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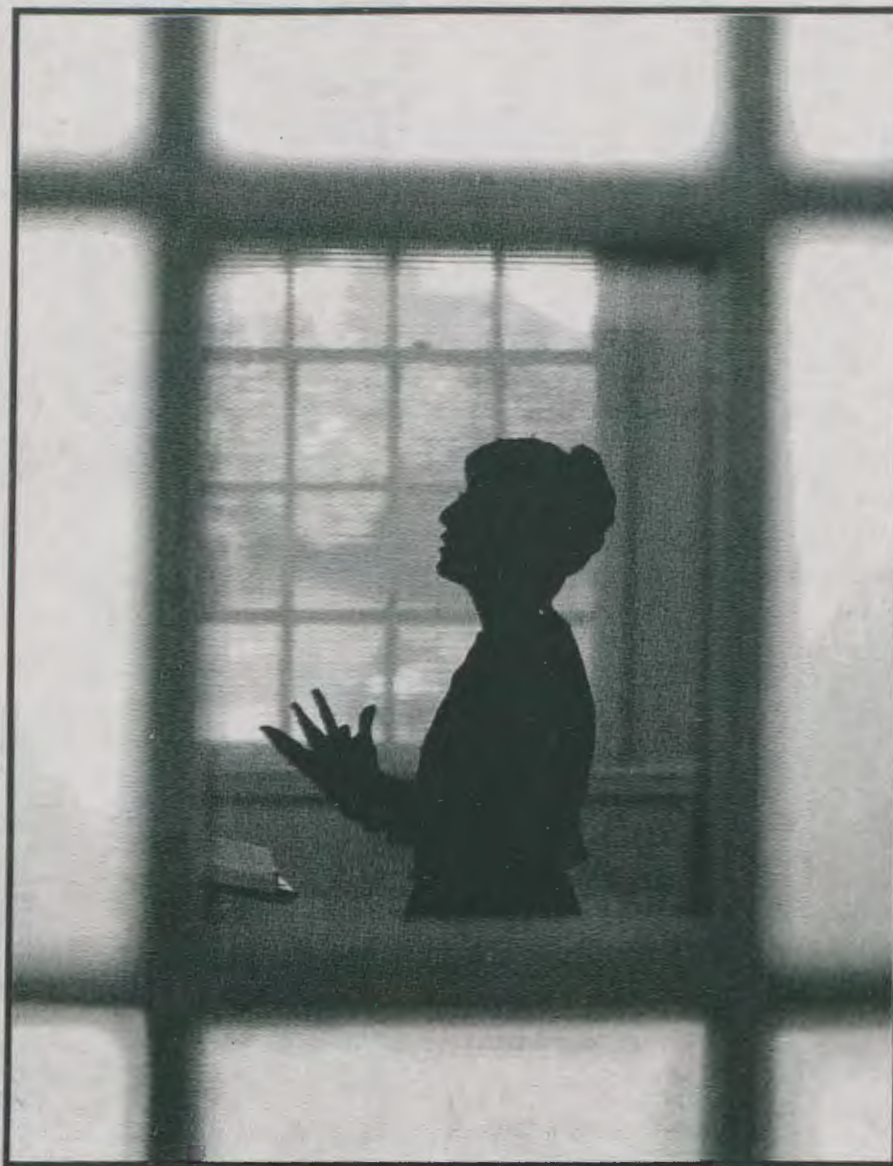
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## PIONEERS: First class carved out a path



Peggy Matthews, framed by the classroom door, presents a sermon to fellow students.

JOURNAL PHOTOS BY CHRIS ENGLISH



# Faith Refocused

Wake Forest's divinity school to send 20 into service

WS Journal, Sunday, May 19, 2002

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## An Island to Itself

Guantanamo Bay base  
may be on Cuba, but it  
has more of the feel  
of a small town in the  
United States

Insight, A15



## Family Vacation

Focus on wholesome  
entertainment, patriotism  
is drawing crowds again  
to Branson, Mo.

Travel, F12

## Index

Books . . . . .	A18
Business . . . . .	D1-D8
Celebrations . . . . .	E5-E7
Classified . . . . .	L1-L26
Crossword . . . . .	F7
Editorials . . . . .	A16
Nat Irvin . . . . .	A15
Ken Keuffel . . . . .	F1
Ann Landers . . . . .	E2
Movies . . . . .	F2
Obituaries . . . . .	B4, B5
Lenox Rawlings . . . . .	C1
SAM . . . . .	B2
Television . . . . .	F9
Travel . . . . .	F12
Kim Underwood . . . . .	E1
Phoebe Zerwick . . . . .	B1

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# Faith Refocused

Wake Forest's divinity school to send 20 into service

By Michelle Johnson  
JOURNAL REPORTER

They are 15 women and five men, ranging in age from 25 to 61. They include a one-time businessman and a former schoolteacher, and represent a cross-section of Protestant denominations, from Baptist to Presbyterian to Moravian.

They are the first graduating class in the School of Divinity at Wake Forest University.

Few in this group receiving their diplomas on Monday are headed for a traditional pulpit. They speak more of social justice than of sin and salvation.

All came to Wake Forest conscious that they were part of an experiment: the creation of an ecumenical divinity school that would, among other things, serve as a counterweight to the conservative domination of the Southern Baptist Convention and its seminaries.

The school is still a work in progress. Students and faculty have struggled to find a balance between honoring Wake Forest's own Baptist roots and promoting religious pluralism and academic freedom.



Jeannette Quick chats with a family during an internship in Greensboro.

"It's not without its faults — because whenever you bring all those different voices together, there's tension and disagreement," said Stan Cross, one of the graduating students.

"It's like the Bible. Out of the tension and argument and disagreement comes life," he said.

Because they were the school's first students, this

See DIVINITY, Page A16

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## AT HOME: Mexican village mostly women

By Amy Frazier  
JOURNAL REPORTER

GUSANO, Mexico

Inside the salmon-pink bell tower of a church in the dry hills of Gusano, a man in his early 50s leaned his weight into a rope, signaling the start of the 11 a.m. Mass.

Groups of women and children, well dressed in fresh, unwrinkled shirts and flowered dresses, shuffled over dusty earth toward the large wooden door of the church.

Young men are nowhere to be found. About 90 percent of the working age men in this community have

moved to the United States, where they often make more in an hour than they could have made in a day working in Mexico.

"This church was built entirely with money from the (United States) and the women put up the stones," said Adriana Cortes Jimenez, a community leader in the Mexican state of Guanajuato where Gusano sits.

The absence of men is obvious during a walk through the community's streets. Women carry black umbrellas to shade them from the sun. Children gather in the playground of a local public school.

"We're almost purely women here," said Maria de Jesus Vargas de Aguilar, 59, a resident of Gusano.

Palmillas is one of 12 villages that make up the community of Gusano — which means "the worm" for the way in which the villages snake through the rust-colored, dry mountains.

Of the 300 families living in the village, there are only 20 or 30 men, Aguilar said.

On the other end of the migration pipeline, North Carolina and other

See MEXICO, Page A5



Maria de Jesus



## DIVINITY

Continued From Page A1

group actively participated in helping to refine the school's mission and identity, Cross said.

"We all felt part of that pioneering experience," he said. "That awareness adds a sense of responsibility and a real desire to make things work and do our best."

### A call for moderate voices

Talk of starting the divinity school first surfaced in the late 1980s, a few years after the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention. Many moderates had left or been forced out of posts at Baptist seminaries because they refused to teach biblical inerrancy, the defining conservative tenet.

The Rev. Mike Queen, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Wilmington and a Wake Forest trustee, was among those who approached the university's president, Thomas K. Hearn, with the idea of starting a divinity school.

They argued that Wake Forest — whose Baptist founders in 1838 envisioned it as a producer of ministers — needed to join other Baptist schools that were re-embracing theological education. Over the years, that training had moved to denomination-run seminaries.

Baptist universities, meanwhile, had grown increasingly independent of the denomination: Wake Forest severed its last ties to the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in 1986.

But the university made slow progress in creating the divinity school, and some early backers withdrew financial support, Queen said. He nonetheless defends Wake Forest's approach.

"The university is dealing with so many different constituencies about money, space ... we had to make sure that this was going to fit in with everything else," he said.

The school opened its doors in 1999 with 24 students. Moderates and liberals hailed a new era; conservatives questioned whether the school would ever meet a critical challenge: turning out a significant number of graduates who actually wanted to preach.

Today, the ideological divide remains deep. The Rev. Jerry Pereira, the conservative president of the Baptist State Convention, declined to comment about the school, saying that he doesn't know much about it.

But Willie Jennings, the academic dean at the Duke University Divinity School, said that other schools are watching and hoping for Wake Forest's success.

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If the congregation does, as expected, Wyatt will be the first woman to be ordained by the congregation. She plans to work for the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington, a nonprofit organization that deals with issues of religious liberty and the separation of church and state, and eventually return to graduate school for a doctorate in biblical studies.

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"We really have to prepare students for religious communities that are in what I call a state of permanent transition, and we are doing it inside a university that is trying to diversify itself. I find that challenging and a bit invigorating — certainly invigorating," he said.

Leonard has always made it clear that he wanted a diverse school, one that reflected the state of modern religion. The faculty includes a Benedictine monk, a black preaching professor and a feminist biblical scholar, along with well-known academics who are veterans of the struggle between conservatives and moderates within the Southern Baptist Convention.

There is, however, no self-described conservative Baptist. And diversity for the student body has been a challenge, as it is at many schools.

The graduating class is all white, and mostly female. Subsequent classes have brought more balance: Seven out of the school's 65 students in 2001-2002 were black. Men were also better represented.

"We're trying to recruit students," Leonard said. "We don't know what future profiles will look like, and we won't know until we get accreditation."

Because it is so new, the school has not been accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. The accreditation process begins this summer but will not be completed until 2005.

"I think we all get impatient with that," Leonard said. "It really is stages of growth."

Graduation from an accredited school is generally a prerequisite for ordination, but students can ask for exceptions in some denominations.

## A work in progress

Even though many of these graduates will not have a traditional pulpit, they will be asked to preach from time to time and will be judged as ministers by what they say, said Brad Braxton, the divinity-school professor who teaches the art of preaching.

Those first graduates will begin to develop the school's reputation in the outside world.

"It begins to form an identity about what students come here to do," Crainshaw said.

Jennings said that historians will be watching closely to see how the school deals with issues of diversity, theology and the complex interplay between cultural issues and religious beliefs.

"In many ways, it's unprecedented — to have a major university found a seminary at the end of the 20th century," he said.

"It's going to be a very important test case for gauging the character of Christianity in the South in a very modern university at the turn of the century."

For his part, Leonard downplays such talk.

"I think theological education in general is a test case," he said. "We're a microcosm of what schools all over the country are facing. We have an advantage because we're new. We haven't gotten to turf issues yet."

Parker, who will be ordained at Wake Forest Baptist Church next Sunday, said that the school faces a struggle.

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But Willie Jennings, the academic dean at the Duke University Divinity School, said that other schools are watching and hoping for Wake Forest's success.

"Everyone ... understands that Wake Forest's seminary is significant and has promise to be a major voice in theological education," he said.

"We really want them to do well. We're convinced that the formation of the clergy for the church needs to be done in the context of the university."

#### The first year

It wasn't always easy.

Early on, the divinity school got caught up in the maelstrom surrounding the use of Wait Chapel on campus for a same-sex commitment ceremony. Susan Parker and Wendy Scott, the two women who requested the ceremony,



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#### Different paths

Hearn said in 1999 that he hoped many students would ultimately choose ministerial work.

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Part of the challenge is knowing if many people in this new generation of ministers wear their denominational affiliations loosely, Leonard said. The way to ordination is through Christian denominations.

"Denominations still become a necessary entry point, but they're not necessarily helpful in dealing with the broader cultural issues," he said.

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Part of the challenge is knowing that many people in this new generation of ministers wear their denominational affiliations loosely, Leonard said. Yet the way to ordination is through Christian denominations.

"Denominations still become a necessary entry point, but they're not necessarily helpful in dealing with these broader cultural issues," he said.

have brought more balance: Seven out of the school's 65 students in 2001-2002 were black. Men were also better represented.

"We're trying to recruit students," Leonard said. "We don't know what future profiles will look like, and we won't know until we get accreditation."

Because it is so new, the school has not been accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. The accreditation process begins this summer but will not be completed until 2005.

"I think we all get impatient with that," Leonard said. "It really is stages of growth."

Graduation from an accredited school is generally a prerequisite for ordination, but students can ask for exceptions in some denominations.

### A work in progress

Even though many of these graduates will not have a traditional pulpit, they will be asked to preach from time to time and will be judged as ministers by what they say, said Brad Braxton, the divinity-school professor who teaches the art of preaching.

Those first graduates will begin to develop the school's reputation in the outside world.

"It begins to form an identity about what students come here to do," Crainshaw said.

Jennings said that historians will be watching closely to see how the school deals with issues of diversity, theology and the complex interplay between cultural issues and religious beliefs.

"In many ways, it's unprecedented — to have a major university found a seminary at the end of the 20th century," he said.

"It's going to be a very important test case for gauging the character of Christianity in the South in a very modern university at the turn of the century."

For his part, Leonard downplays such talk.

"I think theological education in general is a test case," he said. "We're a microcosm of what schools all over the country are facing. We have an advantage because we're new. We haven't gotten to turf issues yet."

Parker, who will be ordained at Wake Forest Baptist Church next Sunday, said that the school faces a struggle.

"If this is really going to be a new experiment, we've got to keep pushing back against the forces that want to make us into their image of what theological education should be," she said.

"Are we going to find a way to live in the tension?"

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