

# faith

Jim Parks

But he also emphasized that his faith has enabled him to maintain control when he is exposed to such choices.

"It was still a part of me. Things I learned in the past — they're what kept me going," he said. "Personally, this was the time I asked myself, was my drive strong enough? Was my faith going to pull me in the right direction?"

Marc added that his faith enhanced his ability to turn his head and not be a part of many distractions and temptations.

"It just felt like the right thing to do," he said.

As his first semester went on, Marc said, he also found himself becoming more comfortable in asserting his faith. For instance, he was quite pleased with a recent conversation he had with his girlfriend at Ithaca.

"It was a huge talk about faith and family, and I told her how important that is to me," Marc said.

Collene said that her faith was challenged, and deepened, through talks with her three best friends at Cornell — a Catholic, a Jew, and one who questions the existence of God.

"It's really been interesting to sit down and explain my religion. I wouldn't say they're arguments, per se," Colleen said.

Collene said she's aware that some religious groups on campus oppose Catholic beliefs. However, she feels that she's firm enough in her faith that she would decline invitations to join such groups.

"My personal reaction would be to nod my head, say 'Thank you very much', get up and walk away," she remarked.

Meg said she feels equipped for these kinds of deterrents once she begins college.

"My Catholic faith has done so much for me. Granted, it's going to be challenged, but everything I have is rooted in my faith," Meg said. "What I've been built upon is going to make it easier. I couldn't imagine a weekend without going to Mass, it means so much to me."



Meg also pointed out that teens don't need to wait until college to begin taking ownership of their faith. For example, she said she is involved in her peer ministry group at Aquinas and also performs volunteer work outside of school.

**"I've started putting my faith into action on my own,"**

Meg said.

Rob Stevens also said he's becoming more open with his faith during his high-school years. For instance, he recently began making the sign of the cross on his Brockport High School teammates' heads before their wrestling matches. He also gets down on one knee to pray before his own matches.

"It's coming from me, rather

than a group or my parents," said Rob, 16, from Church of the Nativity in Brockport. "It's a lot of my own choices and responsibilities; it becomes more personalized."

However, in personalizing his faith, Rob observed that he has also begun to question some aspects of the Catholic Church.

"It's hard to believe everything, 100 percent," he said. "A lot of my doubts come when I talk to people of different faiths and religions. Who's to say that you and I (as Catholics) aren't wrong?"

This exploring process could take several years, Marc observed.

"I'm not 100 percent ready to be settled in my faith, my morals, my values," Marc added.

Yet Rob and Meg agreed that it's not a bad step to have such

questions.

"I think that's healthy," Rob said. "It shows you're active in your faith and praying about it."

"You're starting to form your opinions on certain topics. Everyone sort of has doubts, and that's what makes it faith," Meg said. "The doubts and questions — that's what leads to progress."

Even as these questions occur, Rob said that one constant — prayer — always helps him maintain a healthy perspective.

"Prayer is so important," he said. "If you have questions, you can look to God and say, 'Help me out here!'"

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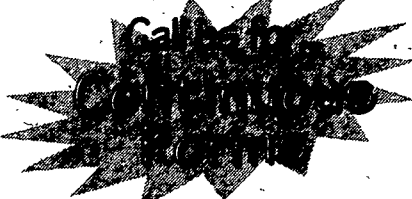
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