

Mass attendance low for college students

As parents study prospective colleges for their kids, they'll devour information about Catholic campus life, but their student might be headed in a different direction.

Father Edward S. Hendricks, the Catholic chaplain at Frostburg State University and the director of the Office of Ministry of Higher Education for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said of students, "As they come on campus, Catholic Campus Ministry is not their first stop."

But Father Hendricks knows that's OK. He's seen it before - a fascination with Eastern religions or even a complete disregard for any type of religion. Sometimes students are just too overwhelmed and busy to join a campus group or even attend Mass.

But he knows something else, too - those students will be back.

"College is a time for students to begin to move from the faith of their family to their own faith, and sometimes that involves not going to church at all," he said. "Even if they stop going for a while, by and large they'll come back. Obviously that's a tough thing for parents to deal with - I'm not a parent so it's easier for me to say it than for you to hear it."

He advises parents to continue sharing why their faith is so important to them and resist the temptation to nag.

"I've had parents call me and say, 'Would you call my son or daughter and tell them to go to church?' and I say, 'No.' Just because a person stops going to church for a while doesn't mean all is lost," Father Hendricks said. "I've been amazed and blessed by the students I talk to outside of church - because they're not coming to church - and by junior or senior year they're coming to church and they're involved. When they come back they'll be stronger in their faith because they're making their own."