

# MARGARET FARLEY RETIRES

by Elizabeth L. Wilkinson '08 M.A.R.

**M**ARGARET FARLEY retired in the spring of 2007 after nearly four decades at Yale Divinity School. Among her lasting marks are the Margaret A. Farley Chair in Christian Ethics, the Yale Interdisciplinary Bioethics Center, and the YDS Quad itself, which she actively worked to save. Yet, more permanent are the marks she has left on generations of students and colleagues.



Farley, known for her excellence in scholarship (including 11 honorary degrees, seven books, and the 1992 John Courtney Murray Award for Excellence in Theology) has long been regarded for being both encouraging and demanding, for her ability to connect with students, and for grading her students' papers in green ink, the color of hope. As noted in a 1986 Yale Alumni Magazine feature on excellence in teaching, "[Her] magnification of each individual's importance is a particular form of love of student that is rarely encountered."

Farley was appointed to the YDS faculty in 1971. During the 1970s female enrollment at YDS was on a dramatic rise, and as the first full-time woman faculty member, Farley played an important role in addressing the challenges faced by this change in the student body.

The good humor and awareness that Farley and her colleague, Letty Russell, possessed played an important role for all women of YDS. Many students of that era will remember the infamous "bathroom sit-in" during which Farley and other female doctoral students occupied the men's restroom in the library until the YDS dean agreed to assign a library restroom for women. From moving classes off campus during labor strikes, to welcoming African theologians on campus during dialogues on responses to HIV/AIDS, Farley's ministry consisted of making space for others.

"In ethics, one seldom gets to set one's own agenda," Farley says. It is necessary to respond to the ethical questions of one's place and time—as well as to provide a basis and tools for ethical discernment. She has faithfully held to the motto, "The great work of the Church is never

done under ideal circumstances." With a doctoral dissertation and second book on personal commitments, Farley laid the ground-work for her career, which has responded to some of the most important issues the church and world face today; love and social justice, AIDs, sexual ethics, and stem cell research.

Marie Fortune '75 M.Div., founder and senior analyst of the FaithTrust Institute, says that Farley's work in

ethics provided the foundation for Fortune's work across the globe to eradicate sexual and domestic violence. "Her impact on those of us who are in ministry outside of the academy has been as important as it has been on scholars and teachers in the field of ethics," says Fortune. "For those of us who have chosen [nontraditional] forms of ministry, studying with her taught us about how to be out in the world."

A Sister of Mercy, Farley has remained grounded in the Roman Catholic faith, while maintaining a strong commitment to ecumenical and interfaith relationships. As faculty adviser to the Catholic student organization, she has been a source of strength and hope. "She's in many worlds at one time," says Catholic student Mary Lou Bozza '08 M.Div. "She is never disconnected from the outside world, while engaging with religion, faith and the academy all at once."

Farley's legacy will continue with Fortune, Bozza, and countless others, says Professor Willis Jenkins, the first appointed holder of the Margaret A. Farley Chair in Christian Ethics. "That a group of students were so impressed with Margaret's teaching that they worked together to endow a chair in her name—that in itself testifies to the significance of her impact at YDS. It is a great and daunting privilege to bear that legacy," said Jenkins.

Though no longer teaching at YDS, Farley continues to be active. In addition to directing doctoral dissertations at Yale, she remains involved with Yale's Bioethics Center, and continues to co-direct a project with women in sub-Saharan Africa. She lectures widely across the world; is currently working on her next book, addressing issues of freedom of choice; and hints at the possibility of teaching again.