

II. Reorientation

FROSH Student Interview

Interviewer: Alexis DiPrima

WELCOMED: To begin, what parts of your background, origins, or community feel most important for readers to know?

Interviewee: I am a first-generation, low-income Catholic student. My parents are from southern Mexico, and they immigrated to the U.S. more than twenty years ago. That history shaped me a lot, and it really nurtured my love for being Catholic. I think of myself as queer and Mexican, and politically I am a democratic socialist. Those parts of me are not separate from my faith. They all inform how I try to live and what I feel called to do. One of the biggest things was that my parents sent me to Mexico when I was young so I could experience pueblo culture directly, not just hear about it. That gave me a real sense of belonging and memory.

WELCOMED: Are there particular community traditions that stand out?

Interviewee: Yes. Every year on September 10, our community honored its patron saint. People from my parents' hometown who had moved to the U.S. still carried that tradition, so there was a real diaspora, and you could feel how connected everyone was. There was camaraderie and celebration, but what grounded me was that the saint's day was not just one day. It was really the whole stretch from September 1 through September 10. Leading up to it, we would all pray the rosary together, a traditional Catholic devotion made up of repeated prayers and reflection on key moments in the lives of Jesus and Mary, using beads to keep track of the sequence so we could focus on meditation rather than counting. There were prayer-oriented traditions that made it feel like faith was something lived in community, not just a private idea. It made me realize I am a poblano. It taught me that knowing where you are from matters, and that building community around that identity can be powerful. That is part of the root of my perspective on faith.

Faith guides my decisions and informs my moral character. It is not just something I do on Sundays. It shapes how I want to live and what I think I am responsible for in the world. It is a big reason I want to go into public service. I want to help people around me and uplift marginalized communities. I am studying urban studies, and I am trying to engage in service-oriented work starting now, not later. I want my faith to show up in what I do.

WELCOMED: You also mentioned there are tensions you are carrying. Can you say more about that?

Interviewee: The biggest tension is grappling with being queer in relation to the Church. Sometimes I think I would make a good priest. I feel a real desire for that kind of life. But I also think I can make a bigger impact on the world by pursuing policy or law.

I try to trust that God has big plans for me, and that I am on the path He wants for me. I also want to draw a distinction between my relationship with God and the institution of the Church. I consider myself a good Catholic, and I think I have strong morals, but I also recognize my flaws and my struggle.

I have not taken communion in about two years. That is not because I do not believe. It is almost the opposite. I truly believe communion is the body and blood of Jesus Christ, so I do not want to take it performatively. I want to reconcile more deeply first, especially around queerness, and be honest about where I am.

WELCOMED: Has your time at Stanford strengthened, complicated, or changed your relationship to faith?

Interviewee: It has complicated it, but not in a way that feels purely negative. I knew coming in that being here would test my faith.

I grew up with church as a constant. My parents took me, and that routine kept me disciplined. Here, you have to choose it more intentionally. I have missed Mass once or twice, and I felt bad about it, but overall I have still stayed disciplined.

WELCOMED: Has anything surprised you?

Interviewee: The political divide surprised me. In my home Catholic community, politics did not feel as sharply divided in the same way. Here, a lot of Catholic students are conservative, and that makes some conversations challenging.

Sometimes it feels like differing viewpoints end with me being shut down. I do not always feel there is real openness to debate within the community.

For me, the Bible calls us to protect marginalized groups, especially groups being persecuted today. It is frustrating when people's political beliefs contradict what they claim about their dedication to the Bible.

I think Stanford actually does a good job of integrating spiritual life into campus if you choose to pursue it. There are spaces and communities available, and you can find them.

I think the student body generally respects religious belief. At the same time, I think Stanford can silence students at times if they express certain viewpoints, but I think that applies broadly. I do think the university tries to enable a platform for different viewpoints equally.

The Catholic community is very motivated and fosters a strong environment. I feel like it is a real community, not just an event you attend. I do not feel like I need to hide being Catholic. It is not always the first thing I share, but it definitely defines who I am. I think Stanford students do a good job of not excluding people based on identity. The religious communities are also tolerant of each other. That helps a lot.

WELCOMED: Have there been moments when your beliefs or practices were challenged here? How did those moments shape you?

Interviewee: The biggest challenge has been seeing how strong conservatism is among Catholics here. Sometimes I think conservative Catholics are misinformed, or just very far from my viewpoints. It makes me question whether my beliefs are “correct,” because they are not as mainstream within the Church. It is hard when you feel like your faith is real, but your politics and identity put you at odds with what seems dominant.

There is a group of first-gen, low-income Catholic frosh that I am part of, and many of us share similar identities, including queerness. That makes a huge difference. I feel seen. People learn your name. They invite you consistently. They make an effort to bring you into things. It feels like people really care, not just that they are being polite.

WELCOMED: If a new student or colleague felt unsure about how to bring their full beliefs or identity into a secular university environment, what would you want to say to them?

Interviewee: Give yourself time, and look for a group you genuinely connect with. It might take a while, but it is worth it. I would encourage people to look off campus too. A close friend of mine is Christian but not Catholic, and she took time to find a church near campus. I feel lucky the Catholic community here is strong, but I think everyone can find some version of that support if they keep searching.

WELCOMED: When someone finishes reading your story, what do you hope they understand about faith, belonging, or college life?

Interviewee: I hope they understand that your relationship with faith does not have to be linear. It is always changing and growing. You may not always have the strongest relationship with God, but if you have the intent to build that relationship, it can happen. I am trying to make that effort every day. I want readers to feel encouraged, and I wish them luck on their faith journey, especially in college