

ETHICIST MARGARET FARLEY HAILED AS MENTOR BY FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, AND STUDENTS

by Gustav Spohn '73 M.A.R.

ON APRIL 15 AND 16, 2005, MORE than 200 colleagues, friends, and former students gathered at Yale Divinity School to honor the life and work of Professor Margaret Farley '70 M.Phil., '73 Ph.D., Gilbert L. Stark Professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School. The event, much like Farley's contributions to the academy and the classroom, was multifaceted, featuring a conference, vespers service, and celebrative reception. There were also multiple purposes for the gathering: an endowed chair and *Festschrift* were presented to celebrate the 70th "tax-day" birthday of YDS's beloved professor. The event was not, Farley was quick to note, the announcement of her retirement.

The conference portion of the celebration, titled *Just Love: Feminism, Theology and Ethics in a Global Context* featured four panels of experts offering presentations on disciplines



Margaret Farley '70 M.Phil., '73 Ph.D. offers her reflections after several panel discussions on the impact of her work on ethics, feminist theology, and the church.

that have been deeply influenced by Farley's work over the last three decades.

During the panel *Method: Feminism, Theology, and Ethics*, William O'Neill, who teaches social ethics at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and works in an inner-city parish, described Farley's work as a "fusion of a Kantian morality of respect with a feminist ethics of care." That is, the foundational component of Farley's ethics is the diversity and complexity of concrete human experience, in all of its sufferings and joys. As panelist Joyce McClure '92 M.A., '95 M.Phil., '98 Ph.D. of Oberlin Col-

lege put it, Farley's ethics teach that "experience is an indispensable source of moral knowledge" that can "provide insights about peoples' needs." In linking "compassion" with "respect," and "love" with "just," Farley forges a moral imperative that is a call to justice and responsibility informed by warmth and caring. These theories have reached beyond the realm of theological ethics into other academic areas. Panelist M. Cathleen Kaveny '86 M.A., '90 J.D., '90 M.Phil., '91 Ph.D., who teaches at Notre Dame Law School, mentioned a case study she uses in the classroom "to suggest how Margaret's idea of 'compassionate respect' might be used to illuminate the arena of the law, particularly the arena of common law reasoning."

Farley's work also influences those who work within the church. At a panel titled *Just Sex and the Churches* Lisa Cahill, J. Donald Monan professor of theology at Boston College, pointed to Farley's emphasis on empowerment of the laity within the Roman Catholic tradition as a major contribution. Farley has also influenced many ministers across denominational lines through her long teaching career.

Her contributions do not stop at the doors of the church and the university. She has long been committed to applying her knowledge in the world. Farley founded the *Project on Gender, Faith, and Responses to HIV/AIDS*, which co-sponsored a major conference at YDS in 2001 and is planning additional conferences in Africa. *Justice and Love for a World in Crisis: HIV/AIDS and Africa*, panelist David Hollenbach '74 M.Phil., '75 Ph.D., Margaret O'Brien Flatley professor of theology at Boston College, pointed to Farley's work in Africa as an example of "genuine dialogue across cultural borders" and evidence that "commitment to universal norms and respect for cultural difference need not be adversaries." Panelist M. Shawn Copeland, an associate professor of theology at Boston College, further cited Farley's partnership with women African theologians as exemplary: "Margaret Farley's work has made the most despised sufferers visible, uncovered our commitment to one another in just love, and offered us a grounding, strategic, and disturbing opportunity made possible only through love of God and love of neighbor."

Farley's influence on medical ethics was explored during the panel *Compassionate Respect: A Larger Ethic for Health-care*. Panelist Sherwin Nuland '55 M.D., author of the



Barbara Lundblad '79 M.Div. offers a sermon (left) at the vespers service (center) that was part of the celebration. After worship, Janet Tanner '98 M.A.R. introduced the initiative for the Margaret Farley Chair in Social Ethics during a reception in the Common Room.

award-winning book *How We Die* and self-described "religious skeptic" served for years with Farley on the Bioethics Committee of Yale-New Haven Hospital. He attributed his appropriation of religious language in the sphere of medicine to Farley—words and phrases like "sacred trust," "priesthood of service," and "pastoral." Farley is currently co-chair of the Interdisciplinary Bioethics Project at Yale, an initiative that brings together teachers and students from around Yale and hosts visiting bioethics scholars.

Perhaps the highlight of the two-day event came on Friday night when attendees gathered for a Vespers service and reception. Presiding at the service was Jamie Manson '02 M.Div., a former research assistant to Farley and current director of publications at YDS, and offering a typically excellent sermon was Barbara Lundblad '79 M.Div. Following worship, friends and colleagues gathered with food and drink to toast the new *Festschrift* and endowed chair created in Farley's honor.

In presenting the *Festschrift*, *A Just and True Love, Feminism at the Frontiers of Theological Ethics*, editors Maura Ryan '89 M.A., '90 M.Phil., '93 Ph.D. and Brian F. Linnane '90 M.A., '91 M.Phil., '94 Ph.D. said the fifteen essays in the volume "serve to chart the important influence of feminist theory and methodology generally, and Margaret's work particularly on Christian ethical reflection in the contemporary world." The *Festschrift*, published by the University of Notre Dame Press, is available for purchase at the Yale Divinity School Student Book Supply (www.yale.edu/divinity/sbs).

Presenting the Margaret A. Farley Chair in Christian Social Ethics was Janet W. Tanner '98 M.A.R. a member

of the YDS Board of Advisors and another former Farley student. Tanner, who has led the initiative to endow a junior chair, reported at the reception that about half of the \$1.25 million necessary for funding the chair had been raised. "There's no question this is happening," she said. "The only question is whether it will happen in a year or a few years from now." To donate to the chair, please visit www.yale.edu/divinity or call 203.432.5358.

"I looked out around me this afternoon, and I said, 'I know all of these people,'" remarked Farley with her classic wit at the packed reception in the YDS Common Room. "This is a time to celebrate these truly wonderful former students and colleagues I've had at Yale Divinity School."

A Sister of Mercy, Farley was the first woman appointed to serve full-time on the YDS faculty and shared with Henri Nouwen the distinction of being the first Roman Catholic faculty member at the Divinity School. She is widely published and the recipient of the John Courtney Murray Award from the Catholic Theological Society of America. She has served as president of both the Catholic Theological Soci-

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ety of America and the Society of Christian Ethics. Farley has been at work for decades as a progressive theological voice in a broad range of areas including feminist theology, medical and sexual ethics, the role of women in the church, sexuality and the church, and religious perspectives on the environment.

Jamie L. Manson contributed to this article.