

# BISON CATHOLIC FORUM

*Spring/Summer 2023*



## **A Year of Growth and Blessing**

In these pages, you will find a small sampling of our HU Bison Catholic ministry this past academic year 2022-23. It was a full one, as we emerge two years from the pandemic. We invite you to enjoy the range of our activities which shows some of our efforts to grow the Catholic presence at Howard University. This community of young believers desires ever more to deepen their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ, as you will see in this newsletter. Thank you for your interest in our ministry and for your prayerful support.



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## The Power of God's Grace

by Miles Lee, 'HU 24

My time at HU Bison Catholic has been a testament to the power of God's infinite grace. Like many others, I have made more than my fair share of mistakes. Academically, socially, and religiously, I have been far from perfect. And unfortunately, perfection has often been the unachievable goal for which I have strived. There were times when I felt that my mistakes were just too great and refused to even entertain the idea of being granted forgiveness by anyone, including myself and God. I probably never would have been able to convince myself alone that I am not defined by mistakes.

Thankfully, God has worked tirelessly to protect me and lead me to him during my darkest moments, even when I was unable to notice Him. A prime example of his unexpected grace was my introduction to HU Bison Catholic in 2020, just before my freshman year. My parish priest, Fr. Joshua Johnson, put me in contact with Fr. Boxie during a time when I felt very distant from God and was doubting my Catholic identity. I am confident now that my distant feelings were wholly one-sided, for a few text messages between Fr. Boxie and me (that I did not send until about a year after getting his contact information) led to me to serve as Co-President of HU Bison Catholic, a turn of events that I certainly would not have predicted in 2020. Our Catholic student ministry has been

everything I wanted and needed to renew my faith, and for a while, I thought it to be too generous a gift from God considering all the mistakes that I have made. While I may not deserve such a good gift from God, everything good that I have is ultimately undeserved, especially God's grace. No one on this planet could ever measure up to God's benevolence. Simply waking up every day is a precious gift that we are not owed. Yet God offers us always his great grace, so long as we ask for it. I went a long time not allowing myself that access to God's grace and only received it thanks to the intercessory prayers of those who love me.

But it is imperative that I, as outgoing Co-President, stress the importance of asking for God's grace and impart it onto others. I was able to share my experience with God's grace on our Spring Retreat with the University of Maryland's Catholic Student Center where I met several students with similar stories. I, like everyone, am an undeserving beneficiary of God's grace because God wants us all to be close to him, just as He planned from the very beginning. Our mistakes are totally insignificant to His plan.



## Student Spotlight: Trinity Ijoma

by Trinity Ijoma, '24

Hi everyone! My name is Trinity Ijoma. I am a junior mechanical engineering student at Howard University from Dallas, Texas. I have been brought up in the Catholic faith since I was a child, and it is something that I have always identified with. However, during high school, I strayed away from my faith and didn't really work on my relationship with God. I knew that I always wanted to get stronger with my faith, but I never really took the initiative to do so. My freshman and sophomore years, I didn't know about any Catholic groups on campus at Howard University but I knew that I wanted to join one. So, I was very excited to see in my junior year at Howard that HU Bison Catholic was an active organization. I decided to join HU Bison Catholic because I wanted to finally take the initiative to get stronger in my faith since I have strayed away from it in the past. I also wanted to surround myself with like-minded people who are passionate about God and being involved in the Catholic Church. I've known since I was young that I wanted to become an active member of the church and help lead others to start their journeys with their own faith as well, so being led to this group was a blessing.



Since joining, my experience with HU Bison Catholic has been nothing but amazing. I have met a lot of people who have helped me grow stronger in my faith.

I joined RCIA this past year, and received the sacrament of Confirmation at the Easter Vigil at St. Augustine Catholic Church. I have learned so much about Catholicism, and I also feel the presence of God in my life more strongly now. I am also a member of the women's bible study, and that is something that I look forward to on Mondays. Next year, I will serve on the e-board as the Hospitality/Outreach chair.

HU Bison Catholic definitely has provided me with the opportunity to change my life in numerous ways, and I'm so happy that God led me to join this ministry. I can't wait to see what the future holds as I continue on my journey with HU Bison Catholic.



# Simple Witnesses

by Seminarian Pascale Atunzu

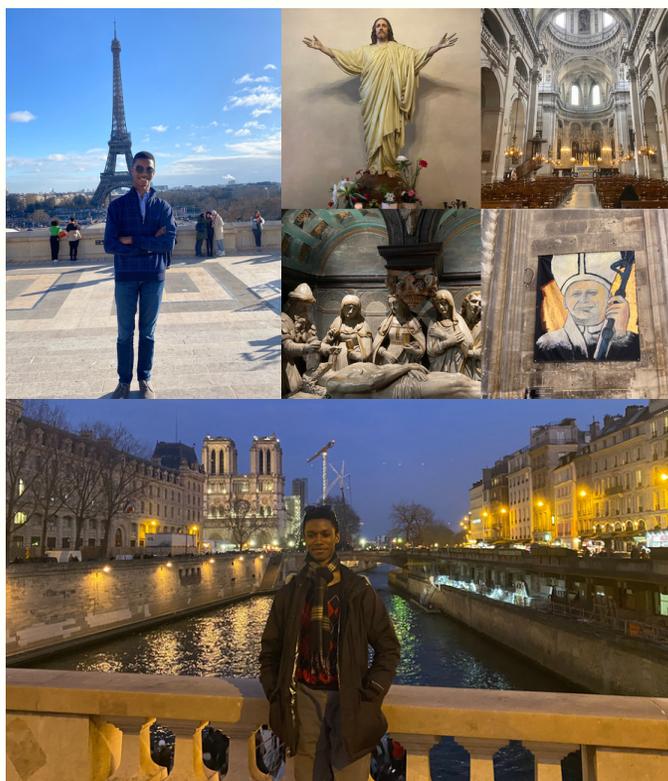
The late Pope Benedict XVI in his homily during the Mass of possession of the Chair of the Bishop of Rome said, “It is through witnesses that the Church was built, and all Christians in their own way can and must be witnesses of the Risen Lord.” Being a witness of the risen Christ could take on grand forms such as serving the poor on the streets, going on mission trip. However, it could also be much simpler, such as gathering with young college students for fellowship on Thursday nights. This weekly, simple act by the Catholic students at Howard university for fellowship has been a good example of living the Christian witness in a simple way. Their ability to carve out time from their own personal schedules for Christian fellowship through insightful questions, presentations, and prayerfulness has served as a witness to the Christian life which Jesus shares with those who believe in him. I have learned through my engagement with the students that, in order for the faith to be an integral part of their lives, it needs to be nourished and strengthened through fellowship with one another. The consistent fellowship of the students on Thursday is a testament that though we may not all resemble the great cloud of witnesses and figures in the Gospel, like the Apostles, but in our own simple ways, such as a weekly gathering, we are able to share God’s love with each other.



Left to right: Br. Curse Calais, SSJ, and seminarians Pascale Atunzu, and Joshua Wright

## BONJOUR, BERETS, AND BISON

by Myles Griffin '24



My name is Myles Griffin, a rising junior Political Science Major & French minor. I spent the Spring semester studying abroad in Paris, France. Interestingly, I think my faith benefitted the most from this experience. France is rich in Catholic history and monuments! As a result, one of my goals was to visit one new church every week. By the end of my sojourn, I visited well over 16 different churches! The language barrier during Mass was initially a bit difficult, but with my improved listening and my already intermediate speaking skills, it eventually flew quite naturally! Study abroad experiences are really all about what you make out of it. Everyone changes in some way, shape or form after their experience. And while I’ve been to France before, having four months to truly take in all that France has to offer from a Catholic perspective, it was quite literally "soul changing." I am looking forward to sharing my experiences with our ministry when I return to campus. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God." Ps. 42:2.



# Our Presence Matters

by Ali Mumbach, G'24

This was a historical moment. This was the first time that Howard University had a group of students attend the SEEK conference, or any conference of this magnitude. And it very well may have been the first time that FOCUS ministries had a HBCU in attendance at their conference. We felt it. We knew going in what the demographics would be like, and how vastly outnumbered we would be as Black Catholics.

Yet, knowing this did not make it any more comfortable. But God is going to show up if you do. We did and He did.

The conference was overwhelming in many different ways. For one, the sheer number of people in attendance (more than 17,000). Secondly, the schedule and number of talks and activities available. Thirdly, being a few of the POCs in this predominantly white space. Although it was a lot, it was also good. It was good for us to see so many college students and young adults who were excited about their faith, with a thirst to learn and grow more. It was good to hear the talks and the ways in which we are called to live as followers of Christ.

**"We are a part of this Church body, and it is in fact more complete when we are present."**

And it was very good to remind others and ourselves that we are a part of this Church body, and that it is in fact more complete when we are present.

As the representative HBCU, we took it upon ourselves to meet other Black students that we saw attending the conference. We were even able to gather a group of about 50 students one evening and talk about our experiences being at the conference. This moment was a highlight for many of us. As is always the case, it was good to be reminded that we were not alone and to be in solidarity with one another.

Fr. Josh Johnson, who was a keynote speaker at SEEK, joined us for this time as well! Overall, it was a very anointed trip. We are so extremely grateful to all those who donated during the iGiveCatholic campaign and made it possible for our students to attend. We look forward to next year and bringing an even bigger group!



# A Most Holy of Weeks

by Victoria Koffi, '24

## Holy Thursday Pilgrimage



Holy Week has always been one of the most sacred times at my home. Being away on the other side of the country, I was sad that I could not spend the week before Easter with my family. However, participating in Holy Week activities with HU Bison Catholic not only allowed me to build community with other young Black Catholics, but also I was able to ease the part of me that was missing home--from seeing familiar faces to meeting new ones. From Palm Sunday to the 5-church pilgrimage on Holy Thursday to the Good Friday Stations of the Cross on the yard, all the way to Easter Sunday, I was able to continue enriching my relationship with our Lord through the different events held. I am very grateful for being able to celebrate Holy Week with HU Bison Catholic. It allowed me to deepen my faith through Mass, prayer, fellowship, and worship. I look forward to celebrating Holy Week again with the ministry next year and hope to help in continuing to grow our community of Black Catholics on Howard's campus.

## Good Friday Stations



*"Holy Week allowed me to continue enriching my relationship with the Lord."*

## Easter Saturday Vigil



## Easter Sunday



# Chaplain's Corner

Fr. Robert Boxie

What a year it has been! A year of growth, a year of celebration, a year of deepening, and a year of possibilities. These descriptions characterize the past academic year as we emerge with some normalcy from the pandemic. We outgrew the space in Carnegie and now hold our Masses in Douglass--such a wonderful sight to see so many students gather on Sunday evening for Mass and fellowship with our Lord and one another.

Our ministry greatly benefitted from the addition of Ali Mumbach, our part-time assistant campus minister, who also balances her schedule as a full-time graduate student in the Sociology department at Howard. Her enthusiasm, experience as a missionary, her love for the Church, and her passion for supporting black Catholic students have been gifts to our ministry.



This past year also allowed us to commemorate our 75th anniversary as a Catholic ministry on Howard's campus. HU Bison Catholic, which began as the Newman Club back in 1947, continues to provide a space for students to practice their Catholic faith in a vibrant, joyful community.



***"God has been extra generous to us this past year."***

We marked the occasion with a packed celebration at St. Augustine Catholic Church (cover photo), during the Archdiocese of Washington's annual Black Catholic History Month Mass with Cardinal Wilton Gregory--indeed, a fitting occasion since we continue to make Black history today.

Our programming allowed students to go deeper in their faith while also strengthening our community. With our liturgies, semester retreats, speakers, attending SEEK23 in St. Louis, and participating in archdiocesan events, in addition to social events and impromptu outings--all of it helped students to encounter Christ and each other in a real way. We capped off the year with an especially fruitful Lent, with two of our Bison receiving their sacraments at the Easter Vigil.

Finally, the momentum from this past year will propel us to next year with our new Sr. Thea Bowman Catholic Student Center at Howard University (1901 3rd St NW). More than 30 years in the making, we will finally have a space to call our own. We began using part of the center during the final month of the spring semester for meetings and gatherings. A formal dedication will be planned early in the Fall semester.

God has been extra generous to us this past year in allowing our ministry to thrive. With your prayers and support, he will continue to allow our ministry to bear fruit in the lives of our students.



## FAREWELL FROM BR. CURSEY CALAIS, SSJ

My dear brothers and sisters at Howard University Catholic Ministry, after seven wonderful years with this ministry, thank you so much for the opportunity for me to say farewell. I deeply appreciate each one of you, your presence, your love, your encouragement, and your prayers throughout my formation and ministry at Howard University. I urge you to remember the great commission our Lord Jesus gave as he said his own goodbye. Keep on making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that the Lord has commanded. I don't know what the future holds for you in this land, but I know that you can be strong and courageous as you preach the gospel by word and action, for the Lord himself is with you, even to the end of the age. Always remember that every beginning has an end, but the end becomes a new beginning. Now, I entrust you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now, and forever. Amen.



# THANK YOU

To all our donors, benefactors,  
alumni, and friends who  
helped make this year possible.

It is by your donations and  
prayers that we can continue  
to invite students to encounter  
Christ through this ministry.

### Prayer Requests

- Please pray that the new Sr. Thea Bowman Catholic Center would become a spiritual home for Howard students.
- Please pray for the safety of all our students.

*Special thanks to all the parishes that  
provided meals for fellowship after  
Sunday Mass:*

St. Augustine, Resurrection Catholic Church,  
St. Joseph (Capital Hill), St. Peter (Capital  
Hill), and Holy Comforter/St. Cyprian



*If your parish  
is interested in  
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