

SYMBOLS OF SERVICE



Over the past century, service has been symbolized in ways that have been meaningful in different ways. The earliest generation of students saw their lives in the context of “senior prophecies” that narrated their collective commitment to go forth into a war-torn world and make a difference. For students and faculty in recent decades, the simple rite of footwashing has become a powerful way to image “Education for Service” in both local and international contexts.

There is nothing particularly fancy or ornate about the practice of washing one another’s feet. In fact, the vessels used—the pitcher of water, the basin, and towel—in this practice are so ordinary that it would be easy to overlook them. Anyone who has ever observed this ancient rite of hospitality will recognize that the plain and simple gesture of footwashing also can display remarkable beauty and grace as particular persons engage in this profoundly personal act of serving one another. Every such gesture is particular to the persons involved and place where it happens, and behind such gestures there are always stories that can be told.

This University has had a longstanding “tradition of doing the good deeds,” but we have not always taken the time to notice the distinctive patterns of service displayed in the lives of students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of the University. As the stories collected in this book display, however, there is something remarkable about how well faculty like Charles Guthrie and Jennifer Fogo and students like Francis Kantner and Matt Brock wear the University’s motto of “Education for Service.” The benchmarks of excellence in “Education for Service” are as varied as the hands and feet of the persons who have been associated with this University, but through such simple images as the basin and towel, we are able to discern patterns of *excellence* in service.

In retrospect, perhaps we should not be surprised to discover that participants in that first international service project that Charles Guthrie led concluded their stay in Azpitia by inviting the Peru Project team members and villagers to wash one another’s feet. Having worked together day after day, they all could celebrate the achievement symbolized by the walls that were now standing. The students departed from Peru knowing how much work remained to be done in this “unfinished world.” Nor should we be surprised to discover that alumni and faculty such as Cheryl Larson ’66 ’71 and Jenny Eaton Fogo ’85, ’87, and Amy Peterson ’02 and others associated with UIndy find the plain and simple image of the basin and towel to be the most meaningful way to think about their own individual commitments to service.

