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A new generation of students has arrived on Montreat College’s campus: the iGeneration.

Higher standards for admission and a renewed focus on intellectual inquiry have ensured that our current students are some of the strongest ever to attend Montreat. And yet they face unprecedented challenges foreign to previous generations of college students.

In this issue, we explore the challenges and opportunities facing the current generation of college students. We look at the latest research on the impact of digital technology on life and learning. We talk with author and pastor Skye Jethani about the spiritual climate our students are immersed in. We look at ways to maximize the potential of the current generation in the workplace. And we profile two Montreat College alumni who work with the iGeneration on a daily basis. Taken together, we hope this issue offers some unique insight and inspiration for the teachers, pastors, parents, and grandparents seeking to lead and mentor a new generation of teenagers and college students.

We also pay tribute to the Rev. Billy Graham, whose witness to the Gospel had a profound impact on my own life and the life of Montreat College. In addition to a worldwide ministry to hundreds of millions, no individual had a greater influence on this college and our local community. His example of humble, Christ-centered leadership cast a benevolent shadow over the Montreat Cove, and we celebrate and give thanks for a life well lived.

We ask for your continued prayers and support as we seek to follow Rev. Graham’s powerful example, teaching and ministering to our students in wisdom and humility.

With gratitude,

Paul J. Maurer, Ph.D.
The iGeneration
The Challenges and Opportunities Facing a Generation of Digital Natives

By Adam Caress

The current generation of students on college campuses across America—often referred to as “Generation Z,” the “iGeneration,” or simply “iGen”—is a generation distinct from its “millennial” predecessors, who are now in their 20s and 30s. While the generational delineation is still being hammered out (and will be for years to come), the iGeneration refers to those born between roughly 1996 and 2012.

The distinction between iGens and their predecessors is most often talked about in terms of their relation to digital technology. Where most millennials can recall a time before the ubiquity of iPhones, social media, and—for the eldest among them—the internet itself, the iGeneration is made up of “digital natives” for whom a life without the ever-present connectedness of digital devices can be difficult to imagine. This is a profound generational shift.

In his book The Gutenberg Elegies, literary critic Sven Birkerts captures the sweeping nature of this shift when he describes how most iGens “will never in their lives have the experience that was, until our time, the norm—who will never stand in isolation among trees and stones, out of shouting distance of any other person, with no communication implement, forced to confront the slow, grainy momentum of time passing. The rules that have [always] ruled individuals… are suddenly, with a finger-snap, largely irrelevant. This is more astonishing than we generally admit.”

Whether one sees this change as the welcome progression of technological advancement or as further evidence of Western culture’s ruination—and Birkerts certainly falls into the latter camp—it is impossible to deny the radical shift that has taken place in recent years, one that has implications across the cultural spectrum, including in higher education.
The amount of time Americans spend on smartphones doubled between 2013 and 2016 to over five hours per day. Teens now spend, on average, roughly nine hours a day using screen-based media, most of that time on mobile devices. This means that the members of the iGeneration spend more time on their smartphones—a device that was introduced to humanity just 10 years ago—than they do in school, with their families and friends, or doing any other waking activity. Such accelerated change is bound to have widespread effects. The question is: what are they?

The initial studies are not encouraging. Jean M. Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University who has published multiple journal articles and a book on the iGeneration, says the answer is simple: “Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on non-screen activities are more likely to be happy. There’s not a single exception.” In a 2017 article for The Atlantic titled “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” Twenge ties alarmingly high rates of depression and anxiety among iGens to smartphone use, particularly social media.

“All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all non-screen activities are linked to more happiness,” she writes. “Eighth-graders who spend 10 or more hours a week on social media are 56 percent more likely to say they’re unhappy than those who devote less time to social media. Admittedly, 10 hours a week is a lot. But those who spend six to nine hours a week on social media are still 47 percent more likely to say they are unhappy than those who use social media even less. The opposite is true of in-person interactions. Those who spend an above-average amount of time with their friends in person are 20 percent less likely to say they’re unhappy than those who hang out for a below-average amount of time.”

While the studies Twenge cites are persuasive, she tends to view the situation as black-and-white cause-and-effect between digital media and negative outcomes. Others see the situation as more complex. In his new book Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression—and the Unexpected Solutions, journalist and cultural critic Johann Hari argues that increased rates of depression and anxiety are due to the broader problem of growing disconnection from other people—a problem to which digital media is but one of many contributors. Citing decades-long declines in religious affiliation, spiraling membership in local community organizations, and surveys pointing to less and less “meaningful” work, he says, “The internet arrived at the very moment when all the wider forces of disconnection were reaching a crescendo.” To Hari, digital media offered a false solution to the pre-existing problem of disconnectedness, which he cites as the leading cause of depression. Digital media has exacerbated the problem; it is not the cause of the problem itself.

To author and pastor Skye Jethani, the problem of anxiety and depression among iGens is related to the stressfulness of having to navigate a less stable society, which he explains in terms of “foreground decisions” and “background decisions.”

“Background decisions are decisions that the society makes for the individual, and the individual never really has to think about,” Jethani says. “And foreground decisions are decisions that the individual consciously makes for himself or herself.”
The argument is essentially that the more background decisions a society makes, the more stable it is, because there are more shared, assumed norms. And the more foreground decisions in a society, the more destabilizing and anxiety-producing it is. I think the iGeneration—they don’t know it because they don’t have anything to compare it to—but they’re growing up with levels of anxiety that are completely unfamiliar to those who are older, because so many more decisions are thrust on them at a younger and younger age about their own identities, about society, about culture and values that just didn’t exist before. So the level of anxiety is enormous. Then you add into that the digital realities of constant connectivity, and it’s not a surprise, unfortunately, that we see escalating rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide among young adults.”

Most behavioral studies continue to rely on survey data about what people do and how they feel, connecting the appropriate dots between the two. But in recent years, advances in brain science have allowed researchers to observe the interactions between the brain and technology—both in real time and over longer periods. In his groundbreaking book The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains, technology writer Nicholas Carr gathered the leading research in the field, shedding crucial light on the social and emotional phenomena being observed in recent studies.

As Carr documents, recent studies have shown that the structure of the human brain is far more malleable—or, as researchers would say, it possesses more plasticity—than was previously believed. The brain is constantly creating new neural pathways in order to more efficiently accommodate new experiences and functions. And according to the latest research, this plasticity isn’t limited to childhood; it continues throughout our adult lives. “Through what we do and how we do it—moment by moment, day by day, consciously or unconsciously—we alter the chemical flows in our synapses and change our brains,” Carr explains. “And when we hand down our habits of thought to our children, through the examples we set, the schooling we provide, and the media we use, we hand down as well the modifications in the structure of our brains.”

But the brain doesn’t just create new neural pathways to accommodate new behaviors; it also allows unused pathways to atrophy. “The vital paths in our brains become… the paths of least resistance,” explains Carr. “They are the paths that most of us will take most of the time, and the farther we proceed down them, the more difficult it becomes to turn back.” In this context, the rapid proliferation of digital media use takes on a new significance, explaining the addictive nature of smartphones. As our brains have created and used the neural pathways necessary to surf the internet, other pathways related to deep reading and in-person interactions have atrophied, making it more difficult for our brains to engage in those kinds of activities—and easier to simply hop online. “It’s not just that we use the internet regularly, even obsessively,” says Carr. “It’s that the net delivers precisely the kind of sensory and cognitive stimuli—repetitive, intensive, interactive, addictive—that have been shown to result in strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions.”

The reasons for our culture’s adoption of digital media are clear: speed, convenience, ease of use, and so on. But there are serious tradeoffs. “Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educators, and web designers point to the exact same conclusion: when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning,” writes Carr. “The internet’s cacophony of stimuli short-circuits both conscious and unconscious thought, preventing our minds from thinking either deeply or creatively.”

And it is precisely this reality that has conjured the dire concerns of intellectuals like Sven Birkerts. “My core fear is that we are, as a culture, as a species, becoming shallower,” Birkerts writes in The Gutenberg Elegies, “that we have turned from depth—from the Judeo-Christian premise of unfathomable mystery—and are adapting ourselves to the ersatz security of vast lateral connectedness. That we are giving up on wisdom, the struggle for which has for millennia been central to the very idea of culture, and that we are pledging instead to a faith in the web. What is our idea, our ideal, of wisdom these days? Who represents it? Who even invokes it? … It would be wrong to lay all the blame at the feet of technology, but more wrong to
ignore the great transformative impact of new technological systems—to act as if it’s all just business as usual.”

A cursory glance around the American cultural landscape would appear to confirm Birkerts’ fears. Huge dives in religious affiliation, the seeming loss of moral consensus, eroding norms of political discourse—all could be seen as symptoms of the problems Birkerts diagnoses. But embedded in Nicholas Carr’s reporting on brain technology is also a ray of hope. The brain plasticity that has led to our current predicament also means that our predicament is not the permanent state of things. Our atrophied neural pathways sit waiting, ready to be re-activated and re-energized. There is always before us a choice, the possibility of change. And this is particularly true for the young.

The Montreat College campus is so nature-filled and picturesque that “digital media” is hardly the first thing one thinks of when setting foot on campus. The Montreat Cove looks much like it did when the college was founded over a century ago. And yet the iGeneration students on Montreat’s campus are facing the same challenges faced by students on college campuses all around the country. In talking with them, the number one challenge posed by digital media immersion becomes crystal clear: distraction.

“I hate this, but last night I was trying to do homework and I kept being distracted by Snapchatting,” says Montreat senior Jordan Devan. “I was just so distracted. For five minutes I would do my homework, and then I would just look at my phone. That constant turning on and turning off of my mind and focus—I could have gotten it done in 20 minutes, but it took an hour.”

It’s a common tale. “So today I was trying to do homework, but I also had a movie on, had some art going on another screen, and then I was also playing a game on the other screen,” says senior Josh Isiguzo. “The homework could have been done in one hour. It wasn’t a lot. But it took me five hours to complete because I was just doing everything at the same time.”

Distraction is also a challenge in the classroom itself. “The presence of phones in the classroom is a huge distraction,” says Montreat Business Professor Hub Powell. “25 years ago faculty believed that technology would strengthen student engagement due to increased access to information, but in fact, it is generally a distraction.”

“Smartphones in the class are a problem all the time, especially in the larger Gen Ed classes,” says Bible and Ministry Professor Don Shepson. “I start every class by saying, ‘Take your earbuds out and put your phones away.’ That’s my pre-class mantra. ‘I’m letting you know these are my expectations.’ I think maybe the only way I could successfully win that battle would be to have a basket outside the classroom door that says, ‘Put your phone in here.’ But this generation is so tied to the device. It’s such a personal thing. It would be like asking them to take off their shirt, or something silly like, ‘I’m sorry, but you can’t have your shoes in class.’ So I haven’t done that, but as faculty we’ve had conversations about it.”

The ongoing challenge has caused some faculty to go ahead and go fully tech-free in the classroom. “I’ve had a complete ban on technology like phones and laptops,” says History Professor Benjamin Brandenburg. “That’s a rapid shift in the past few years that is quickly becoming best practice. I fully expect students to use their phones for research and to use the knowledge available on the internet when they’re outside the classroom, but not in the classroom. I think that change has been accepted, and a lot of students are surprisingly at peace with a complete technology ban. Some students actually enjoy not being tempted to look at their phones.”

The students themselves affirm this approach. “There are studies that show it’s more effective to write your notes by hand because it reinforces the information,” says junior Abby Haas. “It’s also a distraction to have a phone or laptop. You can text, or if you have a Mac, you can do iMessaging. Students can have technology out and look like they’re being studious but also be checking social media and other things. Overall, I think laptops are great for homework in your room, but I think [physical] notebooks are better for the classroom.”
The challenge of distraction applies to students’ social lives, as well. “It’s harder to communicate these days,” says junior Madeline Sides. “When you’re at a table, everyone wants to pull out their phones because they’re afraid they’re going to miss something. I think people have lost their social skills.” Sophomore Joseph Akpome concurs, “When you are with your friends you may pull your phone out instead of talking to each other or doing something good. That’s a huge negative factor.”

Outdoor Education Professor Dottie Shuman has also seen changes in her students’ behavior. “When I first came here in the 90s, students would just hang out in my office to talk about anything,” she says. “I called it ‘plopping.’ I thrive talking to students in one-on-one situations. But now students hardly ever come by. I’m not sure if it’s because of technology, but it seems instead of asking questions in person, students look up answers or send me an email. They don’t make the effort to come by my office.”

Digital media offers many positives, too, especially for college students who have left behind family and friends to attend school. “It has made communicating with people not close to you much easier,” says senior Shelby Treat. “I can just pick up my phone and FaceTime my friend who lives in Canada and see her and talk to her, and that is such a blessing.” “I’m an international student,” says Isiguzo. “So it’s helped me keep up with my family. I can just call home or check social media; it helps me stay connected.”

Another positive for college students is the ease of online research. “You can look up [online databases] JSTOR or NCLive and there are so many wonderful resources there,” says Isiguzo. “Research is a huge positive,” agrees senior Rachel Swapp. “I can’t even imagine going back to having to look everything up by hand.”

Oddly enough, the students who talk the most about the negative effects of excessive digital media use also talk about their difficulty avoiding it. “It frustrates the heck out of me when I’m at a lunch table and everyone is on their phones,” says Swapp. “It’s a waste of time when people don’t engage with each other. It is addictive, though. If I see someone on their phone, it makes me want to look at mine, and I have to fight the feeling not to.”

“I feel like people were more connected pre-smartphones,” says Haas. “So I’ve taken steps to try and fight against societal norms, because I know I would spend way more time reading or doing productive things if I did not have a smartphone or digital media. But it’s hard when it’s just second nature to pull your phone out.”

The addictive nature of smartphone use doesn’t surprise Shepson. “The guys that create these different apps, especially on social media, their goal is to keep you on your app,” he says. “They’ve created apps thoughtfully so that they will be addictive. They build these things to keep you coming back.”

But Shepson also sees a unique opportunity teaching at a Christian liberal arts college, and he believes Montreat’s focus on intellectual inquiry, spiritual formation, and in-person communication is the perfect antidote to the challenges faced by the iGeneration. “I want to help my students to grow in wisdom. That takes time, and we have time here at Montreat for that conversation. We all have to learn to put down things that are distracting and that won’t help us grow in wisdom. I want my students to be people of godly wisdom, that they would know God, be faithful to him. And if we start there, I’m pretty sure they’ll get the other stuff right. That is my hope.”

Adam Caress is the director of communications for Montreat College.
Church, Ministry, and the iGeneration

An Interview with

Skye Jethani

Skye Jethani is an author and pastor who was Montreat College’s 2018 Calvin Thielman Lecture Series speaker. Prior to his Thielman lecture, he took the time to talk with Reflection to discuss his ministry, the state of 21st century Christianity, and the unique challenges and opportunities facing the iGeneration.

Reflection: For our readers who aren’t familiar with you, can you tell us a bit about yourself and your ministry?

Skye Jethani: Well, I’m an ordained pastor. I spent a number of years on staff at my church, primarily as a teaching pastor helping to plant new congregations. But for about 11 years, I served at Christianity Today, which is a communications ministry primarily known for its magazine, both in an editorial and an executive role, dealing with resources for pastors and church leaders. That gave me opportunity to see the landscape of the American church and even some international fronts. Out of that grew more of a writing ministry and publishing books. And so for the last number of years, while I’m still an ordained pastor and still at my same church, my ministry is primarily outside. I write, travel, speak, consult, and podcast. It’s been an unexpected trajectory for me, but all somewhat related to issues of faith and culture—what that means at a local congregational level and in a broader sense as well.

A lot of your writing has focused on the younger generations—millennials and the iGeneration. What do you see as some of the unique characteristics of the iGeneration, the generation that’s currently in college right now?

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A lot of your writing has focused on the younger generations—millennials and the iGeneration. What do you see as some of the unique characteristics of the iGeneration, the generation that’s currently in college right now?

A lot of people focus first on the digital realities; this is a digitally indigenous culture. And that’s certainly true. I don’t want to diminish that at all. But I think that blinds us to some other factors that are somewhat unique to this generation. This generation has experienced globalization to a degree that previous generations have not. So that’s a big change. Obviously, they’re growing up in a far more post-Christian society, where established moral and cultural values that were just assumed in the past are no longer assumed. The most obvious is marriage. I’m a Gen-Xer, and when I was growing up, nobody even thought about what we believed marriage was. It was just an assumed background of understanding in the culture. And today, every young person has
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to ask themselves, “What do I think marriage is?” and even, “What do I think about my own sexual identity?” Those are challenges that were just foreign to previous generations.

There’s a sociologist who talks about every society having foreground and background decisions. What he means by that is background decisions are decisions that the society makes for the individual, and the individual never really has to think about. And foreground decisions are decisions that the individual consciously makes for himself or herself. The argument is essentially that the more background decisions a society makes, the more stable it is, because there’s more shared, assumed norms, and the more foreground decisions in a society, the more destabilizing and anxiety-producing it is. I think the iGeneration—they don’t know it because they don’t have anything to compare it to—but they’re growing up with levels of anxiety that are completely unfamiliar to those who are older, because so many more decisions are thrust on them at a younger and younger age about their own identities, about society, about culture and values that just didn’t exist before. So the level of anxiety is enormous. Then you add into that the digital realities of constant connectivity, and it’s not a surprise, unfortunately, that we see escalating rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide among young adults.
A recent Barna study says iGens are twice as likely to identify as atheists than previous generations. A lot of Christians see this as foreboding news, but you see it somewhat differently. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Yeah, I don’t think I’m the only one. Russell Moore [president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention] has talked about this as well—the trend away from church engagement, the rise of the “nones,” as people refer to them. I don’t think it’s necessarily a depletion in commitment to Christian faith. I think it’s a depletion in nominalism. In other words, the number of people in our society who feel that they have to identify as Christian just to be seen as socially acceptable is going down. That’s disturbing if you’re trying to maintain a religious institution, because you like people showing up and you like them occasionally giving money to maintain those organizations, but that alone is not an indicator of devotion to the Christian faith.

So how do you see the future of faith for young people in America?

Well, there’s good news and bad news. With the decline in nominalism, I think there is more opportunity for people to encounter genuine faith and hopefully be transformed or impacted by those who are seeking to follow after Christ in an authentic manner. For their book UnChristian 10 years ago, Barna polled twenty-something non-Christians about their perception of Christianity, and the downside is that the overwhelming perception was that Christians are homophobic and too political and hypocritical. But when they asked them, “Well, what about Christians you actually know and have a personal relationship with? Are those qualities true of them?” They said, “No, that’s not true of my friend who is a Christian, but it’s true of most Christians.” What that uncovers—and I know this is marketing language—is that there’s a brand problem. Christianity in our culture—the way it’s popularly presented, through secular media and, frankly, also through high-profile Christians in the media—is perceived as homophobic, hyper-political, and hypocritical. And that creates significant barriers to people who don’t have personal relationships with Christians.

Also, there’s a whole generation now who doesn’t believe the Christian life is even plausible, that it has any ability to be lived out in the reality of the world we now see. Because they live in a world of pluralism, where there’s a bazillion different people with different worldviews and religions around them all the time, they see this Christian thing and think, “It’s exclusively the truth—are you kidding me?” Then they’re growing up in this moment where gender identity and sexuality—there’s no binaries anymore; there’s just this wide spectrum of infinite choices and options, and here comes a Christian worldview that says, “Well, no, actual marriage is between a man and a woman, and here’s a view of sexuality”—and it’s like it’s from Mars. It seems completely implausible. And then you add on top of that the clownish behavior of the few Christians they do see in the media, and there are huge barriers there to the acceptance of Christianity and its claims.

The good side is, when they meet an actual, committed, genuine Christian, there’s an opportunity for them to not only see relevance and credibility, but plausibility. “Here’s a Christian in the flesh, living this life after Jesus, and wow, that’s amazing. I’ve never seen that before.” The downside is, those encounters are becoming rarer and rarer, and we can no longer rely just on mass evangelism, institutional engagement, or Christian media to do the work of mission. It has to be returned to an incarnate life-on-life experience, which we’re just not as prepared for as a North American church, sadly.

What have you seen in your ministry that has been effective in addressing this “plausibility gap?”

This is going to sound so unexciting. But it’s frankly what it was two thousand years ago. It’s seeing the life of somebody or a community of people who are genuinely seeking after Jesus, and recognizing that they’re different, and they’re real, and they’re authentic. That stops people in their tracks and makes them think, “Maybe all the perceptions that I’ve internalized about Christianity aren’t accurate, because the people I’m actually meeting don’t fit the stereotype that I’ve been told.”

I don’t think there’s a programmatic silver bullet, that if your church or your ministry just does A, B, and C—putting some candles in the sanctuary, changing the music, or getting the pastor to stop wearing a tie—that iGens are suddenly going to come in the door. Or if you have a live Twitter feed or Instagram feed up on the screen in your church, it’s going to attract millennials.

I don’t think that’s the case. And that’s scaring a lot of ministry professionals because they’ve been taught for the last 50 years that ministry is this sort of mechanical endeavor—that if you just pull the right levers, you’ll get the right outcome. And that’s no longer the case.

In this context, how do you see the evolving usefulness of the term “evangelical?”

I think it’s a beautiful term theologically, and even historically. You can go to Bebbington’s quadrilateral. You can talk about historic evangelicalism going back to the Great Awakening with George Whitfield in the 18th Century, and the various awakenings in England. All of that is wonderful. It’s theological, it’s historical. I would have no problem associating with those things.

Then there is the practical usefulness of the term in our current setting. For me, the turning point was much earlier than 2016. It was actually 2008. There was a document that was put out then called the “Evangelical Manifesto.” The point of the document was to lay out, during that election cycle, the issues that evangelicals care about and how we should be thinking as we select leaders for our country and all that. And the people who wrote it are fantastic and thoughtful luminaries in the American evangelical movement. But the document was long—more than 10 pages—and the entire first half was dedicated to just defining the word evangelical, away from its cultural assumptions. And when I saw that, I thought,
If I use that word in most of the circles I move within, they’re going to make assumptions I don’t intend. It’s going to erect barriers I don’t want to have to spend time deconstructing. And more and more people are feeling that way. A few years ago, I went through all my Twitter followers’ descriptions of themselves, and I could not find a single person who used the word “evangelical” to define themselves. I know the vast majority of those people probably do hold to what we would consider a theologically evangelical framework. But no one was using that word. They’re a Christ-follower. They’re a Christian. They’re a child of God, redeemed by Jesus. They’re coming up with all kinds of terms, but nobody wants to use “evangelical” because it has become so polluted.

**What do iGens think about the term “evangelical” compared to older generations?**

There was a study done by Putnam and Campbell looking at all the factors that had contributed to young adults abandoning Christian faith. And the single most consistent correlation was the association of Christianity with partisan politics. So the more evangelicalism is associated with conservative Republicans, the more likely young people are to abandon the faith. The solution to that problem is not going the other direction and associating evangelicalism with liberal Democrats. But the popular perception is evangelical equals conservative Republican. If the popular perception was evangelical equals Bible-believing Christian, no problem. If people don’t like the Bible and they don’t like Jesus, there’s not a lot we can do about that. But if people are walking away from evangelicalism because they don’t like conservative Republican politics, now we have a problem. We’ve created a barrier that Scripture itself doesn’t create. And the evidence suggests that’s what’s going on.

**What would your closing advice be for iGens and the people—like the faculty and staff on our campus, or pastors and youth leaders—who are looking to support them?**

You’re seeing a lot of research now about the impact of constant online communication, and one of my favorite writers on this is Sherry Turkle from MIT. One thing that she talks about, which I think is really relevant to those of us who care about spiritual formation of young adults—and she’s not a Christian; she’s not coming at it from a religious point of view—but she talks about how boredom is a prerequisite for intimacy. When we’re bored, we have to go inside of ourselves. We become familiar with our own fears, our own anxieties, our own joys and sorrows; all of that internal self-awareness happens when we are bored. The more we know ourselves, the more we are able to give ourselves to others, to have more intimate transparency with a spouse, with a child, with those most intimate of human relationships. Her argument is that because this generation is growing up without boredom—because the moment they feel that pang of boredom, they reach for a device and distract themselves—they’re losing the basic capacity for intimacy and relationships. And I think the exact same dynamic is true spiritually. The prerequisite to a spiritual intimacy with God is boredom. You have to have boredom. You have to have quiet solitude, self-reflection, self-awareness. None of us would ever repent of our sins if we weren’t bored.

My single greatest concern for this generation is that they do not experience boredom, and the church is not giving them space to experience boredom. In our Christian communities, we believe we have to keep them as active as possible, because we’re told they can’t sit still; they can’t be quiet. We have to go—go—go. We have to keep them stimulated and entertained, and heaven forbid you have 10 seconds of silence in a worship service or give a youth group an opportunity to reflect quietly on what they’ve just heard or read. You can’t do that. We want them tweeting their response and posting a picture on Instagram. When we do that, we’re only reinforcing a form of relational and spiritual retardation.

So I would go to Sherry Turkle and some of the other research on the importance of solitude and boredom, or just human flourishing and intimacy, and ask hard questions about what does this mean for the way we construct our Christian communities, our churches, our youth groups. Are we just feeding the beast or are we being an alternative to give these kids the basic skills—not just for intimacy with God, but intimacy in life—that they lack? We need to be aware of that and recognize, okay, there are some good things we can do with this technology in the church for the formation of people and the advancement of the Gospel. But there’s also a whole lot of damage that can be done by embracing this completely and not recognizing that God has made us to be incarnate people that experience His presence in community and need to be present where we are, even if being present requires us to be bored.

That’s where I feel like we’re not particularly well-equipped in the evangelical tradition. Because for the last 500 years, frankly, we have wholeheartedly embraced every new technology that’s come along rather unreflectively. Now one has come along that has incredible potential for damage, and we’re not trying to slow down and ask the hard questions. ■

Skye Jethani is an award-winning author, speaker, consultant and ordained pastor. You can learn more about his work and ministry at www.skyejethani.com.
Receiving support from the Keystone Scholarship Fund has allowed me to continue studying music at my dream school. Here, I feel as if I can reach my full potential because of the guidance and unique experience Montreat College offers its music students. Without this scholarship, going to Montreat would not have been a possibility.

Savannah "21
Music
Is the current generation—often referred to as Generation Z or the iGeneration—really that different from previous generations? While there are some commonalities, the members of Generation Z (sometimes referred to as “Zers”) see themselves in ways that are different from their millennial predecessors. According to a study conducted by Utah State University, Zers see themselves as responsible, open-minded, thoughtful, loyal, entrepreneurial, compassionate, and interactive. Conversely, they see themselves as not being particularly spontaneous, conservative, focused, or creative. The same study noted that they have a fear of missing out (“FOMO”) and may use their electronic devices to make sure important things don’t pass them by. In another study conducted by Vision Critical, Zers see themselves as happy, confident, excited, motivated, and optimistic. Finally, they see education not just as a period of intellectual enlightenment, but more as preparation for careers and financial success.

Like millennials, Zers are fully connected to the internet and are able to use it to solve problems, but—according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)—84 percent actually prefer their human interactions to be direct. While millennials tend to communicate via electronic mediums, Zers actually prefer face-to-face encounters (even while being unafraid to use technology). Interestingly, video chat, in the minds of some Zers, is viewed almost as positively as in-person conversations. And face-to-face communication, even when virtual, is preferred to written communication (including text messaging and email). Finally, they consume entertainment voraciously, but rarely watch actual televisions (one in five don’t watch TV at all, preferring streaming services like Netflix and Hulu).

For Zers, there is also a downside to the constant use of technology, in particular the use of cell phones. Zers’ attention spans have dropped from the millennials’ 10 minute norm to about 6 minutes; one study by Vision Critical noted an attention span of just 8 seconds when consuming media. This will create communication challenges between Zers and those used to lengthy meetings and conversations. However, with 23 million Zers entering the workforce during the next 15 years, the workplace will need to evolve in order to unlock the amazing potential this generation can bring to organizations where they are valued and allowed to contribute.

Zers were coming of age during—and significantly impacted by—the “Great Recession.” And they do not like unexpected change (especially if it is negative) because of the uncertain world they faced as children, not only due to financial concerns, but also the 9/11 attacks and subsequent concerns about domestic terror.
Managerial Tip: Be prepared to mentor Zers to better understand the nature of change in organizations. Not all modifications are carefully planned out with time for understanding and acceptance. Leaders must train Zers to understand this organizational reality so they can get more comfortable with it. After all, change is a constant in the business world.

In contrast to millennials, Zers see work opportunities in a more pragmatic fashion. Work needs to be financially rewarding, and they have expressed a willingness to pay dues and be loyal to an employer for many years if the career path has the potential to offer financial success.

Zers also tend to appreciate leadership and co-workers who engage with them. As noted earlier, they are very face-to-face oriented and subsequently are highly relational. Feedback from others (leaders and co-workers) will be needed for Zers to “stay in the game.” SHRM also advises managers to clarify value and meaning for Zers’ work. They need to understand how their efforts are making a difference. My experience teaching Zers supports this line of thinking; they are willing to engage in difficult projects and assignments if they can understand the value. This requires an explanation of not only what a project entails, but why it is important, what skills it will help them develop, and how they will be strengthened for future work. If they can see the benefit of engaging, they can do so quite well, but the link between work and beneficial outcomes—beyond simply earning a grade or receiving a paycheck—should be made clear.

Managerial Tip: Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. Zers want to understand the big picture. They want to feel valued. Explain the “why” well, and Gen Z employees have the ability to deliver incredible results for your organization.

An additional retention strategy actually goes back to the old-school line of thinking concerning career planning. Being highly visual, Zers need to physically see what their careers might look like. Providing them with written information in this area will not be well embraced; Zers like visuals to help them understand career direction opportunities (i.e., charts, graphs, diagrams, etc.). The more quickly management can embrace this change in presenting career options to Zers, the more successful their retention efforts will be.

Managerial Tip: Foster their loyalty by showing them attainable career paths that exist within your organization. Talk about their goals and mentor them. Gen Z thrives on relationships and they like to see where their careers may take them.
According to SHRM, managers need to understand that Zers are not acclimated to the use of email, which is a central form of communication for many organizations. Zers tend to favor social media for much of their communication. Thus, training Zers in the use of and email may be important if that is how information, direction, and insights flow internally in your organization. The need to help Zers transition to using organizational email is an important retention issue. If Zers miss essential communication because they are not familiar with or oriented toward email use, problems may follow. This can be avoided if Zers are trained and encouraged to adapt their electronic communication habits to what organizations (and thus the Zers themselves) need.

Managerial Tip: While your organization may heavily rely on email, email has its own limitations. Consider what types of information may be better to share with your Gen Z colleague via an alternate medium. In its heyday, no one predicted a fax machine would become obsolete in the workplace. Likewise, look for opportunities to adapt business practices to the best meet the needs of your clients and the employees in your organization.

Leadership researcher Simon Sinek believes that Zers, due to their long-term use of smartphones, have developed systemic impatience. And their continuous ability to access information may make it harder for them to adapt to situations that require waiting for answers or insights. Teaching Zers what patience looks like and how to practice it is something management may find themselves needing to do. Ironically, recognizing this issue could be an exercise in patience for organizational leaders themselves. Why? Those with experience have had to learn patience and may naturally expect others to have it, as well. Training Zers to be patient could seem like a waste of time when it really is not; practicing patience increases efficiency in the workplace, thus helping Zers to better adhere to beneficial behavioral practices.

Managerial Tip: Urgency and impatience are two different traits. Channel Zers’ natural inclination for instant information into projects that capitalize on their need for quick results and information. Their aptitude for finding information through online resources is nearly unrivaled.

In addition, Sinek believes that Zers, again due to the long-term use of smartphones and social media, may be addicted to dopamine, the chemical associated with reward-oriented behavior. If this proves true—and many believe the hypothesis of dopamine addiction is accurate—future Gen Z employers face a unique challenge. Dopamine addiction can result in depression, which in turn may lead to a clinically diagnosed need for chemical treatment or therapy. Depression in the workplace is a significant issue and can pose not just an organizational challenge, but a societal one as well.

Sinek advises that organizations create cultures of trust, cooperation, and safety to combat this issue. As a college professor, I would add to this list a need to create a culture of communication. Deep Patel, a Gen Z blogger for Forbes magazine, refers to this as developing a “connected culture.” Frequent feedback via regular communication will enable Zers to develop a sense of belonging within their organization. This should strengthen retention, thus creating an even stronger organizational culture over time.

Managerial Tip: Giving feedback during an annual or bi-annual performance appraisal isn’t sufficient for most employees, and this is especially true for Gen Z. Weekly one-on-one check-ins, end-of-project debriefs, and in-the-moment reinforcement will help develop trust and ensure you and your Gen Z employees have the chance to communicate openly and effectively.

Finally, as previously noted in the Utah State study, Zers tend to have entrepreneurial tendencies. If given entrepreneurial opportunities within organizations, Zers will generally commit themselves to the endeavor. Opportunities that could lead to engagement and subsequent retention include: solving problems, new product creation, exploring new market opportunities for existing products or services, and social media endeavors that could benefit the organization and create opportunities to creatively give back to the community.

Managerial Tip: Many Zers may enter the workplace having already tried their hand at an online business of some sort. Those who have engaged in an entrepreneurial venture may bring that same opportunity-creating mentality to their employers. Managers who are willing to listen and adapt will be able to tap into Zers’ unique way of approaching business opportunities.

Like every generation before them, Generation Z’s entrance into the workplace presents unique challenges and opportunities. If managers can recognize and work with Zers’ unique traits—a willingness to prove themselves, a lack of comfort with unplanned change, a desire for communication and mentorship, a desire for timely feedback, an entrepreneurial spirit—they can unlock Generation Z’s potential, perhaps revealing one of the best equipped generations ever to enter the workplace. Their unique combination of a strong work ethic, technical capability, and a willingness to learn could make Generation Z the most productive generation since the WWII “Greatest Generation.” Whether or not they achieve that kind of success will be up to all of us.

Dr. John “Hub” Powell is the chair of the Business Department at Montreat College.
Make sure you receive a save-the-date postcard by updating your contact information: montreat.edu/update
Here in the 21st century, technology is advancing at breakneck speed, new scientific discoveries are made daily, and healthcare is more impressive than ever before. With all these advances, it is easy to become caught up in the excitement. But in all the fast-paced changes of the modern world, is something being left behind? Rwenshaun Miller, a graduate of Montreat College’s School of Adult and Graduate Studies in Charlotte, believes so. Rwenshaun, who earned his master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling, is using his personal life experience and testimony to bring awareness to an issue that he believes has been shrouded for far too long: mental health in the black community.

Counseling is not a career that Rwenshaun chose. Rather, it chose him. Fresh out of high school and heading to college, Rwenshaun was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. “When I received that diagnosis, it scared me,” he recalls. “I was actually hospitalized. Coming out of high school and going into college, I was a top athlete and I graduated in the top of my class academically, but then you throw this label on someone and you feel like your world is turned upside down. It was something I didn’t understand because in the black community we don’t talk about it. We say, ‘Just pray about it,’ or we say, ‘There’s nothing wrong,’ and we just try to ignore it. So that’s what I did.”
After his diagnosis, Rwenshaun sought help through therapy and medication. After finding some relief in this, he quit treatment and tried to make it on his own. “My symptoms came back, and instead of going to the professionals, I started self-medicating with alcohol. I went through a state of depression where I actually attempted suicide three times.” The last failed suicide attempt was Rwenshaun’s wake-up call. “I said to myself, ‘You need to do something different.’ That’s when I went back to therapy and started using medication. When I got better that time, I started to look at the world differently. I started to realize that there are a lot of people out there in the world who are struggling and suffering alone because we don’t talk about these issues.”

This epiphany led Rwenshaun to open his own non-profit, Eustress, Inc., and pursue a career in counseling. After earning his bachelor’s in sociology from the University of North Carolina, Rwenshaun began looking to further his education. “I was drawn to Montreat, for one, because it was right here in Charlotte. It was also convenient with my schedule because I still needed to work full time. Once I started the process and met with my cohort, it was the perfect fit. Most of the time, I was the youngest person in the group. It was an eye-opening experience because I was able to learn from others and they were able to learn from me. It was definitely an atmosphere where we were all open to different experiences and the understanding that we each come from different backgrounds. That helps you out as a counselor because no two people live the same life. I don’t care if you are the same economic background or the same race or same gender. No two people have the same upbringing. The collaborative atmosphere at Montreat helped me to get my degree. I became a licensed therapist and I’ve been able to go from there.”

Today, Rwenshaun is a professional counselor who works with individuals and holds public events in Charlotte and at various other locations in North Carolina to bring awareness to mental health. One of these events is the “Let’s Talk About It” walk. “Every year I host an annual mental health awareness walk where we teach individuals about the different facts that are associated with mental health and encourage people to get active. This year will be the third annual walk here in Charlotte. I also host a walk in Chapel Hill and in my home county of Bertie County in northeastern North Carolina.”

Rwenshaun’s work is not just limited to adults. He is also active in the public school system in an effort to inform teachers and students on how to better recognize and treat the early signs of mental health issues. “I teach teachers how to pick up on certain signs and symptoms and then how to utilize different skills that can help them in the classroom to address those issues. Many of the young black males that I deal with are diagnosed with ADHD and ODD, but typically these diagnoses are handed out without taking the whole person into account. A lot of times certain signs and symptoms that are associated with ADHD are a child’s inability to sit still in a chair or constant fidgeting or talking. Instead of punishing them, it’s about interacting with them and figuring out what is their best way of learning because the teaching model may not be what works for them.”

For Rwenshaun, though, that is not the end of the process. “You have to take the whole person into account and look outside of the school setting. What kind of things are going on in the home? Are the parents involved? What kind of influences do they have? A lot of times these kids don’t have any structure at home. When they don’t have any structure at home and they get to school and are forced into a chair, it’s like
Putting a round peg into a square hole.” And this is where Rwenshaun’s role comes into play—he is the active voice changing people’s mindsets and kick-starting change in the community.

There is one factor that Rwenshaun sees changing the world of counseling and mental health: technology. Like anything, technology has its pros and cons. Some of the negative feedback Rwenshaun is seeing from the online world is the desire for perfection. Seeing a constant portrayal of people with seemingly picture-perfect lives is leading to higher levels of stress and depression.

Although this is counterproductive to mental health, Rwenshaun feels the benefits technology brings to the field outweigh potential downsides. “You can find your tribe with technology and find some of the people who are going through the same things you are going through. You can also connect with individuals all over the world who may be dealing with the same things you are and try to come up with ways to provide the solution. It allows you to create connections with individuals that you may have never had the opportunity to connect with because of a geographical barrier.”

For young adults, who are often criticized for spending too much time looking down at their phones, Rwenshaun finds that certain apps can be useful in helping them build confidence and find a voice. The ones he finds are the most popular among kids are Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. However, Rwenshaun is a proponent of separating self and technology. “Your brain needs that time to rest. I believe that it’s the thing of making sure that people create a delicate balance. People need to understand that you don’t have to have your phone all the time. You don’t need to be connected to your friends or social media all the time. I think it’s the small things we can do that will help create that balance.”

One of the benefits of technology in the field of mental health counseling that Rwenshaun is finding especially helpful is the ability to connect with a client online instead of having to travel to them. “For individuals who don’t know how to find a therapist or know how to get into therapy, Psychology Today provides a list that you can look up. That way, you are not limited to the individuals who are right there in your community. Technology also allows me to do a good amount of distance counseling, as well. I can provide mental health coaching to someone all the way across the nation or world. Rural areas like my hometown may not have any clinicians at all, but there is internet access. So a person can reach out to a therapist who is able to provide them with the counseling they need.”

Rwenshaun notes also that clinicians are also better able to connect with one another today than ever before. Professionals are not limited to the people they see on a daily basis. They are able to learn from each other, teach one another online, and share knowledge and resources that are available in their field.

Rwenshaun has received high praise for his work. In December of 2017, he was featured in The Huffington Post’s article “17 Top Black Influencers You Should Partner With in 2018.” He was also featured on Blavity.com last May during Mental Health Awareness Month in an article titled “4 Dope Mental Health Media Scholars Team Up to Break Stigma.” Rwenshaun has also been featured on several podcasts, and he has authored a book titled Injured Reserve: A Black Man’s Playbook for When Mental Illness Sidelines You. Currently, Rwenshaun is in the process of earning his Ph.D. from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. For more information about Rwenshaun and his work, visit: www.rwenshaun.com.

Emily Wells ’20 is a communication major at Montreat College.
Whether he would go into ministry was never a question for Valley Hope Church Pastor—and Montreat College alumnus—Anthony Rodriguez. “I tell people it’s something I knew about myself—like I know that my eyes are brown.” Growing up in a strong Christian household, a career in ministry is what he’d always been drawn to. When it came time for Anthony to decide on a college, he knew two things: first, he wanted to be in the Swannanoa Valley because his friend was planting a church in the area. Second, he knew that ministry would be involved.

Anthony first visited a different college in the area, which he would have been content to attend had he not then visited Montreat. But he did, and it was love at first sight. “We drove through the gates of Montreat and I was like, ‘This is where I’m going. I want to go here,’” he recalls. His love for the Montreat College community only grew stronger during the years he spent here, as did his relationships, faith, and gifts. “I made friends here like I never had before. I grew a lot spiritually. I had people who invested in me and who put me in a position to use my gifts and to lead. I loved it; I wanted to stay forever.” Both his biblical knowledge and relational skills were cultivated within the small, close-knit community of Montreat, preparing him to dive headlong into ministry.

During his senior year, Anthony was a resident assistant in Howerton Residence Hall. His resident director, Steve Woodworth, was starting a new church in Black Mountain and asked if Anthony would be willing to preach. “I don’t know why he asked… It was something I had done before, and I felt like it was one of my gifts, but he’d never heard me preach.” Nevertheless, Anthony agreed. Six years later, in 2011, he became the lead pastor of the church. He continues to pastor this body of believers, today known as Valley Hope Church, located in the Swannanoa Valley.
A major theme which runs throughout all of Anthony’s life—from his time as a Montreat College student, up to the present day—is the importance of community. He is now a husband, father of four children, lead pastor, and adjunct professor at Montreat College. “I needed that small community,” Anthony recalls about his time at Montreat. “I’m quiet by nature. It’s hard for me to make new relationships… but having a small environment really gave me a safe place to spread my wings a bit and give it a shot.”

The same principle of community applied when he attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte. Montreat had taught him the importance of being grounded in community, and Gordon-Conwell’s model allowed for that. He was able to be a full-time student while remaining in the Swannanoa Valley—a community where he had friendships, relationships, and a practical ministry outlet. When Anthony became lead pastor in 2011 at the age of 26, community was vital. “I need you to pastor this church with me,” Anthony recalls telling those who were working alongside him as elders of the church. “I cannot be an individual who leads and pastors; we have to pastor as a community.” He credits God—working through the gifts of the community—with bringing his church to where it is today.

For Anthony, this principle of community, which remains so visible in the various spheres and seasons of his life, is a vital part of the human experience. “It’s almost like we’re made for it,” Anthony says, smiling. As he points out, we’re made in the image of the triune God, who has “forever and eternally existed in community.” Even through the challenges that communities face, Anthony’s belief in them holds firm. And as the pastor of a church with a younger demographic than most, one recent challenge to community that Anthony has noticed has been an increasing reliance on technology.
“I think technology affects us [as a church] as much as anything because of how it is shaping people,” says Anthony. Some of those most heavily affected are members of the iGeneration, many of whom cannot recall a significant amount of time in which society was not entirely saturated with technology usage. And these individuals constitute a large portion of Anthony’s congregation.

“We have a significant body of research now that’s showing that heavy usage of technology is closely associated with anxiety, loneliness, and depression,” Anthony notes. He talks about how connection to others via technology, whether it be texting or in the context of social media, creates a semblance of community. But this “digital community” isn’t the same as a living, breathing community. “It’s not going to fulfill your hunger for embodied, face-to-face, in-the-nitty-gritty kind of community,” he says.

In addition to the challenges posed by technology, Anthony and Valley Hope see value in using digital technology, communicating through their website and on Facebook, which is how most “strangers” find the church. By engaging them through the online community, Anthony hopes to draw them into the kind of life-giving, flesh-and-blood church community they were meant for. “This thing that you’re feeling—that you’re craving—that’s actually a right and a good thing that you’re after, but you’re not going to find it by refreshing Instagram one more time… You have to find it in this kind of place.” In a church.

While “digital church,” such as podcasted or live-streamed sermons, may have some value, Anthony does not believe it replaces real participation in a flesh-and-blood church community. And he thinks churches will begin to reconsider the usage of this sort of technology as they ask themselves, “Are we facilitating people being disembodied brains on sticks who are happy to receive an information download and not have a meal with somebody, cry with somebody, [or] play with somebody?” These are the things a digital church cannot provide. “We’re not just a social club. We’re actually a vibrant and living community fed by the overflow of the community of the triune God.” This, says Anthony, is the community we all long for.

Anthony is also wary of the convenient answers technology seems to offer. “[All of us have] more access to versions of the Bible than any other people in the history of mankind,” says Anthony. “But we may be the most biblically illiterate people in centuries. Knowledge accumulation is not the same as wisdom, and technology cannot help you with wisdom. Wisdom is learned and attained in the context of living in community.”

Anthony would be the first to say that technology has many positive uses—he is an active user of Twitter and maintains an online blog—but that those uses are limited. “I love what [technology] can do for us, [but] I’m very thankful that God still works in slow, ordinary, very plain, and boring ways. I mean, communion is bread and wine. It’s so simple and ordinary, and yet… so profound that it cannot be replicated and replaced by technology.”

Anthony hopes that his life, family, and church continue to model the kind of Christian community life which remains vital even in—or perhaps especially in—this age of technology. “Christians are a counter-cultural people. That’s always meant to be true, but I hope that more and more [we model] that. That we are not like everybody else, and that we’re okay with that. And that, ultimately, we’re better off.”

Anastasia Howland ’20 is a Bible and Ministry major and English major at Montreat College.
The Rev. Billy Graham, best known as the dynamic evangelist who preached the Gospel to millions over a career that spanned decades, passed away on February 21, 2018, at his home in Montreat, North Carolina. He was 99. While his life and legacy as an evangelist and public figure have been celebrated nationally and internationally, he will also be remembered as a civic leader, college supporter, good neighbor, and loving husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather by those in the local Montreat community.

“The impact that Billy Graham had on Montreat College and the local Montreat community cannot be overstated,” says Montreat College President Paul J. Maurer. “He and his wife Ruth were tireless advocates for the college, giving of their time, resources, and spiritual guidance over the course of more than 60 years. Even as Billy rose to the level of a national and international figure, he and Ruth maintained deep roots in the local Montreat community as loyal friends, neighbors, and civic leaders.”

During his long life, Billy Graham moved from rising evangelist in the 1940s, to evangelical movement leader in the 1950s, to national political figure in the 1960s, to American celebrity in the 1970s, to global icon in the 1980s and 1990s. Graham’s brand of ecumenical Christian evangelism reached millions through his radio and TV shows, syndicated column, movie company, thirty-three books, and stadium-scale Gospel crusades. Few individuals had as much impact on 20th Century American culture as Billy Graham.
Despite Graham’s ascension to global prominence, the boy raised on a farm outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, never lost his sense of place. In 1943, Graham married his Wheaton (Illinois) College classmate Ruth Bell (1920-2007), whose Presbyterian missionary parents had settled in Montreat—Ruth graduated from Montreat College’s high school program in 1936. After graduating from Wheaton, the Grahams made a home for their growing family on Montreat’s Little Piney Ridge. Their mountaintop home became a peaceful refuge from Graham’s increasingly busy schedule of evangelistic crusades, which emerged as an iconic American religious experience after the sensational success of his 1949 Los Angeles Crusade. While Graham and his team would travel the world over the next half century, he would keep coming home to rest and to pay special spiritual attention to the people of Western North Carolina, both personally and professionally—as seven full-scale crusades in Greensboro, Asheville, and Charlotte attest.

Graham will also be remembered for far more than his crusades. In partnership with his father-in-law Dr. L. Nelson Bell, he worked to create a new, vibrant multi-denominational evangelical movement that rose to prominence in the postwar era. Graham’s leadership helped birth institutions like the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, humanitarian organizations like World Vision and Samaritan’s Purse, and the prominent Christian media voice Christianity Today. Graham’s support of Christian higher education proved important for dozens of faith-based colleges and universities.

Specifically, the Grahams were intimately involved with the growth and sustenance of Montreat College. In 1943, Billy and Ruth Graham were married in Montreat College’s Gaither Chapel, which was renamed Graham Chapel in their honor in 2015. The Grahams were common fixtures at convocations, banquets, and building dedications at the college just down the ridge from the Graham home. They raised funds to help build the L. Nelson Bell Library in the early 1970s. Their significant personal and financial support during crucial moments helped Montreat College grow into the fully accredited four-year liberal arts institution that it is today. Ruth served on the college’s Board of Trustees from 1972 to 1981 and was named a trustee emerita in 1981. She was also awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award in 1967. Billy and Ruth’s son Franklin Graham graduated from Montreat College in 1974, and their grandson Will Graham served on the college’s Board of Trustees from 2007 to 2016. In 1991, Montreat College awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters to Billy Graham for “a commitment to preaching the Gospel throughout the world and for a lifetime of dedicated and unselfish service to others.”

Throughout his ministry career, Graham’s care for the people surrounding him pushed him into a number of important cultural developments, to which the evangelist proved remarkably adept at adopting for his Gospel aims. At his momentous 1957 crusade in New York City, Graham’s controversial decision to work with Catholics and mainline Protestants opened up a long-dormant conversation into the ways Christians could productively work across denominational divides for the good of the Gospel. On race issues, Graham was more progressive than most of his fellow Southerners, but he remained a moderate throughout the Civil Rights era. He bravely began to desegregate his crusades in the 1950s, and he modeled a way for millions of conservative Americans to move towards an acceptance and embrace of racial equality. One way he did this was through music. While Graham remains closely associated with the deep-barrel baritoned “Just as I Am” of his music leader George Beverly Shea, Graham’s music ministry showed remarkable adaptability. And a multi-racial and multi-generational musical sensibility became increasingly evident at his crusades through regular appearances by artists from a wide array of musical traditions, including Johnny Cash, Ethel Waters, Mahalia Jackson, and DC Talk, as well as Korean, Hungarian, Latino, Hawaiian, and Native American music.

Graham also became a celebrity in the political world. His sermons were famous for their unchanging consistency, but they
nearly always began with a preamble that focused on problems of the world. Beginning in the 1950s, Graham developed a special relationship with a long line of American presidents, particularly Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Over the decades, many prominent politicians would brave the curvy and narrow mountain roads to visit their spiritual confidant at his home in Montreat. Barack Obama’s 2010 visit continued a close relationship between the pastor and the office of the president that stretched all the way back to the Truman administration. While Graham often served as a personal pastor and confidant to very human presidents, he eventually began to question those politically complex relationships, especially after he and the rest of the American public were made privy to the dark side of his friend Richard Nixon’s administration through the revelations of the Watergate scandal. In 2011, when asked if he could go back and do anything differently, Graham told Christianity Today, “I would have steered clear of politics.”

Graham’s lifetime witnessed momentous changes, and he was central to many of them, but his most significant impact may have occurred outside of the United States. By the time he retired in 2005, Graham had preached to nearly 215 million people in person in more than 185 countries and territories, and to additional hundreds of millions through electronic broadcasts. Graham first took his modern campaign to Europe in 1954. While large sections of the European press initially dismissed the man they called the “Atomic Gospeler” and the “Coca-Cola Gospeler,” he eventually won over much of the skeptical press as Europeans learned from Graham what it meant to identify as both Christian and modern. In the 1960s and 1970s, Graham’s trips increasingly took him beyond the West, where his crusades would continue to set numerous attendance records. In South Africa, he held that nation’s first large scale integrated event in 1973. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the formerly staunch anti-Communist took his revival campaigns into the Communist Bloc. He was the first Christian, Eastern or Western, to publicly preach behind the Iron Curtain after World War II, culminating in giant gatherings in Budapest and Moscow—and later to unprecedented invitations to Beijing and Pyongyang in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As the mature Graham entered his twilight years, he was able to witness the explosive growth of Christianity in the southern hemisphere, a moment in Christian history that has surpassed all others in terms of the number of converts to the Christian faith, and his team was vital to that process. In addition to his own crusades, Graham’s team did the extensive work of training and empowering indigenous leaders to participate in worldwide evangelistic endeavors. In the end, perhaps the greatest heavenly gift that the North Carolina native received was that he was able to participate in the unprecedented growth of a vibrant—and truly global—Christian community.

Benjamin Brandenburg is an assistant professor of history at Montreat College.

“My home is in heaven. I’m just traveling through this world.”

REV. BILLY GRAHAM
Spiritual formation seems like the domain of the spiritual master, the monk who perches on top of a mountain for decades at a time. And for those of us who are dominated and ruled more and more by devices that chirp and vibrate and notify us into submission, spiritual formation sounds like an impossible task. But in *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, Tish Harrison Warren offers hope and a way forward for the spiritually incompetent amongst us. Which is to say: all of us.

Using the structures you might expect at a liturgical worship service, Warren invites us to re-appropriate the common habits of our days for the slow and gradual work of spiritual formation. Acts as simple as making your bed or brushing your teeth or sitting in traffic become moments to be attentive to the habits we have acquired that shape us and the ways we might alter them to slowly form ourselves in God’s direction. What if, for example, we honored our need for sleep as a gift from God to remind us of our smallness and not something to fight for another episode in our latest Netflix binge?

Warren’s book is charmingly accessible. She freely confesses her own frailties and foibles such that any reader can feel the author is wholly sympathetic to the difficult task of ordinary spirituality. But this is precisely what makes her practical, simple suggestions so encouraging. The everyday work of everyday people, which is what “liturgy” means, really is for people like you and me. With Warren’s help, the boring ordinary can be the common arena for spiritual formation. Never mind those mountain-top fantasies. How might God meet you in the grit and grind of your everyday normal?
Back in the 60s, Marshall McLuhan enjoyed an academic comet ride that emitted sparks enough to lend his name celebrity cachet on talk shows as well as college campuses. The home TV set was an appliance that both transfixed and rattled families with its rapid-fire delivery of live footage—from presidential debates to American Bandstand to the Vietnam War—and McLuhan’s musings on the social effects of media made him sound as current as the evening news itself. He upped his ante with a knack for inventing hip-if-arcane sounding neologisms, a trait that made him popular with the Haight-Ashbury crowd if not always equally so in the faculty lounge (of his counterculture fans he quipped to Playboy, “I’m flattered to hear my work described as hallucinogenic, but I suspect many academic critics find me a bad trip”). Some of his material now seems only marginally less florid than a mural by Peter Maxx, but it turns out the professor wrote with more prescience than he knew. His uncannily spot-on predictions and maxims about technology’s warp-speed escalation are more and more taken for granted. McLuhan imagined a “digital divide” issuing from a “global technological village” long before the worldwide web, and he coined the phrase, “The medium is the message,” a half century before anyone was dropping vocabulary like “vlogging” or “abandonware.”

Less remembered, however, is the fact that McLuhan himself was a convinced Christian believer. In Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work!, novelist-turned-biographer Douglas Coupland reclaims this and other facts as he portrays the scholar as a latter-day prophet with honor. At once informing and entertaining, this slim monograph is the best pairing of biographer with beast in memory, what another reviewer called a virtual “Vulcan mind-meld” of two cultural mavericks. Coupland, whose acclaimed 90s novel Generation X scrambled Kerouacian listlessness with a jump drive’s worth of pop culture allusions, ably explains why McLuhan is rightly regarded as patron saint by the technophiles who read Wired magazine. Even the book’s style (short declarative passages interspersed with portions lifted from the web, and clipped chapter titles named after computer key-command cues) functions as an implicit homage. But the portrait that emerges here is as aware as it is affectionate. Though he doesn’t share his subject’s faith, Coupland highlights how McLuhan’s Christian conversion provided the integrity, as well as the warp and woof, behind some perceptive pop scholarship:

“How do you explain the fact that, while you’re busy hanging out in eternity, the world you left behind has merely the drab little future ahead of it? Although he never phrased it as such, it was the irreconcilability of the world with the afterworld that generated the contradictions that defined much of Marshall’s career. On the one hand, technology was a bauble to be played within the mortal coil. It was not worthy of the respect accorded religion [but] it was a transformative agent for the mind and society. It had to be worthy of the same attention as literature. It was this detachment from the world that afforded him an objectivity missing in other social analysts… He came to feel that his religion was indeed a sense, a sensory perception that colored his life as much as, if not more so, than sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell, or gravity. He had found his key to eternity and was now free to turn his full and detached attention to the merely human.”

Armed with such detachment, McLuhan pioneered the field of media studies and left behind an artful arsenal of creative arguments about technology’s hardly neutral influence. Coupland has produced a quirky, kinetic, and accessible account of an intellectual life. Marshall McLuhan’s story, Coupland surmises, “shows us the majesty of the human brain in all its flaws and kinks and wonders. It also tells us about a certain window in time, now long closed, when rules were being rewritten … and the future existed as clearly and wonderfully as a place one might someday hope to visit, like Rome or New Zealand.” Reading and remembering about it all now from such a lookout reanimates a whole set of new hopes and apprehensions for our own Tomorrowland.
July 1, 2017

Dr. David Bruce, longtime executive assistant to Rev. Billy Graham and Montreat College board member since 2015, became the college’s new Board of Trustees chair. Dr. Bruce served as executive assistant to Rev. Billy Graham for the past 19 years. He also serves as president of Graham’s Blue Ridge Broadcasting ministry and has been a part of Graham’s ministries for over 25 years. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Wake Forest University and his M.Div. and D.Min. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Bruce previously served on the boards of the Mission Hospital Foundation and Asheville Christian Academy, and he currently serves on the boards of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

July 10, 2017

Montreat College was named one of America’s “Best Colleges for Your Money 2017” by Money magazine. Only 23 of North Carolina’s 48 colleges and universities made Money’s list, and Montreat College was ranked 8th among those schools. Only one of the institutions in the UNC system ranked higher than Montreat. Money magazine ranks colleges based on 27 measures of educational quality, affordability, and alumni success. The rankings also take into account how many low-income students each school has propelled into the middle class, a measure which, according to the magazine, points to “colleges that help students achieve the American dream.”

August 22, 2017

Montreat College achieved the highest degree-seeking enrollment on its traditional campus on record in the school’s 101-year history, both for new students and overall enrollment. Overall degree-seeking enrollment on Montreat’s traditional campus was 520, up from the record of 477 achieved the previous year. The college welcomed 174 first-time freshmen, also the highest number on record, outpacing the previous year’s record freshmen class of 167. The college welcomed 52 new transfer students, bringing overall new student enrollment to 226, eclipsing the previous record of 218 new students achieved in 2015. An additional 61 non-degree-seeking students brought the headcount to 581 students on the traditional campus. In addition, Montreat College’s School of Adult and Graduate Studies enrolled 336 students in Asheville, Charlotte, Morganton, and online, 176 undergraduate students and 160 graduate students, bringing the grand total to 917 students attending Montreat College.

September 1, 2017

Just over six months after a tragic car accident in which he nearly died, Britten Olinger returned to work at Montreat College as assistant track and field coach. In his new role, Olinger’s responsibilities include coaching and training long, triple, and high jumpers, recruitment of new students for the track & field program, home meet management, coordination of meet officials, and administrative leadership for home events. On September 24, 2017, Olinger and his family were able to move back into their Black Mountain house for the first time since the accident. The move-in was made possible by a complete rehabilitation—including wheelchair accessibility—undertaken by a team of volunteers. And on September 26, 2017, Olinger and his wife, Samantha, and their daughter, Kolbie, welcomed a new baby boy, Easton, into their family.

September 5, 2017

Montreat College announced that it has been designated a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education by the National Security Agency (NSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Montreat College is the first member of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) to receive this designation and just the 4th four-year school in North Carolina. According to the notification from the NSA and DHS, “[Montreat College’s] ability to meet the increasing demands of the program criteria will serve the nation well in contributing to the protection of the national information infrastructure… Like all nations, the United States has a compelling interest in defending its vital national assets, as well as our core principles and values, and we are committed to defending against those who would attempt to impede our ability to do so. Education is the key to promoting these ideals.”

September 20, 2017

Montreat College announced that President Paul J. Maurer has been named to serve on the National CyberWatch Center’s Curriculum Standards Panel. In his role, President Maurer will represent
Montreat College as it continues to develop its role as a national leader in cybersecurity education, helping to shape the standards and priorities for the teaching of cybersecurity in American institutions of higher education. The National CyberWatch Center is a consortium of higher education institutions, public and private schools, businesses, and government agencies focused on collaborative efforts to advance cybersecurity education and strengthen the national cybersecurity workforce.

October 10, 2017
Montreat College announced that it had been named a Gold-level Champions of Character Five-Star Institution for 2016-17 by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). While Montreat has an impressive record of being named a Champions of Character institution in recent years, this was the first time the college has achieved Gold-level status, ranking among the top 66 NAIA schools in the country. In determining Champions of Character schools, the NAIA measures institutions on their demonstrated commitment to fostering character development within athletics. Schools earn points in character training, conduct in competition, academic focus, character recognition, and character promotion.

October 27, 2017
Montreat College hosted its 3rd annual RETR3AT Cybersecurity Conference. RETR3AT is designed to engage, educate, and raise awareness about cybersecurity in Western North Carolina and beyond. 2017’s RETR3AT keynote speaker was U.S. Department of Energy Chief Information Officer Max Everett. Other speakers at the conference included Bank of America Senior Vice President for Information Security Amy Braswell, FBI Special Agent Brian Cyprian, National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education Director Rodney Peterson, Ally Bank Information Security & Risk Management Executive Keith Gordon, CVS Senior Director of Information Security Casey Marquette, CounterHack Founder Ed Skoudis, and Tenable Network Security Director of Business Development Chris Cleary. 307 guests attended the conference, up from 169 in 2016 and 77 in 2015.

February 14, 2018
Montreat College announced that its Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) program has received accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP is a specialized accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The CMHC degree program is offered at Montreat College’s campuses in Asheville, Charlotte, and Morganton.

March 20 and 21, 2018
Montreat College hosted Skye Jethani as its Calvin Thielman Lecture Series speaker. Jethani is an author, speaker, consultant, and ordained pastor. He also serves as the co-host of the popular Phil Vischer Podcast, a weekly show that blends astute cultural and theological insights with comical conversation. Between 2004 and 2015, Jethani occupied numerous roles at Christianity Today, including managing and senior editor of Leadership Journal and as the director of mission advancement. He was also the senior producer of “This Is Our City,” a multi-year, multi-city project telling the stories of Christians working for the common good of their communities. He has also authored numerous books and curates the “With God Daily” devotional, a subscription-based daily email designed to help a smartphone generation begin the day with God.
Adjunct Professor of Natural Sciences Dr. Sam DeMent, along with Kendra Sulzer and Stanley Rikard, published the study “A Study of American Kestrel Nest Box Occupancy and Natal Dispersal in the Midlands/Sandhills Region of South Carolina” in The Oriole journal (Vol. 81).

March 23, 2017
# Professor of English Dr. Don King was the keynote speaker at the symposium “Love Letters to Jack, Love Letters to God” at Brenau University. He also published the article “Warren Lewis, Mrs. Janie King Moore, and The Kilns” in The Journal of Inklings Studies (April 2017). Dr. King also presented as part of the plenary session “Callings in Context: Fields of Study as Resources for Vocational Reflection” at the NetVUE book retreat in February 2018.

April 1, 2017

April 19, 2017
# Assistant Professor of Business Dr. Paul Gratton presented at the Oregon Rural Health Conference in Prineville, Ore., on the topic, “Finding Success in Emergency Department Diversion through Term-based Care and the Patient-centered Medical Home.” He also published a chapter titled “The Development of Management Thought” in the book Management: Research, Theory, and Practice (Cognella, 2017).

May 18, 2017
# Adjunct Professor of Bible and Ministry Dr. Stephen Woodworth published an article titled “Every Tribe and Every Tongue: The Westminster Confession of Faith and Biblical Translation” in the inaugural issue of the Westminster Society Journal. He also presented a paper titled “Shepherds in Chains: The Use of Metaphors in Training Global Leaders towards Pastoral Identity” at the Evangelical Missiological Society’s Southeast Regional Meeting. And he published six articles as a staff writer for Think Christian.

September 25, 2017
# Assistant Professor of Cybersecurity Kelli Burgin presented at the InfraGard National Conference in Dallas, Texas, on the topic “Healthcare Critical Infrastructure Defense: Turning Risk into Resiliency.” She also presented at the CCCU International Forum in Dallas on January 30, 2018, on the topic “A Primer on Cybersecurity for Christian Colleges and Universities” along with Montreat College President Dr. Paul Maurer, Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Greg Kerr, and Assistant Professor of Cybersecurity James Tippey.

November 2, 2017
# Adjunct Professor of Mathematics Michael Mashburn presented at the North Carolina Classroom Teachers of Mathematics State Conference in Greensboro, N.C., on the topic “I Didn’t Know My Calculator Could Do That!”

January 3, 2018
# Professor of Business Dr. Isaac Owolabi presented on the topic “Teaching Adult Learners” at Elizabeth City State University’s annual Faculty & Staff Conference.

January 4, 2018
# Professor of Environmental and Outdoor Education Dr. Dottie Shuman was chosen by the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) to serve with a group of six faculty members from three different universities to develop training materials for NAAEE Accreditation for Distinguished College and University Environmental Education Programs.

January 11, 2018
# Associate Professor of Psychology and Human Services Dr. Brad Faircloth and Adjunct Professor of Environmental Education Dr. Andrew Bobilya presented two papers at the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors Biennial Conference in Bradford Woods, Ind.: “Closing the Loop: A Multi-Year Study of How to Measure Change” and “Effects of Participation in a Semester Boarding School on Student’s Biophilic Expressions.” And Dr. Faircloth and Adjunct Professor of Outdoor Education Dr. Brad Daniel presented a third titled “The Impact of an Organized Night Walk on Brain Wave Activity and State-Trait Anxiety.” Dr. Faircloth and Dr. Bobilya also published two papers together: “Exploring course outcomes utilizing a new Outward Bound outcomes instrument” in Research in Outdoor Education and “A Qualitative Analysis of Participant Learning and Growth Using a New Outward Bound Outcomes Instrument” in the Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership.

February 1, 2018
# Assistant Professor of Psychology and Human Services Dr. Megan Clunan and Assistant Professor of Counselor Education Dr. Noreal Armstrong presented at the North Carolina Counseling Association Conference on the topic “The Mind-Body Connection: Food Therapy and Mental Illness.”
Pauline Ribelin Ross ’35
Pauline (Polly) Ribelin Ross, Montreat’s eldest alumnae, passed away at the age of 101 on Sunday, Oct. 1, 2017, surrounded by her family. Pauline was born Dec. 22, 1915, in Albemarle, N.C. She was preceded in death by her husband, Dr. James Hervey Ross. Pauline graduated from Montreat College in 1935 where she was May Queen her senior year. She met her future husband Hervey, a student at Davidson College, in Montreat, where both had summer jobs. Pauline attended the Presbyterian School of Education in Richmond, Va., in preparation to serve as a missionary to Mexico. In 1940, she moved to Mexico to marry Hervey Ross, where he was finishing medical school and starting an internship at the American-British Hospital. They lived four-and-a-half years in Mexico City and then moved to Morelia, Mexico, a city 200 miles west of the capital. There, Hervey practiced medicine and helped in the founding of a 100 bed (now 300) hospital. Since there were no English speaking schools in Morelia, Pauline spent her time homeschooling their 3 children. However, she learned to speak Spanish and taught Sunday school in the local Presbyterian church. Pauline and Hervey Ross served as Presbyterian missionaries from 1940 to 1966 in Mexico. They then moved to Nashville, Tenn., where Hervey became the medical secretary of the Board of World Missions. After his death, Pauline moved to Matthews, N.C., in 2004 to be closer to family. In 1967, she was awarded Montreat College’s Distinguished Alumni Service Award.

Mary Lou Gray Snead ’56
After graduating from Montreat, Mary earned her bachelor’s degree in elementary education and taught school for four years. Her husband of 62 years is a retired dentist. They have lived in Danville, Va., for 56 years. Mary and her husband have four children, 11 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bob Hann ’63
Bob was ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1968, and in 2013 transferred his ministerial membership to the Reformed Church in America. He has served several churches as pastor and has taught at Temple University, LeMoyne College, and at Florida International University in Miami. Most recently he taught Greek and New Testament at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, N.Y. He is now enjoying retirement with his wife, Sharon, and their cat, Bella, preaching and teaching occasionally. They live in a townhouse in a suburb of Rochester, mostly enjoying hobbies and traveling, and their involvement with Trinity Reformed Church. They do admit that winters in Rochester can be challenging! Their big event last year was a three-week vacation to western Canada and the Canadian Rockies in April, which was fantastic!

Mary Alice Payseur Holland ’63
Mary has been retired from teaching for 15 years. She is active in her church, First ARP Church in Gastonia, N.C. She has two grown children. At the present time, she is taking care of her husband, John, who has pancreatic cancer. She would love to hear from her Montreat classmates!

Dale Ward Lange ’66
Widowed in 2011, Dale married Michael Lange on May 8, 2016, and moved to Dunnellon, Fla. She is retired from teaching but still involved in church music. She is living a happy, rich life and wishes the same for all of her fellow alumni!

Sandra Edgerton Mann ’66
After graduating from Montreat, Mary earned her bachelor’s in elementary education and taught school for four years. Her husband of 62 years is a retired dentist. They have lived in Danville, Va., for 56 years. Mary and her husband have four children, 11 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Leo Muller ’74
Leo got married in 1975 to Marlene Miller (now Muller; 42+ years and counting). They have a daughter, Anna Muller, 33, and a son, Peter Muller, 30. Leo is the executive director of CHOICES Education Group (www.choices.org), where he has been an employee since its inception in 1985 and executive director since 1996. After graduating from Montreat, Leo earned his bachelor’s degree in business from Seattle Pacific University in 1980, and he has lived in Seattle since 1977. He has been a member of Bethany Presbyterian Church since that time, where he has served as an elder and led music regularly. He still sings and plays acoustic and electric guitar, and he performs occasionally in other settings. He enjoys racquetball, running, hiking, traveling, and a good microbrew.

Debbie Elmore ’75
It is with great joy that Debbie announces the birth of her first grandchild, Aliza Caroline Elmore, born June 20, 2017, 5 lbs 12 oz. to her son and daughter-in-law Aaron and Sarah. They live in Tulsa, Okla., so there will be a lot more airline tickets in her future.

Tim Thurmond ’75
Tim played baseball under Coach Lynn Stranik while at Montreat. He now lives in Murray, Ky., and owns two small businesses, Thurmond Insurance and Thurmond Properties. Now married for 40 years, he and his wife have two adult children, three grandchildren, and three additional step-grandchildren. Tim recently retired from 25 years of volunteering for the youth baseball and softball program for the kids in his community. When both his curveball and fastball appeared to look the same, he felt it was time to take a break!

Kristi L. Servies ’76
Kristi has returned to her hometown of Greer, S.C., and has moved in to care for her 93-year-old mother. Her son, Timothy Rigg, has become a student at Montreat in the Cybersecurity program.

Ed Blanchard ’78
Ed and his wife, Patty, are serving with LDI in Chengdu, China. They are the team directors at Chengdu International School (CDIS). Two of their sons, John and Josh, are also working at CDIS. They are enjoying a global life with their children scattered all over the globe, and they look forward to re-connecting with friends and family in North Carolina this summer.
Geniese Gruner Gilman ’78
Geniese and her husband Tom thank God for three new grandbabies this last year: Worth Tindall Townsley on March 3, 2017; Grace Cathryn Paiva on August 12, 2017; and Robert Lawrence Hendrick, IV, on September 6, 2017. They enjoyed visiting with so many friends at Homecoming 2017 and are looking forward to Homecoming 2018!

Kay Farmer Farrell ’78
Kay and her husband Tim recently retired and moved from Indiana to Lexington, Va. They are building a new home, and easing back into life in the mid-south has kept them busy but very happy.

Mark Snoddy ’80
Mark and his wife are empty-nesters, watching their kids grow and flourish as adults. Mark was recently in Montreat for Larry Wilson’s funeral in Graham Chapel and was sure that he could see faces from long ago.

Meg Russ ’09
Melinda Gasperson Halford ’10
After graduating from Montreat College, friends Meg Russ and Melinda Halford continued their education at Liberty University, earning master’s degrees in professional counseling. Now, Meg is a licensed professional counselor and a nationally certified counselor and Melinda is a licensed professional counselor associate. After graduating from Liberty, Meg and Melinda have worked together in the counseling field. They both have a Christian private practice in Swannanoa, N.C., just a short drive from Montreat. Meg works with children, adolescents, and adults. Melinda works with adolescents, adults, and couples. To learn more about Meg’s work, visit www.megannrusse.scitive.com. To learn more about Melinda’s work, visit www.melindahalfordcounseling.com.

Alex Popa ’13
Carlie Popa ’14
After meeting at Montreat in 2012, Alex and Carlie were married in November of 2014. They fondly remember their years at Montreat, playing soccer, hiking up Lookout Mountain, and scrounging up coins to buy coffee at the Dripolator. Over the past few years, they have been serving in ministry at Wears Valley Ranch, right next to the Smoky Mountains in eastern Tennessee. Wears Valley Ranch is a home and school for children and youth who come from crisis family situations that they did not create. During their time there, the Lord has been so kind and gracious, allowing them to serve in several roles, beginning as mentors living in the homes with the students and assisting with daily discipleship and teaching, and then serving as houseparents in one of the girls’ homes for two-and-a-half years following their marriage. Over the past year, they have once again changed positions with Alex now serving as the biblical counselor to the male students and Carlie working in admissions and as the assistant in the Counseling Center. Wears Valley Ranch has changed their lives and they feel incredibly fortunate and blessed that the Lord has led them there and continues to sustain this wonderful ministry. Montreat will forever remain dear to them, as it was instrumental in laying the foundation for the Kingdom work they have since been called to.

Akira Shavers ’16
Maddie Shavers ’16
Akira and Maddie are excited to be expecting a baby come June 2018!

Caleb O. Owolabi ’17
Since graduating in 2017 with a bachelors in business management, Caleb became the youngest board member ever elected to the board of the YMI center on Eagle St. in downtown Asheville, N.C., the oldest African-American men’s center establishment in the country. He has also been hired to work for Buncombe County government where he works on tax payments for real estate and personal and business property. While doing this, he has also had chances to do his art, including directing, playacting, photography, and film webseries.
UPCOMING FALL & WINTER EVENTS

Join us at the following Montreat College events:

Homecoming & Family Weekend October 5-6
Alumni Gathering October 6
Heritage Society Luncheon October 6
RETR3AT Cybersecurity Conference November 2
Giving Tuesday November 27
Christmas Concert December 1
Fall Commencement December 15

Visit montreat.edu/calendar to view all upcoming event information.

Support the Cavs! For a full list of athletic events, visit: montreatcavaliers.com.
2018 MONTREAT COLLEGE

POPS CONCERT

FEATURING

COLLEGE CHOIR
COLLEGE ROCK ENSEMBLES
MONTREAT CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

SATURDAY
APRIL 28
2018

ANDERSON AUDITORIUM | 7 PM
MONTREAT, NC

FREE ADMISSION!
FREE DESSERT DURING INTERMISSION

Special guest Billy “Edd” Wheeler,
American singer-songwriter and performer
Gift planning allows you to create a lasting legacy to provide for future generations of students. The Galax Society is a special group of Montreat friends and alumni of who choose to make a lasting investment in the college through planned giving.

For more information regarding planned giving, contact Joe Kirkland by phone at 828.419.2045 or by email at joe.kirkland@montreat.edu.

Daniel '18
Business Administration Major & Recipient of the Wilson Scholarship