

THE OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAINS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE
Box 1931 Brown University, Providence RI 02912

August 15, 2009

Dearly Beloved In-Bound Brunonians,

Amid the hum of lazy, late, New England summer it happens. As though responding to a musical tone heard only by the Brown family, we converge on the hill near the head of Narragansett Bay.

Urgently, Brown's new generation packs and travels from points across the globe to Providence. Putting belongings away in new drawers, we use maps to navigate a labyrinth of paths and streets that soon will be trammelled while reading or even dozing, and we find sleep on beds of new dimensions. Left behind are familiar landscapes and faces. Over meals not quite like home cooking, we meet fascinating strangers whose names evaporate from memory exactly as their nametags disappear. Meanwhile within the University, folks greet from behind counters, lecterns, and pulpits, conveying a soothing composure that derives of we-have-done-this-more-than-two-hundred-times.

But from tweed to hip-hop, novice to expert, pious to irreverent, Brown University is quivering---poised on the verge of what we will become. We wonder who or what will animate or trouble our hope or our sleep? Will this voltage leave us energized or intimidated? Will the measure of our "Providential" labors be constructive? Whatever is actually happening with the American economy how can its human face be fore-grounded? Is healthcare reform possible, advisable? How can suffering in Sudan be diminished? Will the Class of 2013 design better wind generation, solar cells and mass transit while making wearing sweaters a new fashion statement? Can we discern what is worth setting our hearts on? What will matter and to whom? Will Brown grasp the privilege about to be ours with enough energy and humility?

These wrestlings, at the heart of a Brown education, are predicates for Brown's multi-faith team of chaplains. We work on them from within and beyond spiritual traditions, within and beyond academic disciplines, and in myriad settings with students, staff, faculty, and *alumnae/i*.

The spiritual and convictional diversity of the Brown family includes so much¹--the rigors of Ramadan, passionate pursuit of ethical conduct, the laws of *Kashrut*, ritual observances of Hinduism, Indian dance, feminist spirituality, the discipline of the Rosary, the epistemology of atheism, activism for social justice, Zen meditation, the Reformation's scriptural legacy, and much more.

The same ear that hears the summoning Brown tone can hear on campus the strains of Gospel at Imani Jubilee, the chant of Hindu blessing, the stillness of

¹ Faculty legislation insures a student's privilege to make proactive arrangements with any instructor to accommodate religious observances.

Quaker meeting and Zen meditation, the dazzling discourse of Thursday Suppers* and the Multi-faith Council, mugs clinking at OXFAM's Hour Glass Cafe, the prayers of Christian fellowship, "Shabbat Shalom" at Hillel's door, Jumuah prayer at the Muslim Student Center, the support of the Bereavement Group, the midnight conversations at Interfaith House, the lyrics of inclusion from a *Call to Worship*- a lively group of progressive Protestants.

And these spiritual addresses are only a few of the settings where Brown's learning seeks wisdom. Strengthened by invaluable classes, labs and libraries students also immerse themselves in the co-curricular offerings of the Swearer Center for Public Service, the Third World Center, the Sarah Doyle Women's Center, the Brown Chorus or orchestra, not to mention the many fields of play, studios for dance and art, debates, lectures and the theatre.

Brown's surface is rarely still. But plumbing the depths of this busy-ness is the point of your time at Brown. Annie Dillard's opening observation in *A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* comes to mind: "It could be that God has...spread, as our vision and understanding of the universe have spread, to a fabric of spirit and sense so grand and subtle, so powerful in a new way, that we can only blindly feel of its hem.... "

This month we all arrive to become Brown University; your faces and faiths, our newest members, added to a marvelous heritage. The privilege about to be ours is to trust and to be trusted with a part of that vast fabric of spirit and sense – each other.

Whether you are the devout, the curious, the skeptical, please accept our warmest welcome. Your birthright invitation within the Brown family is to an academic experience enriched by engagement and discernment. During Orientation and the opening days of the school year we look forward to meeting you—whether at Registration, at services, barbecues, or at a very special Thursday supper.

Before life gets too busy, do stop in and introduce yourself at the Office of the Chaplains and Religious Life –our offices are in J. Walter Wilson—4th floor, a building full of marvelous spaces and services for students beginning with your mailboxes.

We truly look forward to knowing you, to sharing life's joys and struggles, and, of course, to helping with directions for the Brown's labyrinth's—whether to locate great coffee or any other worthy destination

Safe journey until we see you on campus.

Peace and blessings,

The Reverend Janet M. Cooper Nelson
Chaplain of the University
Director of the Office of the Chaplains and Religious Life (OCRL)

²*Thursday Night Interfaith Supper (TNS) begins its 43rd Brown season with a welcome to "2013" on September 10, 2009. Gather at Faunce Arch to walk to the Chaplain's Home. TNS meets weekly in term for supper and discourse. Sign-up for weekly email: www.brown.edu/OCRL