

November 2023 | First Edition



CHRIST AT THE CENTER

THE CATHOLIC CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Christ at the Center of Athens

Artwork by Anne Frain

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CHRIST AT

What's the situation in Athens?

The reality of our campus is that we have a lot of people who don't know they're loved by God. They do not know the story of Jesus. They do not know how they are involved in God's story! 9/10 Catholics who are at the University of Georgia are not going to church anymore. They either do not believe, or they do not find it the most relevant thing in their lives. This is an issue! There are many social pressures in college. There are many challenging experiences that college students face in our culture. A young adult Catholic has to swim against the current if they are trying to follow Jesus. The Catholic Center exists to help introduce people to Jesus and help them grow in this relationship. It's a challenge, but it is the 'vineyard' that we are called to.

What is our response?

We have responded by building a community in Athens that fixes its eyes on Jesus. The community invites people to pursue virtue in this life and live intentionally in a relationship with God. We want our community to be a safe environment where people can comfortably be themselves, understanding of their true identity in Christ, and ready to dive into the spiritual life with God at the center of their lives.

What does our ministry look like?

Our ministry looks like emphasizing and prioritizing the sacraments! Whether it's Sunday Mass, daily Mass, confession, or adoration of the blessed Sacrament, these are the prioritized points of encounter for absolutely everyone! Food is an important part of our humanity and it brings us together. Most of our activities have some form of meal involved. And something that I am very proud of about our students is that we know how to throw a great party. Social events foster community and allow new members to easily acquaint themselves. We hang out, get to know each other, and have fun.

THE CENTER

What is our strategy?

Our strategy is to invite students to mass! From there, they notice a community. Then they get a free meal! Then a leader will invite them to an event that is happening during the week. Ideally the event piques their interest (that's why it's important to have quality events!). Then, they meet the priests. After socializing and getting to know each other, the hope is they feel comfortable and have had a good experience. Then they come back and they're a part of the community! They begin to grow as disciples, learning about Catholicism, learning about their relationship with God, their identity in Christ, and perhaps they begin to become leaders themselves. At the time that I'm writing this, we have over 100 students who are leaders in our community in some form or fashion.

How do we help students grow as disciples of Jesus?

We help students grow as disciples of Jesus by pointing them to the sacraments. This is number one! "Join us at daily mass!" "Join us at adoration!" "Come to confession!" We have student-led programming and FOCUS Bible studies available so that weekly Christian formation is accessible. The priests also intentionally spend time with students so that they have a relationship with a priest! This is huge!

What is the ministry of the priest?

The ministry of the priest is to form students through the sacraments, by teaching and by preaching. We are always inviting students to adoration, we circulate books for them to read, we offer spiritual direction, and we socialize until we can't socialize anymore! Building relationships through trust is the beginning of evangelization.

What message are we spreading?

We are spreading the message of putting Christ at the center! This is the way. This is what brings life! How do we put Christ at the center of every aspect of our lives? What does this look like? This is reason why we themed this magazine with this title. It's intentional. It's all about putting Christ at the center! We are always called to conversion, and there is healing and freedom in that!

OF ATHENS

What about the FOCUS Bible studies?

Our FOCUS Bible studies are led by a team of FOCUS missionaries. The priests oversee and pour into these missionaries. The missionaries are the ones who are interacting with students more so as peers. The Bible studies are geared towards evangelization and teach students doctrines of faith. Most importantly, the missionaries forward people to Christ! They invite them to Sunday Mass, daily Mass, and adoration. It's a blessing to have FOCUS missionaries operate on our campus. We are able to spread the gospel to more people on campus because of them!

Is there student-led programming?

Our student led programming is made up of spiritual, social and service-oriented events. Our spiritual events include Worship nights and regular speaker series. We often have students give testimonies or talks, or we bring in visiting speakers. Our social events include holiday parties, normal fun gatherings, football tailgating, and sports. Our service programming includes volunteer opportunities such as making care packages for the homeless or serving others in need. We also have leadership opportunities. We train leaders for the future of our parishes in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Our student leaders coordinate and organize all of our events and programming. The more organized and repeatable we are, the more helpful it is for next year's leaders to build off of what we have. Again, we have 100+ student leaders serving. It's a huge blessing and a fairly large operation.

What do we need?

We are always in need of prayers and support! We can't ask enough for prayers of inspiration and protection! Please ask for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on our Catholic Center community and on campus. This is so vital. We can't do anything without the help of the Holy Spirit. We are also in need of mission partners to join us in this mission. We are always looking for interested benefactors to support these efforts of helping college students put Christ at the center of their lives. It's a very meaningful ministry and to invest in it goes a long way. I watch lives be changed during college years for these young adults. God is at work in this community!

Fr. Brian McNavish

Director, The Catholic Center at UGA

OUR MINISTRIES



Ignite

Ignite is a student ministry that offers small groups, community and dinner for freshmen students.

Ablaze

Ablaze is a student ministry that offers community through men's & women's nights, small groups and more events.



Seeking Water

Seeking Water is a student ministry that offers talks, adoration and praise & worship.

FOCUS

Fellowship of Catholic University Students

Through Bible studies, outreach events, mission trips and everyday accompaniment, missionaries inspire and build up others in faith, sending them out to spread the good news and live out the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).







HAVING CHRIST AT
THE CENTER OF OUR
LIVES IS MORE THAN
JUST ACKNOWLEDGING
THAT HE IS LORD BUT
RATHER LIVING IN
THAT REALITY.

Claire Walker, UGA Student



In Memoriam:
VIRGINIA MACAGNONI

“How did I make it here?” Memory helps me understand the answer to this question; memory also clarifies the path forward. More personally, how did I make it “here:” a priest at the Catholic Center? Especially when the “from” makes it that much more stark - how did I become a priest at the Catholic Center, especially when I was a rambunctious student at the Catholic Center? Here, memory helps answer the question: what comes up and sharpens it are the many people during my time here who have influenced how I made it “here.”

In particular, there’s a person who has been one of my biggest fans (though many people would say she was that to them) from day one until her last day. She is Virginia Macagnoni. I remember the first time I met and interacted with her. Around 2011, there was a Catholic Center initiative to connect students with locals, and for those students to help out with anything around their house, especially for the older members. During that visit, all the other students went and did service around her house, while my sister and I sat with Virginia and got to hear about her life.

It began a lot of memorable interactions and conversations all with the particular and familiar thread of myself (and many others) feeling incredibly appreciated and worth being in her presence. Virginia had two specific qualities that proposed, expressed, and solidified her gratitude for the person in front of her: her smile and her excited welcome for a person. I remember this in that first conversation as well as when I went to visit her a couple times at the hospital in her final days - and so many interactions in between. Every single time we saw each other, she would express incredible excitement.

She is a big reason as to why I am here, today: a beloved son of God and a priest at the very Catholic Center where I grew in my faith and received the call - in part because of her, who always allowed me to feel welcome “here.” So, she teaches me, even to this day, the “here” never really leaves: there’s always something, or more specifically, someone given to me, to help me along the way, that the way in and of itself might be the “here.” So, how did I make it “here?”

It’s because of the loving people in my life that have been with me that allows a “here” to always be here, reminding me of this God who is always here, excited to see me.

Fr. Michael Bremer

Assistant Director, The Catholic Center at UGA

VIRGINIA MACAGNONI

December 4, 1927 ~ September 22, 2023, age 95

Virginia gave her time generously, and financially supported a variety of causes in Athens and at the University of Georgia, always inspiring ways for people to work together to achieve a goal for the greater good. Known for her engaging personality and spirited fashion style, Virginia had many friends of all ages in the Athens community. She was devoted to The Catholic Center for decades and was often found in a pew with her trademark flower in her hair. With her zest for life, her warmth and generous spirit, Virginia Macagnoni lived her values, inspiring all who knew her.

“Be the best person you can be with what you have and the situation you are in because every person is non-repeatable.

We are all precious.” – Virginia Macagnoni



CHRIST AT THE

He is not outside of our sometimes monotonous schedules, rather these are the places that He longs to encounter us.

EMMANUEL, GOD IS WITH US.

*It means that we do everything with Him
and every step we take, He takes too.
When we rest, He rests.*

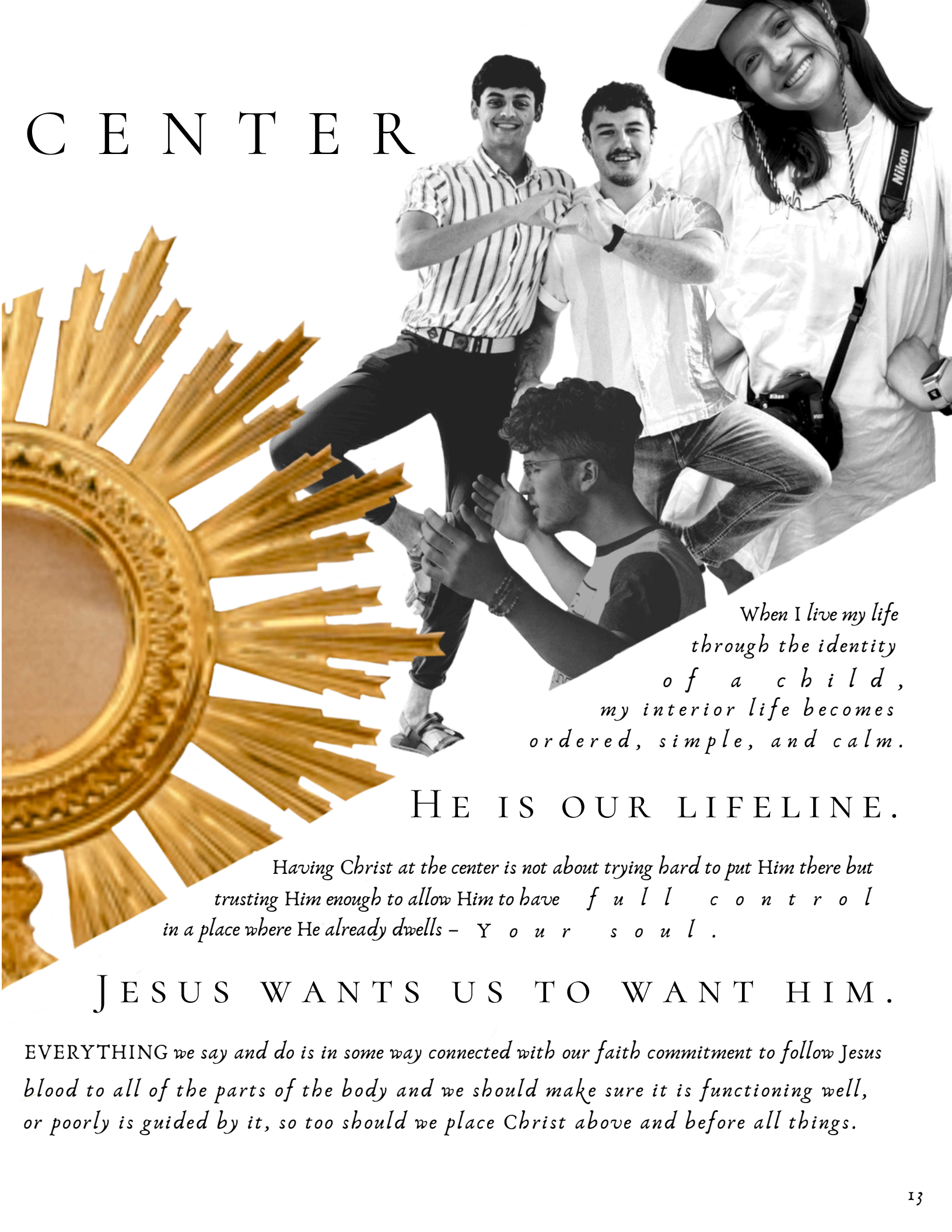
*It means mercy...that I get a another chance
for all the many times I fail to keep
Jesus at the center.*

ONE WITH HIM



*Just as the heart pumps
considering how we live well*

C E N T E R



*When I live my life
through the identity
of a child,
my interior life becomes
ordered, simple, and calm.*

H E I S O U R L I F E L I N E .

*Having Christ at the center is not about trying hard to put Him there but
trusting Him enough to allow Him to have f u l l c o n t r o l
in a place where He already dwells - Y o u r s o u l .*

J E S U S W A N T S U S T O W A N T H I M .

*EVERYTHING we say and do is in some way connected with our faith commitment to follow Jesus
blood to all of the parts of the body and we should make sure it is functioning well,
or poorly is guided by it, so too should we place Christ above and before all things.*

World Youth Day 2023

By Kevin Braski



World Youth Day is probably one of the most important pilgrimages you can possibly go on. The event began in Rome under the leadership of St. John Paul II in 1984 and has continued every two to four years since. I was very blessed to have been able to attend as a seminarian and chaperone for the Diocese of Savannah this past August in Lisbon, Portugal with around 1.5 million other pilgrims from around the world. We happy few from Savannah arrived a week before the official start of the event and were blessed to visit the holy sites in Lourdes, Burgos, Santiago Compostela, Fatima, and then Lisbon.

As all pilgrimages, World Youth Day in Lisbon and the traveling that it entailed were both challenging and powerful. Not only were we in foreign countries, which made it difficult to communicate, we regularly were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people that seemed to aimlessly flow through the streets as they, like us, wandered around trying to figure out how to get to their next stop. These massive crowds that caused many of our frustrations were also some of the greatest instruments of God's grace.

It was a lot of fun carrying a UGA flag to help our group find each other more easily should we get lost. We received many funny looks and questions about the flag as to what it represented. It was also fun bumping into some random UGA alumni and fans as well as some of our rivals overseas. It was simply a fun part of our group's pilgrimage that we were really only able to share with our fellow Americans.

Overall though, pilgrimages and gatherings of this magnitude showcase humanity. Exhaustion, heat, claustrophobia, and overwhelmed Portuguese infrastructure, volunteers, and cops were all there, but so were 1.5 million pilgrims, predominantly between the ages of 16-35, who were dying to see an 85-year-old man in a white robe sitting in a wheelchair.

To the outside world, it seemed nonsensical but not to us — because we all knew deep down that we needed to see the Pope and hear his message of faith, hope, and charity that is so badly needed for this world and for the youth of the world, which can only fully come from Christ and his Church. He challenged us to be Catholics by serving others and living out our faith more fully. A few memorable lines were his call to be welcoming to all by genuinely walking with people. He clarified that this does not mean that we should jettison the rules of the Church but that we are only allowed to look down at others if it also entails a simultaneous action of us extending our hand to pull them up closer to Jesus. We cannot complain about others; we must serve others.

We must break down our own insecurities to help evangelize and bring the love of Jesus to the world. We cannot be complacent, but we must rise and make haste as the Blessed Virgin did after the Annunciation—we must say yes to God and move in accord with His will so as to be the hands and feet of Christ. Following the Pope's message entails having courage, which he no doubt knew was necessary while he exhorted us in his homily during the closing Mass by saying the familiar words, "Do not be afraid!" The joy of this event brought us in touch with our weaknesses and strengths. It exposed us to the beauty of different cultures with their language, food, songs, and more. The universality of the Church was very present at this event, but most importantly it was an event to show us Jesus Christ. It was an event that showed the world how much we continue to desire the way, the truth and the life that Christ says he is.

Yes, it was an incredible experience to see Lisbon, the Pope, and so many other people, but it was so powerful seeing everyone silently kneel, stand, and sit for Adoration and Mass just like we all do at our home parishes and chapels. It was reinvigorating, and I pray that the Catholic Center plans on going to the Jubilee Youth Event in Rome in 2025 as well as the next World Youth Day in Seoul, South Korea in 2027 so that more Catholic Dawgs can experience the love of Christ and bring that love back with them to a city that we love but also know so greatly needs it, Athens.



KEVIN BRASKI

Braski is from Warner Robins, GA. Braski graduated from UGA in 2018 studying Food Industry and Marketing Administration. He was involved in UGA Miracle, was a member of Sig Ep and helped run a small group for Ignite. He attended St. Joseph Seminary in St. Benedict, LA to study philosophy and is currently enrolled at Notre Dame in New Orleans studying theology for his sixth year of seminary. He will be ordained a transitional deacon at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Macon, GA in 2024.

READ KEVIN'S FULL STORY ON OUR WEBSITE.

a year at the Catholic Center

THE NUMBERS FROM 2022-2023

5,200

FREE MEALS SERVED

200



HOURS OF CONFESSIONS

448

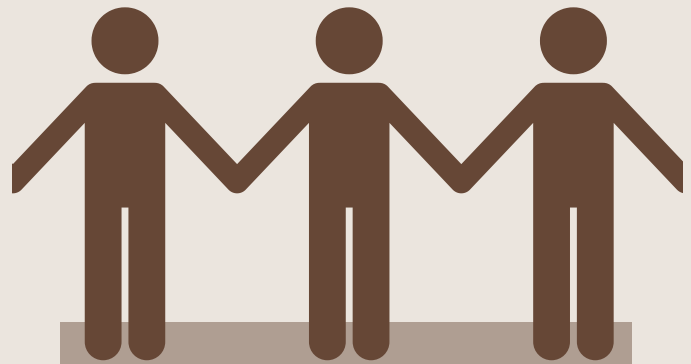


SUNDAY & DAILY MASSES

450



HOURS OF EUCHARISTIC ADORATION



150

STUDENTS IN
BIBLE STUDIES

120

STUDENT
LEADERS



200

**STUDENTS FED AT
WEEKLY SUNDAY
DINNER**

500

**BIBLES DONATED
TO OUR STUDENTS**

30

**WEEKS OF FOCUS
BIBLE STUDIES**

80

**SPIRITUAL, SOCIAL
& SERVICE EVENTS**



13

**R C I A
BAPTISMS**

20

**C O N V E R T S
TO CATHOLICISM**

FOCUS MISSION TRIP

Peru 2023

This March 2023, 13 of our students accompanied our FOCUS Missionaries and our priests to Lima, Peru where they served in a small village called Pamplona, building stairs and greeting the locals with a Christ-like love. They encountered many smiling faces and welcoming arms despite the living circumstances.

The locals in Pamplona live in houses that are closer to the size of a single bedroom here in the United States. The roofs of their tin houses are held on by rocks, their restrooms are often just holes in the ground and they make long treks up and down the mountain on unsteady gravel and rocks.

This is where our students were able to step in and help by spending their week mixing cement, framing stairs, filling them in and slowly building a pathway for the locals to walk up and down with ease.

"Peru was a time to walk with our students as we encountered Christ in the poor. It was a time of prayer, reflection, community and service. We had fun together as a group while also encountering the harsh reality of the plight of God's children," said Fr. Brian McNavish.

FOCUS has led several mission trips to Lima, Peru over the years and has formed a relationship with the local community. One of our FOCUS missionaries, Daniela Cadenas, joined the group on the trip making this her second time serving in Pamplona.

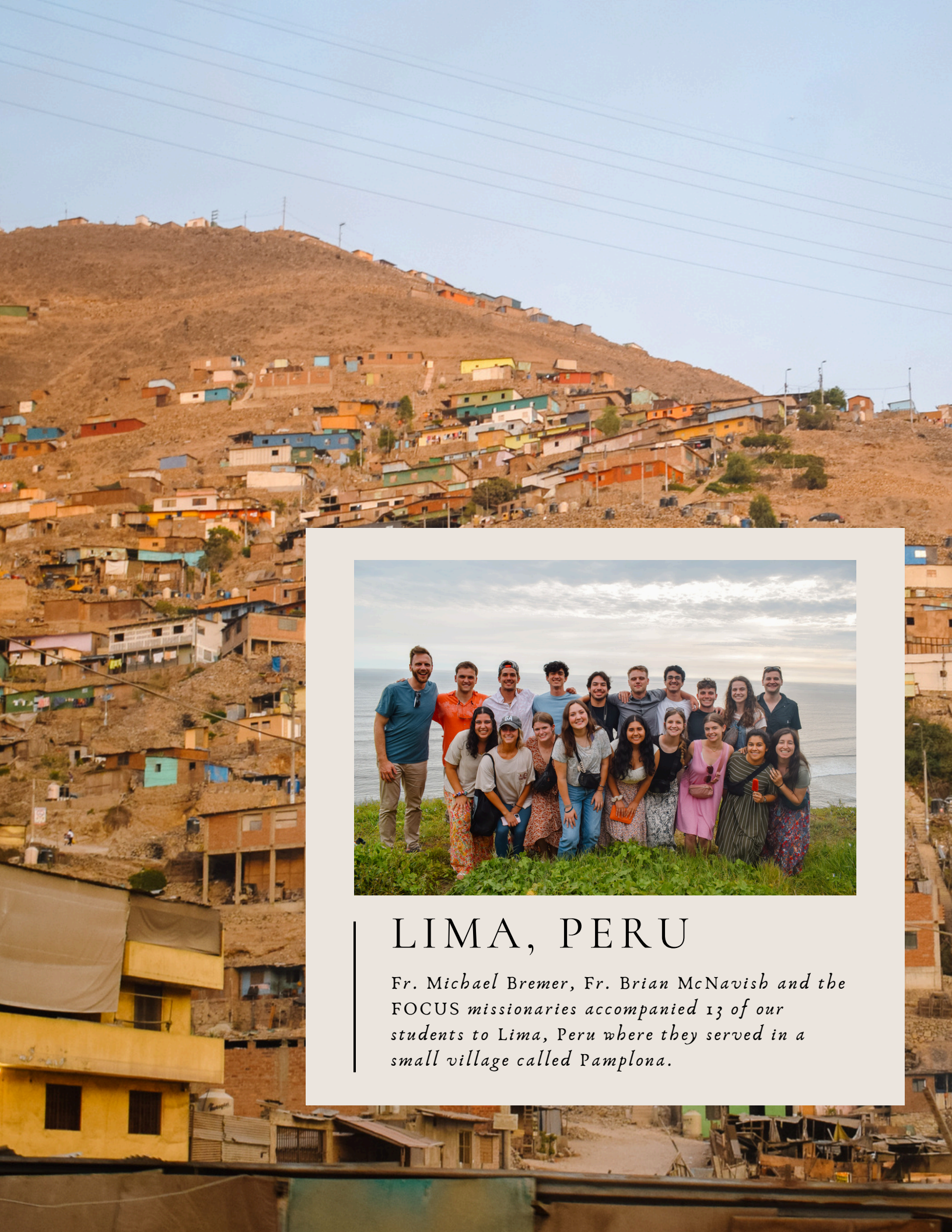
Daniela shared, "This Spring Break we had the opportunity to encounter and serve God in the people of Pamplona, an impoverished area outside of Lima, Peru. Our task was to build stairs, but our purpose of being there wasn't actually about the stairs at all. Valuing relationships over efficiency, we experienced a great joy, freedom and closeness to the Lord unlike ever before.

My heart is forever changed by the ways I was loved by the Lord and His people in Peru!"

Several students opted into serving for their spring break despite many other opportunities. "Peru was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life thus far," said Cecilia Nilsson, 2022-23 CSA President. "It was truly eye opening to the world around me and something I will always remember. I lived true freedom in the simple life, experiencing what our hearts are made for."

Danny Fisher, FOCUS missionary, shared, "Bringing the light of the gospel to the locals in Peru and seeing their joyful responses gave me so much hope and a deeper insight on the Lord's nearness to all of us."

We are so proud of our students and the choice they made to serve and love those less fortunate than us. And a big thank you to our FOCUS missionaries for leading our students on this trip.



LIMA, PERU

Fr. Michael Bremer, Fr. Brian McNavish and the FOCUS missionaries accompanied 13 of our students to Lima, Peru where they served in a small village called Pamplona.

*“I can now say I not only
confidently believe in but
also LOVE knowing
Jesus in the Eucharist.”*



LEIGH BLANCHARD

Leigh Blanchard is from Augusta, Georgia. She is currently a third-year student at the University of Georgia studying Communication Sciences and Disorders and is pursuing a minor in religion. She currently serves as the social media co-chair for the Catholic Student Association Board and is on the photography team at the Catholic Center. She is also involved in Young Life of Greater Athens as a WyldLife leader at Oconee County Middle School. Leigh is also a member of the Audiology Dawgs club.

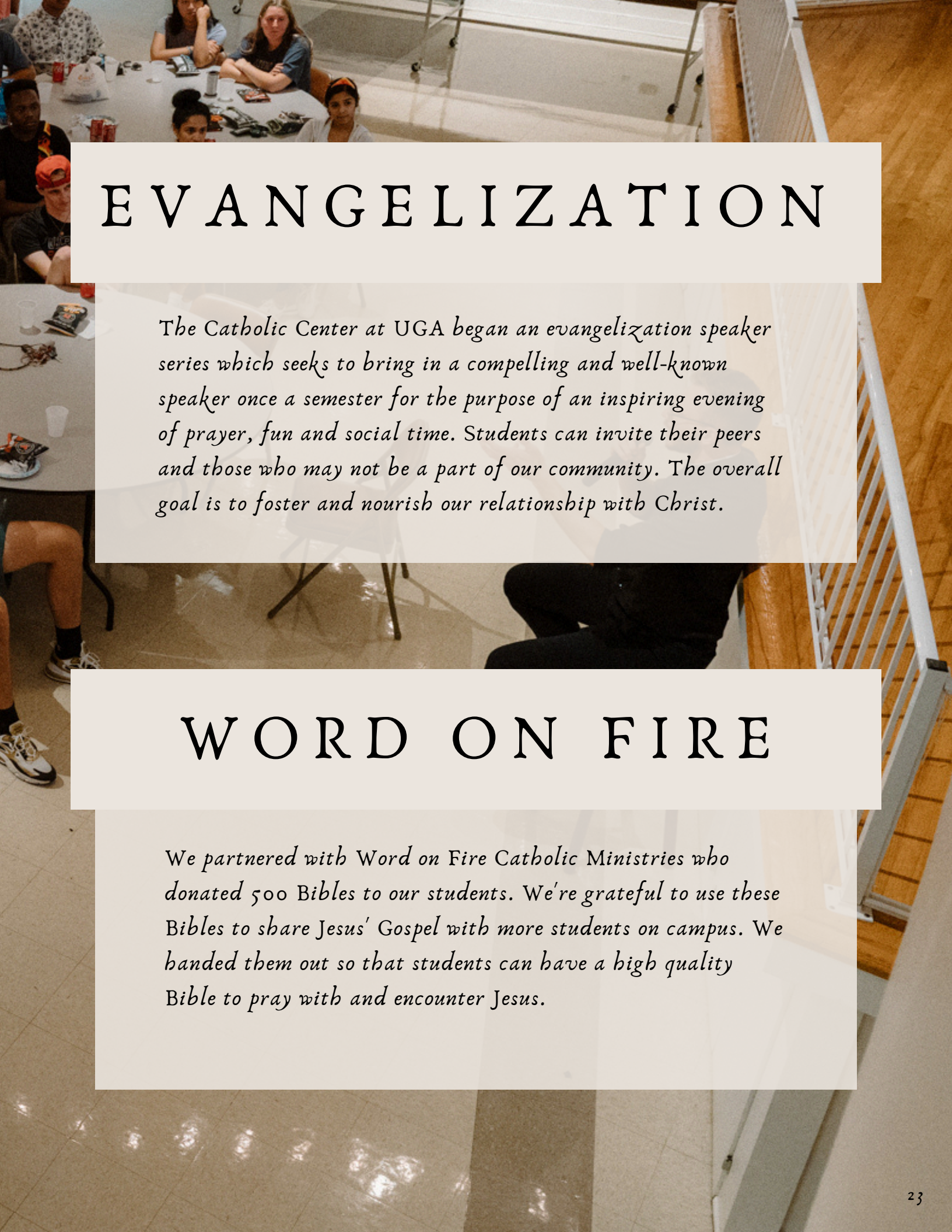
THE JOURNEY TO *Catholicism*

I first came to the Catholic Center on the last day of class my freshman year for a Seeking Water worship night. I do not think I ever could have guessed the beautiful journey the Lord had in store for me at this center and in His Church. I don't remember much from my first time at the center, but I remember being so struck by the beauty and intimacy of the worship I found here. Growing up as a non-catholic Christian, I had been to my fair share of worship nights and conferences, but there was just something so unique about what I found at the Catholic Center and I could not stop thinking about it. I decided to get involved at the center even though I was not Catholic and was immediately welcomed by such a loving and sweet community here. I never once felt isolated because my beliefs were different or pressured to become Catholic.

But in my heart, the Lord was doing slow and steady work to reveal Himself to me in the Eucharist. I heavily wrestled with the belief of Jesus being fully present in the Eucharist for a very long time before I was able to confidently profess a belief in it. Seeking Water and adoration at the Catholic Center played a crucial role in this growth in my faith. I felt free to sit down in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and voice my questions, doubts and struggles. The people at the Catholic Center played such a crucial role in this point of my faith as they patiently listened to my struggles, answered my questions and all along, prayed for me, my heart, and my relationship with God and the Church to grow.

After over a year of asking A LOT of questions, wrestling with the Lord and myself and deconstructing a lot of what I thought I knew, the choice to join RCIA felt like an easy decision after a long, hard road. I can now say I not only confidently believe in but also LOVE knowing Jesus in the Eucharist. I love Mary, I love Apostolic Authority and I know that the Catholic Church is the Church founded by Jesus Christ. I feel so supported and celebrated by the community here at the Catholic Center, who I know have been and are still praying for me. I am always learning, growing, and deepening my faith in Jesus and am beyond thankful for the Catholic Center and its role in my life. I cannot wait to receive Jesus in the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil!

TKC
THY KINGDOM COME

A background photograph showing a group of students sitting around a white table in a common area, possibly a cafeteria or lounge. There are drinks and some items on the table. A white railing is visible on the right side of the frame.

EVANGELIZATION

The Catholic Center at UGA began an evangelization speaker series which seeks to bring in a compelling and well-known speaker once a semester for the purpose of an inspiring evening of prayer, fun and social time. Students can invite their peers and those who may not be a part of our community. The overall goal is to foster and nourish our relationship with Christ.

WORD ON FIRE

We partnered with Word on Fire Catholic Ministries who donated 500 Bibles to our students. We're grateful to use these Bibles to share Jesus' Gospel with more students on campus. We handed them out so that students can have a high quality Bible to pray with and encounter Jesus.

(706) 543-2293 | 1344 S. Lumpkin Street, Athens, GA 30605



The Catholic Center
at UGA



@catholicdawgs