



Letting FAITH take its course

1. Katie O'Dunne Kilpatrick teaches at Woodward Academy as a chaplain and comparative religions teacher.
2. As a former Elon cross country runner, Kilpatrick competes in various triathalons.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATIE O'DUNNE KILPATRICK

Former cross country star becomes high school chaplain

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With long strides and a determination to succeed, Katie O'Dunne Kilpatrick '12 bolted through the grassy fields of North Carolina during her first cross country race at Elon University in 2008.

Her positive attitude and passion for running propelled her onward, but the more distance she covered, the more she felt an excruciating pain develop in her foot. Upon crossing the finish line, Kilpatrick struggled to walk. Much to her dismay, she discovered that a stress fracture was responsible for the pain.

As someone whose college career was supposed to revolve around running, Kilpatrick was devastated.

"I had put absolutely everything into running," Kilpatrick said. "It was all I cared about at that point. I literally thought my life was over."

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REV. KATIE KILPATRICK

RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND HUMAN SERVICES '12

Despite this standstill, she refused to let a stress fracture prevent her from getting involved at Elon. So, she decided to explore other interests, such as her faith.

Local community church members heard about Kilpatrick's running impediment and asked her to preach about that struggle to the congregation.

"It was when I was preaching about that experience that something really clicked for me," she

said. "I have been a part of the church and service my whole life, and that is really where I felt the most joy, and it was this incident that made me think I should really pursue this."

Even though Kilpatrick once regarded this stress fracture as an unfortunate event that stalled her running career, she soon viewed it as a blessing in disguise.

And through it, she found her call to ministry.

Following a calling

Today, the Rev. Katie Kilpatrick has been the academy chaplain and comparative religions teacher at Woodward Academy in Atlanta, Georgia, for two years.

Kilpatrick teaches, provides pastoral care and promotes the religious studies program to the 2,800 students at the school.

As a comparative religions teacher for the Upper School of the academy, Kilpatrick teaches four different sections of the course throughout the semester.

In this class, students choose a specific topic of interest and explore that topic across different religious traditions.



She visits the Primary and Lower schools to discuss empathy and understanding, teach religious traditions for an interfaith club for the Middle School and conduct interfaith prayer services with the Upper School.

Peggy McNash, academic dean of the Upper School at Woodward Academy, said Kilpatrick has made a significant contribution to the school through her new and exciting initiatives.

"She has lots of great ideas and relates very well to the students," McNash said. "The interfaith prayer group fulfills a great need among the students and staff."

In addition to being so involved, Kilpatrick has a wholehearted love for the students at Woodward and her ministry work.

"I love what I'm doing so much, I am so passionate about these kids and everything here," Kilpatrick said. "I just love Woodward."

Learning from her roots

Before working at Woodward, Kilpatrick attended Elon where she obtained a bachelor's degree in religious studies and human services and graduated with a GPA of 3.98.

Though Kilpatrick said her call to ministry was clear after her preaching experience, she was uncertain about what that call would entail after graduation. But with her Elon professors' guidance, she was reassured.

"The opportunity to study different traditions under the best

professors I've ever had made me really passionate about interfaith work," Kilpatrick said. "It was Elon and religious studies that made me realize I am passionate about the church."

She said these Elon professors offered her opportunities and internships that enhanced her faith and confirmed her decision to pursue ministry work.

One of Kilpatrick's most prominent mentors, Jeffrey Pugh, professor of religious studies, largely shaped her outlook on religious traditions.

"[Kilpatrick] was always one of the leaders of the discussion and was always respectful of others' opinions," Pugh said.

To this day, Kilpatrick said she quotes Pugh to her students at Woodward.

With her professors' advice and leadership, Kilpatrick received a full scholarship to the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

Running with religion

In the midst of her studies and after recovering from her stress fracture and other various injuries, Kilpatrick continued to run on the cross country team all four years at Elon. On the team, she won academic awards as a student athlete and was selected to be the team captain her senior year.

Former cross country coach Christine Engel and teammate Christine Pacewicz '13 said Kilpatrick made a commitment

to improving, had supportive interactions with her teammates, was enthusiastic at practice and had a cheerful disposition. They said Kilpatrick epitomized the ideal student athlete that they all strived to be.

"She was always the one we turned to for support no matter what," Pacewicz said. "She kept the team upbeat."

"When she was at practice, she was present and excited to be there," Engel said. "That mentality definitely rubbed off on her teammates. As a coach, having someone like that on the team was just amazing."

With a natural ability to run, Kilpatrick said she utilized her talent to further her relationship with God. Running brought her peace and clarity, an ideal environment to facilitate her faith.

"Running became a spiritual place for me," she said. "Being able to go out and run was a place that I could talk to God."

Today, she still pursues her love for running as a triathlete who competes with the United States' team.

From all she has learned about respecting others' differences as an athlete, student, intern and chaplain, Kilpatrick hopes future generations will likewise learn to embrace individuality and strive for global change.

"My hope for the future is that we can all live alongside each other in true appreciation for the beautiful distinctions that we have," Kilpatrick said.