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STUDENT LIFE

Questioning college students find campus religious groups

By LAURA FRANCIS and CRAIG ALLEN Staff Writers

Philosophical questioning typically accompanies the development of the mind. And for many, questioning occurs during the college years, when they find themselves challenging their beliefs, leading them to search for a different church or faith.

"College is a time to grow in every area — the threat would be not to grow," said William Peck, associate professor of religious studies, who studies religion in relation to psychology. "I focus on an academic study of the way people construct the world they perceive themselves to be in; in other words, a study of the various varieties of the religious experience."

Peck encourages students to respond to a type of worship that suits their temperament. So a person who is "quiet, steady and ascetic" may prefer the Episcopal Church, which follows rigid rituals, he said. Each different religion does not appeal only to one type of person, Peck said. "One can find *some* specific correlation where there's a tendency to attract certain kinds of people, such as with Positive Thinkers or Christian Scientists."

With the decision to explore religious options; students may have a hard time deciding because the choices range from the many types of Christianity to Eastern religions such as Hinduism. But they don't have to travel too far to find answers because several campus organizations offer the chance to experience different religions.

Opting for Christianity

With its many denominations, Christianity offers students the chance for participation in various organizations on campus. According to the Rev. Manuel Wortman, the Wesley Foundation tries to involve students in the Methodist church with activities, discussions of religious question and worship services. The group meets every Wednesday, usually holding a dinner before the program.

Although the group attracts many Methodists, it holds a desire to bring students with different beliefs together, Wortman said. "The group is a community of people," he said. "I don't think you can characterize the students as holding a certain set of beliefs."

Kathy Koonts, a rising senior English education major from Shelby, has been involved with the foundation since she arrived in Chapel Hill. She said she liked the group because of everyone's agreement to disagree.

"I'm in Wesley because it's religious without being overbearing," Koonts said. "Religion is not shoved down my throat. Everyone respects everyone else's beliefs, and the people are very caring and open."

The Rev. Bill Gattis, senior minister at University United Methodist Church, said his congregation tried to accommodate students and make them welcome. Besides offering students the chance to sing with the Wesley Foundation Singers, University Methodist sponsors "Adopt-a-Student," a program in which interested students are assigned to families, couples and single church members.

The students dine with their assigned families, worship with them and do other things to become acquainted. Gattis said the program's goal is to "be a home away from home" for students.

Another group offering students the chance to become involved in the Protestant faith is the Baptist Campus Ministry.

The Rev. Bob Phillips, campus minister, says the Baptist Student Union makes up the majority of the ministry. Phillips serves as adviser along with the Rev. Harriette Bugel, but they try not to interfere in the administration of the group. That burden is left up to students as a beneficial part of the overall experience.

"We have a strong concept of students

come. Besides offering students the leading the ministry," Phillips said.

The BSU offers weekly meetings and residence hall Bible studies. And the group's center, Battle House, is open to anyone who wants to study, meet friends or escape the noise of the dormitory, Phillips said.

The ministry is not restricted to members of a Baptist church — everyone is welcome whether he wants to worship or just talk. "It has a Baptist flavor to it," Phillips said. "The concept is for there to be a wide range of opportunities for people to grow and develop. As campus ministers, we're available to students. All they need to do is pick up the phone and call."

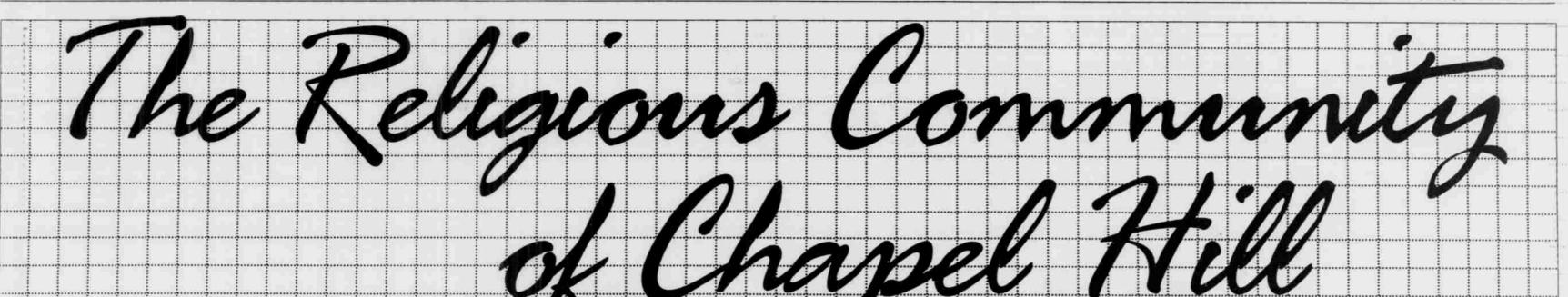
The Presbyterian Campus Ministry also reaches out to students with various religious backgrounds. "We're open to anyone coming," said the Rev. Rebecca Reyes, Presbyterian campus minister.

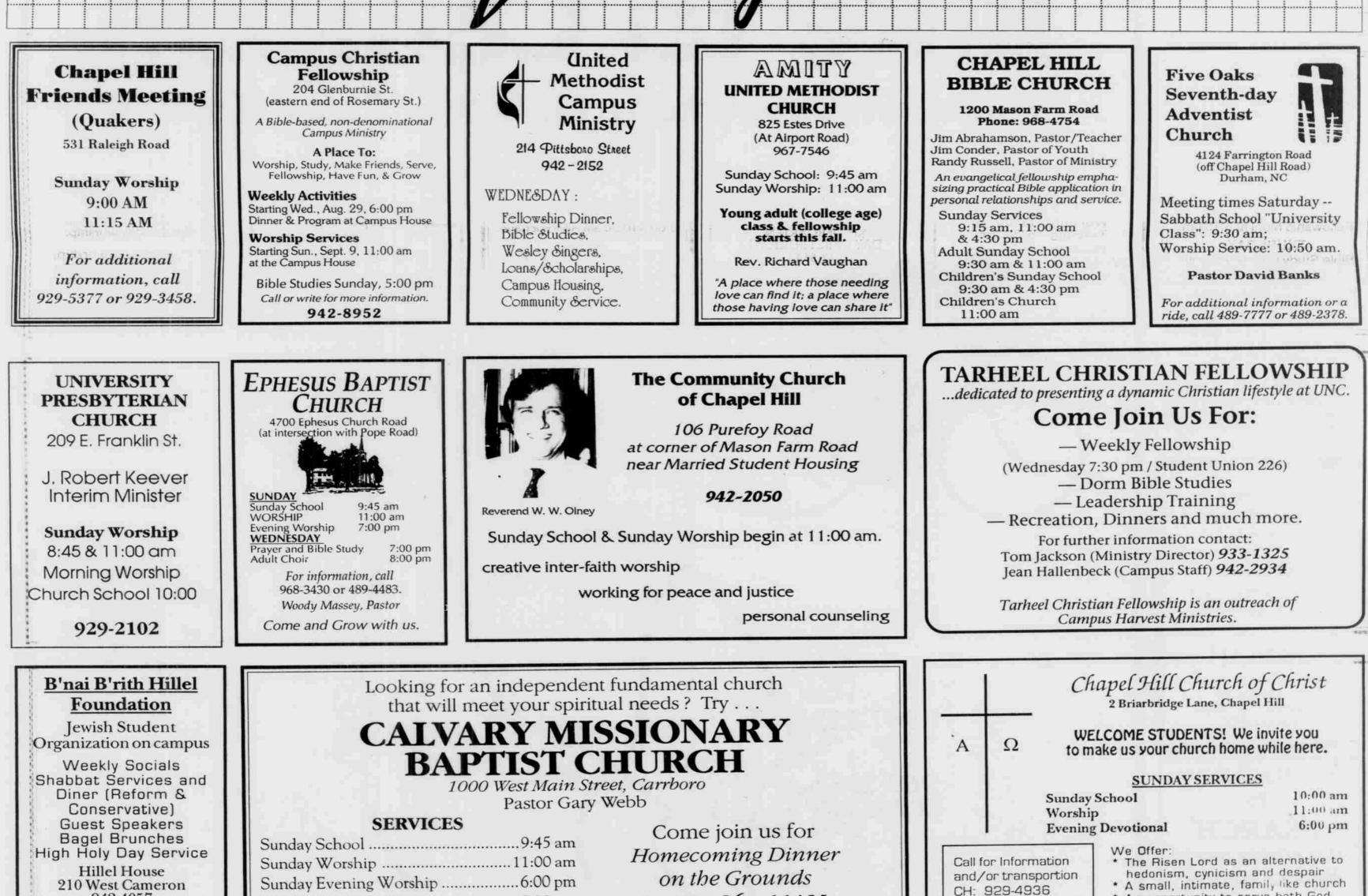
The student center, located at 110 Henderson St., hosts biweekly programs on Mondays and Thursdays on community outreach, current issues or fellowship, Reyes said.

"Although the Presbyterian stance" sometimes comes through in such programs on divorce or abortion, we are diverse theologically, politically and socially."

The Rev. Larry Hartsell, Lutheran campus pastor, said the Lutheran campus group had many programs for students, all held at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Chapel Hill. Some of the programs include a Wednesday night worship, dinner and Bible study on Mondays and Thursdays. One of the most important objectives of the Lutheran church is to carry its message to anyone willing to listen, Hartsell said. "God calls us to say to all people that they are loved."

Similarly structured in ceremony and belief to the Lutheran church, the Episcopalian Anglican Student Fellowship meets at The Chapel of the Cross. According to David Stanford, associate for campus ministries, the strength of the Episcopal church is its





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