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ROOM FOR OPPORTUNITY: AN INVESTIGATION OF CATHOLIC STUDENT
LIFE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
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ABSTRACT

Like most Honors graduates before me, the final work for this thesis became something much different than what I had originally intended. Originally, I wanted to make short videos and blog posts about the nature of religion at UMaine. However, the project evolved into a short documentary focused specifically on Catholic students. I produced, directed, shot, and edited the film. My primary goal was to investigate whether or not Catholic students felt like a minority and how that affected them. I was repeatedly forced to reevaluate my own experience with faith throughout the production process. As a practicing Catholic, I went into this project with many biases and preconceived conclusions. I expected all of the students that I interviewed to feel shunned. I expected them to feel like they had to hide their faith. This turned out to be false. Of the four students featured in the documentary, only one expressed that she had felt ostracized for her faith. However, even this student said that this changed over time. I titled the finished documentary, *Room for Opportunity*. This is a quote from Jake Gebhart, a subject in the documentary. The title refers to the idea that while UMaine is a secular campus, it also allows students to be challenged and grow in their faith.

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CHAPTER I

THE INSPIRATION

I began this project largely because I simply wanted to make a video of some sort. This was my starting point: the desire to make a video. My desire to make a video stemmed from my love of stories. I believe that stories are an integral part of the human experience. We are uniquely capable of telling complex stories as a way of communicating our emotions, our beliefs and our history. Stories allow us to investigate who we are. My favorite movie, *Predestination*, is an elaborate story of a time traveling agent trying to recruit their past self while also trying to stop a terrorist bomber. However, it's not an action movie, it's actually a deeply emotional story about this person trying to figure out who they are and what their purpose is. This is what I believe is at the core of any good story; "Who am I?"

I specifically chose to make a documentary because I believe that real people talking about real things can make a strong impact on people. This has certainly been the case for me. Damon Gameau's *That Sugar Film* is one of my favorite documentaries and inspired me to get into documentary filmmaking. The film is about how our diets are full of excess amounts of sugar. Gameau specifically highlights how much sugar is in what most of us consider to be "healthy" food. However, his criticisms of the American diet were not the thing that inspired me to give up sugar, it was the fact that he was telling his audience about something he was passionate about. At the beginning of the film, Gameau switches from his personal, sugar-free, diet to a "healthy" diet full of sugar. Over the course of the next few months, he interviewed scientists about the effects of a

sugary diet and talked to different people who had been negatively impacted by a sugar-rich diet. He did all of this while his body changed due to the amount of sugar he was eating. He gained weight, got fat around his liver, and had changes in mood and energy levels. He made it personal and that's what stuck with me. After watching this film, I knew that if I ever wanted to make something impactful, the subject would have to be really important to me. Anything else would be a flop.

After considering all these things, I decided to make a short documentary. I then had to come up with a subject for the video. I knew this had to be something important to me. Otherwise I may not have had the motivation to produce a good final work. I decided that the focus of my video would be religion. Religion is an important topic to me because I am a practicing Catholic. I go to church every Sunday, I pray regularly, and I actively engage in the church community. Being Catholic is an important part of my identity. My faith was deeply personal to me and making a documentary about faith forced me to investigate my own identity; to ask myself who I am. I sought out to investigate whether the secular nature of UMaine had an impact on religious students. In the context of this project, when I refer to religious students, I specifically mean students who consider their religion to be an integral part of their identity and actively practice it. Of course, a religious person could be anyone who considers themselves to be a part of a religion regardless of how often or to what degree they participate in the particular rituals associated with their religion. A person's religion is a matter of personal belief and identity. However, I wanted to ensure that the people I interviewed cared deeply about their faith. I was worried that someone with a more ambivalent attitude toward

their religion would not be willing to be interviewed. Thus, I decided to specifically interview students who were highly involved in their faith.

Reflection

After reflecting on the completed work, I cannot say that *Room for Opportunity* accomplished everything I sought out to do. In terms of form, it absolutely is a short documentary. It features real people talking about their real lives. While I did my best to accurately depict Catholic students, I worry that my own Catholic identity may have made me biased when producing the final work. I fear that the final draft may be inaccessible to a wider, non-Catholic, audience due to the rather coded nature of the conversations I had with the students I interviewed. They didn't need to explain their faith to me, and thus they didn't explain their faith on camera as much as a non-Catholic might need them to. Documentaries as a genre serve to inform their audience about a subject with which they may not be familiar. This is something which *That Sugar Film* does very well. *Room for Opportunity*, however, may require its audience to have a predetermined understanding of Catholicism in order for it to resonate with them. I now realize that despite intending to make a short documentary for non-Catholics, I ultimately made *Room for Opportunity* for Catholics. Not to say that non-Catholics won't be able to understand it all, just that the way the different students speak about their faith might only be fully understandable to other Catholics who already have an understanding of what things like faith, prayer, and going to mass mean to Catholics.

CHAPTER II

THE PROCESS

The period of time between when a filmmaker begins their work and when the work is completed is referred to as “the production process.” This process is divided into three sub-processes: pre-production, filming, and post-production. (Steiff, 2005) This chapter will discuss how I went through this process, my thoughts on documentaries, the tools I used, and what I learned along the way.

Creative Philosophy and Documentaries as Research

I believe documentaries can offer a unique balance of research and storytelling. All documentaries are educational in nature, this a defining attribute of the genre. On the other hand, all films tell a story; this is a defining attribute of the medium of film. The relationship between these two things is the most interesting aspect of documentary filmmaking to me. This relationship requires the filmmaker to walk a line between accurately representing their subjects and telling an engaging story. If a filmmaker tries too hard to make their final product engaging, they run the risk of misrepresenting their subjects and therefore failing as a researcher. On the other hand, if a filmmaker focuses too much on the facts of the subject matter, the story can become dry and unsatisfying. In the context of this project, I knew that the final cut of room for opportunity would have to balance the emotion that any of the subjects associate with their faith with enough actual description of what living that faith is like at UMaine. This is why the

final cut opens with the subjects describing how they see the attitude toward religion at UMaine and ends with them all proclaiming their identities as Catholics.

The actual code of ethics and best practices associated with documentary filmmaking have never truly been defined. That being said, there are a few things that most documentary film makers agree should be considered when dealing with subjects, producing your final cut, and then releasing to the audience. According to a study from American University (Aufderheide, Jaszi, & Chandra, 2009), when dealing with subjects, most filmmakers agree that any subject must be treated with respect. If a subject has any demands prior to interviewing, the filmmakers should try to accommodate these demands. If a subject wants a quote to be cut from the final film, the filmmakers should remove it. However, if such a quote is integral to the story the filmmakers are trying to tell, they may be forced to keep it in for the betterment of the film. This brings up another concern that the study found; a filmmaker's duty to create an entertaining documentary. The problem with not having a clear set of ethics documentary filmmakers to follow, they are sometimes forced to make arguably unethical choices, choices that could end up hurting their subjects or misrepresenting a controversial topic. Fortunately, while religion can sometimes be controversial, I was not forced to make any difficult choices while making *Room for Opportunity*. I made sure to respect my subjects, I stopped filming when they asked me to, and I did my best to make an engaging short documentary while managing this.

Although *Room for Opportunity* is a creative work, I must acknowledge that it was created in an academic setting. This only enhances the educational nature of

documentaries, as I mentioned above. An article by Kim Munro and Paola Bilbrough examines the concept of documentaries as research more closely. They conclude that,

“Despite the obstacles, the practitioner as researcher has a certain privilege that stems from being able to offer insights from within the practice, and knowledge that can only be gained through the messy process of testing and failing. It is also through this process and critically interrogating what we do when making documentary, that we can find spaces and gaps and new ways of looking and listening that can infiltrate assumed ways of thinking about filmmaking. We believe that using methods that draw on research also allow for other approaches to be applied to the filmmaking process that can shift the work away from traditional activist films into potentially more engaging responses to social issues.”

-(Munro & Bilbrough, 2018, p. 267)

I believe this quote summarizes the nature of documentary filmmaking as research very well. As I mentioned above, the exact process of making a documentary hasn't been defined. This allows each documentary filmmaker, or researcher, to find their own ways of producing their research in the best way possible. Filmmakers have an incredible amount of freedom when doing research. I find this level of freedom fascinating and it is one of the reasons I decided to become a documentarian. While I do not claim that *Room for Opportunity* is valid as scientific research, I would be excited to use the medium of documentary as research in the future.

Pre-Production

Pre-production covers everything leading up to the filming of a video. For documentaries, this means contacting subjects, organizing staff, procuring equipment, and defining the scope of the documentary. Luckily, the only “staff” I had to organize was myself, since this was a completely personal project. I also used my own equipment. My advisory committee helped to define the scope of the project, a

documentary investigating whether the secular nature of UMaine had an impact on religious students. This left only one more thing to do. The hardest part of this project was finding people to interview. Specifically, getting in contact with people that I did not know. I was easily able to set up interviews with two other Catholic students, Jake Gebhart and Erin McConnell. Many of the other students I reached out to did not return my emails. Those that did usually declined to be interviewed. Just when I had begun to make connections with other religious groups, all students were sent home due to the COVID-19 epidemic. I knew that this would make interviewing students that I did not know personally nearly impossible. This forced me to reconsider the scope of the documentary. Luckily, I was able to interview two more Catholic students in person before Gov. Mills issued the stay-at-home order. These students were Craig (CJ) Jipson and Katie Dube. Whenever I got permission to interview a subject, I would then move into filming.

Filming

Equipment

As mentioned above, I used all my own equipment to produce *Room for Opportunity*. I used three different cameras: a Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera (BMPCC), a Canon EOS T6 (T6), and a Samsung Galaxy S10 (S10) smartphone. The Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera was used for the interviews themselves. I chose this camera because of its remarkable image quality and versatility in different lighting situations. The BMPCC has 13 stops of dynamic range. This means that it can see better detail in highlights and shadows than most cameras. It uses a color profile called “log”

which produces an image that looks nearly black and white with low contrast. While this may sound bad, it actually grants the editor more control over what the final image looks like. It also writes the video files using a codec called Apple ProRes, which does not compress files as much as other codecs and thus makes editing faster. I attached a Rode VideoMicro microphone to the BMPCC to record the audio for the interviews. I used the T6 and S10 for b-roll, the supplementary footage that went over the interviews. I chose these primarily for their ease of use. While the image quality is not as good as the BMPCC, they are both much more mobile and look less intimidating when shooting in public spaces.

Interviews

When it came time to actually sit down to interview a subject, I chose to ask questions in a rather conversational way. I would ask an initial question, see how they responded, and then let what they said guide the next question I asked. I did this in order to make the subject more comfortable and feel like I'm really listening to them. However, I did have a base set of questions I made sure to ask each person. First, I asked how they identified in regard to religion. Then, I would ask them to describe the attitude toward religion at UMaine as they have experienced it. Depending on how they responded, I would ask whether or not this impacted how they felt; whether or not they felt like a minority and if it mattered to them.

Jake Gebhart was my first subject. He is a friend of mine, so setting up the interview with him was easy. When asked to describe how he felt as a Catholic at UMaine, he said that he was aware that Maine in general is one of the least religious

states in the country. Jake told me that he expected UMaine to be very secular as well, but he was rather surprised by the Catholic community at the Newman Center, the church just across from the UMaine campus. He seemed almost grateful for the secular nature of UMaine because it challenged him and forced him to be strong in his faith. Jake also expressed that this provides a lot of “room for opportunity” to talk to people with different faiths and grow from that experience.

My second subject was Erin McConnell, the current president of Black Bear Catholic, the student organization for Catholic students. She described UMaine as a very secular campus. Erin told me that she knew this just by walking around campus and listening to others voice their opinions. She felt like the fact that she actively practices her faith made her a minority. Erin said that she believed many students might say that they belong to a particular religion, but very few UMaine students actively practice. This did not seem to bother her, however. She described how her non-Catholic friends are always very respectful of her religion; they’re fine with her having to miss certain things if she needs to go to mass or Bible study. Erin was also extremely grateful to be able to attend services and events at the Newman Center. The community there gives her the sense of security she needs to feel confident about her faith on campus.

Craig Jipson, or as most know him, CJ, was the third person I interviewed. Unsurprisingly, he also described UMaine as a relatively secular campus. However, he believed that most UMaine students actually are religious but that they are afraid to show it. He explained that it may be easier for young people to hold onto their religion when they are with their family. However, once they move to college, there are many more options for them on a Sunday and their peers may persuade them to skip going to

church until they eventually lose track of their faith. The most moving part of my interview with CJ was when he told me about how discovering his faith in college pulled him out of rough times. He described his problems with gambling and partying. He eventually had to let go of the lifelong friends that led him to those things in order to pursue his faith. At the time of writing, CJ has been gambling-free for six months. He attributes this progress to the Catholic church and the Newman Center.

I finished my interviews with Katie Dube. She was the one student I talked to who expressed that she had difficulties expressing her faith in college. She said that close friends of hers would scoff at her when she would mention her faith. Katie told me people would completely change the way they acted around her once they found out she is Catholic, despite being friends with her for months before. She acknowledged that there can be a negative connotation to proclaiming oneself as Catholic due to the various scandals the Catholic Church has faced and continues to face. Katie said that these things made it difficult to bring her faith into her adult life. However, once she settled into the community at the Newman Center and made friends with other Catholic students, she grew more confident in her faith. Katie was thankful for the friends she made and the challenges she faced because they helped her figure out who she wants to be.

Post-Production

I edited the video on my MacBook Air laptop using adobe Premiere Pro and Adobe Prelude for video editing, Adobe Audition for audio processing, and Adobe After Effects for the credits. The Adobe applications are great for doing work like this because they work together seamlessly. I started with Prelude to mark out which sections of the

interviews I wanted to use in the final draft. Then I brought the footage into Premiere, where I did most of the work. Premiere allowed me to send the audio into Audition where I could enhance the subject's speech and reduce background noise. Once I was done piecing the video together, I made some very simple credits in After Effects, brought them into Premiere and exported the final draft. While this was a process that I was familiar with, I was grateful for the opportunity to practice making a more complex video. It forced me to reevaluate the way I stored my files and organized my projects. I also had to teach myself a bit about audio processing in order to make the interviews audible.

Post-production turned out to be the most engaging aspect of the project. I produced two rough drafts before the final edition. Each time, I received feedback from my advisory committee on the narrative structure of the film and advice on how to make it more engaging. This was when I realized the value of iterative creation, making multiple drafts of something and improving it each time. There is a saying among artists that says, "a work of art is never finished, merely abandoned." Before I took on this project, I wasn't sure how I felt about that. Now, after being forced to abandon *Room for Opportunity*, I realize that the phrase is true. While I do believe I've made a decent finished product, I also believe the final product may never be perfect.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPERIENCE

Assumptions and Expectations

Going into this project, I assumed that UMaine was a largely secular community. This assumption was largely based on my own experience as a practicing Catholic. However, this was not completely subjective. Research from the Pew Research Forum shows that Maine is the third least religious state in the country. Thirty-one percent of Mainers identified as atheist or agnostic and although sixty percent of Mainers identified as Christian, only thirty-four percent said religion was highly important to them (Pew Research Center, 2015) This same study also showed that the number of religiously unaffiliated people was increasing, and the percentage of Christians was decreasing all across the United States of America. The Pew Forum also showed that younger demographics tended to be less religious than older generations. This all comes together to show that the population of the University of Maine would be a more atheistic population.

My second assumption was that this environment would keep students who were religious from expressing their faith, that they would hide it in order to fit in. This was reflected in a study by Cristen Dalessandro at the University of Colorado Boulder. The study showed that most Catholic students would strategically decide whether or not to show their faith based on how their peers would perceive them. Dalessandro writes,

“The students in this study did not see their identities as Catholic as impeding their integration into campus social life, unless they wanted

purposefully to be seen as different. In the latter case, becoming actively involved in the Church adjacent to campus offered an alternative social scene. However, for all the students in this study, the newfound expectations students encountered at school shifted some of the meanings associated with Catholicism. While being Catholic was not, in itself, a stigma, students recognized that there was a line between appropriate and inappropriate expressions of religious identity.”

- (Dalessandro, 2016 p. 10)

This had certainly been the case for me in the beginning of my college experience. I had many friends who strongly disliked Catholicism because of the church’s teachings on issues like abortion and gay marriage. Others would make jokes about all priests being pedophiles. I learned that if I wanted to fit in with these people, I would have to suppress certain aspects of my religious identity. I knew that this line Dalessandro described existed, and I expected other Catholic students to find the line extremely uncomfortable to navigate. I soon realized that this may not be as bad as I thought.

Take-Aways

While the students I interviewed all mentioned that they thought UMaine was a relatively secular campus, they had all found a way to express their faith and maintain their desired social lives at the same time. It seemed that the Catholic community at the Newman Center gave them an outlet to comfortably develop their religious identity. They also expressed that their non-Catholic friends were fine with them practicing their religion.

This forced me to reevaluate my own experience with religion. As I was editing the film, I was reflecting on my journey as a Catholic student. For so long, I had considered my Catholic identity as separate from my college identity. Listening to the interviews made me wonder if the challenges I had faced were really as significant as I

had remembered them. Upon reflection, I realized that my experience had only been marginally different from that of any other college student. Any argument I had with my friends, any ill-natured joke they made only helped me to understand the role that religion played in my life. I did my best to reflect this realization in the final edition of *Room for Opportunity*. I wanted to show that anyone can find a way to practice their faith without becoming an outcast.

CHAPTER IV

THE FINAL DRAFT

The full video can be seen at: <https://youtu.be/PUidS6R6pjY>

Transcription

Audrey: So, I think just in general people want to know that they belong. So it doesn't matter where you are, whether you're in a new class whether you're in a new town, whether you're in a new church, or whether you're at college for the first time. You want to belong; you want to go somewhere, and people know you.

Katie: Like anything, I mean everyone has an emotional reaction to the word religion.

Jake: Personally, I know that the state of Maine is known for its lack of religion. So, coming into UMaine, I figured that the university would be just like that There would be a lack of religion or a lack of understanding or respect for people who are religious. I can't say I've personally experienced too much of that. The people I've surrounded myself with, whether they're religious or not, have always shown respect and openness to conversation or just learning about religion. And if they're not they still have a normal attitude about it there are certain aspects of the University of Maine that aren't geared towards someone who might want to invest in their religion. I don't know, if there wasn't

a Newman Center there wouldn't be a lot here there wouldn't be a lot of opportunities for people to practice their faith.

CJ: You know I go to the Union sometimes and I see people reading the Bible. I go to Union sometimes and I see there's Bible studies or discipleship is going on, but you don't you don't really notice it unless you're looking for it, or you don't really notice it unless you're someone who's in religion. I think it's something that a lot of people at UMaine believe in. I think there's a lot of people at UMaine that have been raised from it. But then you come here and there's a lot of different options. Before, growing up, it was school, religion, and sports. You know? That was kind of the options. You get here, there's fraternities, there's parties, there's other things you can do, and I think, you know, religion becomes kind of a setback and it takes a lot of work to keep practicing your religion. There's a lot of other opportunities that I think people choose over religion not because that's what they want to choose but sometimes, that's what's easier to choose. I think if more people said, you know, "I'm religious, I'm going to church on this day. You want to come with me?" I think a lot more people would do that, but I think, you know, it only takes a few people to say, "hey I'm religious, let's do this." But I don't think enough people are doing that.

Katie: I think that the overall attitude toward religion in general at UMaine... it's... I think it's accepted. I think there are some... There's definitely recognition I mean we've been allowed to table. we were allowed to host events, but like politics, religion is a very difficult one to talk about. Like anything, I mean, everyone has an emotional reaction to

the word religion. So, how can I, at the university, have super in-depth conversations with someone I just met when I don't know what their emotional reaction will be to the word religion?

Erin: UMaine is definitely a secular campus, so it definitely... you can feel that just being on campus and being a student. People definitely voice their opinions and those opinions don't always go with views of religion but having somewhere like the Newman Center makes it so easy to still practice my faith on a secular state school campus. The Newman Center is a church but it doesn't look like a church and it's on the UMaine campus for UMaine students and students of surrounding universities to come to practice their faith with other people from their age group and somewhere that they can come that can be home for them and somewhere to go to mass but also to join Bible studies and just join in fellowship with other people who practice the same faith and have the same beliefs views and morals that they do.

CJ: I came to the Newman Center and for a while it was kind of just a place to hang out but to me it finally became home and now to me it is home because I live here in the apartments; but you know I went to other churches and it was kind of "Hey, here's you know, Bible here's your Sunday church service and then go on your way." but with because Catholicism, especially Catholicism here, it was adoration on Tuesdays, it was Wednesday night supper on Wednesdays, it was Sunday night on Sundays it was Sunday Masses. It was just so much going on. It felt more like I was invested in God and wanted to learn about God, it was different than any other experience I've been through before.

Yeah, I've never been baptized I've never kind of always been nondenominational but I've always felt the feel good experience when I've gone to those churches, where when I come to the Catholic church, it's maybe opened up some wounds I wasn't ready to open up but it's been better for me. Yeah, no I was doing things I probably shouldn't have, I was gambling a lot, and I was missing classes, I wasn't happy, I was kind of depressed, I got, you know, I had a few girlfriends and they fell through, and I think I was just kind of stuck. I didn't know what was the most important thing to me; and I thought it was being with a girl, I thought it was being the cool kid. But, I came here and being at the Newman Center, specifically and being in the Catholic Church, it made me you know find who I truly was, who God intended me to be, and by coming here I started going to classes again, I started to be able to fall asleep at night, and I stopped gambling and you know because of the Catholic Church, I'm coming up on five months gambling free. And to me, that's allowed me to be the CJ that I've always intended to be. Without the Newman Center and Catholic Church, I don't think I'd be here

Erin: well I'm a cradle Catholic, so I was baptized as an infant, but especially through being here since I've been at UMaine, I have been able to further myself in my faith and further my relationship with God. The Newman Center has kind of given me an outlet for that. All of the people that I hang out with outside of the Newman Center, all of my friends that I've made in other ways, are all really okay with the fact that I'm Catholic, really accepting of it, and they're always fine with it if I can't go to something because I have to go to church or If I have to go to Bible study or anything like that

Katie: I had to make the decision if this was something that I was going to bring into my adult life, because I've been used to attending Mass with my parents, making sure that I go to events in high school, but since I came to college, I think you're just shoved out into the real world for the first time and seeing that if it's truly important to me I'm gonna have to hold on to it. I think I have actually made my faith my own since coming to college because I've had to; I've had to find out what's the best way for me to practice and I think that's the beauty of religion in general is that you can really figure out where your piece fits in this larger picture.

Jake: When I arrived at the University of Maine, I didn't really think too much about my faith. I went to church and told people I was Catholic, but I don't think I was super involved with anything. But when I came to the University of Maine, I discovered the Newman Center and realized that there were a bunch of people my age who actually practiced their faith and knew a lot about their faith. Just being involved at the Newman Center and being around a community of students who knew more than me and were able to push me into learning more about my faith allowed me to grow a significant amount.

Erin: Especially being someone that actively practices my faith, I think there's probably a bunch of people who would maybe consider themselves part of a religion but aren't actively practicing and so, me being someone who goes to Mass weekly, and goes to Bible study, and is part of discipleship, and I'm doing all of these things with my faith,

and really practicing my faith, I think I'm definitely minority on this campus. I think it's definitely difficult. If I go into a class and I'm with or I hear someone saying something that goes against things that I believe because I'm Catholic, that definitely makes it difficult and kind of puts me in a position that I may not be at if I wasn't at a secular University, but the fact that I both have the Newman Center to come and to practice my faith and I also have all of the people I know from the Newman Center makes it a lot easier to be comfortable and be confident in my faith when I'm talking to people who aren't religious.

Jake: It impacts me in the sense that I wish it wasn't like that. Because I know just what I have personally gained and what I've seen other people gain with practicing their religion and knowing who God is and how I'm having a relationship with God... what that can do for someone. So, it's kind of a bummer, but it leaves a lot of room for opportunity Just to talk to people to find people who have the complete opposite opinion of you, complete opposite faith of you. That yeah, sometimes you'll find people who don't want to talk about it but sometimes you'll find people who are open to it and interested in learning and I find that's a really cool opportunity.

CJ: People are scared, you know. I think growing up, you went to Sunday school when you were with, you know the 20 people you were with, but they all believe in the same thing you did, or, you know, you lived with your family your whole life and they're Catholic or they're some type of religion, and so, they go to church on Sundays, you go

to church. You wake up in freshman year on a Sunday, no one else is going to church on your floor, they're going out drinking on a Sunday. "Oh, I might, you know, skip Mass or church this Sunday, I'll go with them." The next Sunday you miss it again. So, I think growing up it was easier to be religious because the people you were around were always religious too. Where here, not everyone's like that. I think a lot of people are religious but they're afraid to speak on it just because of what others will think. I think college is a time to reinvent yourself and I think it's a great thing I think, you know, you shouldn't be judged on your past but there's also good parts to your past, the religion that you were part of, the religion that you attend, and I think too many people leave that behind because they want to create a cooler self of theirs. Katie: in some ways, I would say that developing my faith in college was actually pretty challenging. Unfortunately, there can be a negative connotation to actually proclaim like, "I am a Catholic person" and honestly there has been so much that has happened that I completely understand. I'm not going to hide the fact that bad things have happened. As a freshman, I was uncomfortable expressing that, but as I grew and had more mentors and more opportunities to be challenged myself, it's been a little bit better, now I feel like I can carry a conversation it's not... it's just another part of who I am, I'm an intersectional being there's a lot of really cool things about me.

Jake: Although I didn't come here for the Newman Center, after being here and experiencing the Newman Center, I fully believe that being at a public university, especially like UMaine, that doesn't have a lot of religion, for someone who does, and finds the Newman Center, I think it's a huge opportunity to grow in your faith because

you're challenged a lot. I feel that at a public university having the Newman Center and having a community here was really helpful for my faith and just my college experience and it challenged me in a lot of ways that I wasn't really expecting to be challenged when I came to college.

Erin: I appreciate in myself that I found this place so early. I know that there's a lot of people who don't even realize there's a Newman Center until they get to their third or fourth year here and they don't get to take full advantage of it. So, I think I'm really fortunate that I went into college knowing that FOCUS and Newman centers exist, and knowing to look for one, and that I was able to find it so early so that I can enjoy it and receive all of the benefits from having something like this so close.

Katie: I'm thankful that in these formative years at college, I have had mentors I have had leadership positions, I have had volunteer opportunities, to really allow myself to check who I am, check where I am and create a foundation for who I want to be.

Interviewer: How do you identify? Do you identify as a Catholic or...?

CJ: As a Catholic, yeah.

Erin: I practice Catholicism.

Jake: I am Roman Catholic.

Katie: I am a Roman Catholic.

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Jacob Buttarazzi is from Arundel, Maine. He was born on August 14th 1998. He grew up as the youngest of three children. He graduated from Thornton Academy in 2016 and immediately enrolled in the University of Maine. His father, mother, sister and brother all graduated from the University of Maine before him. Jacob is majoring in New Media Design with a minor in Business Administration. He is a brother of Alpha Tau Omega.

After graduation, Jacob plans to become a videographer with the goal of opening his own studio. He hopes to produce work that fosters community and positivity among all people.