

VIEWPOINT

Readers will miss Voices of Faith editor

By Tim OToole

It all started for me in 2004 when colleague Mike Rivest, a frequent contributor to the Times Union's Faith & Values page, suggested that I could write a column for Rob Brill's weekly creation: Voices of Faith/Faces of Faith.

Brill gave ink to my voice with my initial offering, a tongue-in-cheek piece on avoiding church building campaigns by discouraging new members. Fourteen years and two dozen columns later, Faith & Values continues to serve our community, providing thoughtful access to all the major religions on an impartial basis.

This is critically important at a time when major news media tend to focus on the destructive elements within each religion, be it anti-gay preachers from Kansas picketing military funerals; non-peaceful Buddhists purging Rohingya; or so-called Islamic terrorists who care not for widows and orphans but rather create them.

Christians, Hindus, Sikhs or Jews — Faith & Values focuses on the people in our community making a difference, be it housing or tutoring refugees, operating food pantries and soup kitchens that feed body and soul, speaking truth to power or protesting peacefully with prayer vigils and polite arm-twisting.

In the past 14 years (less than half

of Brill's tenure at the Times Union), I would be hard-pressed to think of any religious organization or denomination that has not appeared on Brill's Saturday page.

It will be even harder for me to envision what that page will look like in 2019, when Brill retires from his career in journalism, which included time at the Village Voice before he took Albany by storm. The Hudson Valley has been kind to that former merchant marine and should continue to do so in his alleged retirement. As they say: Once an editor, always an editor. I have borne personal witness to his wordsmith talent, which can compress innumerable vague thoughts into a coherent 500-word column.

Sure, Brill's editing efforts were not limited to the Saturday morning paper, but his Faces of Faith byline guaranteed a good read on a quiet morning, giving every reader reassurance that there are still kind, active and insightful people making a positive contribution to society week after week.

Perhaps Brill, like other Times Union alum will continue to make his presence known on a periodic basis within the pages of my favorite periodical.

► *Tim OToole of Albany is author of "The American Pope," a thriller about a future papal election.*