

BISON CATHOLIC FORUM



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A Christmas Gift

by Fr. Robert P. Boxie, III

EVERY Advent invites us to reflect on the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at Christmas, God's special gift whose birth fills us with joy. Despite the untold hardships, disruptions, and losses we have all experienced this past year from Covid-19, there still is a reason for our joy! St. Paul says, "Rejoice! I shall say it again, rejoice!" As the new priest-chaplain at Howard University, I am grateful for this gift to minister to our young people at Howard, with its celebrated history, its rich legacy of academic excellence, and its long record of producing Black leaders for our world. Most especially, I have been encouraged by the faith of our students. They chose the theme of "Mindfulness" for our ministry this year. When we are mindful of God's many gifts and his consoling presence, we truly can find the joy that only He can bring while persevering through all the challenges that we face. For HE is the source of our joy. We at HU Bison Catholic wish you all a Merry Christmas and a new year full of the gifts that God's Son brings down from above.



Crystal Uremma Egbe ('22)



Danae Byer ('20)

Co-President's Message

by Danae Byer ('20)

HEY everyone! This is Danae and I was blessed with the opportunity to serve as this year's Co-president alongside Crystal Uremma Egbe. As you all know this semester was a little different as we all had to acclimate to online school and this was no easy task. In theory, online classes translated to more free time, but I am sure almost all of us can agree, that workload seemed to double, and any free time you thought you had, became a time where you stressed about completing the next assignment, which did not leave much time for student organizations. Hence, a major challenge we grappled with was keeping our numbers up, keeping current members engaged, and reaching out to incoming freshmen. Wonderfully, we were able to come up with a number of events and fun activities to address this challenge. We sponsored movie nights, Games nights, the very first virtual/all on-online retreat, and even a couple video projects that were extremely fun to work on. These positively impacted the members not only through their relationship with God, but through their relationships with the other members by helping us stay in touch despite the distance. Now that we have the ball rolling, we hope to have an even more exciting and faith-filled semester in Spring 2021. Hope to see you there!

Seminarian Musings

by Anthony May, Diocese of Raleigh

ONE of the concepts that I never had thought of very deeply before I began serving with HU Bison Catholic was Mindfulness. The term had appeared in my general education psychology class, and perhaps somebody had mentioned it in passing, but I knew it as nothing else than a term. When I came to Howard, I learned that this was the year-long theme under which I would be working and discussing Catholicism, current events, and the experiences of life with the students. I have been impressed with the importance of mindfulness, and been made more aware of it as this semester has passed by. I have to say that working with Howard has been a novel experience for me, and yet I am so thankful. The men and women, students and leaders who I have encountered this past semester are among the most enthusiastic and faithful Catholics whom I have been privileged to be with. I have been overawed by their dedication and by their labor to keep the Catholic community a strong part of Howard University. We are small, but God is with even the few who gather in His Name. One of the greatest insights of the semester came from the Fall (virtual) retreat. Fr. Patrick Mullen taught us that every person has a unique spirituality, a unique path to sainthood. This is so true. We all have our own favorite saints, our own favorite types of Christian music, our personal devotions that others might not understand.

Especially as I have become acquainted with the community at Howard, this insight coupled with Mindfulness has been eye-opening.



Anthony May is a 4th College Seminarian at Theological College at the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

My understanding of Mindfulness is that it is all about awareness of others and the circumstances I am in, and then finding the appropriate action in that situation. It's about being silent when one would be offensive, and about responding when it will strengthen another. It's about not acting when what you do will not make things better, but then acting when your actions are going to help someone else. There are many differences between the Howard community and my previous experiences. There are perspectives that confuse me simply because I have never experienced things that way. It's not so different from seminary, in some ways. Every diocese is its own culture, and they are nothing if not diverse. Therefore, in both my pastoral ministry and in my seminary, I had to have Mindfulness to be aware of the differences in spirituality. I value this awareness because despite how different all spiritualities, all perspectives, and all experiences are, we are all bent on salvation, and there is our ultimate unity.



Thursday Night Bible Study

by Peace Aku, ('20) Social Media Manager

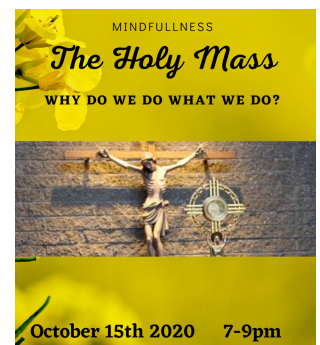
MANY of us found ourselves secluded and confined in the midst of the fear-inducing Covid-19. Churches were either closed or had to adhere to new protocols. So many changes were made. We had to ask ourselves: “How could we connect with our church community outside of the physical Sunday experience?”, and “What will virtual fellowship look like?”

It took a little adjustment, but we made it through. In line with the theme for the academic year, Mindfulness, we developed some engaging topics and discussions during Thursday Night Bible studies. We began with a wellness check to see how everyone was feeling (from online classes, events of the summer, etc.) and provide a space for everyone to express their thoughts and experiences due to the pandemic. This was a great way to kick off the semester. We followed this up with a discussion on mindfulness during prayer. The discussion covered topics on how to pray, what our prayer life looked like at the moment, some difficulties we had with praying, and ways to encourage one another in prayer moving forward.



It was good to remember to let our lives be a prayer and to invite God into our day, talk with Him, commune with Him and give Him praise all the days of our lives, in good times and in bad times. Another key topic was social mindfulness. This opened the floor to conversations about the political climate as well as the social injustices that were happening around the world, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. As Black Catholics, these are issues that affected us so it was essential to talk about them in a safe space and connect them to the Bible’s teachings about social justice and engagement.

We had the opportunity to learn about Sr. Thea Bowman, one of our African American sisters who is in the pipeline for canonization. Fr. Maurice Nutt, C.Ss.R, the diocesan liaison for her cause who also personally knew her, led an educational and inspiring presentation about her life. Although her message was primarily for the audience of her time, it also relates to what we are experiencing in the times we live in now. We watched a segment of her famous address to the U.S. Bishops Conference in 1989, entitled “Being Black and Catholic,” and discussed common themes that stuck out, especially that of embracing one’s identity as Black and Catholic, as well as the important role that the laity play in the sanctification of the world.





On Mindfulness: Fall Retreat

by Apongwu Fopenawoh, Campus Ministry Assistant

COVID-19 has presented the challenge of growing in faith and community and in the Church in a way uncommon to many of us. As Howard moved to a virtual environment, so did most of the HU Bison Catholic ministry to keep us connected in faith. We held our first-ever virtual retreat through Zoom--a one-day retreat to come together and be centered on Christ. Retreatants wanted to grow in their faith and be connected with others, especially as many of these opportunities for recollection have been put on hold due to the pandemic. Iman Davis, an HU Bison sophomore from Houston, TX, stated simply that a retreat is needed for “a break from the long week”. The many other unpredictable occurrences of life present the need of many hearts to seek after that which matters the most--true rest in the love of Christ. As we kicked off the year with the theme of Mindfulness (examining mindfulness in prayer, in social life, in the mental and emotional), we sought to dig deeper into what it means to be mindful in the life of every Christian.

We dissected through Romans 12:2, on a two-session retreat. The first session was on “not being conformed to the world”, and the second was on “being transformed”. This retreat was directed by Fr. Patrick Mullan, the parochial vicar of St. Joseph in Largo (Md)) who led the retreatants through talks, questions, and reflections on practical life issues. Danae Byers, HU Bison Catholic co-president, coordinated the Ice breakers and shares her experience: “The retreat was an opportunity for me to be closer to my fellow students, and also to sustain the relationships within our E-Board and the members that attended since we haven’t had in-person time. It was a great way to pray together and learn together aside from our Thursday Night Fellowship, and strengthen our relationship with each other and with God. Leading the Icebreakers was something very fitting not just for my personality and role, but also to share my energy so as to allow retreatants to have a fun time and get to know each other. It added an interactive element that gave the retreat a good balance of prayer and fun!”



Fr. Patrick Mullan, retreat leader

Gathering on the eve of All Saints' Day (Oct. 31st), students expressed a common take-away from the retreat, that of sainthood. As Kristen Mollineau describes it, "sainthood begins with God's initiative and ends with God completing His work in us." That this sanctity is also needed in all walks of life and not just limited to religious orders. Having touched on ideologies in the world such as individualism, materialism, and relativism that are rampant in today's world, Fr. Patrick encouraged us all to continue to live to be the saints God has called us to be in not being conformed to that which takes away the meaning of our lives. Neechi Okwor shared that the retreat helped him "learn the importance of slowing down and the inherent dignity and value of life." Indeed, saints are made when each human recognizes who God has made them to be and lives that to the fullest.

Planning and executing our fall retreat came with its own challenges. Nevertheless, we are thankful that it showed us the need in our hearts to reconnect and re-center our minds on Christ and His calling. Graduate student Franchesca Arcy shared, "I am always seeking ways to strengthen my relationship with God. The retreat gave me the opportunity to do so while being surrounded by so many others who love Him just as much as I do!" We continue to pray that amidst these challenging times, God continues to work in each person's heart, and also through avenues of ministry. God's will doesn't lead us where His grace wouldn't keep us!

"Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is God's will; what is good, pleasing and perfect."

Romans 12:2

Congratulations Sr. Barbara!



Sr. Barbara Bartlett,

2020 Rocky-Stone Award Recipient

ROCKY Stone was an advocate for persons who had the disability of hearing loss. As a young man, he suffered this same loss while serving in the military. After a career in the FBI following his military retirement, Rocky began to serve as an outstanding advocate for those who had some form of hearing loss. His efforts were the reason why the Archdiocesan Office for Reaching Out to Persons with Disabilities decided to name their annual award for persons who show a similar dedication as a volunteer ministering to those who have disabilities. This year, 2020, our very own Sr. Barbara Bartlett was chosen to receive the award because of her service as a volunteer working with persons having disabilities of different kinds. At the time she was presented with the award, Sr. Barbara expressed her feelings of both humble gratitude and deep pride in being identified with the extraordinary person of Rocky Stone.

Those present were assured the recognition was due mainly to the example of volunteerism that members of her family showed and encouraged in her during her growing up years. Sr. Barbara reminded everyone of the wonderful gifts which she receives from those with whom she serves. These treasures have helped her deepen her commitment as a volunteer. We are grateful to have her as part of our ministry team, which she has been generously serving our community for over 20 years. Her wealth of knowledge and dedication and commitment to the faith gives students a concrete example of what it truly means to be a disciple of Christ. ***The Bison Catholics at Howard University, like students at most other schools, are encouraged to reach out in service to others. What about you?***



Pass the Baton

by Deacon Joseph Bell, Assistant Chaplain



“When you see something that is not right, not just, you have a moral obligation to say something. Our children and their children will ask us, ‘What did you do? What did you say?’ We have a mission and a mandate to be on the right side of history.” Congressman John Lewis, December 2019

IF anyone has ever run track or participated in a team relay race, you know that one of the last things that happen is the group huddle pep-talk before the team splits and goes to their positions. You review any strategies or key points and make one last rally cry for the race ahead. Then, the first runner heads to the starting point and is asked to get ON YOUR MARK. This is where an individual runner needs to prepare. There’s a mental game inside, and it is a moment where you drop yourself into the race and become present. You remind yourself, “What do I need to do to win this race? What do I need to do to help the team?” GET SET. You are in position, your legs are set in the blocks, and the baton is held in your hand in just the right way. Breathing intently, you know what you need to do, and you are set to start. You concentrate on not jumping the gun and making a clean start. GO! You take off running! You explode out of the blocks and set off with purpose. You do what you have to do to pull your weight and show up for the team. You run your leg of the race and pass the baton to the next runner.

The Baton has already been passed to Millennials and Generation Z. As Congressman Lewis said on the 50th Anniversary of the March to Selma, “They must use this moment to recommit themselves to do all they can to finish the work. There is still work left to be done. Get out there and push and pull until you redeem the Soul of America.”

Many before us have suffered, protested, marched, demonstrated, sacrificed, preached—and they have now passed the baton to the next generation. In our time, the Black Lives Movement is a rallying cry for human dignity of all people of every race and way of life to come together. This is our opportunity to take the baton and run the next leg of the race. In life, we are called to serve. Much like a team relay race, there will be people who are looking to us to pass the baton or maybe who want to run the race with us. The Lord has called us to serve Him in His Kingdom, and we must step up and answer with courage and conviction. We are called to do the right thing.

We are called to be examples, even “icons,” of Christ. And when we look back, we can say proudly, “This is how I ran my race.”

Other people can be proud to be on your team, and you can know that in the moments where it counted most, you stepped up, kept running, and passed that baton, knowing that the race means more than just yours alone in that moment. You are serving the greater good of God’s Kingdom and winning a race that garners the Glory of the Father. As we sing in the Black National Anthem, “Let us march on ‘til victory is won!” We Must Keep On Keeping On!!

MEET THE TEAM



Left to Right: Sem. Anthony May, Sr. Barbara Bartlett, Fr. Boxie, Deacon Bell, Apongwu Fopenawoh



Chaplain's Corner: A New Ministry in the Time of Covid

by Fr. Robert P. Boxie, III

AS the first priest chaplain in almost a decade, and the first full-time archdiocesan priest at Howard, I am excited about my new ministry at the university. I am grateful also to Archbishop, Cardinal Wilton Gregory for his support and leadership in this assignment. We continue to celebrate his historic elevation to the College of Cardinals, the first African American Cardinal in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. He has made Howard students a priority early on in his arrival to Washington. Unfortunately, that hasn't always been the case in the past.

The possibilities for our ministry at Howard are endless. With a full-time chaplain, we are now able to provide the sacraments for students and establish a strong Catholic presence on campus. We will continue our mission to educate and encourage students in their Catholic faith and create a space for fellowship and community as we form the next generation of Black Catholic leaders. We seek to collaborate with other student organizations as we tackle the challenges that affect us all. We also will promote vocations, which are sorely needed in our Church from our community, as a number of priests in our archdiocese have come from our college chaplaincies.

As you can imagine, starting this new ministry in the midst of a pandemic has presented its challenges. With campus closed, students at home, and the university

completely online (including the Spring semester), we too had to adjust our approach. Our ministry has transitioned to all-virtual as well. We have Masses in-person and live-streamed on Sundays from Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in DC (where I currently reside), and our Thursday Night Fellowship takes place through Zoom. We even had a virtual Zoom Fall retreat. We have been active on our digital platforms and social media accounts so as to reach as many students as we can and build relationships as best we can in these unprecedented times. Like so many students, especially the freshmen, I too have felt the frustration of not being on campus to participate in all the traditions and experiences unique to HBCU's. However, we know that this too shall come to pass.



Cardinal Gregory and Fr. Boxie, MLK Mass 2019

I am especially grateful to our ministry team and for their dedication and commitment. Dcn. Joseph Bell, current assistant chaplain, has provided a wealth of experience and institutional knowledge for us to continue our ministry. Sr. Barbara Bartlett, SHCJ, has been a long-time volunteer religious sister at Howard. Apongwu Fopenowah, campus ministry assistant, is known to many of our students from her time at the University of Maryland. Seminarian Anthony May (Diocese of Raleigh) joins us this year as well. And kudos go to our co-presidents Danae Byer and Uremma Egbe for their leadership.

I hope you have found in these pages a snapshot of our ministry this past semester and all the ways we have been connecting with one another during the pandemic. We know that God sustains our ministry, and we do it because of what we believe and who we are as people of faith. We look to build on the momentum from this past semester which will carry us into the New Year 2021. We hope that you will support our efforts and stay connected with us as we do the work that God has called us to do.

HU BISON CATHOLIC IN THE NEWS!

Catholic Standard

Black Catholics express joy at elevation of Cardinal Gregory, first African American cardinal

NOV 28, 2020 FAITH
BY MARK ZIMMERMANN



Father Robert Boxie III, the Catholic chaplain at Howard

Catholic Standard

'Faith as an anchor': Catholic campus ministries serve students during pandemic

OCT 9, 2020 FAITH
BY JOSEPHINE VON DOHLEN

The Life and Legacy of Sr. Thea Bowman

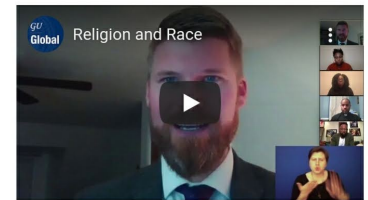
November 6, 2020 | 60 min.

Fr. Robert P. Boxie III, discusses the life, legacy,

October 13, 2020

Religion and Race

The Future of Anti-Racism and the Catholic Church



Catholic Standard

Drawing on faith, learning from Church's history is key to confronting the sin of racism, panelists say

OCT 23, 2020 FAITH
BY MARK ZIMMERMANN



Father Robert Boxie III, the Catholic chaplain at Howard



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Immaculate Conception Catholic Church
1315 8th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

hunewmanclub@gmail.com



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