

Parents Weekend Multifaith Service  
University Public Worship  
Stanford Memorial Church  
February 26, 2012

### **Reflection by Jenna Nicholas '12**

Good Morning!

A very warm welcome to you all, especially to all the parents in the audience.

I remember four years ago sitting where you are now during Admit weekend, wondering what my life would be like here, intellectually, socially as well as spiritually.

I must say that the crazy Stanford band brought a few questions to my mind, but overall I felt inwardly that this was the right place to be. I certainly have had no regrets.

In fact, Stanford has brought me more than I could have ever hoped or dreamed for.

I am a member of the Baha'i Faith which had its origins just 160 years ago in the Middle East.

Exactly 100 years ago to this very year, in 1912, just a few years after the founding of Stanford University, one of the central figures of the Baha'i Faith, Abdul Baha, visited Stanford at the invitation of Daniel Star Jordan, Stanford's first President, to address an audience of 2000 students and faculty.

He came dressed in his Middle Eastern robes, with a long beard, a sight unfamiliar now, but even more so then.

He talked about international unity, the oneness of religion, how science and religion should develop hand in hand, and he praised Stanford for its openness of spirit and desire to serve mankind.

He received a standing ovation.

This might seem a strange person to invite to speak at such a new university, but it tells you something about Stanford. Stanford was and is open to all and at the forefront of innovative ideas for humanity.

One of the quotes from Daniel Starr Jordan, this same President who welcomed Abdul Baha all those years ago is:

“Be life long or short, its completeness depends on what it is lived for”.

Another is that

“Wisdom is knowing what to do next; virtue is doing it”.

As you can see, there has always been great emphasis here at Stanford on putting the education received to use to benefit society in some way.

This stunning Memorial Church is a testament to the spirit of Stanford to draw students and faculty to the higher life.

The Stanford family, who were religious, but not committed to any denomination, decreed that the church would be open to all.

It was an experiment to test whether a non-sectarian church could minister to the spiritual needs of a great university.

I believe it was very advanced in its thinking and it has certainly passed the test of time.

Any religion can hold a service here and there are many opportunities for inter-faith programs.

Religion for me is not just professing a Faith; it is about thoughts, actions and principles.

“Let deeds, not words be your adorning” is one of my favourite Baha’i quotations.

At Stanford there are many opportunities to get a socially aware education.

It is just a question of choice.

I have been fortunate to work with the Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, the HAAS Center for Public Service, the Stanford Social Innovation Review and a large Social Entrepreneurship Competition.

In this way, Faith becomes real and practical, as well as spiritual and meditative.

I believe that Stanford has helped to shape me in incredible ways.

There is a wonderful passage from the Bahai writings that sums up my attitude towards how inspiring Stanford has been for me.

‘Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.’”

I am constantly overwhelmed by the support, encouragement and vision of everybody around me.

It is truly humbling and inspiring to be in such an environment.

People are continually thinking about how they can live more purposeful and meaningful lives.

One such example of this is the Fellowship for Religious Encounter, a weekly gathering of people from different faith backgrounds who come together to discuss various issues related to their respective faiths.

I participated in this and appreciated the opportunity to learn from people from all different perspectives.

I would like to end with a section of the transcript from Abdu'l-Baha's talk at Stanford in 1912, as follows:

“Praise be to God! I find myself in an assemblage, the members of which are peace loving and advocates of international unity.

The thoughts of all present are centered upon the oneness of the world of mankind, and every ambition is to render service in the cause of human uplift and betterment.

I supplicate God that He may confirm and assist you, that each one of you may become a professor emeritus in the world of scientific knowledge, a faithful standard-bearer of peace and bonds of agreement between the hearts of men.”

I believe these words are as true now as they were then.

Thank you.