

NU students question prior religious beliefs

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shock her parents. Her search ended when she discovered the Baha'i faith.

Baha'i is a religion that was formed in Persia, or present-day Iran, Pedersen said. It worships one God and is devoted to the idea that the world is one big family.

There are nearly 100 people in Lincoln who practice the Baha'i faith, including a group of five UNL students. Pedersen said the idea of a unified international community is a key aspect of Baha'i.

"Throughout the ages, God has revealed His will at different times and places," Pedersen said. "The result is a lot of small individual religions."

"Now we have communications that connect the world, and it is time for us to realize that we are one global family."

Pedersen said Baha'i has reconfirmed her lifelong religious beliefs.

"I have always been active in church, and I never once felt like I had to rebel against the Methodist beliefs," she said. "But I always had a problem with the thought that only Christians would go to heaven."

This difference caused Pedersen to look into other religious beliefs, and she found Baha'i to be the most intriguing.

"I have always felt that all religions are very closely related, and Baha'i reinforced that and made me see that the entire world is one community under God," she said.

Baha'i requires Pedersen to spend a certain amount of time each day praying and participating in mandatory group worship. The religion stresses dedicating a lifetime of service to God and humanity, she said.

Pedersen said she has experienced a wide spectrum of reactions to her faith. Some are curious, she said, while others are disgusted.

"My parents were rather apprehensive (about the change)," she said. "I felt it was a fulfillment of my beliefs, but they saw it as a rejection of what they had given to me."

Many people ask Pedersen about her beliefs, but that curiosity could sometimes lead to unwanted advice, she said.

"People at work asked me about my faith, and I began to explain it," she said.

"My boss overheard me, and she called me into her office. She said that she was concerned about me and scared that my soul would go to hell."

Inner conflict

Angela Hatcher, a senior English major, found herself questioning religion at a young age. She is a member of the Campus Atheists and Agnostics, a group of nearly 100 members.

"I was raised as a Catholic," Hatcher said. "But I was a bit odd for a Catholic child. I wasn't sure about communion, so I did it at age 12, while most kids do it at age 7."

Because of inner conflicts, Hatcher rejected confirmation into the Catholic Church when she was 16.

"I read the Bible, and a lot of stuff just didn't jive with what I felt," she said. "I always believed what I was told, but when I became old enough to question authority, I came up with theories of my own."

After entering college, Hatcher

"I'm not doing anything radical. I just have unanswered questions."

ANGELA HATCHER
member of Campus Atheist and Agnostics

said she began to spend time with different people and learned that the most open-minded people had no religious affiliation.

"The people most true to my beliefs of being a good person and having an open mind didn't have a religion," she said.

"I started to distrust organized religion. I began to devote myself to free thought, not religious worship."

During her junior year, Hatcher decided to become agnostic, and joined Campus Atheists and Agnostics.

"I am agnostic because I don't know what to think about God and religion," she said.

"If there were a multiple choice question that read 'Is there a God?' then I would select the answer that said: 'Not enough information to answer the question.'"

Hatcher said if there is a God, then humans are not evolved enough to find the true answer.

"I don't assume to know God," she said. "I don't try to push my beliefs on other people. I respect their beliefs, so I expect them to respect mine."

Hatcher has experienced some backlash because of her beliefs, but she said most of it is because of ignorance and common assumptions.

"For some reason, when Christians hear the word agnostic or atheist, they seem to immediately associate it with Satan," she said.

"They think you go home and sacrifice goats in your basement. I'm not doing anything radical. I just have unanswered questions."

Finding a good fit

Some students have found themselves bouncing around within a religion.

Jessica Reddick, a senior family science major, tried many forms of Christianity before settling on Lutheranism.

She attended the First Plymouth Church for six months, and then looked briefly into Catholicism before joining a Lutheran church.

"I tried to avoid the people attend-

ing and just experience the different religions, so I could make a final choice," Reddick said.

Even though Reddick said Lutheranism is the best fit for her beliefs, she still attends other religious ceremonies outside of the Lutheran denomination.

"It is always good to go out of your comfort zone and experience something different and new," she said.

"I identify myself as a Christian first and foremost. Lutheranism is my denomination, but Christianity is my religion."

Reddick grew up in a non-Christian family. Her mother believed in a form of God, but she did not believe in Christ. Reddick followed her mother's beliefs until adulthood.

"I began to ask my friends about Christianity, and it sounded like something I wanted to be a part of," she said. "I gathered bits and pieces from them because I had a lot of questions without answers."

Reddick has experienced some awkwardness in her family. The fact that her mother and brother are non-Christians has led to some difficulties.

"My family has shown support of my personal beliefs, but it is hard for me to be in a non-Christian family," she said.

"I really want to share beliefs with them and pray together, but we don't have that spiritual bond. It is very hard."

Reddick said her friends are still motivating factors in her religious growth.

"I think that my friends are part of God's plan for my life," she said. "They have always been there for me when I was lost."

Whitt said because of an unfamiliar community and peer influence, the college environment incites religious change.

"The influence of friends is really important as to what religion people choose," he said.

"Social networks lead students to change."

Hagel takes part in panel on Kosovo

OMAHA (AP) - Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel on Tuesday was part of a bipartisan congressional delegation meeting with NATO leaders in Belgium to discuss the status of military operations in Kosovo.

Hagel and other lawmakers joined Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Ralston at NATO headquarters.

A news release from Hagel's office said the delegation also will travel to Ramstein Air Base in Germany to review humanitarian relief efforts and Aviano Air Base in Italy to visit U.S. and allied forces.

"Talking to NATO leaders and

U.S. allied troops will give us a better sense of what's going on and give us an up-close look at this problem," Hagel said.

Hagel, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a Vietnam veteran, has been critical of the Clinton Administration's reluctance to commit ground forces in Yugoslavia.

Heightened military action by NATO is justified because of increasing Yugoslav attacks against ethnic Albanians, Hagel said this week, calling Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic "a butcher, a tyrant" who should be dealt with appropriately.

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