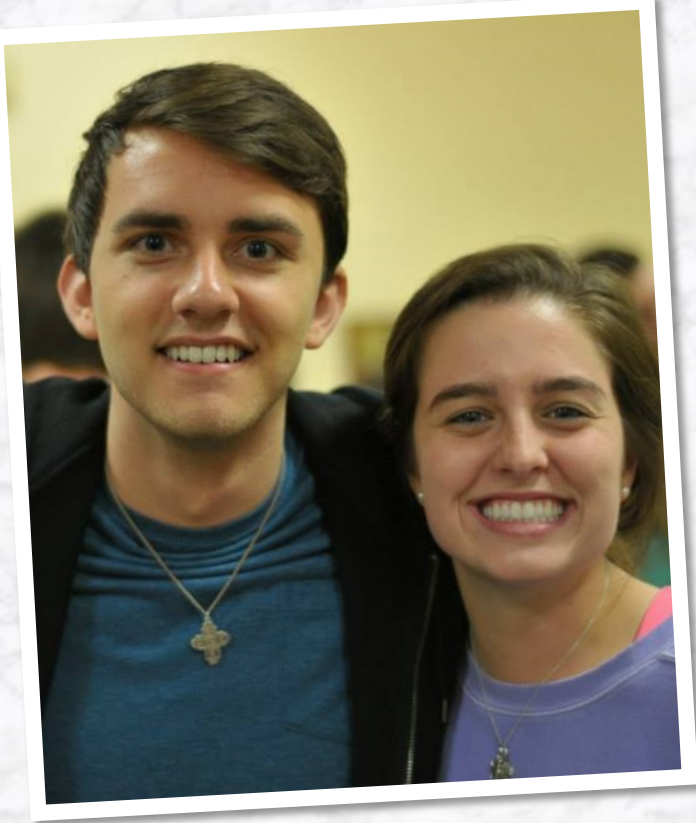




Colter Brown - Catholic Student Union



My name is Colter Brown, and I am a twenty-one year old proud Catholic! I was raised in the faith by my two incredible parents. My mom was also raised Catholic, whereas my dad, once Methodist, converted to Catholicism when I was a kid. From a young age, my faith has been the most important aspect of my life because of the witness of my parents' nurturing love for Christ and for me.

After graduating high school in 2012, I decided to attend Florida State University. At the time, I had no clue about the faith journey on which I would soon embark. Over the course of my first year and a half of college, I was confronted with the reality that the current college culture is often directly opposed to a life of faith. As a result, my unpreparedness led me to a time of desolation and spiritual poverty. I continued to attend Mass on Sundays, but I didn't really care. I only liked God... I didn't really love Him anymore. I knew something was wrong and wanted so badly to change, but I was lost. Whatever spiritual wealth I had earlier in life had been depleted by the challenging

environment of the world around me.

Then, one fateful Sunday evening in the fall of 2013, after Mass at St. Thomas More parish (the church across the street from FSU's main campus) I heard an announcement that the Catholic Student Union (CSU) of FSU was going on a weeklong Spring Break Mission Trip to Haiti. Those interested in going were told to sign up for more information. At this point, I was making headway through my desolation, but I knew that I simply couldn't wait around for things to get better: I felt that God wanted me to step out in faith. So I signed up without ever meeting anyone in CSU and having never attended any of their events.

To my surprise, after several information meetings and an interview process, I was selected to be on CSU's team of 14 college-age men and women to serve the materially poor of Haiti. Four months later, alongside my new friends and fellow students, I was serving as a missionary in Haiti during spring break. We lived at a mission base in Miragoâne, which is a small village roughly four hours from Port-au-Prince. We spent much of our time serving the local people, praying and sharing stories with them, and building and renovating areas within the mission base so that it could better serve the people. We also had the opportunity to minister to inmates at a local prison, care for children at an orphanage, and offer prayer ministry for the people at the cathedral in Miragoâne.

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During our service trip, I came to encounter the incredible material poverty of the Haitian people. However, I also experienced the astounding spiritual wealth of their lives. Through this, God revealed to me my own spiritual poverty, and I realized God was reaching out to me — and always had been. All I had to do was reach out in faith to take His hand. His love was reflected so beautifully in the people we had the privilege to serve. Even though we were only able to speak limited, broken Creole, the love in our hearts needed no translation. The joy this realization has brought me is something I will never lose sight of again. This week would be the first of many experiences with the Catholic Student Union that God would use to have a profound impact in my life.

My deeper conversion came through encountering my own spiritual poverty while serving the materially poor of Haiti. As a further growth from that experience, I realized my need for deeper formation as a disciple who desires to be sent out on mission, so I attended the School of the New Evangelization (SNE) in St. Paul, MN. This weeklong retreat-conference trained me as a missionary disciple equipped to serve God's people. I was profoundly impacted by SNE's vision of preparing young men and women to be apostles of the faith!

With this formation, I returned to Haiti this year for a second Spring Break Mission Trip as one of the CSU student leaders and also attended CSU's highly impactful Fall and Spring Retreats. I have since developed an overflowing amount of friendships within the community who share my belief that God is more important than anything else in life. Now I regularly attend CSU events and I have spent the last two semesters as a member of CSU's Missionary Corps, a group of men and women dedicated to sharing the wealth of Jesus with the spiritually poor on our college campus. Often times I think back on my life in college before my time with CSU, and I wonder where I would have ended up, what my life would be like had I decided not to sign up to go to Haiti. Experiencing God radically change my life through CSU has strengthened my faith beyond what I ever thought it could be. I am so thankful for the Catholic Student Union, and I pray for other students to experience God as I have through this wonderful ministry.

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