focus
fellowship of Catholic university students
Ministry Impact Newsletter
FALL 2015
MISSION
Bank of America
Chicago Marathon
379
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“evangelization has no bounds, strict rules, or predictability”
— Sr. Stephanie Baliga, Chicago Marathon Partici

a letter from curtis martin

Greetings in Christ! Summer has already turned to fall, and as the seasons start to turn I can't help but reflect on God's many blessings. My wife Michaelann and I are ever grateful for the blessing of our children and their excitement as we move into the new school year. What joy our heavenly Father has brought into our lives!

I also feel blessed and encouraged by the work of our Lord and the Church, and I want you to know the impact of your support. Many times I'm asked why FOCUS leads Bible studies on campus. The simple reason is because, when we invite students to study the Scriptures, we invite them to know Christ in a personal way. A student's faith comes alive, and they become more Christ-like as they start to imitate what they read. For students wavering in their Catholic beliefs, joining a Bible study is the way to tip the scales, encouraging them to keep the faith and follow Christ.

There is powerful testimony for the positive impact Bible studies have within the stories I hear from our missionaries across the country. Marshall Bolling, a missionary at the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa, began his year investing in the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, where he met a junior named Chris. Together Marshall and Chris had a conversation about how to be a member of a fraternity while living out one's faith. Thanks to that conversation, Chris is now attending a FOCUS Bible study led by Marshall! The University of Alabama is just one of our first year schools where the interest and demand of students for Bible studies, by the hundreds, is almost more than we were prepared for!

You are such a crucial part of our mission, and it's thanks to you that our missionaries can touch lives like Chris'. As I reflect on my blessings, you and your prayers for us are counted among them!

Sincerely in Christ,

Curtis Martin

Founder and CEO

In Chicago, a Nun's on the Run

FOCUS Alumni Ran for an Olympic Trials Qualifying Spot at the Chicago Marathon

On October 11, people from all 50 U.S. states and from over 100 countries ran across Chicago in the Bank of America Chicago Marathon. Among the runners was Sister Stephanie Baliga, FOCUS alumna and Chicago's own running nun. In this marathon, Sr. Stephanie, aged 27, was striving to qualify for the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials in Los Angeles, California, in February 2016.

As a college student, Sr. Stephanie attended the University of Illinois and was motivated by one thing: running. But when a disastrous foot injury her sophomore year prematurely ended her running career, she was drawn into the campus's Newman Center community, where she found healing and heard a call to a new vocation. A large part of her discernment was through FOCUS and a bible study she participated in at U of I.

"FOCUS taught me that evangelization has no bounds, strict rules, or predictability," said Sr. Stephanie. "God has blessed me with the opportunity to put this understanding of evangelization to work through my day-to-day life as a religious sister with the Franciscans of the Eucharist."

'FOCUS taught me that evangelization has no bounds, strict rules, or predictability,"

When she took her initial vows with the Franciscans of the Eucharist in October 2011, Sr. Stephanie ran straight to her vocation — literally. As a part of her mission work with the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels, Sr. Stephanie has formed marathon and half-marathon teams to minister to Chicago's West Side, one of the most impoverished areas of the city.

"The running program has amazing evangelization potential due to its ability to create intentional time for growth in friendship," said Sr. Stephanie. "It offers opportunities for vicarious suffering as an individual and group, and it acts as a living metaphor for the Christian life."

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FOCUS GREEK FALL OUTREACH

Braxton Callen, a second-year missionary and a Kappa Sigma alum from the University of Louisiana-Lafayette, shared how God has been working through his ministry. Braxton and his teammates, Anna and Karianne, are all reaching out to Greeks on campus.

"When my team and I arrived at the University of Missouri last year, I met Christian, a Greek junior who occasionally came around the Newman Center. We quickly built a friendship and together began a Bible study in his fraternity, Beta Theta Pi. There were about 11 men who came to the study each week. Later that semester, I invited Christian into discipleship and he accepted. The next semester, Christian not only led a Bible study in his fraternity, but he also had a huge part in planning our first-ever Greek Night. Christian helped contact leaders in every fraternity and sorority on campus who were able to make personal invitations to students in their chapters. He also encouraged the leaders to offer up prayers and to fast for the people they were inviting. In the end, 220 Mizzou students attended! Today, we have 111 Greek students in Bible studies and 11 Greek students in discipleship (all of them leading Bible studies). It just goes to show the difference one man can make!"

praying for you

As we celebrate All Saints Day in the Catholic Church, we are reminded of the power of God's grace, as given to us through the Church, to fulfill the universal call to holiness. Each one of us is invited into that personal relationship with our Father, which begins in this present moment and which is finally fulfilled when we see Him face to face in heaven. The saints are ordinary men and women who became extraordinary through the power of God's grace. But they are not just abstract examples of holiness; they are also close friends, helping us follow in their footsteps. Each of us should have a "best friend" in heaven. This is a particular saint to whom we speak every day, with whom we discuss all the events of our life and about whom we know all there is to know (for we've read all there is to read about their life). Here at FOCUS, the saints inspire our missionaries and certainly intercede for them. We ask for their powerful intercession for all of you as well. May the saints pray for you, and may they continue to inspire you to reach the fulfillment of your own calling — to be a saint!

Fr. Jay Buhman, FOCUS National Chaplain

Fr. Jay Buhman is originally from the Lincoln, Nebraska, diocese and was ordained in 2004. He first became involved with FOCUS when he served as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln chaplain, where he called himself a "FOCUS groupie."

journey
IN THE
Footsteps of St. Paul & the Early Church
A MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE PILGRIMAGE
May 17-27, 2016

journey in the footsteps of st. paul and the early church

EXPERT GUIDES

Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, *Archbishop of Denver*
Curtis Martin, *Founder & CEO of FOCUS*
Ben Akers, *Assistant Dean & Associate Professor of Theology at the Augustine Institute, FOCUS Alum*

Join us on a disciple's journey in the footsteps of St. Paul and the early Church as we discover the passion and faith of this world-changer. Following the inspiration of St. Paul, we will be led by some of today's best evangelizers as we travel the Mediterranean and explore these early missionary sites in the Church.

In addition to the blessing of Archbishop Aquila's spiritual guidance, Curtis Martin and Ben Akers will give dynamic talks and spiritual teachings that will help you ponder the significance of this pilgrimage in your life as a Christian.

"I have been on several trips. It's not always where you go, it's who you go with, and I'm very glad I went with FOCUS!"

- Kiley Kudrna, FOCUS Pilgrimage 2014

"Everything that I see Curtis do in his leadership is all geared towards bringing the light of life to the world," said Angela Telthorst with the Augustine Institute. "He's an ardent disciple of Jesus Christ; it's absolutely contagious."

You will also spend time with FOCUS missionaries who will share stories of the trials and joys of living the call of missionary discipleship. "What a wonderful blessing it was to get to know the people in FOCUS," said Anna Hamilton, who went on the FOCUS Pilgrimage 2014. "Our pilgrimage was amazing, and I would travel anywhere with these faithful, genuine, caring folks."

Traveling aboard the Celestyal Crystal cruise ship, you will experience sites such as Mary's home in Ephesus, the Judgment Seat where St. Paul was tried at Bema, and the Temple of Athena on the Acropolis. This will be a time spent in prayer about how God is calling us into His mission. It will be a time of fellowship in learning about evangelization in the early Church and today, and it will be a time to experience the beautiful message of St. Paul. Your heart, mind and soul will be transformed, and you will grow closer to Christ every step of the way.

We are all disciples on a journey. How will you change the world for Christ and His Church?

To view the full itinerary and to register, please visit www.focus.org/journey.

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