

Couples of different faiths find perspective to make it work

BY CAIN TWYMAN | PUBLISHED 10/07/15 12:21AM



Alex Vasquez, a senior dramatic arts and psychology major, and Max DePietro, a senior management and society and art history major, sit together in St. Anthony's Hall, a co-ed art fraternity of which they are both a part.

Photo by Claire Collins / The Daily Tar Heel

UNC sophomore Salem Hockett says she's a United Methodist Christian. She was raised in the church, and her father was the preacher.

Growing up, Hockett always wanted to rebel against her father and the expectations she felt the church held her to. But Hockett loved her family — she was conflicted.

So the summer before her first year of high school, she started dating an atheist.

Her boyfriend, raised by Christian parents, does not believe in God.

Hockett says she's struggled with this. Even though she was still trying to figure out if she was Christian when they first started dating, it was something she worried about.



Vasquez was raised in a Catholic family and now identifies as Christian. DePietro was raised in a Jewish family but is now agnostic.

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“In the beginning of our relationship, I hadn’t made my decision yet,” she said. “I didn’t know what being a Christian meant for my life or a relationship.”

It’s been difficult, Hockett says, and she gets frustrated. But at the same time, she said this relationship has helped her grow in her own faith.

Instead of pushing her boyfriend toward Christianity, she said she prays that one day he’ll believe in God. Forcing her views would be more harmful than helpful in her relationship, Hockett said.

“Sometimes I get frustrated with God because I’m like, ‘I’ve been praying for this for four years, and you’ve shown no progress,’” she said.

Hockett and her boyfriend, McCann Sheridan, a sophomore at Duke University, have been together for five years now. When they talk about the future, they differ on how they would raise their children.

“We’ve kind of already decided what will happen down the road,” she said. “I want my children to go to church with me. I won’t give in on that, and he knows that.”

‘Shares your values’

Stephan Labossiere, a life and relationship coach in Georgia, has helped many couples of differing religions.

Many times, he said, there can be problems when making decisions because of the different life philosophies the people have.



Labossiere said if those in the relationship don't strongly practice their religions, then the likelihood of clashing is lower. However, he said, most people tend to date within their own religions.

"You need to be with someone who shares your values and spiritual beliefs," Labossiere said regarding families. "You can't have the team believing in two different philosophies."

Labossiere said the key components to any healthy and successful relationship are honesty and communication. He said respect plays a big role in all relationships, but it might be more of an issue in interfaith relationships.

"In order to date effectively, you need to be yourself, be honest and be willing to communicate," he said.

Interfaith couples he had coached often had big differences in opinion when it came to their lives. Labossiere said he believes all relationships should benefit both people.

"As long as they are getting what they need ... to keep them happy, then it should not be a problem," he said.

In Hockett's romantic relationship, she said it is important for her to have a relationship with God.

"It's hard because there are a lot of things that say you shouldn't be with someone who is not a Christian," she said. "(But) he in no way wants to hinder my relationship with God."

'Practice love'

Though a relationship between people of different faiths has its fair share of difficulties, it's not always an uphill battle.

UNC senior Resita Cox has been in an interfaith relationship since May. She is a Christian, and her boyfriend, Rohan Smith, who graduated from UNC in 2014, does not believe in God.

"I read my Bible. I go to church. I believe fully," she said. "He doesn't know what he believes in."

Cox said she had reservations about this difference during "the courting stages" in the months before they made their relationship official.

But Cox said that in any relationship, there are going to be two different perspectives coming together.

"I just realized that the main practice of Christianity is to practice love," she said.

She has been a Christian all her life and was raised by Christian parents.

But one of the things she worries about is raising children, even if she only thinks about it passively.

"The one thing I believe about raising kids is giving them a choice," she said. "(But) as far as raising kids, it's not something I have to worry about now."

UNC senior Alex Vasquez and her partner, senior Max DePietro, have been dating for a year.

Vasquez was raised a strict Catholic, but she lately started identifying as a nondenominational Christian. DePietro was raised Jewish but is now more agnostic.

"We were both raised differently, but if we ever have questions, we can ask," she said. "I didn't know much about the Jewish faith."

She said she was not worried about their religion getting in the way of their relationship and that she and DePietro are still on their respective religious journeys.

"I'm still not fully practicing and am still looking for a denomination that fits me," she said. "It's more faith-based than actual religion."