

BULLDOG CATHOLIC

FALL SEMESTER 2025 NEWSLETTER | DRAKE UNIVERSITY

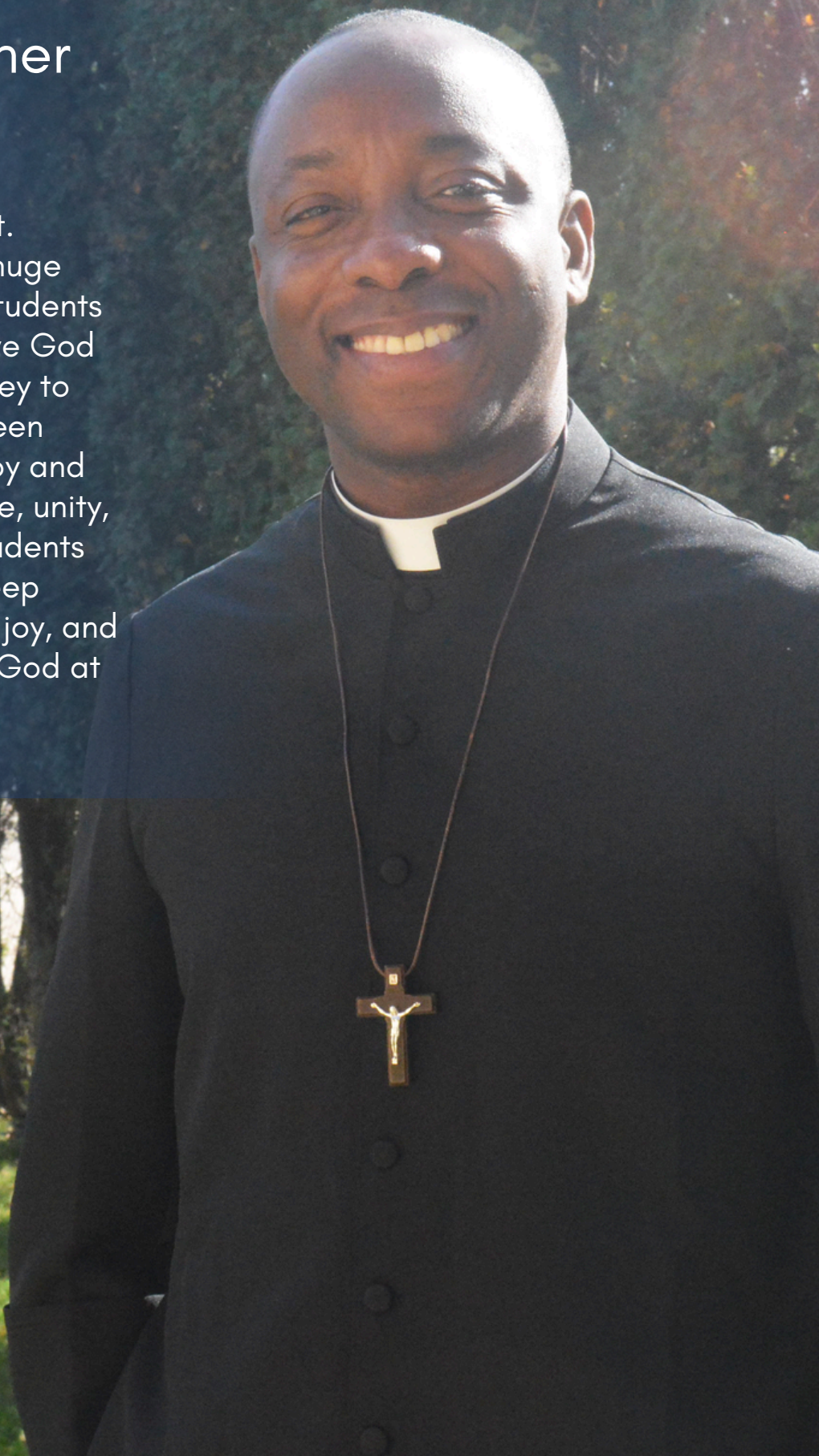


ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA
**CATHOLIC
STUDENT
CENTER**

Welcome, Father Daniel Adjei!

"My priestly ministry at St. Catherine's has been a huge blessing. Encountering students and parishioners who love God and are on a joyful journey to grow in their faith has been sacred. I wake up with joy and eagerness to see the love, unity, and acceptance that students bring to worship. Let's keep growing in faith, sharing joy, and building the kingdom of God at St. Catherine's."

— Father Daniel



WELCOME

Welcome to our alumni, parents, and friends.

We're thrilled to launch this newsletter for the supporters of our community, and to invite you along on our journey. St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Student Center exists to serve college students in the greater Des Moines area, and we ask for your prayers throughout the academic year.

This is my third year as campus minister, and I'm abundantly blessed to work alongside the students at Drake University, DMACC, and Grand View University. My faith is constantly renewed by the zeal of our student leaders at St. Cate's. I'm proud to share the growth of our student center, all due to the glory of God and the work of our wonderful students. We've had physical changes at our Newman Center, including major projects such as Drake ID door scanners to improve student accessibility and a complete kitchen and bathroom renovation. Community involvement continues to grow, with more students regularly attending Sunday Mass and Candlelight Mass on Thursday nights year after year.

Although spiritual impact is not measureable, it's clear that college students are reaching for Jesus, and we are here to help share His love in our surrounding communities.

This past year at the Drake University Bulldog Catholic leadership team retreat, our students developed a new mission statement for the student organization: "Our mission is to extend an invitation to encounter Jesus Christ through authentic community, one where all people are welcome." As our students strive to share this encounter with their friends and peers on campus, I ask for your support in our ministry. Whether it's financially — by helping to fund renovation projects or supporting student activities — or through prayer, we can work together to share the gospel of Jesus. Thank you for your generosity, and I look forward to sharing the graces of the Lord's work at St. Catherine of Siena.



Sincerely,
Megan Schultz, Campus Minister



Hi! My name is Emmett McMenamy, and I'm the creator of this newsletter. I'm a senior at Drake studying Multimedia Journalism and Public Relations, and I'm originally from St. Louis, Missouri. St. Catherine's has played an integral role in my reversion to the faith that began in my first year of college. I started going to a FOCUS Bible study at St. Cate's, attending student Mass on Sundays, and Candlelight Mass on Thursdays. This community has changed my life, and I'm eager to share our stories with you. If you'd like to connect with me, share a St. Cate's story, or have questions, my email is emmett.mcmenamy@drake.edu. All glory to God for the work He's done in this community. May He bless you, and I hope you enjoy the newsletter.





KOINONIA FALL RETREAT

Koinonia, which means “community” in Greek, is a retreat dedicated to forming friendships rooted in the love of Jesus Christ. Over three days, students move through the themes of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, emphasized through intentional testimonies shared by student leaders, as well as time in prayer and fellowship. This year, 32 students attended the retreat at St. Thomas More Center in Panora, Iowa.

“ I said yes to Koinonia, not knowing that one weekend on retreat would **impact my life so beautifully**. For the longest time, I kept my faith to myself. By spending time in community, I realized how powerful God can be when we gather to glorify Him. I encourage you to **say yes to God** every chance you get! ”



— Cassidy Gall, sophomore at Drake



Living Mission at Drake

When Matt Prendergast became a FOCUS missionary at Drake in 2022, he could not have imagined the ripple effects of his ministry. Since his arrival on campus, student involvement at St. Catherine's has significantly increased, and missionaries have shared the gospel with hundreds of students. The Lord is working through Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) missionaries to grow God's family at Drake; Matt is one example.

FOCUS sends missionaries to college campuses to evangelize students through a discipleship program and Bible studies. Through discipleship, missionaries equip students with the skills to live virtuous lives and share the gospel with others. Matt, who left Drake in May to continue working for FOCUS in Denver, led several men in discipleship and Bible study. Those men are now evangelizing other students on campus. There are currently nine student-led Bible studies.



"Any time I'm on campus, I'm running into a student who's involved at St. Catherine's, who's striving to live out their faith, who's in a Bible study, who's in a discipleship group," Matt said.

FOCUS missionaries fundraise their salaries before coming to campus. As a missionary, Matt went beyond fundraising for his own salary. He fundraised to send multiple students on a mission trip to Tanzania and 20 students to Salt Lake City, Utah, to attend the SEEK conference — a five-day FOCUS conference featuring speakers such as Father Mike Schmitz. The new FOCUS team director, Tyler Dillon, and Drake's team continue to partner with campus ministry, following the Lord's call to lead souls to Jesus Christ.

"To see the impact is very humbling, but very revealing of the work that the Lord desires to do and did in those three years and is continuing to do on campus," Matt said.



Efrain Gonzalez is a fifth-year missionary from Storm Lake, Iowa. Below, he sits with his wife, Bridget, and son, Jose. He played soccer at Drake in college.



Lexi Kisor is a second-year missionary from Bowling Green, Ohio. She graduated from Ohio State University and was a campus minister before FOCUS.



Sam Pichardo is a second-year missionary from Branson, Missouri. She graduated from Benedictine College and paused grad school at Mizzou for FOCUS.



Tyler Dillon is a fourth-year missionary from Findlay, Ohio. He is Drake's team director and was previously on mission at the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh.



Fed by Faith

Mike Larson experienced a turning point in his faith at a simple meal. From then on, he decided to feed his soul.

Mike grew up in a Catholic family, but faith was challenging for him, and he had many questions about the meaning of life. Then a FOCUS missionary came to his house for dinner right before Mike's first year of college at Drake. Mike grew up just north of the Twin Cities, and, unknown to him, one of the incoming missionaries at Drake named Luke Kubic lived nearby. Coincidentally — or just maybe by divine intervention — Mike's mother was connected with Luke's mother through a church group. She invited Luke over for dinner to meet Mike, who was annoyed about the guest. To Mike's surprise, the Lord worked through the encounter.

Luke was enthusiastic about the faith, and he spoke with bold confidence that Jesus was fully present in the Eucharist. His confidence inspired Mike to believe in the real presence at Mass after just one conversation. Mike left that dinner with a goal: to get involved at the Newman Center upon his arrival at Drake.

He started attending St. Catherine's and eventually gave his life to the Lord in his first semester. He even remembers the date: Oct. 2, 2017.

After a Bible study, Mike said he "just went all in," fell in love with Jesus, and never looked back. St. Catherine's became Mike's second home. He prayed, studied, attended daily Mass, and went to any event he could. He graduated from Drake's pharmacy school in 2023 and looks back on college fondly. He encourages any first-year student to get involved.

"There are some yeses that are going to be really tough and challenging that you'll face in college...but you just have to have those 30 seconds of insane courage to say yes and go," he said.

Now, Mike works in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and is married to his wife, Mackenzie, whom he met at Drake. They also have a son named Toby. His family is involved at their local parish, and Mike still attends daily Mass when he can. Mike's life only looks like this now because of his encounter with Christ through St. Catherine's.



MISSION REVIVAL

Renewing Our Heart for Christ

By John Gaffney



The St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Student Center is beginning a Mission Revival — a season of renewal meant to refocus our energy, prayer, and vision around what matters most: helping students encounter Jesus Christ and live as His disciples on campus.

Over time, even the strongest ministries can slip into maintenance mode — busy, but not always burning with purpose. A mission revival is our way of pausing to listen to the Holy Spirit, to rediscover who we are, and to re-commit to the mission Jesus has entrusted to His Church: evangelization and discipleship.

During this revival, students and parish partners will reflect on how our community can better live a spirit of radical hospitality, where every student — Catholic or not — feels seen, known, and loved. We will work intentionally to bring down walls that divide us and actively build bridges toward communion, fostering genuine relationships across differences, generations, and inviting all into the life of the Church.

We'll strengthen student leadership, deepen our prayer and sacramental life, and renew our outreach to those searching for faith or meaning.

When the revival is complete, we envision a community that radiates welcome and purpose — a place where students don't just attend events but grow as missionary disciples who bring Christ to their friends, classrooms, and the world.

This is more than a project; it's a movement of grace. Together, we will become a campus community that truly embodies St. Catherine's wisdom: "Be who God meant you to be, and you will set the world on fire."

John Gaffney is the Evangelization and Mission Director for the Diocese of Des Moines. John plays a pivotal role in coordinating, promoting, and supporting the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel and forming disciples. His work is broad, strategic, and deeply relational, often bridging parishes, schools, campus ministries, and diocesan initiatives.



PEACE BE WITH YOU

Bringing Peace on Campus

In his second year as DU Bulldog Catholic president, Matthew Bell planned his boldest event to date: a peace walk on Drake's campus. With recent acts of political violence in the United States and armed conflicts across the globe, Matthew felt called to proclaim the necessity of peace to St. Catherine's surrounding community.

"Everybody can agree that peace is important; peace is necessary," Matthew said. "We have to come together to make peace a reality."

Matthew typically helps plan social community-building events, such as swing dancing or activities after Thursday night candlelight Masses. But the peace walk was different. He wanted as many Drake students as possible to join in prayer. He worked with the rest of DU Bulldog Catholic's leadership team to be bold and invite friends and members of other organizations to attend the ecumenical peace walk.

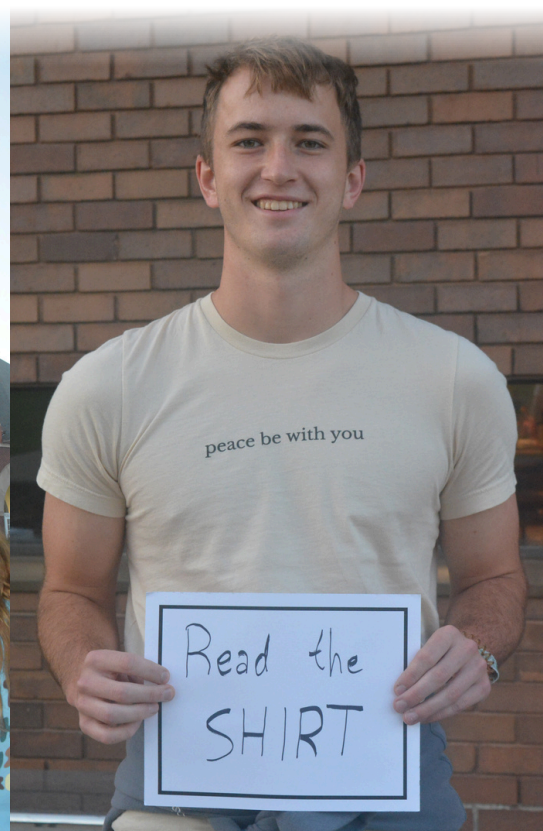
"We have a responsibility to be bearers of peace to other people," Matthew said.



In his opening address, Matthew invited participants to meditate on the Catholic Church's definition of peace: "the work of justice and the effect of charity." Participants also filled out signs to show others what they were praying for. The group walked in silence — with their signs and some Rosaries — around Drake's Bulldog Mile, ending and beginning at Olmsted Center.

The walk aligned with DU Bulldog Catholic's theme for the year, "peace be with you." The event wasn't planned to solve the world's problems, but to stand against violence and in support of peace as a united body

"Let's now go forward in hope and action to help create a more peaceful world," Matthew said in his closing address.



GROWING THE CHURCH

Conversion Stories at St. Catherine's

All it took was one Mass at St. Catherine of Siena to convince Theo Brown of the truth of Catholicism. Theo was a first-year student at Drake last year, and he was invited to Mass at the beginning of the fall semester by a sophomore named Katie Jones. Saying yes was a pivotal moment in Theo's journey to becoming Catholic.

"I had come to believe that the Eucharist was the person of Jesus Christ," Theo said. "When Father Opondo (the former St. Catherine's pastor) elevated the host, through the grace of God, I came to believe in that moment. So, I signed up for OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) the same day."

The Lord has been converting hearts at St. Catherine's — Theo is just one example. Shortly after he signed up for OCIA, so did sophomore Henry Brown — no relation. Theo (left) and Henry (right) both came from Lutheran backgrounds but had fallen away from faith. The community at St. Catherine's helped them on their journey back.



"It was a hard transition from going to not practicing any faith at all to being a practicing Catholic," Theo said. "The community was really huge in helping me to do that and calling me higher in a lot of ways."

St. Catherine's community played an integral role in Henry's conversion, too — people just kept inviting him to Mass. He was attending Mass for about a semester, but one specific Sunday was crucial in his conversion. Fr. Opondo mentioned during Mass that anyone who crossed their arms for communion needed to talk with him.

Henry followed Fr. Opondo's invitation and signed up for OCIA that same day. He noticed that Theo had already signed up and felt the Holy Spirit calling him to become Catholic.

"It was a little abrupt, but I knew it was coming at the same time," Henry said.

Henry and Theo entered the Church on Easter of 2025. The two motivated each other and grew closer throughout OCIA. This year, the Holy Spirit is continuing to move at St. Catherine's, with two more students converting: sophomore Gracie Hines and first-year Sebastien Meyers.

Despite growing up Catholic, Gracie wasn't confirmed. Her friends didn't support Catholicism, so she "found every reason not to do it." But discovering an enriching Catholic community at St. Catherine's helped her say yes to receiving the sacrament.

"I never really thought about [getting confirmed] until I came here and really fell in love with St. Cate's and everybody here. It just made me feel so much more comfortable," Gracie said.

This community also helped Sebastien enter OCIA. He arrived at college desiring to become Catholic — a goal he developed after his grandfather's passing. But an invitation from senior Emmett McMenamy was the help he needed to sign up for OCIA. Sebastien connected with Emmett at fraternity recruitment, and Emmett introduced him to Fr. Daniel Adjei at St. Catherine's and invited him to Candlelight Mass. Shortly after, Sebastien signed up for OCIA.

"Coming to St. Catherine's and seeing that there's such a big student body influence showed me that I'm not alone in this journey," Sebastien said.



Support the mission.

We need your assistance, through your personal time, talent, and treasure, to make St. Cate's a transformational home for students. Our ministry is funded solely through donations and diocesan support. We need your support to reach even more students at Drake University.

What impact can your contribution make?

\$500 - Pay for 30 students to attend the fall orchard outing.

\$350 - Covers the cost of a Sunday supper for 65 students.

\$150 - Fill our hospitality cart with free coffee and snacks for students.

\$50 - Sponsor a student in need of a scholarship to attend Koinonia.

\$25 - Become a steward of St. Catherine Campus Ministry.

Donate here! At the first drop-down, select 'Campus Ministry,' or the specific project of your choosing.

*under 'note' please write "Newsletter."



Stay in touch!

@DUBulldogCatholic on Instagram
stcatherinedrake.org

Comments or questions?

Email Megan Schultz at:
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