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Press Release: Civil Rights Trip Looks Back; Inspires Desire to Move Forward

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News



Trip guide Rev. Charles Rice. Photo by Alexandria Luben

Civil Rights Trip Looks Back; Inspires Desire to Move Forward

March 17, 2016

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Each spring students in the class Religion and Civil Rights take a journey through history. The trip through the American south brings to life the key roles African American churches and social and political organizations played in cultivating change.

Students, accompanied by college chaplain Rev. Charles Rice and Hillel director Rabbi Michael Ramberg returned from the 11th annual trip with new perspectives.

Grace Barter '16, an environmental studies major and sociology minor from East Sandwich Mass., was moved as she stood "in the same places that those I was reading about stood in ...It was really inspiring to meet people, especially young ones, that are doing educated, meaningful, and passionate work."

Going as a group made a difference. "Yes, I could visit the same places that we did but the combination of having my peers, professors, alumni, and other professionals together, learning and conversing about complex issues of history, religion, race, gender, and social justice today was unique," Barter said.

Looking back, looking forward

Laura Johnson, '19, of Reading, Pa., found herself looking forward, as well as back through history. "I take away from this whole trip the necessity to continue immersing myself in civil rights history in order to hopefully, in the future, contribute to the fight for equality. My goal now is to be educated, but I cannot wait to make a difference in the world which comes from my authentic education at Ursinus."

The trip began in Nashville, Tenn., gathering at Lee Chapel AME Church with the Rev. Roderick D. Belin. For Johnson, this was the most memorable site. "This was our first stop once we arrived, and it set the mood for the whole trip," she said. "I got to experience the music of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was uplifting, spiritual, unique, community-oriented, joyous ... I could go on and on. I don't even know if words can describe the feelings I felt as I sung with my classmates and the members of the church. As a musician myself, the music especially touched

me. I could feel the energy created by the beautiful voices, the organ, and the drums.” She added, “I have never experienced a full drum set in church service before... this was shocking to me, yet the impact of the drums made the music that much more powerful.”

At Vanderbilt Divinity School, meeting with the Rev Niger Woodruff, assistant dean for admissions and vocational discernment, the group also met with alumna Shakiya Canty '13, a philosophy major and minor in African American and Africana Studies and Peace and Justice Studies, who is a graduate student at Vanderbilt.

Alabama historic sites

In Birmingham, Ala., the group toured Kelly Ingram Park, site of civil rights demonstrations, the 16th Street Baptist Church, which was the target of a 1963 bombing and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Museum. Arriving in Selma they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, site of the “bloody Sunday” conflict in 1965.

In Montgomery, they visited the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site and toured Tuskegee University and the Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center. There they met with the Rev. Dr. Claudia Highbaugh, chaplain at Connecticut College, former trustee at Ursinus College and former Davis Professor of Judeo-Christian Values. She is the daughter of a Tuskegee airman. Also on the agenda were the Rosa Parks Museum, Dexter Avenue Church and King Memorial Legacy Center, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Freedom Riders Museum and Equal Justice Initiative.

Carrying the legacy

“The most important thing I learned about on the trip was the crucial role historically black colleges and institutions have played in the past and continue to play today in empowering those they serve,” said Rabbi Ramberg. “It was wonderful to reflect on this lesson and all of our experiences with the students on the trip, and Revs. Rice and Highbaugh.”

Students like Alexzandria Luben '18 of Carson, Calif., embarked on the trip to “gain a better understanding of the civil rights movement, who its leaders were, and where they came from.” When the trip concluded, she was inspired to look forward. “Despite what you have heard, there is still a lot of social justice work to be done,” she said. “The civil rights movement is not over. Forms of oppression have not disappeared in this world but they have evolved. So we must evolve. We must use our educations to carry on the legacy of those who marched before us. We are the leaders of the new movement.”

– By Wendy Greenberg