



In addition to being home to more than two dozen different faith communities, the Kay Spiritual Life Center offers a wealth of educational programming for the American University community.

The Campus Mirror

The Newsletter of the Kay Spiritual Life Center:
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A NOTE FROM THE UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN

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In November of last year, the Kay Spiritual Life Center was feted by the university on the occasion of its 50th birthday. People from across the campus joined in the celebration, including those who keep the Chapel serviced and secure (physical plant, public safety, gardeners, and housekeepers). Faculty, students, President Neil Kerwin, Chair of the Board of Trustees Jack Cassell, and the daughter of founder/ philanthropist Abraham Kay, Sylvia Greenberg, joined with chaplains to celebrate its long history and legacy.

The keynote speaker was Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, Senior Vice President for Public Engagement at Auburn Seminary and former Executive Editor of Global Spirituality and Religion at The Huffington Post. His remarks focused on the five spiritual ideals that should be at the heart of any campus community: curiosity, wonder, interconnectedness, meaning, and resilience. He affirmed that these attributes “offer a way for personal growth, academic success, and the fostering of a compassionate and just university.” He went on to say that these ideals “go hand in hand with the mission of the University to educate as well as form productive, healthy, aware citizens for living in our pluralistic world.”

Spirituality has been happening for generations at AU – and the chapel, while not monopolizing it, has contributed to it. From its perch on the north end of campus, succeeding cohorts of students and chaplains have come and gone, each iteration bringing their own style, energy and zeitgeist. With each generation, the university, founded originally by the Methodist Church in 1893, has grown, matured and expanded. The last five decades have been particularly dramatic.

The chapel is a fascinating place to observe these changes because of its prominence on the quad and because of the shifting place of religion in society. Fifty years ago the university was firmly planted in its original Methodist identity and the building boasted and hosted its Methodist roots with a fortified Methodist staff presence. Over the intervening years AU’s institutional ties have diminished while nevertheless continuing to be affiliated with the United Methodist Church.

While religious diversity (as well as other forms of diversity) was far less evident five decades ago, AU’s non-discriminatory admission policy was a harbinger of things to come.





A Note From the University Chaplain, Continued...

Felicitously eschewing quotas led to a thriving Jewish presence with a small but growing number of African Americans. By the 1970s the main line churches were in decline and this precipitated a growing shift in AU's demographics (and the country's). After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Iranian Muslim population increased as did growing numbers of applicants from all over the Middle East. Recruiting from the mid-Atlantic and the Northeast brought a bumper crop of Catholics expanding AU's ecumenical reputation. In many ways, AU's religious composition has been subject to national and international events and trends and mirrors those changes. For example after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government's visa restrictions led to fewer applicants from the Middle East and therefore fewer Muslim students.

In the mid 1980s AU's was having trouble competing with other Washington DC powerhouses and had a "near death" experience. Enrollment dropped and AU had a slippery financial footing. The president at the time and other administrators rolled the dice and took a risk. Counter-intuitively, rather lowering standards to admit more students, AU raised the bar for admission making AU more selective. It worked, and AU began a long journey toward becoming one of the more prestigious schools in the country.

I think that AU's track record of openness to practitioners of all faiths played a role in its resurgence – although this would be hard to empirically validate. This culture of open doors and hospitality toward students of all faiths have helped to cement AU's vibrant interfaith culture, making it a microcosm of the shifting nature of US society.



The last ten years have witnessed a virtual transformation of the demographics of the student body. Facing another decision point about the school's identity, the president and the provost decided to innovate by shifting significant financial resources. In a bold move, today 80% of financial aid is need based. This decision has transformed the composition of the student body bringing much more diversity. Larger numbers of Pell eligible and first generation students are now sitting in classrooms than was the case even a few years ago.

This diversity reaches down to the Kay spiritual Life Center where increasing numbers students proclaim interest in pursuing their spiritual journeys while forgoing more traditional religious institutional identities. So the KSLC of today is effectively less formally "religious" than it was when the doors of the KSLC were first opened, but because of its prominent location on campus it continues to be a beacon for students pursuing their spiritual journeys.

Paul Raushenbush closed his reflection by referring to Plato who said that "what is honored in a country will be cultivated" — and this is true for spirituality within the university setting. Spirituality doesn't just happen -- it is a discipline that requires someone to care about it and to teach and promote it. This spirituality cannot just be talked about on the margins, but must be at the heart of the campus. For 50 years the KSLC has tried to help students (and faculty and staff) explore this essential dimension of their lives – and making it as vital and substantial to the community as is the building.





KAY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF INTERFAITH PIONEERING

By: Patrick Bradley

Alex Gamcsik believes he spends more of his time at AU in the Kay Spiritual Life Center than in class. After joining AU Methodists, he realized the interfaith space provides an educational experience all its own. “I didn’t even know many of these religions existed, to be honest,” he recalled. “There was just so much fascinating stuff to learn.”

The School of Public Affairs junior now serves as president of AU’s Interfaith Council, which promotes dialogue and events across religions. In exploring the topic at AU, Gamcsik joins a tradition that now moves into its sixth decade of existence, as the Kay Spiritual Life Center celebrates 50 years on campus.

In 1961, local Jewish businessman and philanthropist Abraham Kay joined AU’s Methodist president, Hurst Anderson, in the idea of building one of the nation’s first interfaith houses of worship. 1960s Christianity in America was experiencing a movement toward Protestant-Catholic cooperation, but AU—a university with deep Methodist roots—wanted something more.



Chaplains, students, and Kay staff gather at the 50th celebration event.

“They were prescient, if you will, about what would be happening in higher education in teaming up to create an interfaith space,” university chaplain Joe Eldridge said. “I see Christian churches all over the country that are being retrofitted to accommodate an interfaith community, and AU has had this for 50 years.”

With generous donations from Kay, the local Catholic archdiocese, and the Methodist church, this interfaith chapel became a reality. The 1961 announcement of the center alone drew attendance by the U.S. labor secretary, the governor of Maryland, the auxiliary bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, and the ambassador of Israel.

Speaking of the revolutionary structure to be built, Anderson said, “My real hope is that this will become a symbol for interfaith relationship in the heart of the nation’s capital. It will become an example for people of good will to work together.”

The center’s now 24 faith groups, from Catholic to Hindu and Baha’i to Secular Humanist, prove strong testament to Anderson’s words.

Current Unitarian Universalist chaplain Charlotte Jones-Carroll was present for the structure’s dedication in 1965 as an undergraduate student in the School of International Service. She and her friends watched the 16-foot-tall bronze flame rise atop the building, which quickly gained the nickname “the flaming cupcake.”

Then a member of the Interreligious Club Council, Jones-Carroll immediately recognized the importance of the new space.

“Kay is an integral part of the campus, and it was put where it is to send the message that the spiritual and social justice side of our lives is as important as the quantitative economic side, for example,” she said.

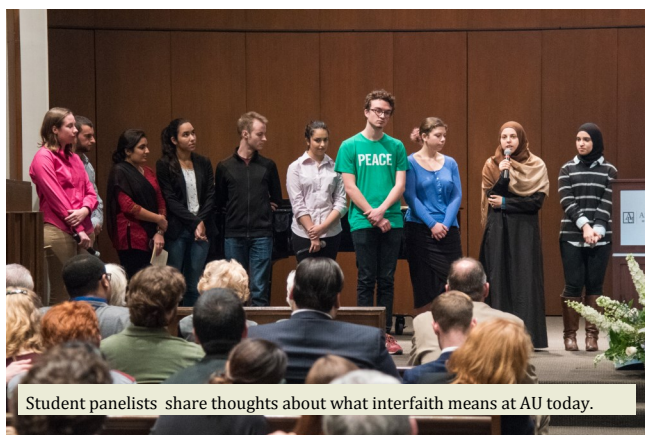
To that end, Kay has spent decades hosting a number of speakers, chaplains, and events that have placed it at the middle of social justice issues. From Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to civil rights activist John Lewis and even Baha’i actor Rainn Wilson from *The Office*, visitors have reflected Anderson’s desire for people of all walks working together both at home and abroad. Kay’s Table Talk Lunch series consistently features panels discussing human cooperation and rights.

At a university with many students dedicated to studying international engagement, Gamcsik believes the center promotes a truly well rounded education. “We are a very political, international-focused school, and you can’t really understand social sciences like that without understanding religion and how people live through religion,” he said.

The center has witnessed and participated in a number of historic movements and moments. When AU and Ward Circle were a hotbed for Vietnam-era political dissent and rallies, the chapel served as a refuge for protestors, and some of its chaplains served as draft counselors.

“How you are in the world is very much an AU focus. The different faith traditions have, at different times, taken stands on social justice, or how you act in the world,” Jones-Carroll said.

The chaplains roster featured one of the first women to be ordained in the Episcopal Church alongside a British Methodist chaplain from then Southern Rhodesia who went on to become the first president of the new nation of Zimbabwe.



Student panelists share thoughts about what interfaith means at AU today.





Kay Celebrates 50 Years of Interfaith Pioneering, Continued...

Aside from its spiritual support, the center has also developed strong ties to academics at the university. Chaplain Earl Brill started CAS' American Studies department, while Eldridge helped found SIS's Social Enterprise M.A. After an influx of students from the Middle East during the 1970s, SIS professor Abdul Aziz Said was instrumental in creating the center's Muslim prayer room.

As AU's student body continues to evolve to include all different cultures and faith backgrounds, the center will lead as one of the oldest spaces and spirits of its kind. With 50 years of history as a pioneer in interfaith efforts, however, the structure will still simply act as home for students like Gamcsik to gather and grow.

"Kay is just a place where there's not a lot pressure to be someone else," he said. "You can coalesce around a religion or a group of people and find a place to be yourself."

TABLE TALK SERIES

By: Fifi Baleva

The Immigration Crisis in Europe: How is the World Responding?

Nearly 100 students, staff, faculty, and community members visited Kay to discuss immigration in the context of Europe. We had three guests educate us about the topic: Nancy Iris, from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration; AU Professor in the School of International Service, Ali Erol; and Susan Fratzke, Policy Analyst and Program Coordinator at Migration Policy Institute.

Iris explained that migrants arriving in Europe are pushed by wars and pulled by the promise of a better life. More than half, 62%, of them are from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. The State Department has sent assistant secretaries to countries in Europe to help with the influx of refugees. One of the first countries helped was Bulgaria. Iris articulated that the State Department also funds the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Lastly, the U.S. helps the crisis by planning to accept 85,000 refugees in 2016.

Professor Erol has been researching the refugee crisis in Syria since 2013 when he worked with the Brookings Institution. Professor Erol stated that a lot of the conflicts seen today are caused by the arbitrary border divisions imposed by Europeans after colonialism. He went on to analyze the responses of the current crisis across the region. Some countries such as Germany want to take in many refugees and other countries such as Hungary are resisting the influx. The president of Hungary believes that refugees will taint the Christian faith of his country. Professor Erol left it to the students to decide if a policy around refugee quota would be effective.

Fratzke discussed how the European Union allows for free movement of people across borders. This free movement, however, created a need to decide what country should process a refugee claim. Fratzke articulated that the country a refugee first enters is the country which assesses refugee claims. The problem is that Eastern European countries say they don't have the infrastructure to handle the amount of claims coming from refugees. The second problem is deciding who should take in refugees and how many. The last problem is that citizens from countries in Europe such as Kosovo are claiming refugee status. She concluded by sharing the possibility that this crisis might lead to the return of border controls and the end of free movement throughout the EU.

By: Fifi Baleva

The Immigration Crisis from Central America: The US Policy Response

Over 80 people gathered in Kay Lounge for a discussion featuring Héctor Silva Avalos, former Deputy Chief of Mission at the El Salvador embassy; Victoria Rietig, Policy Analyst at Migration Policy Institute; and Claudia Paz y Paz, former Attorney General of Guatemala.

Silva Avalos opened the talk by sharing that he believes the situation in El Salvador has not improved and that it is important to understand the link between gang violence and migration. On average, 30 killings happened each day in 2015 in El Salvador. Many people are trying to flee the violence but are detained in Mexico. Members of gangs span three generations, totaling approximately 40,000 people in El Salvador. Héctor Silva Avalos emphasized the impunity in El Salvador by pointing out that even some members of Congress have themselves been convicted of sexual violence and drug trafficking. In his opinion, in order to resolve gang violence, the local and national government need to work together.

Rietig discussed trends in migration, stating that Mexico is on track to apprehend more Central Americans in 2015 than the U.S. In fact, for every 13 kids returned to Central America this year, 12 were returned from Mexico. Those who are deported are between the ages of 20 and 29 and usually have the least amount of education. Despite misconceptions, 61% of those deported do not have a criminal record. When it comes to minors, 95% of those deported do not have a criminal record. There have been 43,000 deportations of children from the U.S. in the last 5 years.

Paz y Paz explained that victims of gang violence are usually poor, young males with little access to education. Extortions often target small business owners, women and low income families. The goal of extortions is to show that if someone does not pay they will be killed. Violence is the number one reason people are leaving Central America because families are afraid their daughters and sons will join a gang. In order to decrease migration, impunity in Central America must be dealt with. Paz y Paz said that Guatemala asked the UN to create a committee on impunity which has led to the appointment of new judges and police officers. Paz y Paz recommended that a regional institution be created to work on impunity.

All three of the guests agreed that deported children have trouble re-integrating back into their society and the U.S. should reconsider its policy response.





Annual R. Bruce Poynter Lecture: An Evening with Maria Elena Salinas

Voice of Hispanic America

By: Gregg Sangillo

In the world of journalism, María Elena Salinas is a pioneer. As a veteran co-anchor of *Noticiero Univision*, she's reported on the remarkable rise—and growing political power—of Hispanic Americans. She's interviewed presidents, dictators, celebrities, and "dreamer" immigrants. Salinas reported from war-torn Iraq, and she's covered natural disasters in Haiti and Oklahoma. Overall, she's racked up six Emmys, a PEABODY, and was the first Hispanic woman to receive a lifetime achievement award from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

Needless to say, Salinas is worth listening to, and she made a special appearance at American University. At the School of Communication's McKinley building, she discussed immigration, the Latino vote, the 2016 election, and diversity in media. Carolyn Brown, an assistant professor in SOC, moderated the discussion. The main sponsors were SOC, the Center for Media & Social Impact, and the Kay Spiritual Life Center-Poynter Lecture Series.

Immigration and the Latino Vote

Brown went straight to the biggest news of the moment. "In the wake of the Paris terror attacks, how do you think the immigration debate here in the U.S. may or may not shift?" she asked.

"I think it's already shifted, unfortunately," Salinas replied, noting that many states have vowed to close their doors to Syrian refugees.

In a follow-up, Brown asked how comments by Donald Trump and other presidential candidates may have affected the Latino community. "In all walks of life, we see Latinos contributing to this country. That image of Latinos, and the importance that Latinos have in this country, I think, was hurt by the comments of Donald Trump saying that immigrants from Mexico are criminals," Salinas said. "Then it united the community, because suddenly we were all Mexicans. Suddenly, everyone felt, 'If you insult an undocumented immigrant, you're insulting all immigrants.'"

Salinas added that three out of four Hispanics in this country are U.S. citizens, and many of them will vote on immigrants' behalf. Polls show that Latinos prioritize education, the economy, and health care, she said. Yet what "motivates them to go out and vote is the immigration issue—because it is a matter of respect."

Journalism, Advocacy, and Equality

Brown said the word "advocacy" often gets attached to Spanish-language media, and she asked if those news outlets cover the

immigration debate differently than English-language media.

"Advocacy journalism sometimes is referred to with a negative connotation," Salinas said. "I think just about everyone advocates for something. The minute that you are choosing to cover one issue over another issue, you're advocating for that one issue. I don't think that we necessarily practice advocacy journalism in that way. But I think all of us who work in Spanish-language media, up to a certain point, do have a social responsibility to our community."



Maria Elena Salinas answers questions from students in the audience.

Later on, a student asked what challenges she's faced being a Latina journalist. Salinas said that as the Hispanic population has grown, networks such as Univision have gotten better access to U.S. leadership.

Yet as a woman, she still faces obstacles. "Latinas still have to work twice as hard to get half of the recognition that men do. But the good news is that we can."

Between Abandonment and Rejection

The audience watched a clip from Salinas's 2014 documentary on Central American children seeking asylum in the U.S. It's called "Entre el Abandono y el Rechazo" (Between Abandonment and Rejection). "This was really a humanitarian crisis. And we thought it was very important to go to the root of the problem," Salinas said of her award-winning special. She did raw reporting from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, as well as both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. "These kids feel like they are abandoned, either by society, by their government, by their parents."

Asked what was the toughest part of making this documentary, Salinas gave a heartfelt answer. "They say that there's an unwritten rule for journalism that you should never get emotionally involved in the story. But it's very hard not to get emotionally involved in the





Voice of Hispanic America, Continued...

story when you see so much human suffering," she explained. "When you give that kind of story a name and a face, I think everything changes."

Making an Impression

Salinas had a nice rapport with the students, and she took a group selfie with much of the crowd after the event. One of those students in attendance was her daughter, Julia, who is currently an AU undergraduate.

In interviews afterwards, two sophomores talked about Salinas's empowering message. And while growing up, both students frequently watched Salinas on TV.

"I knew I had to make it here no matter what. I left work an hour early, and I was like, 'I need to go to this!'" said Angie Trindade. "It's incredible that since she was so much a part of my life growing up, that I get the chance to hear her speak now in person."

Janelly Gonzalez is on the pre-med track, and she said the Salinas appearance inspired her to improve health care systems. "And I know that I'm not alone. Seeing this room full of people coming together makes me realize that other people want to change the Latino community," she said. Gonzalez was particularly struck by something Salinas said about political activism: "Doing nothing is not an option."

Human Rights Defender Series

By: Fifi Baleva

Organized Crime in Venezuela

Luis Cedeño, Director of Paz Activa, spoke about organized crime in Venezuela. Cedeño's nonprofit, which is based in Venezuela, focuses on enhancing citizen activity. The organization does not bring human rights cases to courts or defend them but it is nonetheless a human rights organization. People in Venezuela do not have the opportunity to stand before their government so Cedeño says he finds his work to be a worthy cause because he empowers citizens to organize.

Citizens in Venezuela have little ability to know what is happening in the world because their information is filtered by the government. Social conditions in Venezuela are also not ideal. The minimum wage is \$16 a month. The president raises wages 20% every month to keep up with inflation. Mr. Cedeño explained that human rights organizations can be the target of kidnapping and threats. Threats come from both the military and criminal groups in Venezuela. The

military is deployed to show people to stay away from social upheaval. Criminal groups also have access to military weapons so they are a constant threat.

The Venezuelan government claims that there have been no human rights violations in the past 15 years. However, Mr. Cedeño reminded the students that when Chavez came to power 20,000 people lost their jobs because they did not support his policies. Economically, elites are benefitting. Elites have the money to go to Aruba to do their shopping while poorer Venezuelans are experiencing shortages of vital items such as medicine. The government makes it seem as if the shortage of goods is worldwide. Many Venezuelans are quitting their jobs to buy cheap items in Venezuela and sell them for more money abroad. Mr. Luis Cedeño is fighting so all Venezuelans can express grievances about their life such as these economic conditions to their government.

Missed an event at Kay? We encourage you to visit the

Kay Spiritual Life Center YouTube Channel to watch

videos of our events from the fall semester!





RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES UPDATE

By JSA Contributing Writer
Michael Engler

Jewish Student Association Updates

On September 26, 2015 AU Jewish Student Association, America's student-run Jewish organization started another tradition by starting a Havdalah service. Havdalah, which in Hebrew means "separation" symbolizes the start of the new week after the period of Shabbat, which is the time of rest. A Havdalah service consists of coming together on Saturday evenings, typically when there are three stars in the sky and say prayers over wine, spices, the special twisted candle symbolizing the separating of Shabbat and the work week, and finally a prayer for the separation itself.

On that September evening, the JSA community came together on the Kay steps, celebrated the beginning of the new week together, and then celebrated the new week with s'mores inside. In the Kay lounge, we had graham crackers, chocolate

spread and marshmallow fluff, and we were able to have the camping experience-but inside! It was an amazing way for us to get together, catch up and get excited about our upcoming week together.

Following that great event, JSA has decided to make Havdalah a monthly event. Each month we will have the familiar ceremony, but each month there will be a different theme that will promote discussion. The next Havdalah event took place on Saturday, January 30 and focused on the theme "Hot Chocolate and Havdalah".



"A Havdalah service consists of coming together on Saturday evenings, typically when there are three stars in the sky and say prayers over wine, spices, the special twisted candle symbolizing the separating of Shabbat and the work week, and finally a prayer for the separation itself."

Interfaith Council Update

By Alex Gamcsik
Interfaith Council
President

The Interfaith Council at American University has hosted great events during the fall semester. We met every week to have discussions on interfaith

topics such as how we pray, how we deal with religious vices, and how we entered our faith. These rich discussions allowed people from different backgrounds to more fully understand each other, which fostered understanding and respect.

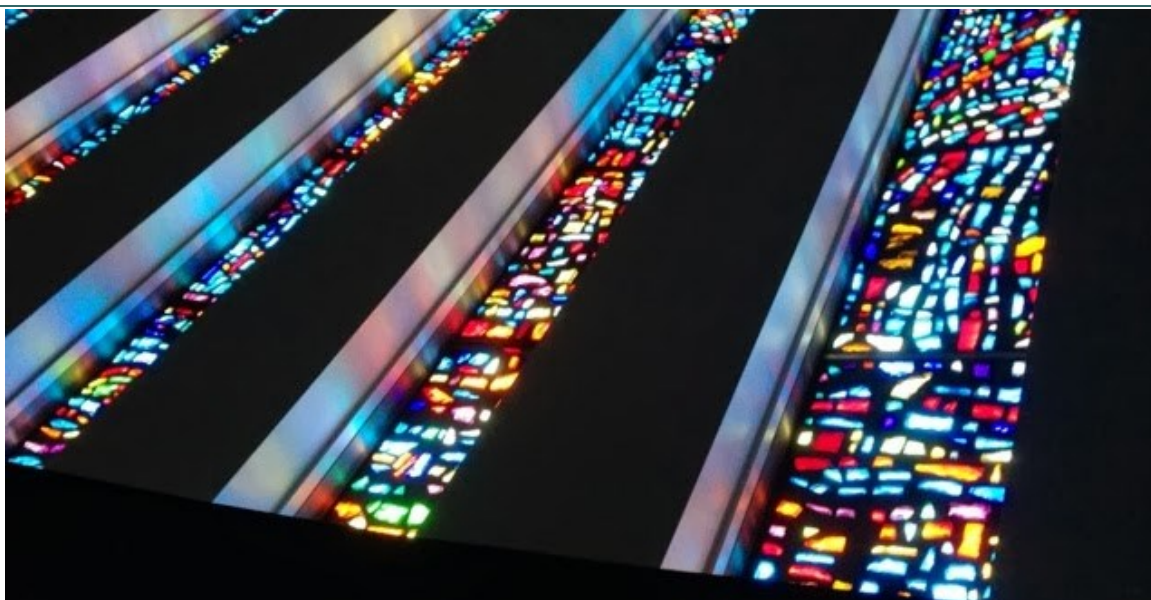
The semester's greatest event was Interfaith Thanksgiving. Alex, President of the Council, put together a wonderful meal of cornbread, green bean casserole, rosemary-garlic potatoes, and oven roasted turkey with stuffing. Individuals brought interesting food items like salad, pumpkin bread, and stuffed peppers. After grabbing plates, people went around to share what each person was thankful for. This succinct discussion was a heart warming start to a delicious meal. It was uplifting to see 30 people from different faith backgrounds sharing food and conversation. After dinner there were desserts which included ice cream and apple pie. Perhaps the most uplifting moment of the evening was when five members of the Inter-

faith Council cleaned dishes after the event was over. These dishes were piled two feet high along the entire countertop, but these members were willing to accept the responsibility of helping out.



It is kind and generous people like this that make Interfaith Council the wonderful place it is. The fall semester was a success for the Interfaith Council. Both the weekly discussions and Interfaith Thanksgiving lead to this success, but our members really made it special.





Your contributions to the Bruce Poynter Endowment at American University allow us to reach out to students through our Table Talk programs, Alternative Breaks, and Speaker Series. We thank you for your generosity!

To make a donation, please visit

<https://www.american.edu/anewau/giving/index.cfm>

Upcoming Events for Spring 2016 Will Include:

“What Matters to Me and Why” Series (Feb 24 at 4PM in SIS Founders Room)

SIS Associate Dean & Professor Patrick Jackson will share his personal story about how he became a teacher.

“Seeds of Hope: Visions of Sustainability, Steps toward Change” Exhibit (Displayed Feb 28—Mar 5 in Kay Chapel)

Brought to us by our SGI Buddhist Chaplains, this exhibition stresses that sustainability is not only about protecting the environment but also about ensuring social justice and peace in the world.

Women Human Rights Defenders from El Salvador (Mar 17 at 12PM in Kay Lounge— Lunch will be served!)

Mons. Oscar Romero: 36th Anniversary of his Martyrdom (Mar 23 — 11AM in Chapel, 12PM Lunch in Kay Lounge)

***Beyond Apologies* Book Talk with Debra Efroymson** (Mar 24 at 3PM in Kay Lounge —Tea and snacks will be served!)

Women’s Rights & Political Participation in Afghanistan (April 5 at 3PM in Kay Lounge— Tea and snacks will be served!)

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Note: We will be adding more events and may have a few changes as we continue to plan! If you wish to be added to our email listserv to receive updates, please email us at kslc@american.edu !

