

2008 Year-End Memorial Service

Tuesday, April 29 • The Chapel

Good evening.

This has been a difficult year for the University of Georgia proper and our extended family. We lost 40 of our friends and colleagues from this campus; we suffered with our friends in Chapel Hill and in Auburn, where Eve Carson and Lauren Burke lost their lives; and we mourned with Meredith Emerson's friends and family here in Athens.

The life cycle of any community is marked by highs and lows, by moments of joy and sadness, by light and by darkness. This community is no exception; 40 times we have been told of the death of a loved one, a dear friend, a valued colleague, a favorite teacher – each time the sensation as much physical as emotional.

It hurts, and it should, for in the pain we reaffirm our own humanity. We are sentient beings; our ability to feel both joy and pain – and to think about both emotions – is a significant part of what makes us human.

So we gather at The Chapel today bringing our own pain, our own memories, our own grief to share with others in a common ceremony, hoping that we may find some comfort from each other and offer comfort to each other.

There many faiths that suggest that when someone passes away, that it is not the end of life – it is the rejuvenation of life. That ideal is manifested here this evening in ways that are symbolic and other ways that are very real.

This is the case for the historic Chapel Bell that normally sounds its tomes for occasions such as this. That bell, although not retired, is not available for our use this evening.

When it was determined that the Chapel Bell would be unavailable for this special ceremony, members of our physical plant remembered another historic bell on our campus located at Snelling Hall, and diligently worked to clean it, condition it, move it, and secure it here at this location. They did so with a level of care and commitment, as they recognized how important the ringing of the bell in memory of our lost loved ones is to this community.

Those individuals ensured that the legacy of the bell will live on, much in the same way that our own lives continue whenever we lose someone close to us. It will never be the same; it will be a little different. But it will serve as a little reminder of what it was like when that loved one was last with us.

We must also pledge today to live our own lives to the fullest and in a manner that will honor those whom we mourn today. To put it simply, life must go on; our lives must go on.

The Campus Ministry Association has played a meaningful role in these services, and we are grateful to the two representatives of that group who are with us tonight. The Reverend Nathan C. Byrd, III of the Baptist Collegiate Ministry will offer the opening prayer.

Reading the names of those faculty, staff, and student names who we remember this evening are be Connor McCarthy, president of the Student Government Association; Bill Vencill, chair of the executive committee of University Council; and Shannon Scott, chair of the Staff Council.

At this time, members of the Arch Society will prepare for the traditional candle lighting and passing of the flame.

As each name is read aloud, the Arch Society members will light candles from the flame of the person next to them, and the bell will ring one tone.

It is a simple, elemental act, but powerful – shining a light into the darkness, sharing that light with another. The first candle will be lit from the flame of a Master Candle, and the flame will spread through the dusk as the individual candles are lit.

This sequence continues until the last name is called, the last candle lit, and the bell has rung one time for each name. Then, after a final word from Mr. McCarthy, Rabbi Justin Kerber of UGA Hillel will offer a closing prayer.

After the closing prayer, the Southern Wind Woodwind **Quintet** will perform a piece we traditionally hear at this service entitled, “Going Home”. As the music plays, the Arch Society members will light the candles of those in the audience, sharing with you the flame they hold in the names of those from this University community we have lost.

That will conclude the ceremony, but you are each welcome to remain as long as you care to visit and reflect. I thank you for being here this evening.

I will now ask Rev. Byrd to lead us in our opening prayer.