to meet us where we were at and move us forward no matter how far short we’ve come of the goals. He never allowed what is to determine what ought to be.

As I teach today, I know that what he said to me over and over again is true: “We are standing on the shoulders of giants.” As he has moved onwards and upwards, one of our giants is now him and Ursinus is where it is today because of people like him who were willing to serve and lay low so that we could rise high, so that our floor would be his ceiling, and so that his relentless dream of selfless love flowing within and amongst humanity under God—that is, the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed—would be that much closer to our reality.

Branden Irving ’14
Rev Rice was truly a blessing to the Ursinus College community and he helped to shape the lives of all the individuals he encountered - including mine. I first met Rev Rice during CIE freshman year, where he was my professor. Not only did he encourage everyone to speak, ask thoughtful questions, and argue their perspectives, he also wasn't afraid to speak his mind about the texts we were discussing. During a week when we were reading a series of religious texts, Rev Rice pointed out the similarities between the origin stories across many of the religious texts and noted that the original versions of those stories came before they are said to occur in the Bible. I remember the entire class being in shock and wondering if, as a reverend, he was allowed to say those kinds of things. As a Christian, I found Rev Rice's perspectives on such events refreshing and I remember thinking that he was the kind of Christian I wanted to be.

At the end of my freshman year, Rev Rice pulled me aside and told me that he had nominated me to become part of the CIE Fellows, a group of students from all different disciplines that shared a passion for CIE and would be tasked with helping freshman interact with the course and realize its relevance to their daily lives. As a shy person who never had been in any kind of leadership position, I distinctly remember questioning Rev on his decision to nominate me for this group. He told me that it would be scary for me to step out of my comfort zone, but that he had complete faith in my ability to do this job well. He said that he saw something inside of me that I had yet to see in myself and that once I embraced that, I was going to do big things. He was 100% correct. After joining the CIE Fellows, I joined countless other groups on campus such as the UC Ambassadors. I became a leader in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship group on campus, I became a neuroscience and chemistry lab teaching assistant, and I even had the courage to become a Senior Admissions Fellow. Nearly everything that I ended up doing at Ursinus College was a result of the confidence and faith that Rev Rice had in me as a freshman. To this day, I'm still not entirely sure what he saw in me, but the fact that he took the time and went the extra mile to invest in my future both at and beyond Ursinus College, is the perfect representation of the thoughtful, unselfish, and caring person that Rev Rice was. I know that I am the person I am today because of Rev Rice and I will be eternally grateful for the impact he had on my life.

In the first semester of my freshman year, Rev Rice promised that when I crossed the stage at my graduation, he would stand up and hug me. When that day came in May 2015, he kept that promise, stopped me in the middle of the stage, stood up, and wrapped me in a hug. Commitment. Faith. Comfort. Genuine. Love. These are just a few of the words that describe the man that Rev Rice was and will continue to be in our hearts and memories.

Sincerely,
Emily Black ’15
While I only met Rev. Rice as a second-semester senior I was immediately impacted by his huge energy, mind, and heart. I took The African American Religious Experience with him and was exposed to some authors that have forever changed the way I think about the world and my place in it. While environmental and social justice were always on my mind, I’m committed to making this work part of my path for the rest of my life. The semester with Rev. Rice was truly life changing—from the conversations we shared, the Civil Rights tour over spring break, and the guidance he provided both for a campus club I was a part of and for my own personal growth. I am thankful for him and for his family who welcomed my into their Sunday morning gatherings that I wish I had joined as a young freshman. I exchanged several emails after graduation seeking guidance with what my next step could be and am so sad to know those conversations have come to an end. However, I will carry Rev Rice’s words and deep love with me. I will think of him when I face challenges and I now know that it’s my call to be part of the hard work we face as a society. This is because of him and I hope to honor him through this commitment. I miss and love you, Rev.

Love,
Grace Barter ’16
To Mrs. Rice, Roby, and Martin,
I have a million memories with your family and I know will have a million more in the coming years. I am so grateful for coming to know you and have you all a part of my family and to be a part of yours. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for sharing your husband and father with the rest of the world and for opening your home and hearts to so many people over the years. I am going to pick one memory to share, because otherwise I would write one and on and fill an entire book.

I am going to pick my very first memory with your family. It was my freshmen year and I was in CIE with Rev at that point. He had asked me after class if I was going home for Easter, and I responded that I would just be hanging around on campus. He seemed a little surprised by this and I talked about my parents' separation and the rising tension at home as the reason I was not going home for Easter that year. This was something I rarely talked about, so I am sure I stammered awkwardly getting this out. But I still remember clear as day, him saying "Well let me check with my wife but you should come to Brooklyn with my family."

I was taken aback by this. I had never met someone who opened their heart and family so easily to a student. I thought surely his wife will want this to be just a family affair (I hadn't met any of you yet!) but thought it was a nice thought nonetheless. I didn't really expect to hear a follow up, but sure enough later that evening Rev called to tell me his wife had said of course I could come. I was excited! Excited to have people to spend the holiday with and even more delighted by the goodness of this family. This is where the journey all began. Rev told me to be ready by Gam and that we would be leaving early. Sure enough, Sunday morning I got up and got myself all set to leave by 6am, which as you know now is most definitely not my favorite time. Only to receive a text from Rev, saying "Wait till I call we are not ready yet." Sure enough, around 8:30 he called and we set off for Brooklyn. I remember on the drive it seemed like you guys knew a half dozen churches where we could stop and go to service. This amazed me, but I chalked it up to Rev being well a Reverend.

What I have learned since then is that your family has friends and family everywhere not because Rev was a Reverend but because all of you welcome others so fully into your lives. I have learned so much from this and all of you and for that I am forever grateful. So to Mrs. Rice - thank you so much for saying okay to taking a random girl with you to Brooklyn for Easter and letting me be a part of your family every day since then, I appreciate and love you so very much. To Roby and Martin - thank you so much for being the best Ursinus little brothers I could ever have. From picking out phone cases, to talking about Mario cart and girls, to eating Swedish fish, and every Waldorf concert and play over the years, it has been an honor to be a part of your lives and I cannot wait for the years to come and the many more memories we will make.

All my love,
Olivia Keithley '16
I met Rev only once in an official manner. He was being interviewed with the Ursinus communications office in the Kaleidoscope as they needed students to be a part of the interview so it really looked like he was talking to students. I remember he asked what our next steps were. As a senior coming off of a rough summer, I couldn’t even think about what my next step or even what the end of the month would bring. Even though I didn’t say much, I enjoyed having that moment with him and my peers.

Whenever I saw him across campus, he always said “hello”. I would see him a lot crossing main street in front of Bomberger and his home when I was going and leaving Children’s Schoolhouse of Collegeville at Trinity Church. During these moments, I would think to myself why isn’t he using the crosswalk, but that was his thing to cross right there and not down at 6th where there was a crosswalk.

Even though I only met Rev Rice once, hearing stories of him from friends I felt like I knew who he was. He was a known name on campus like Bobby. We all knew who he was based on his presence on campus and his connections with students and the Ursinus community.

My thoughts are with the entire Ursinus bear pack as we come together to grieve this lost
Hannah Marshall ’16
In Chicago this year I drove up in my car, a 12 hour drive, and we spoke to churches and non-profits and doing justice work, and at the end of each of our meetings with guests he would ask “What sustains you in your work?” and he would say, pensively and intentionally, “I am- prayerful-for the success of your work .” with his head tilted and his eyes serious.

One of our last classes before he fell, Rev was lecturing, preaching, about James Cone’s Black power and black theology, and getting increasingly passionate about love. “You cannot swim through the waters of race and expect to not get wet.” He’d say to illustrate how race must be acknowledged by all Americans. “And it is the curtain of race that prevents you from being able to love each other honestly.” He had different versions of this talk, sometimes he would add our names in stories about the shapes our lives would have taken had we lived in the 30s in Louisiana, or what kinds of husbands and wives we would be. This time was imminent and immediate, and I felt myself learn and expand. He made theories vivid and tangible this way, slamming his hand on the chalkboard to emphasize the word love.

He was a constant figure at Ursinus, late, quoting Baldwin in a Steve Jobs esque uniform, having engaged in “persperative reading” late into the night, applying continuous pressure to challenge the minds of students, taking people to movies, referencing the formidable strength of his mother, asking demanding questions of the class, always answering his phone if family called.

Rev has been gone for almost 2 weeks as I write this and the amazing thing is because he was always so late, when I look and see rooms filled with people he loved I think he’s about to walk right in.

Mary Holmcrans, class of 2017
Dear FAMILY,

That is exactly what you all, Mrs. Rice, Roby, Martin, and Rev have been for me since the very beginning of my Ursinus journey. You all have truly redefined the words love, family, and hope in my life. When my light was dimming Freshmen year after my Grandma passed, you not only noticed but put the spark right back into it. Rev took me to restaurants all over the map, educating me on the history of the area (but unfortunately being unsuccessful in improving my horrible sense of direction). Although I have a geographical sense of direction, my direction in life and vocation is far stronger because of the wisdom, mentorship, and straight-up honesty Rev shared with me. I know you won't find me leading a yoga class (as you remember I could barely manage to do downward dog!) or working in finance (can't even hold on to a wallet but I still have the one you gave me Mrs. Rice with the dollar you gave me for good luck; but you will find me living by Rev's main values he instilled in me: doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly... remaining hopeful, comforting the troubled and troubling the comfortable, as our girl Kelly rearticulated from Betsy! Baptist at our 2017 Baccalaureate, and believing in myself as Rev spent so much time convincing me to do... as Rev spent so much time convincing me to do. You'll also see me rebounding for you before our big ball games + attempting to improve my Mario Kart game. It's simply not enough to say that these last 4 years would have been drastically different w/ or Rev + you guys - I am so blessed and forever changed because I've known your kindness and love, and it will remain in me in every future endeavor. I am one of an infinite amount of seeds Rev planted and will continue to grow with his voice in my ear for the rest of my life. I will throw a phone call away (and hopefully a short drive) Thank you for seeing me what I could not see myself, letting me know love, and opening your hearts to this 6'2" blonde that was actually, as you knew shy before met. I hope you can hear us all making a joyful noise together as you read this. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine... and that we will, we definitely have a whole lot, and an amazing person, to keep on shining for. Love you all forever and ever.

Keep on shining!
Angela Uptight '17
Dear Mrs. Rice, Roby, and Martin,

I want to start by saying thank you for allowing your husband and father to extend his love to us all and for treating us like your own children or “adoptive” siblings. Rev always talked to me about you three, especially when we would be working long hours in the office. He would remind me with pride, Mrs. Rice, of when you asked him what his intentions were very early on in your courtship. He would follow this with a pointed look, which I knew meant that I need to also be as strong-willed as you were when I date. Roby, whenever we talked about all about love and discussed the line “love and abuse cannot coexist,” Rev would always relay the story about how you asked him, at five years of age, whether you can be punished without violence because you didn’t think that a spanking was necessary. That served as a reminder to us that we all need to be loving to our children. And Martin, you do so many things that remind me of your dad. I remember one day when you were giving me that look that means you want something but you’re not getting your way. I told your dad that he also gives me that look when he wants something done that I haven’t yet completed, and he proceeded to stare me down even harder. I want to thank you three for allowing me to join your family and for extending more love to me than I ever thought imaginable.

There are so many aspects of Rev that I will carry with me for the rest of my life, and I know that I will think about him every single day. One of the things I will miss most about him is his guidance and advice regarding my family. Like Rev, my parents did not grow up with the same education that I now have. When I became serious about my studies, my parents struggled to understand why reading a book or writing a paper was more important than watching TV with them. I often felt that I could not communicate with them about my passions and dreams for the future because I didn’t think that they could “get it.” I spent many hours in Rev’s office lamenting about these issues, and he responded to me with empathy but firmness. He told me that he, too, had those struggles growing up, but reminded me that my parents always want the best for me and that I must be patient with them. Roby and Martin, be patient with your mom—she knows what she’s doing 😊

Rev transformed me into a scholar. Coming into Ursinus, I had no idea what I wanted to do in the future, but Rev slowly but surely convinced me that I have the capability to be a professor. I spent much of my four years at Ursinus observing him in the classroom. The way he talked with students, challenging them to think critically and pushing them to take risks in and out of the classroom, has shaped the way that I want to interact with students in the classroom. His ability to make all of us laugh by cracking a joke about his childhood (the tie story was one of his favorites) has taught me that we need to, as teachers, be vulnerable and real in the classroom. We need to truly connect with students and show them that we are invested in their lives. Rev allowed me to build the confidence to take command of a classroom (in spite of my short height), but also reminded me that I must remain humble. I know that going forward, when I eventually do become a professor, his teachings will shape the way I interact with students every day.

The last memory I want to talk about here is one that occurred last fall when we were traveling to Kimberton to attend Roby and Martin’s winter concert. Some Ursinus students wanted to come with us, but we were already headed toward Kimberton and I asked Rev if we should turn around because I knew we would be late. He gave me a look—which I knew meant he was a bit disappointed in me—and said, “of course we will turn around and pick them up, people always come first, Kelly.” Your husband and father made each person he interacted with believe that they were the most important in the room. He made time for any student’s crisis and was always available to offer vocational advice or to take students out for meals and movies. He taught me that I should always put people before everything else. I learned how to love, how to be, by talking, listening to, and observing Rev interact with people around him. I think that may be the greatest gift he has given me.

I know that all our hearts will be hurting for a long time, but I am so glad that I can call you my family. I love you all so much!

Kelly Johnson, Class of 2017
To the Rice family,

Rev. took me under his wing my sophomore year after my roommate passed away. Although I can't remember the memorial service all that well, I do know that Rev. made it beautiful. Since then, Rev provided me with so much love, care, guidance and faith. He believed in me and my raw ability like no one ever had. He was the first professor to tell me that he loved me but that I needed to "kick up my feet & relax" because he trusted everything would fall into place when I didn't. Rev went on to become my pre-health advisor and during one of our meetings that semester, he started to list off Ivy league medical schools and I laughed and said, "Rev., could you please give me some that aren't completely out of reach?" And he gave me that big, hearty laugh and ignored what I said and kept giving me more out of reach schools to look at. Rev has had faith in me like no one else has ever had. He gave me strength, confidence, and faith by nurturing me and believing in me and helping me push through difficulty. I hope that one day, my future is a reflection of his character and belief in me - everything I do will be in honor of his everlasting presence. Sending all my love,

Saloni Parikh '18
I am so grateful for the small bit of time when my life intersected with Rev's. My education with Rev, both in class and in chapel, has done the work that education must do on a soul and mind more than any other course of study I have participated in. It has opened me so gently yet so permanently to pursuing education as a spiritual imperative. It has married the expansion of my heart to the expansion of my understanding of how I must try to live my life within a white body and within a human body, and it did so by drawing my education into conversation with what it means to deeply and wholeheartedly love God. And this was all by the beauty and power of our teacher, our pastor, who so flawlessly and fearlessly brought us into vulnerability without ever once lessening the vigor of the intellectual demand he put on us.

I am so grateful for Rev. Rice. I needed this man at a time when God was losing ground in my heart. Rev. made Christianity vibrant and vital and necessary, and I am so grateful. I know what I need to do in the world now. I am also so grateful to his beautiful and beloved family. Thank you for sharing him with us, for sharing your home and your time and your care with us, for showing me what a family built and bent on the pursuit of justice could look like. That is something I needed to see. You are all such blessings to me and such gifts to the world, just as surely as he was. So much love and gratitude to you and to Rev. So much hope and so many prayers for comfort and strength. And so much joy – I know his life must live on in me and in all of his students; I know I need to finish out the work he started in me.

Sophy Gamber
I've been blessed to have great Mentors in my life for as long as I can remember who have challenged me to stay true to myself, which was easy because I thought I knew the type of person I wanted to be. Then I met Rev. and he made it clear that I should evaluate that person. He threw my faith into question, my practices, my priorities, and my ethics. It seemed as though the straight and narrow path mentioned in the Bible just got as thin as a needle on a thread. I say that because he helped me realize that that's a hard line to walk. I can't be hypocritical, I can't be apathetic, and I have to be a moral responsible self, which will not make me popular. And most importantly I have to love people, WITHOUT conditions. It's the same love that he showed me in and out of the classroom (although the love seemed tougher in the classroom), the love he saw and shared with his wife, the love he instilled in all of his kids, and the love he extended me to make me apart of his family (especially when he tried to set me up with his cousin). That was the biggest lesson, and that was the one I preach the most. I hear him in my voice whenever I'm speaking on love and justice and/or the lack of it. It's become apart of who I am. In the years where I'm vulnerable to transform the most, I've been blessed to know Rev and the Rice family, for being a guide I can look to, call to, eat with, play with, talk with, learn with (but mostly from), and love with, without conditions. There's more I can say, and I think when I have time I will, but for now, I can say with the most gratitude and the highest esteem........... thank you.

Sam Pope, class of 2019
Rev impacted my life in many ways. I was never very interested in the studies of politics, philosophy or race, but after having Rev for CIE, I really developed a greater appreciation for those things. Looking back to the first CIE class, I realized how much I grew in my understanding of these topics. I was also a very quiet person and did not like to voice my opinion. Rev forced me to really step out of my comfort zone and become more outspoken in class. I am extremely grateful for how Rev created a family-like atmosphere in class. Because of that, I have made many great friends with everyone in our CIE class. I consider myself extremely lucky to have had Rev for class and I believe I have learned very many things from Rev, not only about CIE, but about life in general. I loved the way the Rev welcomed everyone and treated everyone like family. I also love how Rev always saw potential in everyone and pushed everyone to pursue things that they did not think they were capable of. On my first essay for CIE, Rev met with me and told me that I was a very strong writer (which I never thought I was). A few weeks later, on the back of one of my assignments, he wrote me a note asking my permission to nominate me to be a writing fellow. I never got a chance to respond to Rev about this, but I decided to try to pursue this next semester.

Alyson Manley, class of 2020
Walking into my first college class ever was Rev.'s class. It was the Friday when all the freshman had to meet with their CIE classes and do a first class type thing (I guess more for us to get comfortable with our classmates and our Professor.) So we go into the classroom, and we all sit there awkwardly because none of us knew each other really. After a few minutes went by we all thought we were in the wrong classroom. Soon from it being 1:30, it became 1:45 (something we should have gotten used to) and we all were looking at each other and wondering if we had been in the wrong place or something. As soon as we are about to double check if we are in the right room, Rev walks in, and it wasn’t what I was used to in a teacher, I’m used to a teacher walking in all quiet and getting ready for class and then telling us what to do. Oh no, Rev walked in and was already talking with us like he knew us from years back. Rev had already made us feel at home from that point on, from first semester, when we didn’t really know each other, to the second semester, when we all knew each other’s nicknames or their pet peeves or even just their favorite thing, and that was something that Rev had a way of doing, he made the most random people in a classroom feel like we were all family. None of us belonged together, we were all from different backgrounds, but that didn’t change Rev’s opinion, you were all family it seemed and it’s just something so small like that, it changes a person’s perspective.

Going back to the first day, Rev asked a question about love (mind you this is our first time meeting) and he asked if any of us had anything to say about it, and I said I didn’t believe in love. I believe was something made up, something forced. I was wrong. The reason I knew I was wrong was because over the next couple months Rev taught our class the importance of love and what it actually means. He didn’t just give us a definition or a book to read and say “Come back when you find it”, no he took his time, and went through all of our readings delicately, making sure we understood what was being presented in front of us. Rev not only made us all feel like family, but he taught us how to love one another, and how to be there for each other. Rev taught us how to love, the right way, and I could not be any more thankful for that, I will miss every moment with Rev, he was the beacon of light in this dark world and with his teachings he has sparked something in all of us to keep carrying it with us and teach others. Rev forever will be the angel that got to touch this earth.

Forever grateful to have him as my professor.

Love,
Dom (aka Zach) Cipolone
Class of 2020
Rev, thank you for caring for everyone in the Ursinus community and beyond it. I needed a place to worship God when I came to Ursinus this year. At first, I did not know where to go. Then, my friend Bobby and I went to Chapel one Sunday morning. Rev and all of the Chapel community made us feel so welcomed and loved. It was so important to me to have a space where I could connect with God at a time in my life when the world seemed darker and colder than ever before. Chapel and Rev gave me hope. It was so wonderful to go to Chapel every Sunday. It was such a gift to spend time with Rev and the Chapel community and to see them shine light onto the world.

My deepest thanks,
Sienna Coleman
Class of 2020
I remember when I first walked into Bomberger. I sat in the back and waited patiently for you to walk in. I was a quiet kid because I didn't know anybody yet. The RA's were telling me how you was the real deal and scary. I thought to myself, "I'm from inner city Philadelphia, he ain't that scary." But I was wrong. A huge man dressed in all blue walks into the classroom and immediately I knew this was going to be a long three weeks. I remember you made us read a paragraph one by one out loud and when it was my turn to read, you made me read the same paragraph three times because my voice was too low. At that moment you kind of pissed me off. You asked us, "why are you here?" Almost everyone gave an answer but me. Everyone was at Crigler to get a head start. I came to Crigler to escape my reality. Drugs and violence. You pulled me to the side and asked me where was I from, and I said Philadelphia, you patted my back and said, "I know why you're here I understand you." From that moment I knew you were the real deal. You preached about black rights and taught me things that I never knew. Your class was interesting. In the beginning I wasn't talking, you pulled me into your office and encouraged me to speak up and use my voice. You taught me to be comfortable in my own skin regardless of the white supremacy at Ursinus College. You were a mentor for me, a father away from home. I ended my first semester. With 3 C+'s and 1 B-. I told myself I would do better. Second semester everything changed for me. I was more motivated and dedicated. A lot of people had the typical black stereotypes of me, this hood kid who won't succeed. Second semester I took, PSJ, SOC 110, & CIE 200. I talked in every class and expressed my voice regardless if I was the only black kid in the class, I dominated most discussions. Everyday I told myself, "I'm going to make Rev proud, he believes in me." I got the email about your passing and I was devastated. It ripped me apart. I cried for a good 2hrs straight. Believe it or not I still was going to go to class that day but I found out she cancelled class. I used your passing as motivation to push even harder. I told myself, "Rev wouldn't want me mourning over his death. He would want me in the classroom giving it my all," and that's exactly what I did. Fast forward a few weeks later. It's the end of the semester and I received my grades, PSJ: B+, SOC 110: A-, CIE 200: A. The first person I thought about was you but it sadden me that I could share this news with you. I made the Deans List, I got into Bonner, & I made it to the executive board of S.U.N. I did all of this because you believed in me and pushed me to go harder. I never got the chance to thank you and that's what hurt the most, it's some people you just don't expect to pass away and you were one of them. In three years I will walk across that graduation stage and make you proud! Your name will forever remain with me... I Love You Rev thank you for everything that you've done to me and my friends we talk about you a lot and now we do this for you!

Jamir Mallory, class of 2020
Though I didn't get to work very much with Charles, I owe him a great deal. If it were not for his active support of religious pluralism, and his willingness to take risks to make pluralism real, there wouldn't be a campus rabbi position and I would never have come to USCUS. Charles was a highly hands-off supervisor, and I greatly appreciated this—he gave me the freedom to set my priorities and as long as I followed through and served students, he was satisfied. This doesn't mean he neglected me, though—on the contrary, he took an active interest in my growth, supporting my participation in professional organizations and entrusting me with public roles (prayers, invocations, etc.), afterwards always giving me kind words of encouragement—"I want to preach like you someday." These words helped to instill in me the confidence I had often lacked in the past. I knew Rev did similar things for others who got to work with him, and I have been awestruck at his success as a mentor and supporter. I was looking forward to many more years of working with Charles and learning from him in countless ways and I am committed to preserving his memory and true legacy at USCUS. May his memory be a blessing.

Rabbi Michael Rambarg
I, like so many, had the privilege of not only knowing Rev as my friend and colleague, but also as the man who married my wife, Deb and me - twice! He performed our Civil Union ceremony in 2007 and then our wedding in 2013. Rev, as usual, made the ceremony warm and beautiful and everyone there commented after - ‘boy, that Reverend Rice is something else. What a wonderful man!’ He and Deb had a very special relationship that she will forever miss.

Charles had a larger than life presence and although he is physically gone from this world, his presence and his lessons will never leave us.

Kim Taylor
I am going to really miss Charles. Our campus and our world will just not be the same without him.

I have many wonderful memories of Charles visiting my office. He would pretend it was to use the fax machine- but in reality- he was on the hunt for good candy. He was fine with M&M’s, but when we had better stuff... it was as if he won the office candy lottery.

We would share stories of Brooklyn and thought of ourselves as having “street smarts” because we grew up there. We share a love of New York and the roots we established there.

But the biggest impact Charles had on me was from a sentiment he shared just after my breast cancer surgery. I was having a hard time and he told me, simply to “lean in the right direction”. He didn’t minimize my dark days of feeling sorry for myself. He simply encouraged me to take steps to getting back to myself... just by “leaning in the right direction”. Those words have stayed with me for years, and I share them with other survivors who have trouble getting back to themselves right away- but need encouragement to get there. I have used this thought from Charles in many situations and I will continue to honor him by always leaning in the right direction. Rest in Peace, my dear friend Charles. Sending love and light to your family.
I might have been the first Ursinus faculty member to meet Charles Rice some twenty years ago. This was because Debbie Nolan and I were chairing the committee to hire a chaplain for the College. Once the committee interviewed Charles, we knew we had our chaplain.

Charles and I fast became friends. I was chair of the Philosophy and Religion Department, of which he was now a member. From the get-go, he would address me as “Boss.” “Would you stop calling me ‘Boss,’” I would always respond. “Yes, Boss.” One of the first crossroads for our friendship was politics. For Charles, almost anything and everything was or was related to politics. He was learning that politics was rarely uppermost in my mind. Then one day I revealed to him that I was a Republican. “NO WAY! You’re not a REPUBLICAN! You CAN’T be! You’re too nice!” But I insisted that I was. He finally reconciled himself to reality, and in response to his “Hey Boss,” I would often remind him that I was Ursinus’ token acknowledgement of genuine diversity. He would always laugh, and, oh, how I loved that laugh.

As close friends do, we laughed a lot. Whenever he would start to talk politics, which was always, I would say “Ah, so we are going to talk about religion again.” To make things even crazier for his political paradigm, he learned that I, his friend who was not preoccupied with politics, was going to run for public office in Collegeville. Against my better judgment, I had allowed the president of Ursinus, John Strassburger, to persuade me to run for Collegeville Borough Council, because he wanted a faculty member on Council (my wife and I owned a home in Collegeville). As the election neared, signs started appearing on lawns with my name on them. One day, Charles came up to me and whispered in my ear that he was going to vote for me. “But don’t ever let my mother know! If she found out, she would die!” I assured him that I could keep a secret (a promise I have now broken). But I told him he could vote for me in good conscience, because the responsibilities of a council person did not go much beyond making sure the garbage was picked up and the snow was plowed.

Charles also cared deeply about education. Occasionally, he would go off and start informing me about the five different kinds of education. I am convinced there was actually something to what he was saying, but I would typically stare at him dazed as he made this point about that, and that point about this. We sometimes talked teaching “strategies,” as we shared stories about trying to get those Ursinus students who were seemingly working very hard at not doing any academic work engaged in their education. On one occasion, he told me that he would sometimes tell students in his classes to put down their pens and look at those sitting around them. “Then,” said Charles, “I ask how many of them would want the people sitting around them teaching their future children.” “You ask THAT?” I queried incredulously. “Yeah,” he responded chuckling. I began to employ a version of the same tactic, which was to tell my classes about what Charles Rice would do in his classes. Because I feared for my job, I thought it wise to tell my students about what he did, instead of doing it myself.

At present, my wife and I are in Oxford, England. We arrived in early January of this year, and a couple of times early on I felt guilty because I failed to say goodbye to Charles before we left. I so wish I had, because I will never again have the opportunity to say hello to him in this life. I always assumed that Charles, like me, believed in the existence of the soul. Without an acknowledgement of its existence, it is very difficult not to conclude that life is ultimately absurd. Thus, I live with the hope that I will one day once again be able to say hello to Charles.

Stewart Goetz
Professor of Philosophy
My Brother, Charles Rice
By M. Nzadi Keita

Twenty years ago I met Charles Rice when we were both new colleagues at Ursinus. I witnessed Rev’s superpowers of perception, soul-force and love from the start, because he used them lavishly. And I relied on those powers, for help with students needing encouragement or tough love; for programs needing funding; aggressions needing a vent; for clear insight on the day-to-day. For doing church in my Lit class with Baldwin’s The Fire Next Time as text.

Somehow food was always involved when we hung out, and usually, some humor. Somehow our stack of common issues intersected well with lunch at China Jade. Sometimes an s.o.s. email from me would fly across the void. No reply expected for a week. If that. He did not like email. Typically, eventually, he’d creak out a one-line reply. Or more likely, knock. “Dr. Keita? Can you eat?”

Both of us chewing, both of us chuckling, in between long discussions about the young people on our radar: students, family, The Community in general. Nudging the fries away. One of us trying in vain to snatch the check. One of us half-sermonizing, quoting James Cone. One of us ordering extra to take home for Tonya. One of us running out of time to finish any of the six or seven conversations we’d started.

We had our best laugh ever in a restaurant. What better way, after all, to launch the 2011 Civil Rights tour to Mississippi than with a trip to Cracker Barrel? His favorite restaurant, he claimed. (Really, Charles?) He shamed me into eating fried catfish with that high-pitched laugh, making his point even funnier. “Now, Dr. Keita; when are you gonna have another chance like this: eatin’ Mississippi catfish after sundown at the Cracker Barrel!” Or words to that effect. I snorted so hard that he had to place the order.

The laughing came from our common ground. Our bond to a culture and a history we would never surrender or forget about or dismiss. In Jacksonville, Mississippi, we stopped outside the Medgar Evers House Museum while students filed in, unaware. We stopped at that cracked suburban driveway, knowing a shotgun killed Medgar Evers there, at the moment when he’d made it home; that moment we all long for. We stared at that symbolically still-bloody crack, knowing what our place and time and generation charged us to do.

We both also loved “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the African-American anthem. Once we quizzed each other to see who knew it better by heart. Most black folk we knew could pull off Verse 1 with ease, and Verse 2 with some fakery, but Verse 3? We held a snooty opinion that we were among the few who knew the thing entire. Something else we laughed about.

My colleague, advocate, friend, and brother Charles brought his love and soul-force to Collegeville and everywhere else he went. With handshakes, hugs, phone calls, negotiations, and stern talk, he urged hundreds of young people toward personal and professional success. Rev. Rice walked with Dr. King’s words—“You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”—and with his wide embrace, raised up a beloved community at Ursinus. Many of us here are part of it.

Rev. Charles Rice not only knew what it meant to be human; he manifested it.
Hope has a cost. Hope is not comfortable or easy. Hope requires personal risk. It is not about the right attitude. Hope is not about peace of mind. Hope is action. Hope is doing something. The more futile, the more useless, the more irrelevant and incomprehensible an act of rebellion is, the vaster and more potent hope becomes. Hope never makes sense. Hope is weak, unorganized and absurd. Hope, which is always nonviolent, exposes in its powerlessness, the lies, fraud and coercion employed by the state. Hope knows that an injustice visited on our neighbor is an injustice visited on all of us. Hope posits that people are drawn to the good by the good. This is the secret of hope's power. Hope demands for others what we demand for ourselves. Hope does not separate us from them. Hope sees in our enemy our own face. -Chris Hedges