

Local

Churches overflow with students

Clergymen seek relief of 'standing room only' conditions

By MARGARITA JAIME
Battalion Reporter

What was once a typical Sunday morning church service in College Station is now becoming a modern sermon on the Mount. Students who attend church services in the area are dismayed to find standing room only.

An 11 a.m. mass at St. Mary's Catholic church is so crowded that people stand in the aisles, on the pews leading up to the balcony and in the lobby at the entrance to the church.

The First Baptist Church of College Station has also considered an expansion program to deal with the increase of students.

"We just voted to purchase 13 acres on FM 2818," Rowland said. "It's a long range type idea at this time, but with the student population increasing as fast as it is, it might be in the near future."

However, the A&M United Methodist Church has expanded. Two years ago, a new student center was built to help alleviate the increase of Methodist students from the community church.

The Wesley Foundation, on Tauer road, which was built for students in 1978, may soon be faced with the same dilemma as other local churches.

The foundation was built to accommodate the 100 students that tried to fit in their small room chapel, before they expanded.

"The foundation seats 250 to 300 students," the Rev. John Riley said. "And I think that in three or four more years, we will have fit the maximum amount of students in it."

Grace Bible Church has also added an extra church service, and the Rev. Andrew Seidel said he hopes to build on to the present church, at 701 Anderson, despite financial difficulties.

He said he is delighted that there is such a dilemma, although he said he wouldn't call the overcrowding a problem. "If it is a problem, it's a nice problem to have," Seidel said.

Along with the Methodist church, the University Lutheran Chapel also has no problem with overcrowding. "We're doing fine," the Rev. Hubert Beck said. "We've added new chairs that have given more sea-



the service is impersonal, and they are scared off."

Oxley also agreed that when a student goes to an overcrowded service he may be turned off.

"Many people come from churches where they participate immensely in the church," he explained. "They come to a church with a big congregation, and suddenly they don't seem to count anymore."

Although the Episcopal church has not yet reached "standing room only" services, it is considering adding a new mass.

"If overcrowding is a problem at our church, it's a nice problem to have," Oxley said. "It only shows that we're doing a good job." He said that it is fun for him to watch a church grow, and to see "more and more people turn towards God."

Rowland said he also feels that when the students are involved in the church they have a sense of importance.

"Our students are very involved in the church and are very reliable in the jobs they do," he said. He also said the students are very involved in the ministry and are teaching in the church.

Rowland said that the First Baptist Church in Bryan is trying to help ease College Station's overcrowding problem by attracting students to their church.

Riley, of the Wesley Foundation, said that he feels bad about having students turn away from the church because of overcrowding. "Students come to church to be somebody," he said. "With a school as big as Texas A&M, a student is suddenly a nobody — just a number."

"We try to get to know the students and get them involved in the church. And we must be doing a good job, if our enrollment is increasing," Riley said.

What causes such an increase in church participation among college students? Riley said he feels the instability of the nation and the fact that the student is away from home may cause students to turn towards God. "The student feels like a person at church, not like a number," he said.

What are the local churches doing to alleviate this problem?

St. Mary's, where 70 percent of the congregation are students, has held a fifth mass to its Sunday schedule.

Last year 75 chairs were set up in the balcony to try and lighten the

"When our services get extremely full, we let the people know that there is a closed circuit television in another room that can be used as an alternative," the Rev. David R. Rowland said.

standing load, the Rev. Bill Brooks said. But after the next week those seats were taken up, and once again the masses were crowded.

"We have added a 1 p.m. mass on Sunday," he said, "but that may not help. People want to go to mass when they want to go to mass. They want to go at 10 a.m. or 11:30 a.m., not at one in the afternoon."

First Baptist Church of College Station has also added an extra church service and is experimenting with a new way to reach their parishioners.

For the past six Sundays, we've been working with closed circuit television," the Rev. David R. Rowland, associate pastor, said.

"When our services get extremely full, we let the people know that there is a closed circuit television in another room that can be used as an alternative."

However, Rowland said that the church was still "ironing out" some

The Rev. Andrew Seidel, of Grace Bible Church, said he is 'delighted' that there is such a dilemma, although he said he wouldn't call the overcrowding a problem. 'If it is a problem, it's a nice problem to have,' he said.

problems that came with the closed circuit TV.

St. Thomas Episcopal Church presently seats only 150 people, but church authorities are considering expanding their church.

It would be nice to have a bigger church," the Rev. William R. Oxley said. "However, our number one problem is financing such a construction."

Oxley explained that to add only 10 extra seats would cost the church \$20,000 or more.

Brooks said St. Mary's No. 1 problem is standing in the way of expansion, also financing.

"With our large student body, we know that they don't have much money," he said. "The money they have comes either from home or from their job savings."

"Even though we have thousands of students, our collections aren't high enough to consider an expansion program."

"I don't care how good the sermon is, if you have to stand through the whole service — forget it!" the Rev. Bill Brooks, of St. Mary's Catholic church, said.

ting capacity, so we don't have a seating problem," he explained.

The major problem the churches are contemplating right now is the effect the overcrowded services have on students who come to church and have to stand.

"I personally feel that it turns them (students) off," Brooks said. "In a matter of a few weeks, a decline in student body attendance will be seen at all the masses."

"I don't care how good the sermon is, if you have to stand through the whole service — forget it!"

Brooks said he is uncomfortable about losing the students. "Students come to church because they want to; it's a commitment they make," he said. "However, because of the large congregations, students feel

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