Nursing seniors and faculty spending the fall 2013 semester in Cape Town, South Africa, were eyewitnesses to the end of a historic era with the death of Nelson Mandela, known affectionately by his Xhosa tribal name, “Tata [Father] Madiba.”

In their own words, eloquent testimony to this moving moment in world history . . .

“As our study abroad students in Cape Town were preparing for two days of exams to complete the semester, news broke that Nelson Mandela had passed away at the age of 95. I knew the students had a busy day in store for them with a review session. I also knew that they had grown to love South Africa as their second home and by extension Nelson Mandela and all he stood for. In our nursing leadership class we often referred back to some of his qualities that made him a great leader.”

-- Denise Bourassa, assistant clinical professor
“There is an overwhelming desire to celebrate his life and his legacy, but also to mourn with the people in the community and the country. We were able to attend a memorial in Cape Town the day after his death on the 6th of December and the atmosphere of love for Nelson Mandela was tangible. People were singing and dancing and their voices conveyed the deepest respect and love for their Tata (father). Nelson Mandela has truly left behind a great legacy of forgiveness, acceptance, and equality – and legacies don’t die. His sacrifices and wisdom have and will forever stay with South Africa and countries worldwide.” -- Tina Nguyen ’14

“I have discovered the tremendous capacity for people to change your life, how moments will change your life, and how, ultimately, YOU will change your life because, as Nelson Mandela once said, you are the “captain of your soul.” No one else is going to run the ship for you.”

-- Marichris Cariaga ’14

“At this ceremony, people were mourning but also showing their appreciation. There were important figures in the city who spoke, transportation was free, and so many religions / races / languages were represented here. The people were Black, “Coloured,” White, Indian, Asian, Purple, and Blue, but most importantly all the people here were Beautiful. It was amazing to see, and the cameras recorded people and projected the images on the screen, which was beautiful because you could see around you and on the video that there was so much diversity in this area ...Nelson Mandela had such a positive influence and even after his death, he is showing us how far the country has come as a whole.” -- Jazmynn Noia ’14
Reverend Vernon Rose’s jovial wisdom and gripping charisma embrace all who meet him. He draws them into deep conversations that often end with a sense of enlightenment.

A Cape Town, South Africa, native, Rev. Rose is the UConn study abroad coordinator on site there. “At the contractual level,” Rev. Rose says, “my role is finding clinical sites in South Africa in the areas of pediatrics and maternity care as well as going to the US to interview and select the students who will study abroad here. But I think more importantly, my role extends to building character and investing in the lives of young people. So in many respects, I am seen as a coordinator of the study abroad program here in Cape Town.”

During the fall of 2013 we spoke with Rev. Rose about his vocation and the role of UConn’s School of Nursing, starting by asking, What contributions have the UConn nursing students made in Cape Town?

“Whenever I visited the clinical sites, the staff that engaged UConn students waxed lyrically about the role of the students,” Rev. Rose told us. “It’s not just about the hosts from the clinical sites sharing their experience, but because of their limited capacities, the students make a noticeable contribution to the actual care of the patients in these communities. The other part of the legacy is that when the nursing students leave, they leave a good reputation at and for the sites.”

In Touch with Reverend Rose

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In his course on South African culture and health care for study abroad students, Rev. Rose addressed the concept of legacy, what it means to leave something behind to inspire others and be remembered by them. His hoped-for legacy is to acquire access to other sites that are currently inaccessible: “I also hope that one day those who aspire to become community health nurses would have the opportunity to come because we actually have access to all of the community health facilities under the City of Cape Town. And I think my final and all inclusive goal is to use that pool of human resource capacity to impact on a project that is sustainable.”

We also asked, Is there a specific quality of UConn nursing student that allows us to be successful in working with the community?

“I guess the reason why I am pursuing this objective of the legacy being a sustainable project is precisely because I think the students that come here, come with certain invaluable experiences and skills,” Rev. Rose observed. “You’ve also volunteered in different settings other than just health care, so it’s just amazing to have an amalgam of all these talents and gifts that students and faculty are able to contribute to the sustainability.”