

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

Page 3 • Monday, September 6, 2004

Keeping the faith

Chaplains encourage students to explore their faith in campus organizations

By Carrie Pierce
THE BATTALION

When Alfredo Balderas, a senior marketing major, was a freshman in the Corps of Cadets, he was having a hard time adjusting to college and had reached rock bottom. Just as he was hitting his breaking point, the chaplain of his outfit came to his dorm room and offered to help.

"He prayed for me, and it gave me the strength to keep going," Balderas said. "It made all the difference."

Balderas now serves as the chaplain of the Corps of Cadets, a position he said is necessary because it's an encouragement to the cadets.

Many large organizations at Texas A&M have chaplains, a position that serves to facilitate religion into the organization. Religious organizations also have chaplains to serve as the spiritual leaders.

Balderas said his job is to provide religious accommodation for the cadets, which includes distribution information about worship services, encouraging church attendance, providing transportation to services and taking cadets to Breakaway, a Bible study held at Reed Arena. Each outfit of the Corps also has a chaplain to organize a weekly Bible study, Balderas said.

"I have a ministry of presence," Balderas said. "I'm around to be there for the chaplain of each outfit."

Balderas said a big challenge he faces as chaplain is standing firm in what he believes while being accommodating to everyone and being politically correct. Some people are easily offended and don't think having a chaplain is necessary, he said. Balderas said the job of a chaplain is not to evangelize, but to show support.

"If you ask us, we'll share our faith with you," Balderas said.

Balderas said having a chaplain in the Corps of Cadets is especially important because everything the Corps stands for is faith-based values and morals.

"In order to be a full person or cadet, you must be sound in your mind, body and spirit," Balderas said.

The Corps of Cadets also has a Jewish chaplain, a Muslim chaplain and a women's chaplain to accommodate for the different beliefs and cultures for an organization as large as the Corps. Askia Tourne, a junior electrical engineering major, serves as the Muslim chaplain for the Corps. His job includes supporting others of Muslim faith, holding prayer sessions and reading the Quran with other Muslims. Tourne said it's an equal opportunity position for people to have spiritual comfort.

"A challenge is to fit the traditions and practices in with the Corps lifestyle," Tourne said.

Tourne said his responsibilities are slightly different from Balderas' because the Corps is not a predominantly Muslim organiza-

tion, and he must actively seek out Muslim cadets. He said his goal is to find out how many Muslims there are in the Corps and let them know he is there. Spirituality is important in this particular organization, he said.

"It's important in the Corps, especially for the freshmen, because it's a stressful time in their life and it keeps them grounded," Tourne said. "It helps knowing you have a higher power on your side."

Tourne said he feels strongly about his faith and is sure that there are other Muslims in the Corps that do, too.

Many fraternities and sororities at A&M also have chaplains to meet the spiritual needs of their members.

Brian Joiner, a senior recreation, parks and tourism sciences major, serves as the chaplain of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. Part of Joiner's job is going to Breakaway and inviting the other members of his fraternity. He also holds a Bible study and leads the prayer before every meal.

"The position is whatever you make it out to be," Joiner said. "I like to think it affects guys who don't have a strong relationship with Christ to want to learn more, and those who do have a strong relationship, to strengthen it."

Joiner said his biggest challenge is getting people to come to a Bible study because people have busy schedules. It's important to put the programs together for the members, even if they are only helping one person, Joiner said. He said the position of chaplain is important because his fraternity isn't officially a Christian organization.

"If I try and follow God's will, I'll do the right thing," Joiner said.

"It helps guide my fraternity in the right direction."

Chaplains of religious organizations have a slightly easier job than those of non-religious based organizations because they do not have to worry about offending anyone, said Joey Rigney, who serves as the chaplain of Brotherhood of Christian Aggies.

As a chaplain of BCA, which is a Christian organization for men, Rigney, a senior communication major, said he is freer to express the truth of Jesus than chaplains of non-religious based organizations are.

"They minister more to non-Christians, so the things they can do are limited," Rigney said.

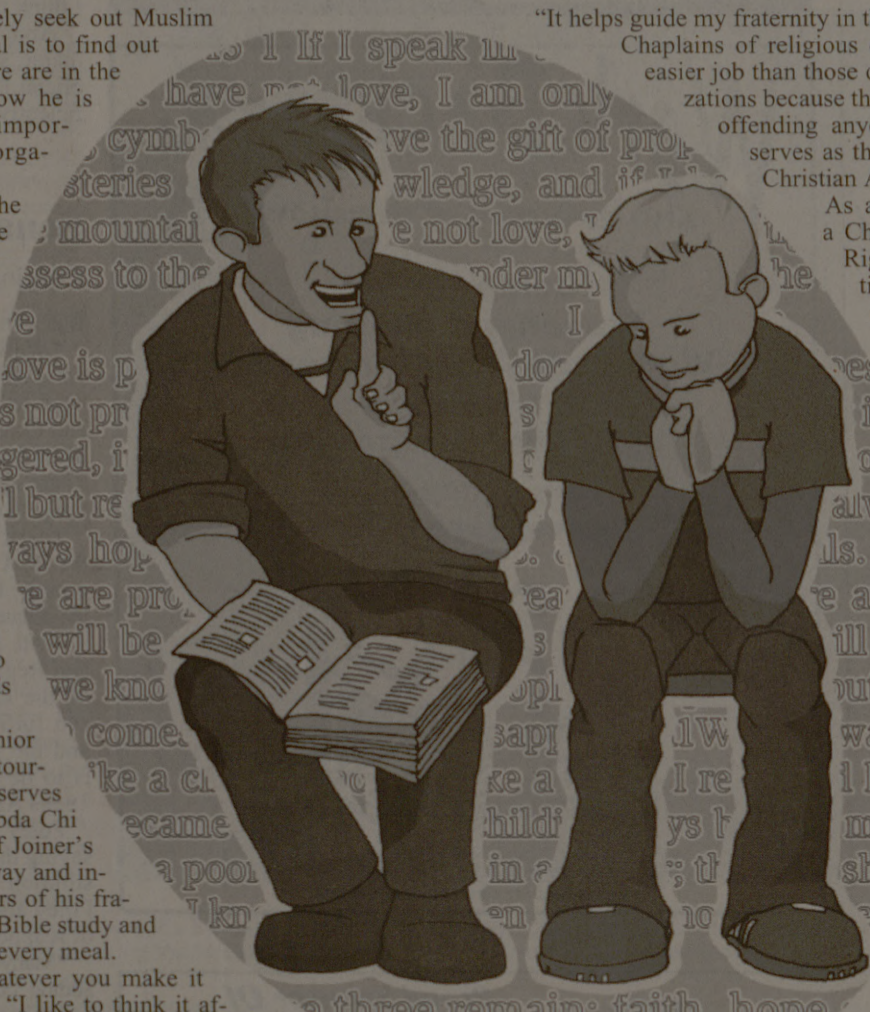
Rigney said he has felt drawn to the position of chaplain since he was a freshman in BCA. It took three years for him to mature enough and to grow enough for God to put him in the position, Rigney said.

He said that one of his growing concerns regarding religious organizations such as BCA is that membership may become a replacement for church attendance.

"A problem in the past with (these organizations) is they pull away from the church. People come and get involved with them, but they can't relate to the people in

the church," he said.

Rigney said his goal in BCA is to provide spiritual direction for



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See Faith on page 4

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