

Duke University

Durham
North Carolina
27708-0968

copy

The Divinity School
BOX 90968

Telephone (919) 660-3400
Facsimile (919) 660-3473

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Dear Willie,

"It is finished." The passion of your celebration you permitted us is over, but my thanks will never be. I will continue to celebrate you every day of my life. I will always remain in awe of your gentleness and your wisdom that has nothing to do academic knowledge.

Students go into your office and they come out healed. New hope, other possibilities, are given to weary or frightened souls. You have taught us what it is to be a community. You have taught me to be ashamed of competitiveness, and you will never know how often I draw upon your example to ask, "how can we make something good out of this?" instead of "what is this person doing here?"

Willie, thank you for acknowledging Mary Collins so generously at the reception. The importance of that was not missed. Thank you for your "charge it to my account" attitude whenever there is a faculty need. Thank you, above all, for wanting to come back among us as full time faculty.

May your sabbatical be a time of true reflection and discernment about your future writing and teaching. I pray that our different denominations are becoming better listeners to one another, and we are not all the strangers to one another it may seem. Now I wait to learn from you academically what I have learned from you spiritually.

All my love and prayers,