

# CONVOCATION 2006

## Sharing Worship Traditions

by Elizabeth Wilkinson '08 M.A.R.

**F**OLLOWING HER CONTEMPLATIVE sermon delivered during a Convocation Week service, Nancy Taylor '81 M.Div. invited worshippers to come forward and pluck a smooth stone from a clear, water-filled glass bowl. One by one, hands reached in as participants reverently considered Taylor's call to reflection. "Stones are what we build sanctuaries from," she said, emphasizing the role of worshippers in creating sacred spaces. "We bear responsibility for making sanctuaries places where God feels heard and listened to, places where God feels at home."

Taylor, the first woman to occupy the senior minister's position at storied Old South Church in Boston, was not talking



Martha Beckwith Peck '81 M.Div. and Don Beisswenger '56 B.D. taking part in a Convocation Week worship service in the newly renovated Marquand Chapel.

simply about bricks and mortar. In her sermon, she argued for an expanded view of sanctuary, a concept of sanctuary that reaches out in order to invade and pervade culture and, ultimately, create "a new way of being human together on this earth."

This scene in Marquand Chapel is but one example of the many opportunities organizers of the five-day Convocation and Reunions 2006 in October gave returning alumni to reconnect with worship at Yale Divinity School and, in turn, to be refreshed in their own ministries.

In a note to returning alumni, Assistant Dean for Chapel Siobhán Garrigan and Director of Chapel Music Patrick Evans wrote, "In planning worship... we wanted to share a little of what goes on in Marquand on a daily basis. We wanted you to experience the ways in which we combine ancient, global and emerging worship traditions." This note, which included a list of liturgy resources, was part of an effort to actively engage alumni in the ecumenical ministry of YDS. There were a series of worship services for the week, designed to facilitate an awareness of sacred space and the mechanics of nurturing creativity.

YDS students have long understood worship as a way to heal, teach, and expand. "I was incredibly nurtured by YDS," said returning alumna Ruth Drews '81 M.Div. of the "discipline and delight of daily worship" at the school. Drews, a Lutheran in New Haven who has spent the last 25 years in inner city ministry, remembers communion with other students as powerful and warm, and a vital part of her journey into ministry. She experienced the act of communion as the creation of a commonality that profoundly transcended any differences. "I found this reality to be true in the inner city," said Drews, who discovered this same powerful commonality in her ministry by sharing ordinary meals with ordinary people. "There is a real hunger people don't know they have."

Alumni had the chance to share ideas about the contemporary religious scene during a discussion forum that centered on issues of interfaith dialogue, racial reconciliation, and the ever-changing American religious landscape. Martha Beckwith Peck '81 M.Div., a United Church of Christ minister in Newport, VT, told the 50 participants, "I think our generation reveled in deconstruction. Now people want to know what they can trust."

One dividend of attending Convocation Week for some alumni is the chance to meet students informally and, in the words of George Todd '51 B.D., "to discover what catches their minds and spirits." Todd, a New York Presbyterian, has long been involved with music and worship in ministry. He is enlivened year after year hearing students report worship at YDS to be challenging, encouraging, and paramount in shaping their own sense of ministry. "It's really exciting," he said, "to think about students out there dealing with the style and content of what it is to praise God."