

Catholic faith at Elon grows during turmoil

Jessica Patchett
Reporter

Despite division among Catholic students at Elon over worldwide church issues, ministry and outreach on campus has grown.

Examining women's roles in Catholicism, priest celibacy and the church's stance on social issues, some students look to reform church policy, while others stick with traditional values. Regardless of individual churchgoers' opinions on pressing issues facing the modern church, students are excited about the increased attendance at weekly Mass.

After attending World Youth Day in Toronto this past summer, Elon student Luke Wake, like many other Catholic youths, said he realized despite their differences, Catholics worldwide are "all part of the same body of the church."

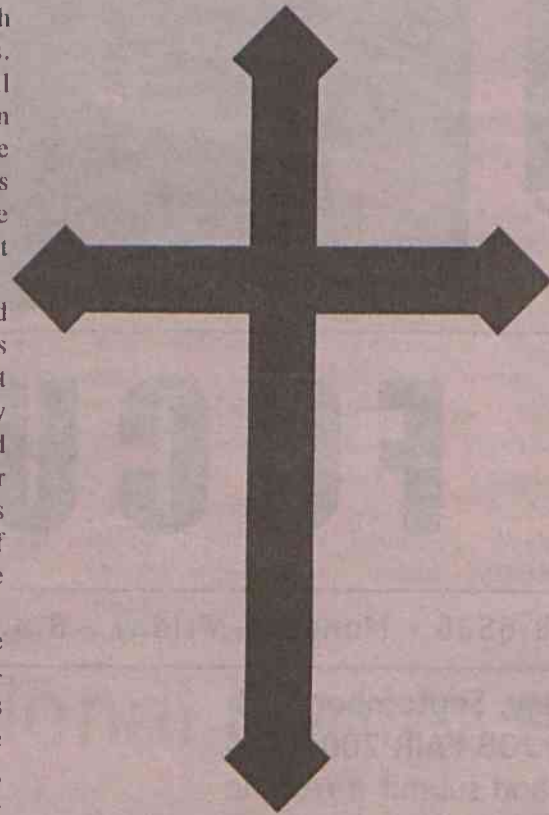
Many students voice strong, conflicting opinions over issues such as women's roles in the church, priest celibacy, divorce and the use of contraceptives.

Amy Nussbaum, vice president of Catholic Campus Ministries, said she firmly supports the role of women in the church. There are many ways for women to fulfill their faith in lay positions, as nuns, or as sisters, while men, Nussbaum said, "take the head role in family and in church. Hanging on to traditional values keeps [the church] in check."

Wake, a freshman in CCM, also recognized "the great thing about the church lasting 2,000 years is its hierarchy," which provides stability and consistency for Catholics.

Like many Catholics, Luke

perceives existing Catholic values equally as applicable in 2002 as they were in earlier times. "Catholics believe sex should be open to life, the most valuable, the most sacred [thing]," Luke said, in reference to the life of unborn children. He emphasized that the use of contraceptives would be "basically blocking life from happening."



Chris Nave, president of CCM, hopes birth control will no longer be looked upon negatively. He says he looks to other young Catholics whose beliefs are different from the norm and are passionate about inspiring change. He says college students look for other changes, such as allowing women to become priests and allowing priests to marry at will. The role of women is improving in the church, but the Catholic church will most likely see optional celibacy before women in the priesthood, said Father John Ruffo, Catholic campus minister.

Debates over the priesthood

and Catholicism in general are prevalent and controversial, presenting constant challenges to practicing Catholics, Nave said. Yet, about 130 Catholics attend Masses on Sunday nights led by Ruffo. Forty freshmen participated in a retreat Sept. 13-15.

As 1,036 students, or 25 percent of Elon's student population declare Catholicism their religion, more than 13 percent of Elon's Catholic students are meeting the challenge of practicing their faith at Mass with Ruffo, in area churches and through CCM.

Only 12 to 13 percent of baptized Catholics are practicing their faith, and generally, college students have a lower practicing population than adults with families, according to a statement from Cardinal Ambrozic, a representative of the Catholic church.

Nussbaum has been attending Sunday evening CCM Mass for two years and observing an increase in attendance by Elon students. Ruffo said he attributes some of this

growth to a spur in spiritual exploration after the events of Sept. 11. Ruffo said he believes there may be an increased interest in finding one's spiritual self and becoming more in touch with God.

To help students explore these aspects of spirituality, faith and religion, CCM holds Sunday Mass, Wednesday Bible studies, monthly movie nights, fellowship retreats and participates in leadership conferences.

Contact Jessica Patchett at pendulum@elon.edu or 278-7247.

Sigma Chi cleans house for heroes



Lindsay Porter/Photographer

Members of the Sigma Chi fraternity gathered Friday to help Elon's firefighters clean up around the firehouse and thank the firefighters for all the work they do. The brothers were also honoring of the one-year anniversary of Sept. 11. "In our own communities we should take responsibility," said junior Eric Hansson, president of Sigma Chi. "We feel like we should give back." Seven members of Sigma Chi fraternity at-large died in the Sept. 11 attacks.

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