

Keeping Pace

The latest news from The Pace Center, VCU's Methodist Campus Ministry



Letter from the Student Development & Engagement Coordinator

Dear Pace Supporter,

In this season of giving, I have been reflecting deeply on what it means to receive gifts from others. Question: what is a gift you have received from someone recently? This could be a physical gift like an object, a piece of clothing, or maybe a book. But at Pace, we talk a lot about non-physical gifts. Such as, showing kindness from a stranger, the gift of a smile, or the gift of rest or respite from a difficult situation. Then, we think about how we can share those with one another.

For me, a gift I have received recently is in the stories that students share. I always find myself inspired by the wonder, curiosity, and care that students bring to their studies and their lives at VCU. That gift then multiplies. Because students share these gifts with one another in forming relationships, building cross-cultural and cross-campus partnerships, and building community with one another here at Pace.

One of the things that initially drew me to Pace was the opportunity to focus more on pastoral care, or 'going deeper' with students. Pace staff - myself, Katie, Kelley, and Jean - meet students where they are and walk alongside them - no matter where that journey takes us. That is a gift the four of us are able to give.

But the gifts I have received from doing this work far surpass that which I am able to give. We receive unexpected gifts along the way from students. Seeds planted at the beginning of the semester are now bearing fruit. Thought-provoking ideas arise from students in our Fellowship lessons. Or, the simple gift of bringing light and joy to Pace every day. There's nothing quite like a smile and big, 'HELLLOOOO!' from a student as you walk through the doors at Pace. That is where I have seen the fruits of 'going deeper' with students, staff, and the greater VCU community.

Amidst this season of gratitude and thanksgiving, I hope you will consider helping us in our mission of going deeper with students by recommending a student to Pace, cooking a meal, signing up to be a mentor, or making a year-end contribution. We cannot continue this work without your faithful support and the gifts that each of you bring to Pace.

We have so much to be grateful for. I am thankful.

RUSSELL M. KERR III

Russell M. Kerr III

Student Development & Engagement Coordinator



When Giving Leads to Burn Out

What does it mean to build a relationship with someone? At Pace, we spend a lot of time asking students: “What are your gifts?” Pace believes that people can use their gifts to enhance their communities. But what happens when you are only giving? In an exercise from Embrace Communities, students were asked what would happen to your community if you ignored the gifts of other community members. What would happen if you were only giving your gifts, without receiving anything back?

Student Lia Fewell, a sophomore majoring in Psychology, shared her insight: “A lot of times people think about being a good community member as giving your gifts to the community or maybe to individual community members. But if you’re only giving all the time, it will lead to burnout. You’re putting a lot into a community, but you’re not really open to receiving things back from it. A community should also be something that’s providing you with a sense of connection to other people.”

“There’s this concept of a one-way giving model,” says Russ Kerr, Pace’s Student Development and Engagement Coordinator. “If you’re constantly giving, giving, giving, and you’re never receiving

something from the community members – whether that’s a gift, or simply the enjoyment of another’s company – you’re not engaging in a healthy way.”

Communities are built upon relationships. When you simply provide without trying to connect to the people in the community – without forming relationships – you lose connection with the community you intended to help. “The first shift is seeing yourself not as above the community or only having something to give,” says Russ. “Once you realize you can also be the recipient of gifts, relationships can start to form.”

Pace doesn’t simply encourage this practice at events for VCU students. Pace students have taken this concept to Belmont Neighborhood Resources food pantry. Students have worked with Belmont staff

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Students practice a gratitude exercise during Mindful Creativity, a weekly event.

“If it’s something you can share with someone else and it affects their life, then that’s a gift that you’re sharing with them.”

- Lia, VCU Sophomore, Psychology

and volunteers to determine ways to connect to the community besides the one-way giving of food. Anabelle Beavers, a Union Seminary intern, has been working with Pace Students to implement asset-based strategies to build relationships with Belmont clients. "Some of it is just being aware of how to interact with the people there and not just think of them as needing something."

"Mindfulness is one gift that I've received from the community here at Pace." Lia reflected. "I was always skeptical of mindfulness - being self-aware of the fact that everything is falling apart doesn't make it stop falling apart! But being here at Pace, I started to think about mindfulness differently because being at Pace gives you a sense of greater ownership over the things that you do. It's made me realize that I do have more control over different aspects of my life."

Lia feels that she's found community at Pace. "We check in with each other. If someone is like, 'Hey, things are falling apart,' we will talk through it step by step, like - ok, what can we do?" And that's the whole point - teaching students to listen deeply to one another and respond lovingly is Pace's intent.

"A lot of students initially come to the Pace Center just to volunteer. I say, 'Well, that's great! But why don't you just *attend* one of our events first? Our events are *for you!*'" "When you volunteer at Pace, it's not really about making sure the dishes get washed. It's about getting to know each other - getting to know the people who are washing dishes together. That's the gift. Now you've gotten to know someone new and this big, 30,000-person campus doesn't feel so big anymore."

Keeping Pace

What does Asset-Based Community Development mean to you?



Kayani Jaramillo

Pace Fellow,
VCU Junior

To me, it's about building a foundation for a successful and engaged community by shining a light on the gifts that individuals bring to the table. It means coming together and sharing our skills and passions with each other to create meaningful interactions and unity.



ABCD is sharing your talents and learning the skills of others in order to develop a safe, supportive, and flourishing community.

Ami Zhang

Pace Fellow,
VCU Sophomore



Elijah Bustamante

Pace Fellow, VCU Sophomore

Discovering the unique gifts of people in the community and utilizing those gifts to build up others. Embracing your community how it is!

Beyond Pace: Servant Leadership in the Wild

Pace teaches its Fellows Servant Leadership principles - how to discover and support the gifts and inputs of all community members to build a thriving community. Pace's goal is to create civically-engaged students who will take Servant Leadership practices with them when they leave VCU. Some Pace students have already found other opportunities to apply the techniques they've learned at Pace.

BaoTRAN Cao, a junior in Marketing at VCU, is very involved in the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA). This winter she will be busy coordinating the Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference for VSA as the director of the Entertainment Committee. Her work at Pace has helped prepare her for this role. Through Pace's Fellowship program, she has honed leadership skills, such as how to structure meetings, how to communicate, and how to listen deeply.

At a recent VSA board retreat, BaoTRAN conducted a Servant Leadership workshop. The Vietnamese Student Association works to build a community that wants to learn about and share Vietnamese culture. "I felt that servant leadership principles were applicable to what we do in MAUVSA (Mid-Atlantic Union of Vietnamese Student Associations). I taught people about gifts - what are your gifts and what gifts do you use to contribute to your own VSA boards. I was kind of proud of myself for being able to voice, like, 'This is the kind of leadership style I have, and maybe this actually does apply to some of you, but you may not have realized it.'"

After the workshop, BaoTRAN noticed other VSA members also considered themselves to be Servant Leaders. "I think they all definitely got something out of it. When I interviewed people afterwards, some of them mentioned Servant Leadership because of my workshop. I was like, 'Whoa! Now you know!' Something small - like, even just learning what this term means, and where

you can apply it, and what your gifts and skills are - is so powerful."

Besides being involved in VSA and Pace's Fellowship program, BaoTRAN also participates in Student Circles at Pace - small groups where students develop a relationship with a non-student adult who they can rely upon for guidance as they navigate college life. In these groups, students learn to listen reflectively and communicate on a deep level in order to support each other. These learned skills are critical to building community.

BaoTRAN has been incorporating exercises from Student Circles into her conversations with friends. During one session, a reflective listening exercise helped them to get to know one another. BaoTRAN ended up using the questions in conversations with her friends. "I was like, these are really interesting, so I just kind of took these questions and asked my roommates. I live with them, but it's not like I see them all the time."

BaoTRAN is just one example of a Pace success story. She's a deeply engaged student who has rebounded from pandemic-era social isolation by helping to build the communities she wants to be a part of. She's taken Servant Leadership principals from Pace and applied them in other areas of her life. "I have a lot of passion because I love giving back to people and providing service when I can."

"I have a lot of passion because I love giving back to people and providing service when I can."

-BaoTRAN, VCU junior, Marketing

“I saw the club as a way to give back and teach others how to knit... What I love about fiber is that people are so willing to share their knowledge with the community.”

-Nicole, VCU senior, Social Work

The Intersection of Art and Outreach

One of Pace’s most popular programs this year is Strings & Things, a weekly crochet and knitting circle that has been attended by over 100 students. Strings & Things is a place where students find community. “It’s very much a comfy, homey, and safe space,” said Stefan Benavides, a VCU junior majoring in Psychology. “I sit wherever is available and chit-chat with whoever is nearby. We’re able to connect over what we’re making.”

Strings & Things leader, Nicole Dann, toured the Pace Center with their Methodist Church’s choir when they were in high school and reconnected with Pace through Strings & Things. They wanted to go deeper with the group and join two of their passions together. “I’m really big on outreach and just letting people know that we’re here.” Nicole has been a member of Rams in Recovery, VCU’s collegiate recovery program since they were a freshman. “I entered recovery in High School and was attracted to VCU because of Rams in Recovery. I am now serving there on an Americorp contract as a peer recovery specialist.”

Nicole started knitting when they were 15 and wanted to share their gift. “I saw the club as a way to give back and teach others how to knit. I love that it’s just so casual. People are really friendly. And what I love about fiber is that people are so willing to share their knowledge with the community.” Nicole felt that the Strings & Things

community might be open to learning something else as well. “Rams in Recovery has this coffee bike on campus. I thought it might be cool to collaborate and bring the two groups together.”

The coffee bike is a component of an art project called *Free Hot Coffee* by VCU Professor John Freyer. “The purpose of the bike is to do a mix of art and outreach,” Nicole explained. “The coffee takes a while to make, so during the process, while the person is grinding the coffee, we’re sharing about recovery on college campuses.” During the event at Pace, Nicole also presented a NARCAN training. “We trained six people to administer NARCAN and we got to talk to these folks and get to know them.”

“It was fascinating to learn what NARCAN is and how beneficial it is to carry it.” Stefan, who is a regular at Strings & Things, says he and other participants got a lot out of the event. “Nicole showed us what to look for to determine if someone is overdosing. People in recovery need hobbies and coping strategies, so it was a nice collaboration with Strings & Things. It was nice to see that everyone was very open to learning.”



Students at Strings and Things - a crochet and knitting club.

Meet Kelley Connelly

Rev. Kelley Connelly (she/her) serves as Pace's Church and Community Relations Coordinator. She is the Pastor for Campus Ministry and Urban Engagement at Second Presbyterian Church in downtown Richmond. Her position is in partnership between the Presbytery of the James, Second Presbyterian, and Union Seminary. Kelley is a graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary and Shenandoah University. In her free time, she enjoys cooking, hiking throughout the commonwealth, seeing live music, making French press coffee, visiting friends and family, and doing whatever her rescue dog, Fynn, wants to do.

1. Why did Ukirk merge with Pace? I started with UKirk in the Fall of 2020 - not exactly an ideal time to start a college ministry position. The students and I made the best of the situation with zoom game nights, picnics, and virtual gatherings. But I knew deep down the students deserved something more. A few weeks later I was talking with Rev. Katie Gooch of Pace, and we realized we had a lot of the same ministerial goals - mainly, to provide a safe place of belonging and community for the students of VCU. By the end of that conversation, we decided we wanted to work together for our shared vision of a foretaste of the Kingdom of God at VCU.

2. What have you enjoyed most about working with Pace/VCU students? Those who know me well will tell you that I am quite the extrovert, it's true :). So it's no surprise that my favorite part of working with students is the relationships! I've loved just about every conversation I've had with a student. Whether it's around the table sharing a meal, discussing our highs and lows of the week, or during morning communion, sharing thoughts about scripture. I love hearing their thoughts and wisdom. It is such a blessing to be able to walk with them in their educational journey, and I'm quite thankful for the ways in which they fuel my extroverted spirit.



Kelley Connelly (she/her), Pace's Church and Community Relations Coordinator

3. What are you looking forward to for the spring semester? I think what I'm most looking forward to is expanding this partnership in the Richmond community. Within my role at Pace, I focus on church relations. I'm excited to see how faith communities in the Richmond area will get involved and support VCU students. Churches are often eager to engage with college students in their area—but sometimes they're not sure how to go about it. Pace provides a platform for congregations to support students in a variety of ways. My hope is that churches will see the wonderful work happening at Pace and jump at the chance to get involved.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?



DONATE

by mail or online



BECOME A MENTOR

by online form



REFER A VCU STUDENT

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Visit www.thepacecenter.com to learn more

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