

January 01, 2020

Friend,

Calls to “go” and “do” – to relocate to places of concentrated need in order to serve people and communities in proximity – have deeply shaped my life. My name is Sarah; I recently graduated from the University of Virginia (Class of 2019). In the course of my undergraduate studies, I journeyed to Greensboro for a service trip with Community Housing Solutions, the West Side of Chicago for urban ministry work, and New York City for fellowship at the intersection of technology and social impact. The most transformative experience of all, however, was a call to “go” and “do” in Charlottesville’s own Venable and 10<sup>th</sup> and Page neighborhoods.

The Perkins House Charlottesville is an intentional living community of undergraduate students dedicated to Dr. John M. Perkins’ “three R’s of community development.” These broad principles – relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution – are rooted in Dr. Perkins’ teachings as a Christian minister and experience as a civil rights activist; he calls for radical alignment with the biblical command to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mark 12:31 KJV). The underlying charge is to participate in God’s transformation of communities through the restoration of dignity. In the words of Dr. Perkins, “You don’t give people dignity. You affirm it.” This is where reconciliation happens.



The Perkins House Charlottesville’s way of life for students weaves together inward-facing and outward-facing routines of neighbor-love through service; residents care both for their fellow house members and for their broader community members. Rhythms of outward-facing service involve volunteering in the community on Sunday afternoons, regularly attending community events, welcoming neighbors for meals and fellowship, and generally seeking to build relationships with the people whose stake in the city of Charlottesville is far greater than that of the average four-year college student. Living in the Perkins House - and being situated in the specific context of Charlottesville - means reckoning with privilege, transience, history, injustice, and mercy.

Truly, I have grown even more appreciative of the ways in which the Perkins House shaped my understanding of a God who longs for justice - especially as enacted through deeply-rooted communities - since graduating from UVA. The same sort of reckoning that must be done in social justice work remains relevant in my newly begun profession as a Technology Consultant in IBM’s Federal Services Sector. The training I received in the Perkins House has equipped me to continue wrestling with such questions as, “Who am I in the world?”, “Who does God call me to be?”, and “What impact will I have in my communities?”

I experienced the Perkins House as the beginning of my lived relationship with the Lord. The God of my childhood was an abstract and uninvolved deity confined to the contents of a book and church service on Sundays. Now I understand my God as one who actively witnesses human suffering and brokenness, became flesh to know it more intimately, and - out of this divine empathy - brings about radical healing and reconciliation. My God is the one who cries out at injustice and, through relationship, compels Jesus-followers to participate in spiritual, social, political, and economic action to protest against it. It was the tangible love of my housemates and neighbors that helped me to connect the life and death of Jesus with suffering in the world. The reality of a God who *sees, cares* and *moves* miraculously entails the laboring of Jesus-followers who “act justly” on a daily basis (Micah 6:8). The Perkins House, for me, was the start of a faith that made sense because it meant something in the world.

Yours,

Sarah Christine Bland  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

- Micah 6:8