



# PLNU's Shaping Mission

By Suzanne Strawn

## The potter

**I**n a sunlit shed filled with well-worn tools and the musty smell of earth, a potter mixes his clay. He adds water to the dry powder, carefully and patiently transforming it from a gritty batter into soft, pliable clay.

After a time, the potter begins to wedge the clay—kneading and pressing it to expel any air or other particles that might compromise its texture and strength. He places the formless mound on his still and silent kick-wheel. He cups his hands around the clay and closes his eyes, imagining the outcome of his work. The potter considers the possibilities for his creation, knowing that for centuries, artists have anticipated their inspiration as he does now. Finally, one idea emerges, leaving the others in the shadows.

**The potter engages the wheel** with his feet and the clay with his hands in a smooth steady rhythm. While he works, he imagines how his creation will be used, what purpose it will serve. Both artist and artisan, the potter knows that the finished product is not destined for a museum, gallery or gift boutique, but for the hands and homes of real people. He pushes his wet fingers into the center of the spinning clay. Low, thick sides begin to form as he gently but firmly works one hand along the inside of the clay and the other along the outside. The potter forms a ridge around the upper edge of the piece and inlays a simple border just below it. After a time, the wheel slows and the potter uses a primitive tool—a piece of wire strung between two small wooden pegs—to separate his clay from the wheel. He wipes the wet clay from his fingers and studies his work.

**In a sunlit shed filled with well-worn tools** and the musty smell of earth, the potter gently inscribes his initials on the underside of the mug, conveying pride and a sense of ownership to his creation. He heats his kiln and places inside it the very special piece of pottery. A traditional round drinking vessel, it is beautiful in its simplicity. There are no handles, so it may be easily held by the very young and very old alike. It has a sturdy footed base to keep it balanced so it will not spill.

Once the kiln has reached the desired temperature and its heat has permanently solidified the mug's shape, the potter cools the kiln. Eventually, he removes the mug and carefully turns it in his hands. He sets the mug on a window sill and stands back to admire his creation. It's not the first mug of its kind that he's thrown and fired and it certainly won't be the last. He wipes his brow and smiles.





## The student

**O**n a sun-drenched hillside high above the Pacific Ocean, several thousand students converge on a late August morning. They represent a mixture of races, cultures, family backgrounds, skills and interests.

*One student stops by a large wooden cross* and stares across a canyon to the sea. She comes from a dry desert town and has never seen the shores of the blue expanse before her. Closing her eyes, she inhales deeply, feeling the cool breeze and light mist on her skin. She considers the next few years of her life, aware that for 100 years students like herself have come to Point Loma, wondering about and anticipating what God will do. She imagines herself crossing a stage, grasping a diploma and smiling.

Slowly at first and then more comfortably, the student engages herself academically and socially, feeling the rhythm of daily university life. In classes, she finds herself challenged to think deeply about things she's never considered or only previously taken for granted. She senses herself being drawn toward particular subjects and experiences and eventually changes her major. A LoveWorks mission trip only confirms her decision and underscores her sense of purpose.

The mission experience now colors everything the student learns. Facts and relationships are infused with new meaning and perspective. She studies abroad for a semester and applies to graduate school. Her life is accented by the lifelong friendships she's formed in residence hall Bible studies, on a student recreation trip and through her involvement in several clubs. Although she sometimes feels herself spinning through the busyness of these years—thrown from one change and decision to the next—she also feels the caring hands of her Creator guiding her.

*On a hillside high above the Pacific Ocean*, several hundred students converge on a mid-May afternoon. The salty breeze carries with it an air of anticipation. A short distance away, one student stops by a large wooden cross and stares across a canyon to the sea. She squints at the waves, shimmering bright gold in the sunlight. The student drops her head and reaches just beneath the collar of her black robe to hold a shimmering gold cross on a chain around her neck. It's a reminder of this place and of her faith that's been solidified here. She breathes deeply and walks quickly, resolutely on. Minutes later, her name is called and she crosses the stage to receive her diploma.

*Heat and dust rise from the teeming streets* of the third-world city. People narrowly miss each other—darting by on bicycles, ambling on donkeys or just walking barefoot. Down a long alley, an outdoor market draws shoppers of all ages to its fresh fruit, raw meats and handmade souvenirs.

Among the crowd, a young woman makes her way from tent to tent. She is clearly a foreigner, but not a tourist. She dresses casually and wears a small gold cross on a chain around her neck. She is a graduate student working on a special project in this country.

The young woman lingers at a tent filled with earthenware, pottery of various shapes, sizes, textures. Her eyes scan the selection until they rest on one particular piece. The simplicity captures her imagination and she is drawn toward it. She carefully reaches for it and turns it in her hands, noticing initials carved into the bottom. The words of Jesus suddenly echo through her mind: "If anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Her eyes well with tears and she reaches into her pocket for the coins.

Is this the end of the story? On the contrary...it's only the beginning. What the Creator has begun, the creation itself is called upon to continue. Ephesians 2:10 reads, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This covenant relationship is truly extraordinary. With it comes great responsibility, but also, incredible satisfaction. ★