



Br. Clinton Reed, Brotherhood of Hope - Catholic Student Union



"It's okay - everything will be fine... He'll start going back to church after he graduates from college." During my 16 years in campus ministry (both as a student and now as a Catholic religious Brother serving in campus ministry), I can't tell you how many people I've spoken to who seemed to think that - after a brief stint away from the Church during college - their son, granddaughter, nephew, or goddaughter would return to the practice of their Catholic faith. **With great sadness, I can say that this is rarely the case. It might have been true in a different generation, but the spiritual poverty of most college campuses is so great that the Church is currently hemorrhaging young people between high school and life as young adults.**

That's the bad news... But I'm here to share a word of hope with you. My life was deeply and forever changed by a vibrant campus ministry during my college years, and as a Brother now evangelizing college students, I continue to see God's amazing work in winning the hearts of young people to Himself and forming them as leaders for His Church!

I wasn't raised Catholic: my dad was a non-practicing Catholic and my mom a non-practicing Protestant through most of my childhood, but God's grace slowly began to capture my heart... After some difficult years in my family's life during middle school (does anyone look back on those awkward years with delight?), I decided to be baptized as a Catholic in high school when some friends shared their Catholic faith with me. Even more so, I started reading about the life of the Church, and it grabbed my mind... but not yet my heart.

It wasn't until college that I encountered God's love for me. Sure, I had received the sacraments in high school, but I hadn't encountered Jesus personally in my life. As Pope Francis has said, "Our faith is an encounter with Jesus. This is the foundation of our faith: [that] I have encountered Jesus..." (Homily on 24 April 2015). How did this come about? By the grace of God, the university I was attending was served by a religious community of Brothers, the Brotherhood of Hope, who exemplified the Church's call to evangelize and form those in great spiritual poverty - the modern college student.

After that deeper encounter, my heart began to be captured with the ideal of being devoted to the Lord as the first priority in my life. By God's grace, I resolved to live a life given over to Him as His disciple, regardless of my vocation. As I continued to grow in my relationship with Jesus, it became clear that He had been preparing me to consecrate the entirety of my life to Him as a religious Brother in the Brotherhood of Hope - to live a life with God First and God Alone.

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Our culture is soaked in spiritual poverty, and that brings incredible challenges to keeping young Catholics committed to their faith. However, the convergence of many factors during college also makes it an ideal time to reach them and let God change their lives forever. *For many young people, college is the first time they’re exercising their freedom to make choices that will affect the rest of their lives. On top of that, there’s an innate desire to change the world for the better - to make a difference in our culture. Moreover, there’s a growing sense among college students that they must lead as agents of change for their generation.* It’s in the midst of these factors that we need to bring the power of the Gospel, that we

need to bring these college students into an encounter with the living God. As we do this, it will form a generation of leaders for the Church equipped to confront the challenges of this age.

Currently, I am the director of the Catholic Student Union at Florida State University, and **it’s impossible for me to tell you of the countless lives changed by God’s grace here...** but it’s happening! College students are entering into a vibrant, life-giving relationship with the Lord and His Church.

Our ministry is active in dorm evangelization, on-campus Bible studies, Eucharistic adoration, men’s and women’s groups, praise and worship, and discipleship training - and much more! But we strive to foster a community of disciples that engage the world around them, rather than creating an artificial bubble disconnected from the challenges of college life. Our students play intramural sports, have lively - but good! - parties, and challenge professors and fellow students who attack the Church in the classroom. **We’re forming a generation of leaders for the Church who are rooted in an encounter with God’s love, just like Pope Francis said.**



After graduation, these young people are continuing to make the decision to remain faithful in their life as Catholics. Many of them have gone on to be leaders in the Church! We’ve seen hundreds of men and women enter the seminary and religious life, commit to one another through faithful marriages and family life, become youth ministers and pro-life advocates, and witness to Christ in the workplace as lawyers, doctors, accountants... The list is seemingly endless. They’ve begun enlivening parishes, forming supportive communities of faith, and bringing others into an encounter with Jesus.

There is no where I’d rather be serving in the Church today than on a college campus. It’s one of the most effective places where we can fight against the spiritual poverty of our age while changing lives that will affect the Church for decades to come!

But the need is still so great - there’s so many more students we could be reaching. Please, keep us in your prayers for the continued growth and success of our ministry to bring more young people into an encounter with God’s love and to form them as leaders for the Church!

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