

A look at FOCUS: The New Evangelization and the Fellowship of Catholic University Students: Part 2



[Part 1:](#)

On Monday I shared about the faith journey of 2009 John Carroll graduate Maura Donnelly who met Jesus Christ in a personal way through FOCUS on the Campus of University of Maryland College Park.

Today in Part 2 we will take a look at what is involved in the day-to-day experience of FOCUS missionary work and see how Maura is now making a difference in the lives of students at the University of Rhode Island.

FOCUS Training at Ave Maria University:

After her 2013 College Park graduation with her B.S. in Family Science, Maura spent a month at Ave Maria University in Florida for summer training with FOCUS. Missionaries attend seminars on topics such as prayer, Scripture, facilitating a Bible Study, apologetics, and evangelization.

The missionaries are also taught how to fundraise in order to raise financial support for their time with FOCUS. Family members, friends, local Catholics from home parishes and schools are among those mission partners who might support the work of the missionaries serving young people during this critical era when many young people are unchurched or falling away from their faith, and when there has been a significant rise in depression and mental health issues on college campuses.



Maura (center), with URI team member Meagan Kline (right) and their friend and fellow missionary Katrina celebrating the Fourth of July at the beach during the summer training at Ave Maria University. (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

Missionary work at the University of Rhode Island:

Maura was placed at the URI as a campus missionary for the 2013-2014 academic year. She is teamed with Meagan Kline, a 2012 graduate of Winona State University in Minnesota, who served at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, last year.

Maura explained to the juniors that while most missionaries work with people in physical poverty around the world, FOCUS works to address spiritual poverty with focus on prayer and offering opportunities for students to encounter Jesus Christ in a real way. She tries to convey to the college students at URI that God is always there for them, especially when times are tough. She challenged them to ask the important questions: Where is God? Why is there brokenness everywhere in the world, in people, in ourselves....? What has been the effect of sin in their lives?



Introducing Maura Donnelly and URI team member Meagan Kline who started FOCUS missionary work at the University of Rhode Island in the Fall semester of 2013 (Photo: FOCUS)

Witnessing to Christ's love and the Gospel message at URI:

She related a particular story from the first semester of witnessing Christ's love to a student who was experiencing profound loss.

After a semester of involvement in the FOCUS Bible Study, an opportunity presented itself where Maura was able to "share the Gospel message" with her, explaining Christ's invitation to know Him more fully. Maura has seen Christ bring deep peace in situations of loss, helplessness, or grief in her own life and the lives of those she encounters.



URI students having fun with Pope Francis (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

Day to day ministry:

Maura continued sharing with the juniors about her daily activities. She and Meagan

live about 20 minutes away from URI in Charlestown. Their average day includes morning prayer, meetings, planning time, and office work, followed by noon Mass. Afternoons includes activities—both formal and informal—with students on campus, with the Bible Study groups held in the evenings. Most of their time during the week is spent on campus getting to know the students. Sometimes special events are offered, such as a Women’s Night series where they spoke about the themes of true femininity.

Maura also shared about 1-on-1 “discipleship,” a form of mentorship, where the missionaries meet with individual students who wished to grow in their prayer life and relationship with God, and to share faith with others.

Maura and Meagan are looking forward to this second semester when they will get a new FOCUS team member, Andrew Vilcan, a graduate of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.



At a recent FOCUS conference with Andrew Vilcan (far left) who will join the FOCUS Team at URI later this month starting the Spring semester 2014. (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

Relationship with Campus Ministry:

Being her high school Campus Minister, I was interested in Maura’s connection and work with the Campus Ministry at URI. She explained to me that URI does not have a Campus Minister, and that FOCUS is not a Campus Ministry, though there is an

overlap. While chaplain Father Matthew Glover and the URI Newman Club offer sacraments, plan retreats and other events, and reach out to the students around the Catholic Center, FOCUS missionaries spend their time evangelizing a more broad population on campus.

Maura spoke to me of the three groups they minister to: Those who have never set a foot in a church; those who stop by the Catholic Center, but may still be exploring their views of faith; and those students who are brought into the Catholic faith and need some encouragement or instruction on how to evangelize their peers. Maura said that so often their ministry involves being a bridge to bring people together.



*A dog-lover, Maura playing with Golden Retriever puppies while visiting a parishioner of nearby Christ the King Parish in Kingston, RI, who breeds dogs.
(Photo: Maura Donnelly)*

FOCUS Conferences:

Students who serve as campus leaders with FOCUS missionaries have opportunities to join with hundreds and hundreds of leaders and missionaries at FOCUS conferences, including the one held last week-end in Dallas. Maura and Meagan, with five URI student leaders, joined up with two student leaders from the University of St. Thomas, Houston (where Meagan served last year) for the 2014 Student Leadership Summit.



URI group at Student Leadership Summit in Dallas, January 3-7, 2014 (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

Speakers, workshops, Mass, adoration, Reconciliation, music, and lots of fellowship were part of this event. Student leaders receive a lot of resources and strategies for successfully leading Bible Studies on their campuses. Maura explained to my students that Bible Studies are very similar to small groups on retreats. Having just wrapped up our Junior Retreat season for this year, the students nodded as they could relate to concept.



From left: Maura, Kayla, Meagan, and Jen at Student Leadership Summit in Dallas, January 3-7, 2014: National exchange students for the fall semester at URI, Kayla and Jen were the first students that Maura and Meagan met there as the new FOCUS team. (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

On alternating years, FOCUS offers national conferences open to anyone interested and available: missionaries, student leaders, and students from college campuses all over the nation. With thousands in attendance, Maura told me that the most moving part for her is witnessing the devotion and reverence to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. She is really looking forward to next year's national conference which will be held in Nashville.



The URI group at FOCUS Spiritual Impact Bootcamp last October held at St. Anne's Shrine in La Motte, Vermont (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

Questions from the John Carroll students:

One of the juniors asked Maura how she and the other missionaries handle the one-on-one mentoring with those who are really struggling. She shared that theirs is so often a “ministry of presence.” Just being with a person who is dealing with difficult issues or struggling is so important as they offer these students an experience of God’s love.

Maura further explained that God has a plan for each of us. He uses past life experiences and the unique skills of each FOCUS missionary as they meet different students on their campuses. Maura is grateful that her studies in Family Science, her involvement with College Park’s Campus Ministry, and the varying challenges and struggles faced by her friends at UMD have helped her relate to and help the URI students this past semester.



Meagan (left), Maura (right) with URI students and a visiting friend at Narragansett Beach (Photo: Maura Donnelly)

Personal reflection with John Carroll Juniors:

Maura asked each group of juniors to whom she spoke to consider some reflective questions: Where do they need Jesus Christ in their lives? Where is there brokenness that needs healing? During this quiet reflection she played Matt Maher's song "Lord, I Need You."

"Lord, I Need You" by Matt Maher

At a time when college students are often drawn into a fast-paced party culture with a self-centered emphasis on the here and now, it is inspiring to learn about how FOCUS is inviting young people across our nation into a faith-centered lifestyle with a personal relationship with Jesus and the Church.

One of the junior girls told me afterwards: "I really liked Maura speaking and thought her job sounded pretty awesome!" Please join me in praying for the mission of FOCUS and the New Evangelization.

For More Information:

- If you would like to read more about FOCUS, check out their extensive website [here](#);
- If you would more information or an application for becoming a FOCUS missionary, click [here](#);
- Check out the [map and the listing of campuses](#) where FOCUS missionaries

are making a difference for the New Evangelization;

- Here is the [Directory of FOCUS Missionaries](#) and the campuses where they serve;
- LIKE the [FOCUS Facebook Page](#);
- Check out the Facebook page for Maura's [FOCUS Team at the University of Rhode Island](#);
- If you like to support Maura Donnelly through prayers and/or financial support, check out her [support page](#);
- Email Maura to get more information about her work or ways you can support her ministry? Email Maura at: Maura.donnelly@focus.org

