

Wellesley



IRON CHEF WELLESLEY

Cooking For The Common Gourd



FALL 2008

Wellesley

'The chapel will be less of a space waiting for an event than a space for people to use on a regular basis.'

—Victor Kazanjian,
dean of religious and spiritual life,
of the restored Houghton Chapel

Photo of the Wellesley College Choir
rehearsing in Houghton Chapel by
Richard Howard

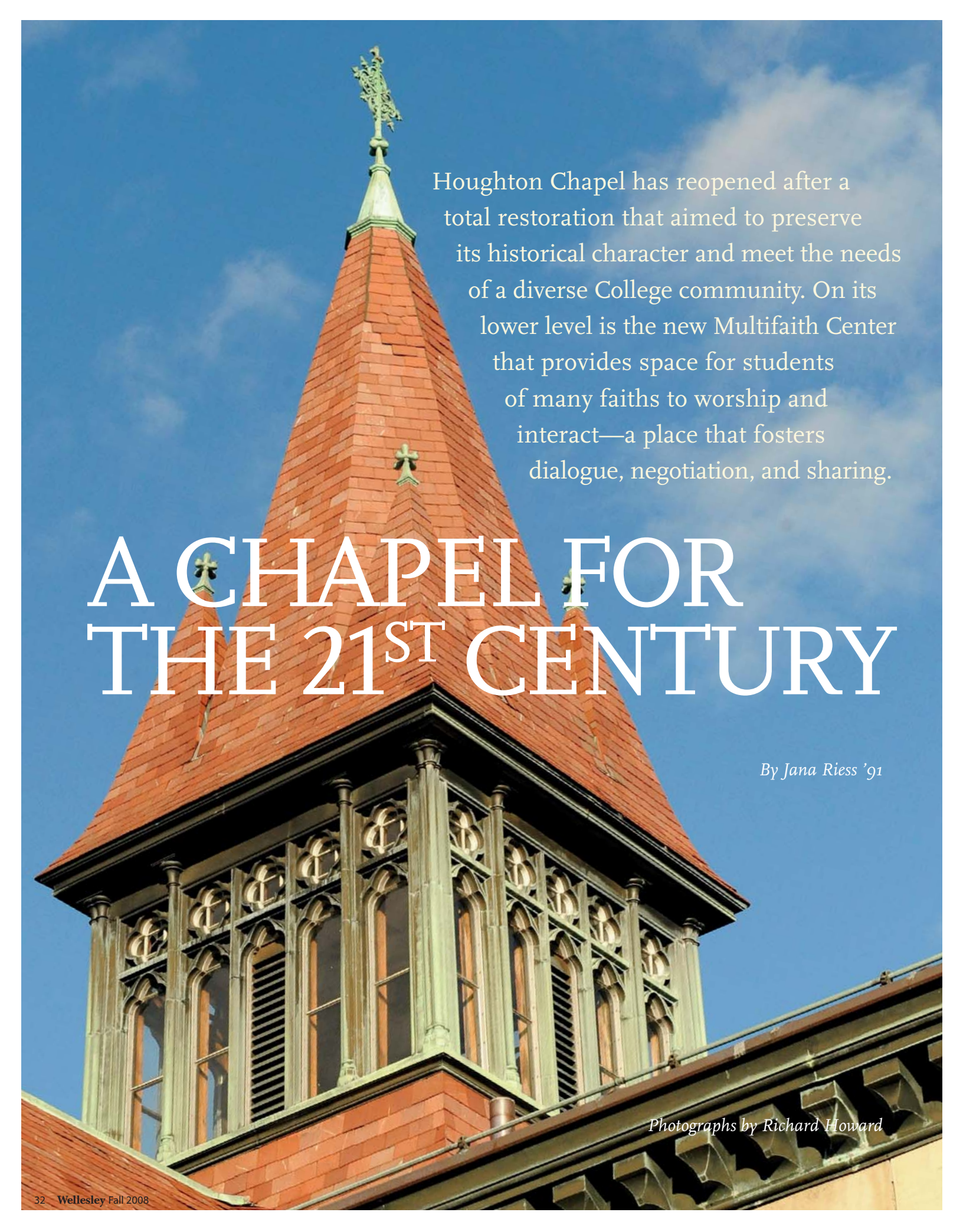
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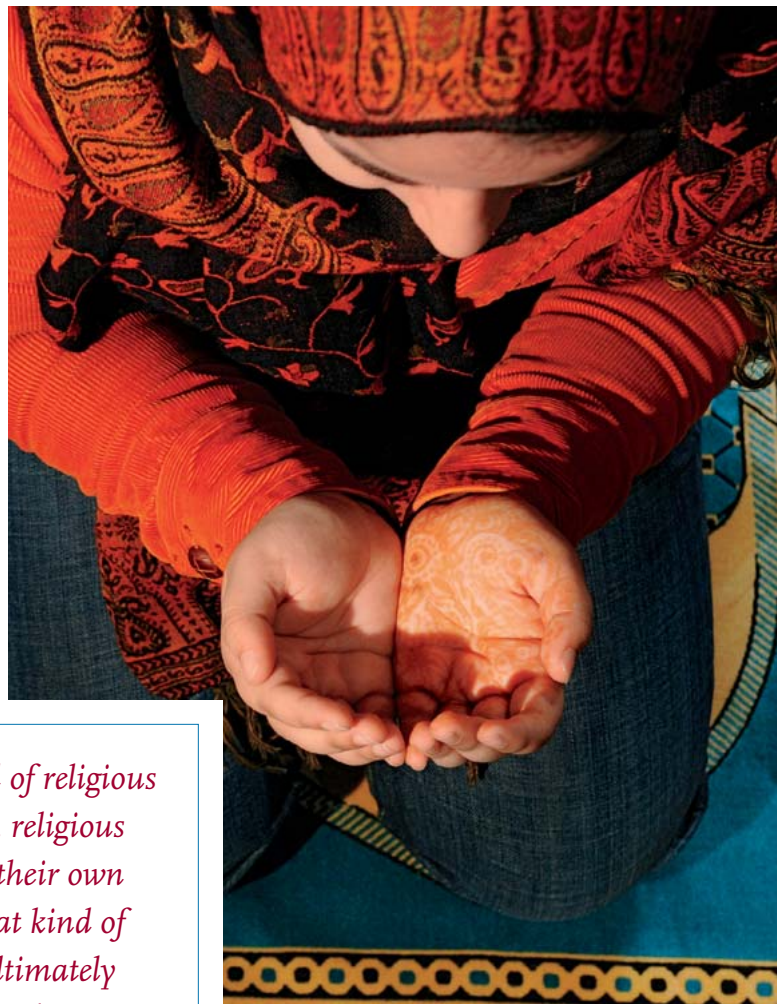


Houghton Chapel has reopened after a total restoration that aimed to preserve its historical character and meet the needs of a diverse College community. On its lower level is the new Multifaith Center that provides space for students of many faiths to worship and interact—a place that fosters dialogue, negotiation, and sharing.

A CHAPEL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

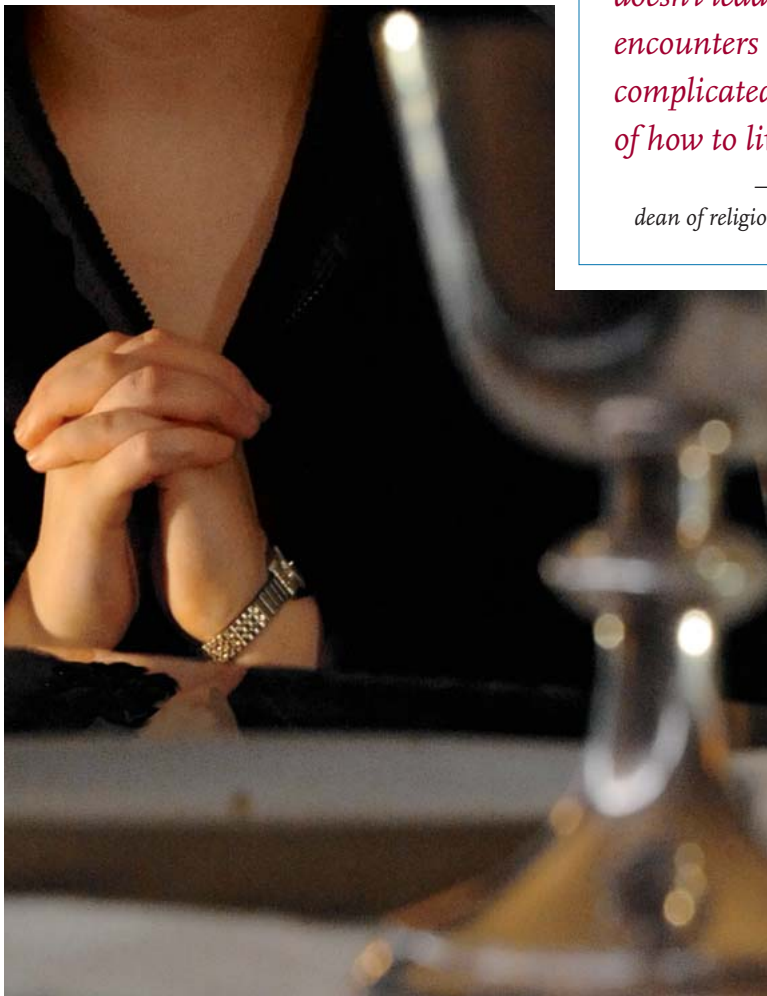
By Jana Riess '91

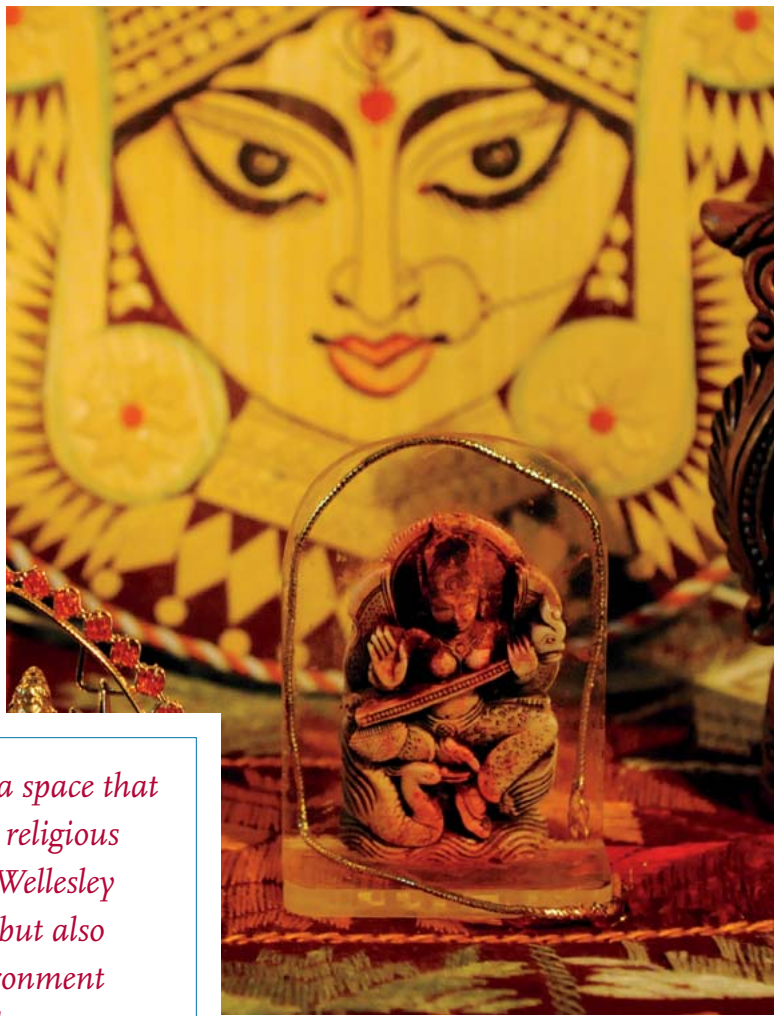
Photographs by Richard Howard



'In the world of religious particularity, religious groups have their own rules. But that kind of separation ultimately doesn't lead to the encounters that are complicated and rich, of how to live together.'

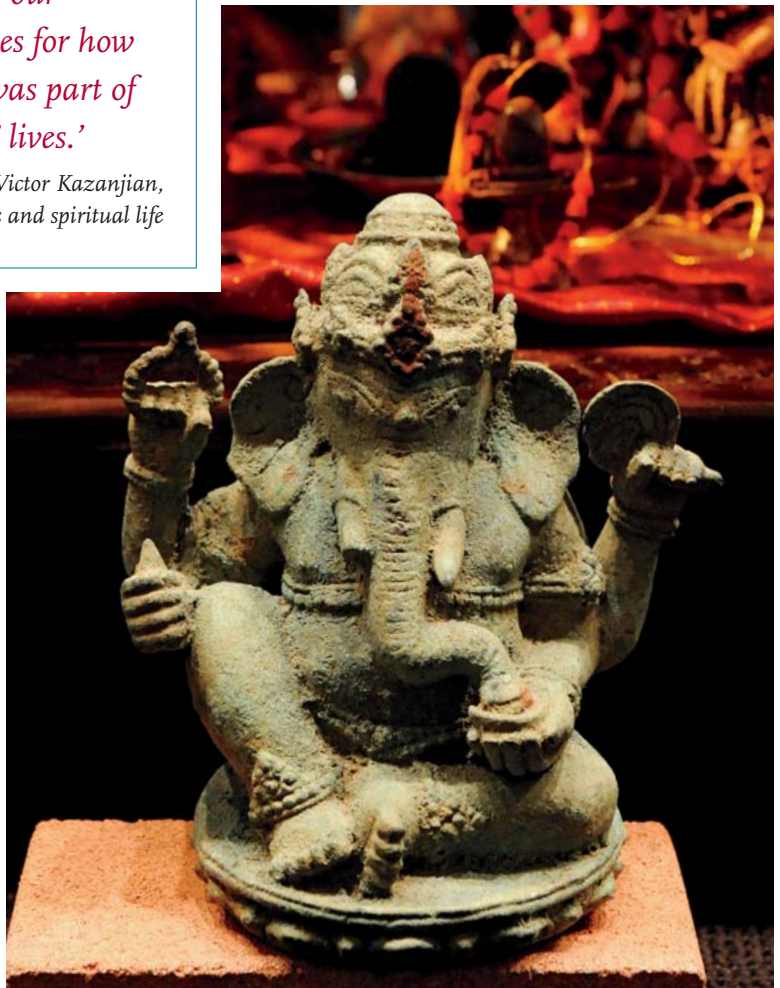
—Victor Kazanjian,
dean of religious and spiritual life





'We wanted a space that both met the religious needs of the Wellesley community, but also was an environment that reflected our broadest hopes for how spirituality was part of our students' lives.'

*—Victor Kazanjian,
dean of religious and spiritual life*



BACK IN 1972, the Rev. Paul Santmire, then College chaplain, fired off a memo to Barbara Newell, Wellesley's president at the time. "The Chapel was completed before the turn of the century. Not much in the way of substantive renovation has been done since 1900 . . .," he wrote, clearly frustrated. And then he went on to list all the ways Houghton Chapel had fallen apart: The lighting was bad, electrical circuits archaic, the interior brickwork in need of attention, the basement "unusable," and the "minister's study . . . an embarrassment."

Victor Kazanjian, the College's current dean of religious and spiritual life, smiles knowingly when he talks about this memo, which he found in the Wellesley Archives, because the problems are more than familiar to him. "Thirty years [after Santmire's memo], nothing had been done," he says. By early in this decade, virtually every wire, pipe, and system in the building needed to be replaced. The chapel also needed soundproofing (everything that happened on one floor was audible on the other) and up-to-date fire protection.

Moreover, the haphazard and dank basement spaces that had been carved out for the campus' religious groups were woefully inadequate. Muslim students would slip in five times a day to pray in what was essentially a storage closet, and the 1950s Little Chapel didn't necessarily fit the needs of an increasingly diverse religious community. Kazanjian and his students began to dream aloud about what the building could become. "We wanted a space that both met the religious needs of the Wellesley community, but also was an environment that reflected our broadest hopes for how spirituality was part of our students' lives," says Kazanjian.

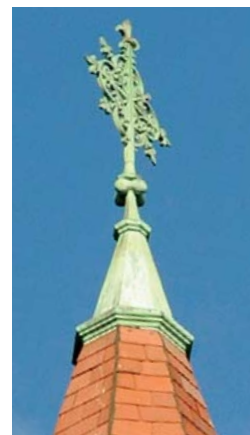
It was a tall order: a total restoration of the 19th-century upstairs chapel that would not alter the character or quality of the space, and a complete gutting and renovation of the downstairs to fit the needs of a 21st-century multifaith campus. Wellesley hired Philadelphia architectural firm KieranTimberlake Associates for the project, citing five necessary functions for the downstairs space: gathering, study, meditation, prayer, and worship. But the new Multifaith Center, which students began using for the first time this fall, is not just functional but beautiful, beginning with the soothing welcome fountain in the entry, stretching through the coffeehouse-like gathering room, with its low couches and soft lighting, to the multi-purpose worship room with space for meetings, meals, lectures, and musical rehearsals and concerts. Off these main rooms are a state-of-the-art kitchen and three smaller

areas for study, meditation, and prayer. Throughout, women's art transforms the space, which features sculpture, paintings, and a welcome quilt along the entry wall.

One of the challenges of the new design was to reflect the diverse realities of Wellesley's religious community without dicing up wholly separate spaces for each group. "In the world of religious particularity, religious groups have their own rules," says Kazanjian. "But that kind of separation ultimately doesn't lead to the encounters that are complicated and rich, of how to live together." The building needed to be about sharing, dialogue, and negotiation, which meant that while spaces could be designed to meet the needs of a particular group (a Torah scroll in the study room, a seated shower for Muslim ablutions in the prayer room), they would be open to all.

Kazanjian says the possibility for the space is limited only by students' imaginations. In the worship room, for instance, he and Buddhist adviser Ji Hyang Padma '91 plan wellness courses with yoga and stress reduction. This year, Hindu students from Darshana will host vegetarian meals there; Protestant Christians will have Bible studies; Catholics will celebrate Mass; Muslims will raise campus awareness of the crisis in Darfur; Unitarian Universalists will hold weekly worship meetings.

Kazanjian is delighted by the hum of activity. "I came in the other night, and the Protestant Christian community was just leaving from a worship, the Buddhists were heading in to meditate, and the Muslim students were here for prayer," he says. "All the while the choir was singing upstairs, and *you couldn't hear them* [downstairs], which was fabulous."



MEET MEMBERS OF THE MULTIFAITH COUNCIL

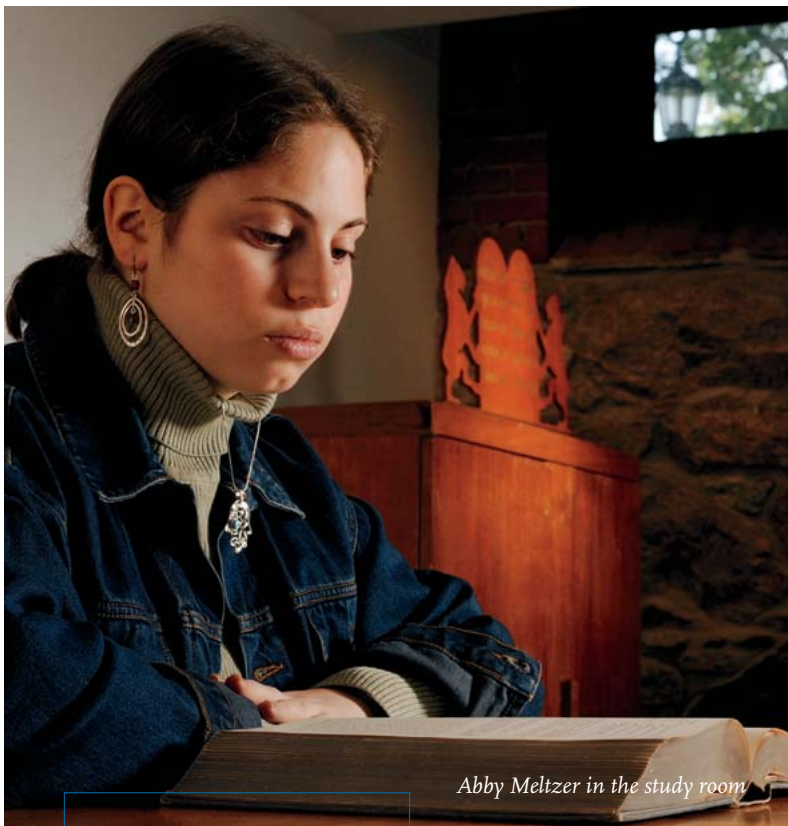
It sounds like the beginning of a bad joke: What do two Muslims, two Jews, and two Mormons have to talk about? But for Wellesley's Multifaith Council, regular gathering and vibrant discussion—even disagreement—are hallmarks of a healthy religious community. The group, which is composed of two representatives from each faith tradition, meets every Wednesday at noon and for occasional retreats and meals. Members might discuss a particular question (What does your religion say about women's leadership? What does your religion teach about the significance of water?), taking the time to register differences and not gloss over conflicts when they arise.

“Having this environment where we're all friends and feel comfortable talking, we openly discuss our religions without feeling shy,” explains Hannah Sholder '09, who is one of the two students representing the Baha'i faith on campus. In these profiles, we invite you to meet seven members of Wellesley's Multifaith Council, and see how they are utilizing the new spaces created by the Multifaith Center.



This “tree of life” table was commissioned from New Mexico artist Jezebel specifically for the space. Below, the Multifaith Council meets in the worship room.





Abby Meltzer in the study room

ABBY MELTZER '10
Glen Rock, N.J.
Judaism

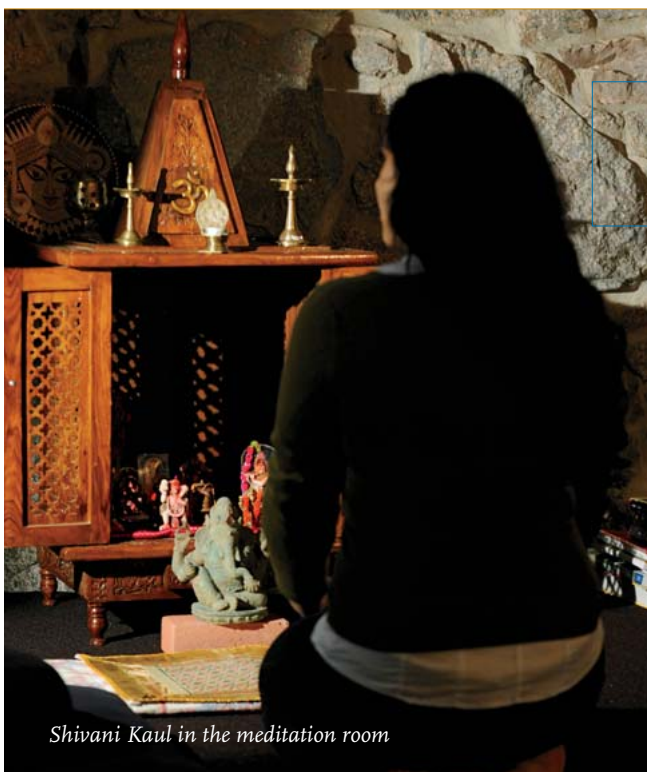
A JEWISH IDENTITY is very important to Abby Meltzer '10, a biology major. Her mother (Laurie Cohen Meltzer '76) lost many of her family members in the Holocaust, a legacy Meltzer carries with her every day. "Our family went through a lot to keep our Jewish identity," she says. "It's important to me to carry on what our family fought so hard to maintain."

'I came into the Multifaith Council thinking that I knew a lot about other religions, and I learned I was wrong very quickly.' —Abby Meltzer '10

That's not to say she's not open to learning about other faiths. "I came into the Multifaith Council thinking that I knew a lot about other religions, and I learned I was wrong very quickly," says Meltzer, who has represented Hillel on the council since her first semester at Wellesley. "I heard about religions that I didn't even know existed, and I learned more about others, like Christianity, that I thought I knew a lot about already."

Meltzer sees the new Multifaith Center as the physical, geographical expression of that shared experience. The study room, which houses one of the campus' two Torah cabinets, will be used frequently by Jewish students, but Meltzer is quick to point out that the space belongs to everyone. "This room gives an opportunity for everyone to learn about each other, whether that be from the books that are provided, or just talking to someone else that is here," she notes.

For Meltzer, that kind of dialogue at Wellesley has meant reaching out to Muslim students. In her first and second years, the Muslims' Ramadan fast coincided with the Jewish students' fall holidays, so they decided to observe their traditions together. "We invited the Muslim students to come pray with us during the last bit of the Yom Kippur services, or they could join us right as we were breaking the fast. It was very powerful to see the Jewish and Muslim students breaking bread together," she says. "You have this idea from what you see in the news that Jews and Muslims can't coexist. It almost gives you hope that it can happen in the world—it's this little spot of idealism, right on our campus. If we can do it here, on our campus, and bring the two groups together peacefully, all hope isn't lost."



SHIVANI KAUL '10
Tulsa, Okla.
Hinduism

FOR SHIVANI KAUL '10, a political-science and South Asian studies double major, part of the joy of the Multifaith Center is its pristine newness. "We're accustomed to the long history of buildings on campus, but it's exciting to know that we're making the history of this building, and contributing to the future of Wellesley itself," she says.

For the Hindu students Kaul represents on the Multifaith Council, some of that history-making will occur in the building's new meditation room. "In the past we had a tiny room in the back of

the chapel," she explains. "Now we're at the heart of something. Our space is part of campus, and our religious life is incorporated right into campus life."

The meditation room, which is also used by Buddhist, Eastern Orthodox, Sikh, and other students, feels sacred from the moment visitors shed their shoes at the door. Lights are on dimmers, and meditation cushions offer soft seating. Kaul is enamored of the space and its possibilities. "We'll do regular *puja* here every Sunday morning," she says, referring to a Hindu ritual

Shivani Kaul in the meditation room



of offering and praise. On some Monday evenings, Darshana, Wellesley's Hindu group with about 25 active members, will also hold discussions on different aspects of Hinduism; the series last year included one discussion on the Divine Feminine and another on the Mahabharata, an ancient Sanskrit epic. Some of Darshana's larger events, including an annual spring lecture, can happen in the large worship and meeting room at the center of the space. Hindu students are particularly pleased by the adjacent kitchen, and the possibility of hosting vegetarian meals and community events.

'In the past we had a tiny room in the back of the chapel. Now we're at the heart of something. Our space is part of campus, and our religious life is incorporated right into campus life.' —Shivani Kaul '10

Kaul considers herself a practicing Hindu with "a little bit of atheism," which she points out is not as contradictory as non-Hindus might think. "A lot of people wonder how the two function together, but throughout Hinduism's history there has been a strand of people questioning," she explains. Her connection to Hinduism got a shot in the arm in 2007 when she accompanied a Wellesley group to Benares, one of India's most sacred cities, for three weeks. "We stayed at an ashram that was also an orphanage," she says. "That was an incredible experience. Benares is undoubtedly one of the most spiritual places for Hinduism."

PATRICIA GANSERT '11
South Salem, N.Y.
Roman Catholicism

IT MAY SEEM PROSAIC, but one aspect of the new Multifaith Center that gets Patricia Gansert '11 really excited is a closet. The Catholic student loves having a dedicated place to store all of the supplies the Newman Catholic Ministry needs for Sunday afternoon Mass. "Before, we didn't have much space, so we had to just put the chalices and various cloths and the container of unblessed hosts in a box we kept under the sink," she says. Now, each religious group has abundant storage space and baskets, labels, and shelves, which help each group feel more at home in the Multifaith Center.

Gansert, a sophomore from New York state, never knew what the old Houghton basement looked like—it

'For me, [the council] was really the first time I was able to meet members of other religious traditions in person. There's just so much more out there in the world than I had ever realized.'

—Patricia Gansert '11



Patricia Gansert in the worship room



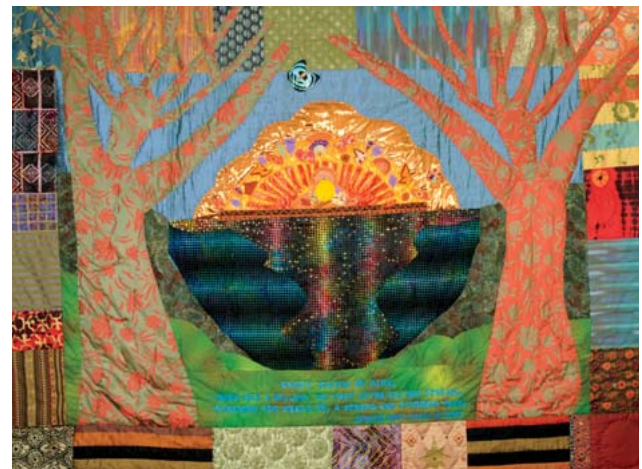
Laura Cox at a Multifaith Council meeting in the worship room

LAURA COX '10
Camden, N.J.
Protestant Christianity


was being renovated during her first year—but acknowledges that she’s “heard horror stories about it.” She thinks the new Multifaith Center is both beautiful and functional, and feels especially drawn to the study room. “It’s a very welcoming space, and it’s comfortable,” she says. “I actually go there quite often in the evenings to sketch for my art class. It’s usually pretty quiet, so I can concentrate, and I feel very much at peace.”

The study room is also where Protestant student Laura Cox '10 was going to attend Bible study this year, but when around 25 students showed up for the first meeting, the group had to move to more spacious quarters in the worship room. “You can have Bible study anywhere, but it’s nice to have a designated space,” says Cox, who represents the nondenominational evangelical group Real Life on the Multifaith Council. Cox also enjoys just hanging out in the center. “I do my homework in the gathering room,” she says. “The whole thing is wireless, and you can do whatever you need to do down here. I also like the fact that it is all so eco-friendly, with low-flow toilets and all of the rooms on motion sensors so it doesn’t waste electricity.”

Both Christian students report that their participation on the Multifaith Council has strengthened their own faith while broadening their view of the world. “It’s great to come and get other people’s ideas,” says Cox. “I never thought I’d be learning about Jainism, but one afternoon when I was really bored I started Googling Jainism, and did that for four hours!” Gansert says that before she came to Wellesley, she had never met a pagan, a Mormon, a Buddhist, or a Hindu. “For me, [the council] was really the first time I was able to meet members of other religious traditions in person,” she says. “There’s just so much more out there in the world than I had ever realized.”



Massachusetts quiltmaker and fabric artist Clara Wainwright made the quilt that greets visitors at the entrance of the Multifaith Center. A tree motif appears in artwork throughout the space.



MEHREEN IQBAL '09
Alpharetta, Ga.
Islam

WHEN MEHREEN IQBAL '09 BEGAN her first day of classes at Wellesley this year, she faced an extra challenge in addition to the usual chaos of figuring out her schedule, adjusting to new professors, and finding all of her classes: It was just the second day of Ramadan, and her body was still getting used to food deprivation and a rearranged sleep schedule. During Ramadan—the ninth and most holy month of the Islamic calendar—Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, set aside more time for prayer and charity, and read the Quran more intently. Iqbal and some of her Muslim friends get together each morning for a predawn meal before the fast begins. “While it’s not fun to get up that early, we have sort of a mini-community in Stone-Davis, and great conversations,” she says. “It’s a great way to build sisterhood. Everybody contributes something to the breakfast.”

Iqbal, a biochemistry major who plans to go to medical school, says it’s not the fasting itself that is terribly challenging, but the sleepiness that accompanies it, especially in Ramadan’s early days. “You’re a little off kilter,” she admits. “But I have to say that fasting is really beautiful. It gives me a chance to reflect on what I want to improve about myself, but also to be grateful—grateful that I am at Wellesley, getting a world-class education.”

And now, that world-class education includes the Multifaith Center, which has been designed partly to meet the needs of the campus’s approximately 60 Muslim students, whose religion charges them with praying five times a day. While the prayer room is used by students of many faiths, including Christians, it was planned to be consistent with Islam: no statues or icons decorate the space; beautiful prayer rugs face east toward Mecca; and there is a special seated shower where students can perform the required ablutions (usually, washing of the hands, face, and feet) before prayers. Iqbal notes that Muslim students can pray wherever they are—which, for her, often means her dorm room or the science center—but that it’s wonderful to have a dedicated place just for that purpose.

“We initiated the space right away,” Iqbal says. “It’s just been so great to have a central point for all of us.” Also, she adds, the Multifaith Center’s proximity to Stone-Davis, where *halal* meat is available for Muslim students several times a week, means that students might head there for an informal meal together after prayers.

Iqbal is also excited that the Multifaith Center’s common areas make it easy for al-Muslimat, the Muslim student group, to hold large events, like an *iftar* (break-the-fast meal) for faculty and staff, a community-service event, or a lecture. As the organization’s community-service chair, Iqbal wants to draw attention to the Darfur crisis and invite all the faith-based organizations on campus to help. “We want to set the tone for the year of uniting for social justice, which is an important theme of Islam,” she says.

Mehreen Iqbal in the prayer room

‘We initiated the space [for prayer] right away. It’s just been so great to have a central point for all of us.’

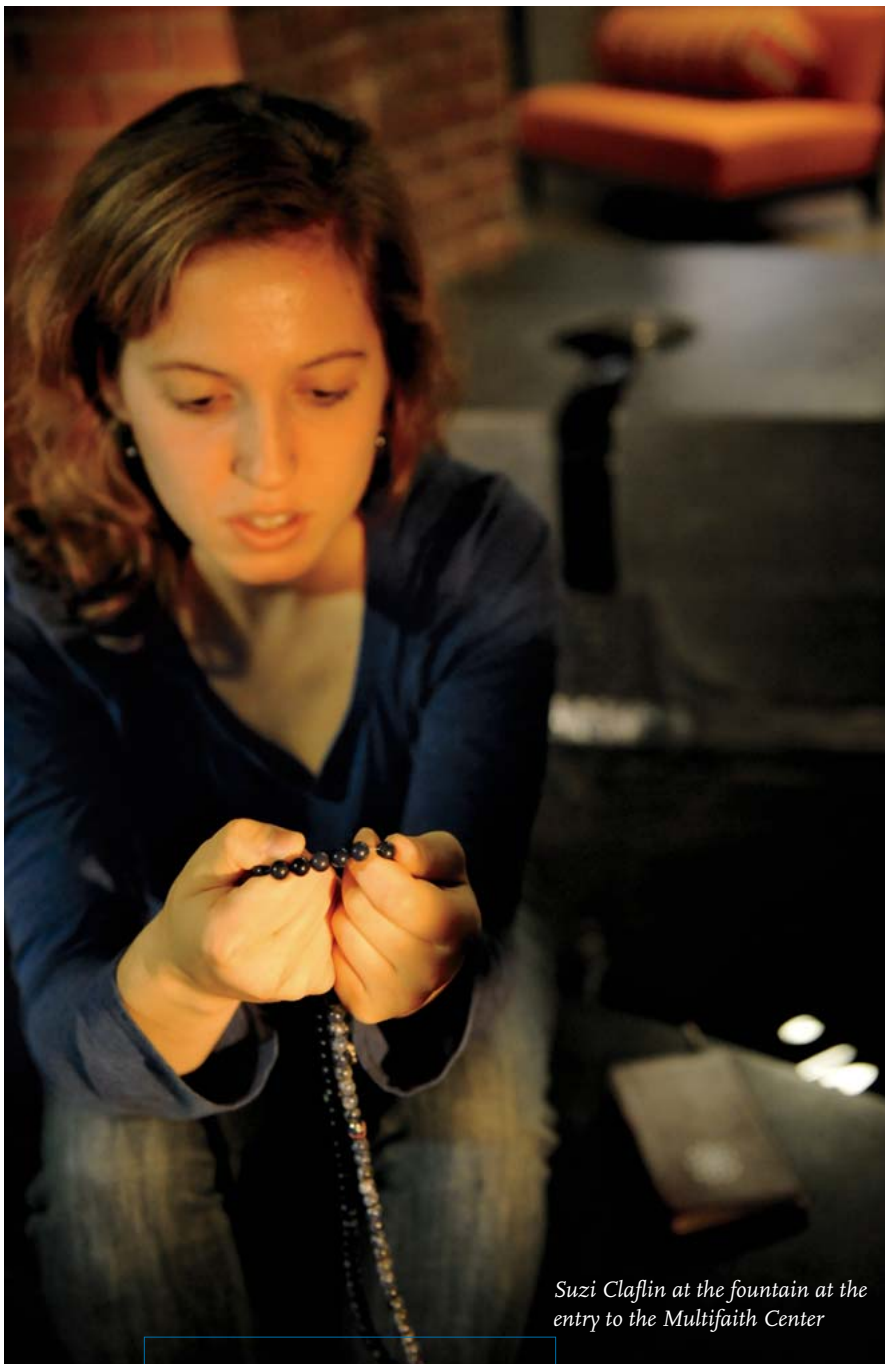
—Mehreen Iqbal '09



THE BUSTLING UPPER CHAPEL

The main chapel upstairs underwent a complete restoration—with new floors, lighting and wiring, and comfortable new chairs—that still maintained the historical character of the space. On any given day, there may be an alumnae worship service, a choir practice, or a labyrinth walk. At right (top), Dean Victor Kazanjian addresses alumnae at a multifaith service.





Suzi Claflin at the fountain at the entry to the Multifaith Center

SUSAN CLAFLIN '09
Bradford, Vt.
The Baha'i Faith

YES, SUZI CLAFLIN '09 is descended from the Claflins of Claflin Hall. Yes, she has lived in Claflin, and was even a Resident Assistant there. And yes, she hears those questions a lot.

Despite the Wellesley-blue pedigree, it wasn't a foregone conclusion that the Vermont native would choose a women's college. But when she came for spring open campus during her senior year of high school, she immediately felt at home. "I was impressed by the community here, and by the sense of comfort," Claflin recalls. "I felt I was welcome and could make this place my own."

She has certainly made her mark, especially in the campus' religious life. Claflin is double majoring in biology and peace-and-justice studies and is especially interested in the

'This space, to me, is a physical representation of everything that we strive for in Multifaith Council. We want to delve into the depths of who we are, and come into a better understanding. This space is designed for that, to encompass everything you might want to do in your search for a better understanding of yourself.'

—Suzi Claflin '09

intersection of religion, identity, and violence. These concerns animate her life both inside and outside the classroom, where she is a leader in the Multifaith Council and among the small group of Baha'i students on campus.

Claflin did not grow up in the Baha'i faith. Her parents were basically agnostic, but willing to let her explore whatever caught her imagination. She dabbled in paganism, attended an evangelical Christian Bible study for several years, and read about Buddhism with interest. When she was 16, an aunt who was Baha'i took her to a retreat and gave her some literature to read, and she studied the faith seriously for two years. At 18, she "signed the card"—formally registered with the Baha'i faith as a member—and landed at Wellesley's orientation just a week later. She was immediately recruited to help represent the religion on the Multifaith Council.

Claflin finds the council's dialogue fulfilling. "It teaches us to see each other in a dynamic way, in a way that is beyond a single identity," she explains. "We're not just representatives of [different] faiths. We're also tennis players and human-rights activists and excellent writers. If you can really learn that skill—to see people as multifaceted—it's impossible to feel hatred toward them. You can see where you connect, and you can experience love toward another person."

Claflin is thrilled about the new spaces in the Multifaith Center, where Baha'i students will gather in the study room for regular devotionals and a Ruhi book group, a study circle that focuses on the writings of founder Baha'u'llah and other spiritual leaders. She also expects to spend time praying individually in the prayer room. "This space, to me, is a physical representation of everything that we strive for in Multifaith Council," Claflin says. "We want to delve into the depths of who we are, and come into a better understanding. This space is designed for that, to encompass everything you might want to do in your search for a better understanding of yourself."

JOHANNAH MURPHY '09
Framingham, Mass.
Unitarian Universalism

WHEN JO MURPHY '09 was in the third grade, she decided she wanted to be Jewish. She constructed a menorah out of Play-Doh, instructed her mom to make latkes, and made Hanukkah presents for her family. Her parents, who were Unitarian Universalist, believed in the values of religious exploration and multicultural respect, so they encouraged Murphy's early seeking. And while the Framingham, Mass., native remains in the UU tradition and plans to become ordained in that denomination, the spirit of exploration and excitement about other religions has never really left her.

'Meeting so many people from so many different faiths and backgrounds has shaped my thinking about how faiths interact, and what it takes to be part of a group with real diversity.'


—Jo Murphy '09

She has loved being part of the Multifaith Council. "I think that as a minister, one of your roles is figuring out how to deal with conflicts within a community," Murphy says. "Multifaith Council is one of the few organizations I've been a part of that embraces conflict head on. Meeting so many people from so many different faiths and backgrounds has shaped my thinking about how faiths interact, and what it takes to be part of a group with real diversity."

Murphy's contributions to the council began even before she was a member, when she proposed a large artistic mural for the pre-renovation chapel basement. In discussing and planning the multifaith mural, Murphy got increasingly involved with the council and eventually became a formal member. Although the mural is not part of the new Multifaith Center, she is glad

to relinquish it in favor of the many sacred spaces that the basement now houses. "I really like how there's the large room in the center, and off of it are the smaller prayer rooms and individual rooms. All of these faiths can join at the center but also have their own spaces," she reflects.

She's also thrilled about the kitchen and the prospect of more food-related events. Food is important to Murphy, who started the College's

first-ever sustainable farm. She and her sister (Eliza Murphy '10) have begun selling the farm's vegetables to El Table and the dining halls, and donating some to hunger relief. 

Jana Riess '91 earned a Ph.D. in American religious history from Columbia. She is an acquisitions editor for Westminster John Knox Press and a freelance writer and editor.



Jo Murphy in the gathering space