

## Letters to the editor

The Record encourages readers to respond to ideas set forth in each issue. Letters to the editor must be 300 words or fewer. Submit letters to CPO W135 or voices.record@wheaton.edu by 3 p.m. Monday.

### So what is a church?

Jimmy Haring's article "Wheaton fits definition of Church" (Sept. 14, pg. 11) expertly carries out the logic of evangelical ecclesiology. The author forces us Protestants to be honest with ourselves.

We don't have a coherent doctrine of the Church. We lack any solid criteria by which to justify what is and what is not a church—we lack an expansive church structure, apostolic succession, Eucharistic celebrations, etc.

While Haring was right to suggest that Wheaton fits the loose definition that we have casually assigned to a legitimate church, he should have recognized that a church and its members serve as a long-term witness to their community—although, one could argue that while the individuals of Wheaton are transient, the institution stands as a benefit to the community—and unlike a local church, Wheaton College's engagement with the citywide community is not its chief end but a mere external branch of the school.

So, maybe Wheaton does not fit the evangelical definition of a church because it is not engaged, as its main purpose, with the local community. However, we should be self-critical at this point and ask, why is this our criteria?

The New Testament implies this definition, but we must recognize that we have interpreted and created our own definitions

of church. As Protestants, we have little right to declare what is and what is not a proper church because our standards are weak and lack any final authority.

We can appeal to Scripture and Protestant church tradition, but we must be honest and admit that if there are two guys with guitars on the beach that sing and give money to the homeless metal detector guy, then they might be a church—even if we do not think they are.

Does anyone wish that we had a Pope here?

Trent Koutsoubos '08

### Wheaton not a church

It is hard to believe Mr. Haring is entirely serious arguing—as he does—that Wheaton College qualifies as a church. But it was an interesting exercise in logic and argument.

The Church is an intentional community—not transient, temporary—bearing ecclesial authority—a magisterium linked to pastoral authority—committed to the ministry of word and sacrament, with a Spirit-led mission to the world fully integrated into its life and worship.

Wheaton College imitates these features as a shared ministry of many churches and as a universal work of the shared educational vision of the Church universal—see Augustine's invisible church. But our communities here are transient, we generally

promote orthodox guidelines without pastoral authority, we have a partial use of the sacraments—which should invite discussion—and we send students without ordination to ministry and mission without a permanent worshipping community behind them.

To say that music, teaching, preaching and friendships are what it means to experience the Church, well, this reflects the sort of Western, individualistic personal measure that lacks a fuller understanding of the Church over two millennia. But Mr. Haring has expressed our culture well: We locate transient private commitments and think we've tapped into something timeless and permanent. Not so.

In a word, Wheaton College may not exist in one thousand years and the Church would be unaffected. If the Church disappeared tomorrow, Wheaton College would disappear soon after. Our college holds an important though temporary place in history.

But this boundary between church and college is important: It forms where students should find a permanent worshipping, missional community at a church and it makes us think again about what we should and should not do here on campus lest we falsely imitate the Church. But we understand our shared work with the Church as we promote student participation there and as we contribute to its well-being.

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