Giving and Receiving Agape

Unconditional love has found its way into my life, it has shown me places where I didn't think love could grow, and it has guided me along a path that will guide me to love others as my own. This I believe: *agape*, unrequited, genuine love, exists in a world that is often casted as cruel; love can be given and received by all who strive to give and receive it.

I was born into this world loved. This love is truly present in my life not only right now, but from the moment I took my first breath. Though one cannot assume that every child will receive adequate and true love from its own mother, God gives this grace freely. I believe that we are loved—with the deepest kind of love imaginable—no matter our standing with the world, no matter how we continually mess up, or no matter how unloved we may feel at times. *Agape* is the goal and the end that should be striven to achieve. It is divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, and thoughtful love. Following by example is not only easy, but God has laid the footwork for his loved ones to do just as he has.

How can anyone truly love you no matter what? How can one reciprocate that same love? I've had my fair share of doubts when it comes to receiving and giving this type of love; recognizing genuine, whole-hearted love is not effortless. We are all imperfect, but unconditional love exists in our lives because of the grace-

filled love that God gave all of us from the moment we entered this life. Trust in God's love, and look for a similar path to this type of love in your own life.

Sometimes agape works its way into your life without you expecting it or even asking for it, but then you're inspired to go out and give it. My host mother in El Salvador, Maria, showed this type of love while we stayed in a small rural town in the mountains of Chalatenango, El Salvador. Food was scarce, water was scarcer, and basic shelter was a luxury. Maria constantly gave love and really asked for nothing in return; she constantly treated us like we were her own that weekend we stayed in the *campo*. She gave us the best cuts of her only chicken in the soup she made us for dinner one evening, saving only broth and a few vegetables for herself and her two children. We were her guests, and we received nothing but the best treatment. With so little to give, Maria was able to open her heart and her home to three American strangers that swooped in and out of her life all in one weekend. Agape is unexpected sometimes, but it has inspired to me strive to love no matter what.

Sometimes finding and accepting agape takes its sweet time, and sometimes it comes naturally, like Maria. Working towards building the trust that is necessary to recognize love when it is present is difficult, but with genuine effort, love can be given and received everywhere. It shouldn't click overnight—agape is special and should be harder to find. With the presence of *agape* in all of our lives, the missions of this campus, of this city, and of our world will flourish in the direction of Christ.