



2020 October Edition
The Aquinas Scholars Honors Program
Editor: Ashley Burt

Scholar Spotlight!



Our Scholar Spotlight this month is Samantha Nordmark! She is a Russian Studies major and is also minoring in three areas: Theology, Aerospace Studies, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Aside from being a scholar, she is also involved in ROTC.

Samantha was nominated to be October's Scholar Spotlight because of her volunteer work over quarantine. She is originally from Rolla, North Dakota and when she went back, after COVID-19 first broke out, she noticed that little to no people were wearing masks. Samantha then began making them for her community members. As a matter of fact she made over 300 masks in the hopes of influencing the number of people who wear them within her community!

In case you missed it...

Pumpkin Painting



Voter Registration



Scholars Journal

Embracing an Interfaith Community like
Family

Ryan Avenido

Ever since I came to St. Thomas back in the fall 2017 semester, I've grown more accustomed to conversations relating to diversity. Not just ethnic diversity, but also religious diversity. In the past few years, I've grown to be more fascinated with interreligious dialogue. In fact, I serve as one of the student representatives for the university's Interfaith Council. Aside from my academic studies with Biology, Music, as well as neuroscience research, I am passionate about learning and raising awareness of a culture of respect for all religious groups. The American motto, "E pluribus unum," or "Out of many, one" reflects the call for civility in order to stand like one family.

According to the Fall 2019 religious affiliation statistics done by the Office for Mission, 40 percent of the undergraduate body identified themselves as Roman Catholics, while the other 60 percent were Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and many other religions I didn't mention. While we've strongly affirmed our Catholic identity as a university for 135 years, I'm pleased to say that St. Thomas has made great efforts in providing dialogue to any non-Catholic students. In other words, making them feel welcome. By no means are the efforts perfect—they are a work in progress.

The University of St. Thomas's efforts for religious diversity can trace their roots back to the Vatican II's October 28, 1965 document of *Nostra Aetate*, or "In our time" in Latin. This declaration reestablished Catholic relations with other religions. One of the main reasons for starting this document was to heal relationships with the Jewish communities after the Holocaust. *Nostra Aetate* wanted to reorient the fact that Jews were not to be held responsible for Jesus's execution; this was an antisemitic basis and unfortunate justification for Hitler to want to eliminate all the Jews. Soon after, the bond between Catholics and Jews extended to Catholics bonding with other groups like Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. In short, *Nostra Aetate* affirmed that people of different faiths are all God's people.

Today, you can see interfaith efforts done at St. Thomas. As a student worker in Campus Ministry, I have the pleasure of interacting with a Jewish chaplain (Rabbi Amy Ariel), Presbyterian

chaplain (Pastor Medhat Yoakiem), Muslim chaplain (Dr. Sadaf Rauf-Shier), and the Catholic chaplains (Fr. Lawrence Blake, Fr. Timothy Combs, and Fr. Brian John Zuelke). I always get a fresh perspective of how they view the world through their religion. Aside from Catholic chapels on campus, there is also a dedicated meditation/prayer space for people of all religions in the Iversen Center for Faith. Campus Ministry provides prayer rugs for Muslim students; Muslim students have washing stations in multiple bathroom sites. While Christians honor Lent and Easter, you may find Muslim students devoted to the Ramadan season and Eid. For the Jewish tradition, you may find some students celebrating significant holidays like Hanukkah or Rosh Hashanah. The list goes on. In an era without a pandemic, we have a program, Peace Meals, which is hosted by the Jay Phillips Center for Inter-religious Studies. In this program, a small group of students would have a luncheon and have discourse about intercultural/interfaith topics. We also have a virtual interfaith discussion group called “Coffee and Conversations” hosted by Rabbi Ariel every Tuesday at 10:45 am via Zoom. This program consists of a series of everyday topics (like politics, environmental issues, social justice issues) being reflected by a guest speaker who implements his/her/their respective faith to the issue. (By the way, I invite you to come join! Email Rabbi Ariel if interested.) So there you have it. By no means is this an exhaustive list of all the interfaith events going on.

In the last decade, we’ve seen counts of religious prejudice in our society and politics, whether it is Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Christianity, or ostracization of minority religious/spiritual groups. We may not necessarily agree with facets from our traditions, but civility comes a long way. *Nostra Aetate* is not the ultimate document for religious solidarity. About twenty-one years after *Nostra Aetate* was finalized, the first prayer for peace was held on October 27, 1986; at the time, it was an unprecedented time to have a religiously diverse population at this event hosted by the Catholic Church. It has also paved the way for another document (approved by Pope John Paul II) called *Ex corde ecclesiae*, which explains how Catholic universities should provide for the spiritual needs of non-Catholics. Pope John Paul II also issued a series of formal apologies for the Church’s previous misdeeds towards religious groups—a step to forgiveness and reconciliation. *Nostra Aetate* has established a legacy of “loving thy neighbor as yourself” and embracing the goodness from the all the hearts of people with different backgrounds.

Scholars Journal

A Socially Distant Fall Day

Anachie Stueve

wake up

mask up

leaves fall

days draw

smiles hidden

eyes lidden

sanitized hands

class demands

life unknown

no status quo

nature who

it's fall!

Scholars Journal

The Evolution of the AIDS Epidemic

Emma Torres

Between 1980 and 2000, approximately 450,000 people in the United States died from AIDS. This truth is a tragedy. It is a tragedy for all the lives lost, but furthermore, it is a tragedy for how this epidemic was responded to, how those with HIV and AIDS were treated, and the lack of action on the government's part to help those in need. Things could have been drastically different had things been cared for better. To make progress and help a community in need, the first thing that needs to be done is acknowledge that there is a problem. Although AIDS was first known about in 1981, it wasn't until 1985 that President Reagan first mentioned the epidemic. This lack of acknowledgment, and silence from all public leaders, resulted in little change and hope for those struggling with AIDS. Not only were people dying from this disease but the country, as a whole, refused to talk about it. As one of the ACT UP members, a political group working to end the AIDS pandemic, stated, "Every time you look up and you realize you lost some of your friends. But no one else notices. It isn't happening to them."

This, largely, had to do with the idealized image of Americans and who was considered "normal." In the 1950s, the "perfect" family was a heterosexual couple. Which was what was considered normal. Anyone in the LGBTQ community, therefore, was not idealized and consequently, looked down upon. The stigma and negative view towards the LGBTQ community played a crucial role in the events of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As one of the members of ACT UP stated, "It was gay people just getting what they deserved."

When ACT UP brought this epidemic to the forefront they highlighted and pressured the FDA to work faster on releasing drugs to help those fighting the disease. It took the FDA years to release drugs that may or may not help. But as a member of ACT UP stated, "we didn't have years. People were dying in months." The pressure that they placed, finally led to the release of AZT, but of course, the release of the drug, and the accessibility of it, are two different things. AZT was incredibly too expensive, denying the majority of the victims of HIV/AIDS from actually being able to get it.

As time went on, and drug trials for new treatments were finally underway, another act of discrimination stood in the way of fair treatment. The drug trials being done were, in most ways, not inclusive or representative of those who actually got AIDS. It did not include people of color, women, homeless people, or drug users. This fight, to have a fair representation of those who were contracting the disease, highlighted other problems in society. Many people dying of AIDS were homeless. They didn't have housing or access to healthcare, resulting in these people dying due to their lack of resources. AIDS was not just an epidemic. It was a housing crisis. It was a healthcare crisis. The victims of AIDS were dealing with all of these issues, not just the disease. ACT UP did their best in trying to show this to the world. As one ACT UP member said, "What AIDS revealed was not the problem of the virus, what AIDS revealed was the problem with society."

Although the AIDS epidemic is mostly behind us, there are many parallels of the AIDS epidemic still present today. There are protests and demonstrations going on within the United States daily. Black Lives Matter protests are almost identical to those started by ACT UP. It is about injustice towards a group of people and displaying the problems with society in as loud and big of a matter as possible. As said in the movie, "Silence Equals Death," being silent is no longer an option for the Black community. The media, for ACT UP, played a big role in showing the world what was going on. Similarly, videos and pictures of how Black individuals and protesters have been treated have also played a big role in society today.

Furthermore, AIDS similarly parallels the COVID pandemic. As ACT UP chanted, "healthcare is a right." Today, however, the inequalities have become clear in the death tolls of different communities within the U.S. The Black population, having fewer resources, has been hit much harder than the White community. This is due to healthcare stratification. How the government handled COVID also remains similar. As ACT UP protested they chanted, "150,000 dead! Where was George?" Many people have the same attitude towards President Trump today with how he downplayed COVID for months and his complete lack of acknowledgment and action towards the virus. As one ACT UP member stated, "We are dying of criminal neglect so great we are dying of genocide." This, in essence, is what is happening today in the U.S. with COVID. People are dying due to Trump's lack of acknowledgment, the government's lack of response in how to handle COVID, and many Americans' neglect of judgment to stay home, social distance, and wear a mask.

Scholars Journal

Olive Trees

Izzy Illiff

There wanders the rustle of burnished leaves,
orange in the shimmer of singeing release
encapsulated in withered papyrus
that elemental autograph.
As olives' roots ripple beneath dry earth,
ensconced in rolling birdsong I sip
the sounds of this needled sadness,
and stumble over the bitter taste of honey and salt.
The mountains lie rooted in ancient emptiness,
that quenching release trailing my footfalls.
There is no map to this place, no syncopated plan
for how I meander the studded blue boulders
and bury my thoughts in these dry grasses.
The aging sun breathes out its waves
and abdicates what we'll take
from the breadth below.

Scholars Journal

Then the Quiet Explosion

Riley Lipinski

The swirling winds and the blindingly bright snow cover the plains. He questions if he's even going the right way. He fiddles with his sleeves and his hat, and continues walking. A fence post becomes visible, layered with more snow. As he steps past it, the snow begins to subside.

The town square presents itself softly. The town is much smaller than he envisioned, but the church is massive. It towers over the square, dwarfing the rest of the buildings. A faint chiming of a bell is heard overhead. He walks over to the closest structure, presses against the door, and it creaks open. The biting wind peeks through the cracks in the walls and ceiling. The wood smells old and moldy. The door slams shut behind, with the wind howling past the building.

The counter's covered in broken glass, ripped clothing, dirty coins, and a layer of dust. The shelves crooked. A toy rocking horse lays on its side near the doorway. He lifts it upright, rocking it back and forth. He hears children laughing, pushing each other off of the horse to ride it themselves. He looks towards the counter and notices the shopkeeper quietly telling them to take turns, while a woman attempts to haggle for a lower price on a new dress. The place bustling with life and warmth. Stepping through the shop, his mind racing, wondering if he would've fit in with them. He comes across the alternate entrance, and opens the door to the square, the inhabitants vanishing with the wind.

The church asserts its presence, with sunlight peering through the cracked stained glass. With the enormous doorway letting snow spill into the entrance, he steps inside, amazed at the scale of the place. He closes the doors behind him, embracing the shadow and the hint of sun through the windows. Walking between the pews, he envisions a hundred people, sitting attentively. He hears the choir singing, and the organs bellowing. He sees the preacher chanting. He sees the candles light up the room. The church echoing every sound. He sits in the closest pew, and closes his eyes. This is who they were. This is how they lived. This is what they have forgotten.

The man stands up, and makes his way through the church, and exits the back. He looks back, and watches the citizens converse, play, and laugh. People sitting on the rotten benches, kicking a ball across the destroyed bricks, building snowmen in front of the deserted storefronts. The wind is picking up, and the snow begins to storm. He doesn't waver.

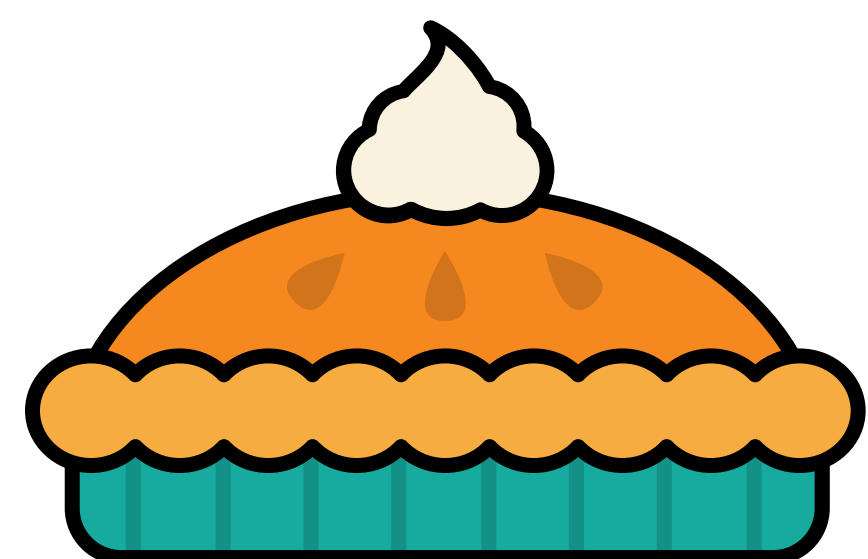
These people were buried. They never saw the light again. They were wiped from existence. No one even knew. Their corpse lay here. Disregarded. My people built this place. My people lived. My people worked, and my people loved. Then, they were gone. Then... The Quiet Explosion.

Inspired by the song: Then The Quiet Explosion by Hammock

Things to look forward to!

1

Turkey Coloring Contest!
The colored turkey is due back to the
social chairs by November 14th.
Check your email for more
information!

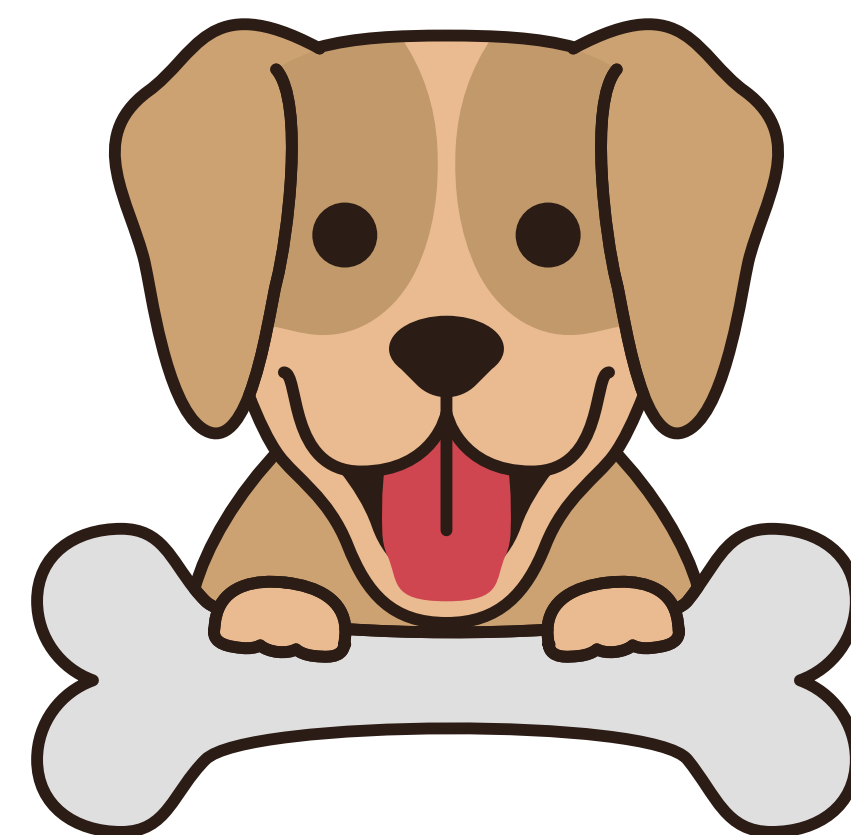


A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving
Join our zoom party for the annual viewing
of "A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving."
Thursday, November 19th

2

3

DIY Dog Toys!
Join the honors program in making dog
toys for the Humane Society.
Friday, November 20th - Tuesday,
November 24th



Contact Us



Cheyanne Simpson, President
simp1139@stthomas.edu



Connor Glinski, Vice President
connor.glinski@stthomas.edu



Megan Smith, Webmaster
megan.smith@stthomas.edu



Ashley Burt, Publications
burt4116@stthomas.edu



Dr. Eric Fort, Faculty Director
ehfort@stthomas.edu



Erica Berglund, Administrative Assistant
berg7582@stthomas.edu