

Students seek fellowship in campus religious groups

The increasing interest in religion at UNL is not the result of an emotional fad, but rather it reflects a growing desire among students to know Christ, said the director of the UNL Baptist Student Union.

Brett Yohn said BSU has experienced a 30 percent growth in membership over the last year while other campus religious organizations report steady gains.

He said all Big Eight schools are experiencing an increase in religious interest similar to UNL's and he believes this is a national trend.

Unlike the highly emotional Jesus movement of the 1960s Yohn said students now are searching for a personal relationship with Christ through spiritual and religious truth found in the Bible.

"The economy and lack of job security increase the desire within students to know who they are," he said.

Organizes, teaches, counsels

Yohn, a Southern Baptist minister, helps the 130 to 150 members of BSU to organize Bible studies, teaches members how to lead study discussions and counsels students who need help.

Students are moving toward a more personal faith in Christ, he said, and shy away from established worship.

"They don't want to go through a travel agency for their religion. They see a home church which is lifeless to them and don't flock to similar places on campus," he said.

Yohn said these active evangelical groups need an authority figure which they have found in the Bible.

Leaders of student church groups disagree with Yohn, saying church ties are as strong or stronger than ever.

Gene Toul, director of Navigators, a Bible study group, said his organization encourages its members to maintain strong ties with their home churches.

Parental involvement

Navigators also emphasize parental involvement in the organization.

"Some groups overlook this aspect, but is important for parents to know what type of organization their children are involved in," he said.

Dave Nelson, present of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellow-

ship said students in that organization have very strong ties to organized churches, but no one denomination composes a majority of the membership.

Nelson said Inter-Varsity is unique in the fact that it is the only religious fellowship organized and directed entirely by students.

All three organizations hold weekly meetings and small group Bible studies ranging from 3 to 8 people.

BSU and Inter-Varsity gain members as students bring friends to meetings with them, while Campus Crusade for Christ, directed by Dave Eggert, and Navigators take a more active approach to membership.

Recruits from residents halls

Members of Navigators contact people in their residence halls who they think might be interested in the group, Toul said.

Inter-Varsity, Navigators and Campus Crusade each have nearly 100 members.

Way Campus Outreach, a group of about 50, is an attempt by the Followers of The Way to bring the truth of the Bible and God to students who are searching for answers to fill a void in their lives, said Harry Berggren, 22, a student member of the group.

Followers of The Way ministry presents keys to the scripture that help its followers understand Christianity, Berggren said.

These keys were discovered by Rev. Weirwille in 1953 while studying Greek and Aramaic translations of the Bible, he said.

Christian organization

Berggren described The Way Ministry as a Christian organization rather than a religion.

"In many religions what has evolved is a bending of the doctrine of God with the doctrine of man, which is often unscriptural in its basis," he said.

The main doctrine of The Way Ministry is that "the word of God is the will of God," Berggren said. Thus members of the organization closely study the Bible to see the truth that God has set forth.

This search and belief in the truth is tested by the practice of faith healing.

"Jesus Christ practiced faith healing and he said we will

be able to do even greater things," he said.

The healing can be either spiritual or physical and works because of the great truth found within the Bible, Berggren said.

Healing possible

The healing will only be possible if the follower is confident in the faith and has a mature understanding of it, he said.

Follows of The Way do not, however, discredit the benefits of medicine and technology, Berggren, a pre-med major, said.

A religious organization based on a vocation of technology is available to students in the College of Engineering.

Engineers for Christ offers engineering students a chance to relate their faith to their school work and future profession, said Fran Solomon, secretary to the organization's adviser.

Although most of the 20 to 25 members are engineering students, any Christian associated with UNL, including faculty and staff, is welcome to join, Solomon said. The group is not affiliated with any particular denomination, she added.

Activities sponsored

Solomon said the club sponsors various social and religious activities, such as weekly Bible studies, speakers, group fellowships, volleyball and picnics.

The two-year-old club is the only one of its kind in the United States, she said.

UNL also has a 25-member chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

The group has no paid staff members so individual volunteers minister to the athletes, Yohn said.

He said there have been 15 to 20 coaches and varsity players meeting for prayer and Bible readings before, this year's football game.

"This is a self-organized effort and represents a desire that wasn't present 4 or 5 years ago."

Christian fellowship also is sought by residents of the Agape House, a Christian living cooperative at 1636 Q St.

Non-denominational co-op

The house is connected with College Career Christian Fellowship and originated from that group's desire for a non-denominational co-op.

Members of the Jewish student community can find similar fellowship with the Hillel organization.

The Hillel Foundation, a national organization for Jewish students, will be reorganized at UNL this year.

The purpose of the organization is to fulfill the social and cultural needs of Jewish students, said adviser Annette Freeman.

The club will sponsor speakers, films and social events, she said. It also will place students in local homes to celebrate Jewish holidays according to the traditional ceremonial customs, she said.

Rides arranged

Students can arrange for rides to and from the synagogues by contacting the organization, Freeman added.

The increased interest in religion also is reflected in the enrollment of UNL's 12 religion classes, offered by the Religious Studies Program.

"I would certainly agree that there is an increased interest," said John Turner, instructor of religion classes in the history department. "Although I'm not in a position to document these facts, I'd say the mood of the time, the uncertainty, adds to the increase."

Enrollment in Doug Erlandson's philosophy of religion class has increased from one section of 25 to 30 students per semester in 1972 to two sections of about 50 students each this semester.

Still actively involved

A large number of his students were actively involved in their religion in 1972 and Erlandson said many still are.

Turner said a majority of his students are conservative and fundamental in their religious beliefs, but want little to do with an organized church.

If students do attend a church it is usually non-denominational, he said and students usually will join a private Bible study to fulfill their religious needs.

Plans to expand the religious studies program include development of a 100 level Introduction to Religion class, which will present provocative, biased guest lecturers, he said.



Photo by MaryAnne Golon

Religious expression can take many forms, from the traditional to the new.

Campus ministries offer variety of services for students

Congregation size at Wesley House has not increased noticeably, said Duane Hutchinson, minister of the campus church.

Bible studies and religion courses are being filled more rapidly than in previous years, he said.

Hutchinson said the active involvement among students in the 1960s is experiencing a revival after the period of intense privacy in the early 1970s.

Students are more "searching," willing to get involved, he said.

Although not always more serious in their religious beliefs, students are more willing to talk about them, said Larry Doerr, director of Commonplace.

Religion courses offered

This uncertainty and willingness to discuss their religion has prompted the campus ministries-Wesley House, Commonplace, the Lutheran Student

Center and Chapel, The Baptist Students Fellowship, and the Episcopal Student Center to offer 13 non-credit religion courses, Doerr said.

Labelled Discovery '78, these include classes in Christian literature and christianity's relation to feminism, Marxism, science and sexism.

Classes of this nature have not been offered in 8 to 10 years, Doerr said.

"This is a period when people are confused. College helps to create an atmosphere of questioning and chances need to be available to discuss feelings, issues and religion," he said.

Six-week classes

About 50 people pre-registered for the classes which began Monday. These afternoon and evening classes meet weekly for six weeks.

The campus ministries also provide other services to UNL students.

The Lutheran Student Center and Chapel offers worship services, counseling and social functions.

Canoe trips, ski trips, retreats, hayrack rides and community service projects are some of the activities planned for this year, according to church intern Jim Holthus.

Students also are welcome to stop by enjoy the center, which offers a lounge, game room and kitchen, he said.

Weekly masses

Catholic students can take advantage of the Newman Center, which holds weekly Masses.

About 500 students from the 2,500 to 3,000 member congregation regularly participate in church activities, said Father Leonard Kalin, Newman Center Chaplain.

These include a function every Sunday night, choirs, visitation groups to Lancaster Manor and the Lincoln Regional Center, and various other social and service pro-

jects, he said.

Commonplace is involved in the University Child Care Project and offers student internships through the "Students in Community Action" program.

Non-denominational services

Wesley House offers non-denominational worship services Sunday mornings at 9:30 and 11:00. Hutchinson said there are 500 to 600 who attend fairly regularly.

The church sponsors a choir and other social activities for its members, and is connected with the Y-Pals child care project.

Wesley House used to take an active role in shaping the political climate of Lincoln. Hutchinson said, but now takes a quieter approach to serving the community.

Students are turning away from religious cults and drugs, he said. "They want to get through school, get a job, start a family and get going in life," he said.