

BISON CATHOLIC FORUM

SPRING 2021



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A SPRING BLESSING...

Our theme of "Mindfulness" for this academic year was taken from Romans 12,1-2, where Paul encourages the Christian community to "not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." When we focus our minds on the things we do have instead of what we lack, we find that God provides hidden blessings right before our eyes. In this newsletter, you will see how our ministry was able to look beyond the challenges of this year and witness how God sustained us throughout the pandemic and drew us closer to Him, to our faith, and to one another.

CO-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY UREMMA EGBE '22

Uremma (Crystal) Egbe is a rising senior, pre-med track, with a major in Biology and a minor in Chemistry. Outside of being the co-president for HU Bison Catholic, she participates in the Omoge Dance Ensemble and also enjoys reading, piano, and singing.

Favorite Quote:

"With shortness of breath, I'll try to explain the infinite, how rare and beautiful it is to even exist"- Sleeping At Last



Hello everyone! My name is Uremma Egbe, and this year I served as the 2020-2021 co-president for HU Bison Catholic. This was the first full online school year due to the pandemic, and it has been anything but perfect. I believe that these imperfections have allowed students and members of our community to grow. Though we rarely met in person, our online meetings were effective and engaging. Through our Monday Bible Studies and Thursday Night Fellowships, I, as well as other students were able to relate socially but more importantly, spiritually. Our retreats and Bible studies allowed us to make the connection between faith and how we are to live in the world. We also provided virtual Masses on Sundays that allowed us to expand our community.

Although there were significant accomplishments, we still faced some challenges. The pandemic as well as academics complicated the participation of our members. Though these conditions were not ours to control, we made do with what we had. Our meetings demonstrated the true meaning of "quality over quantity" because the number of participants was never the priority, but whether or not the Holy Spirit was active in the hearts of attendees. On a personal note, I also saw a decline in my mental health which also affected my team. It became hard to balance my recovery with my leadership role and taking that step back from my Howard family was a hard decision to make. Despite this, I continued to receive support from HU Bison Catholic, as expected. It was through the trial and errors, the successes and failures, and the imperfections that we were able to finish this school year strong. When I was first asked to take this role, I was excited for the work to come. I am proud of our progress, and I am grateful for the lessons this position has taught me. From the first Mass I attended on campus, and even until now, I have never felt more at home than with HU Bison Catholic. I am excited to witness its growth in the upcoming years!

GRADUATES' SPOTLIGHT

Franchesca Arcy, Spring '21
Masters of Science, Speech
Language Pathology

It has been a pleasure to be a part of HU Bison Catholic during my graduate school experience. During these uncertain times, being a part of this community guided me to the light. The pandemic caused many of us to retreat to our homes and find comfort within ourselves, which presented challenges especially if you live alone. I felt lost, as attending fellowship and Mass in-person was no longer an option. Thankfully, by becoming an active member, I was able to create bonds with other individuals, which made navigating the pandemic much more bearable. The virtual community was the additional support system that allowed me to get through the semester and navigate personal issues.

What made HU Bison Catholic special were the weekly events set in place for us to continue to build community. We were able to have relevant and candid conversations surrounding current events and how the Word relates to our lives. Finding these connections within the Catholic faith is how we are able to create a stronger bond with God. As a young adult, I am always looking for ways to strengthen my relationship with God. I feel confident in talking about topics surrounding my faith, and I have also gained a new appreciation for being Catholic.



HU Bison Catholic has allowed me to become more intentional with my faith, especially as I transition from graduating with my Master's degree to pursuing a doctorate in the Fall. I am eager to see how HU Bison Catholic continues to impact the lives of others, and I am grateful for the experiences I've had! It is bittersweet saying goodbye to the friends I have made through Sunday Mass, Bible study, and the Thursday night fellowships that were made available to us!



Danae Byer, Fall '20
Bachelor of Science, Biology



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<https://unqueue.shop/store/nae>

The trials of 2020 proved resilience in not just myself, but my peers who had to juggle college courses, graduate school applications, family lives, physical health, and mental health. It may have allowed us to do some sifting within to discover hidden treasures in ourselves that may have been quieted long ago. While sifting, I managed to discover my hidden talent of sewing which has developed into my small business that I launched in January 2021. As I await the responses from my graduate school applications, I have been developing this talent and working towards building my clothing business.

Another reason I believe I was able to handle this pandemic well was due to the strong connections I formed with the members of the Newman Club. While I always knew I loved being in the physical presence of others, it was clear how much I crave in-person connections.

Shifting from facilitating large retreats and meetings to a virtual environment was an interesting discovery and learning process for me. But HU Bison Catholic, being a very tight-knit group, managed to maintain a certain personal aspect, even outside of our scheduled Zoom meetings. It provided me, and many others, with a safe space to meet with like-minded people and share our ups and downs. Throughout my four years at Howard University, HU Bison Catholic has also provided me with leadership opportunities which has contributed to my professional development post-grad. Additionally, I was given the opportunity to plan and participate in community service activities which really helped to make the Howard experience a holistic one.

FAREWELL SR. BARBARA

Interview with Neechi Okwor

BACKGROUND...

I come from a county north of Chicago, growing up with one sister and two brothers. I went to college a year after high school and finished my degree. I began teaching after making my formal profession. I wanted to go to Africa, and they said that Africa needed science and math teachers, so I majored in biology. I taught for 14 years before they let me go. I spent 4 years in Ghana and 19 years in Nigeria.

When I returned to the US, I worked at Bethlehem House (which I loved) for 6 years in DC, and then had a short stay in New York for three years. Returning to DC, I met a Nigerian priest studying at Howard who eventually became the chaplain. I enjoyed the Masses there. Soon, he asked me to come more often, and I did. There were two chaplains after him and then Dcn. Bell arrived. We became a good team together... and the rest is history!

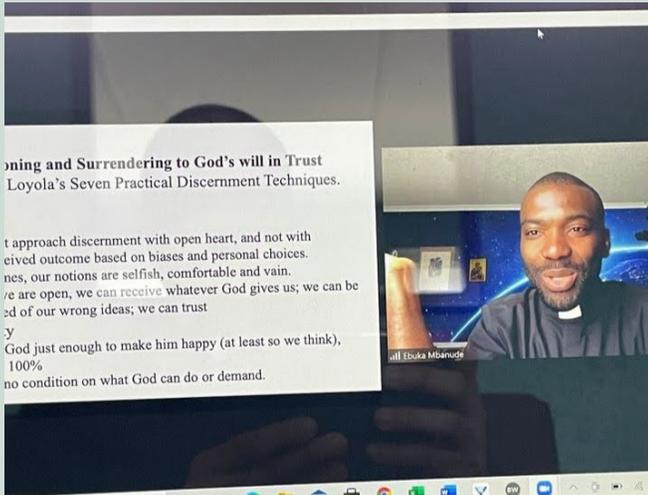


VOCATION...

I had a wonderful upbringing, and I just felt so grateful for all that God had given me. The thought arose, "Why couldn't I do something for God?" I mentioned this to the parish priest who was a family friend. He said, "Why don't you just go to school for a year and see if that desire continues," and that's what I did. If it's what you're supposed to do, you will know. If you're in the wrong place, no matter what the situation is, you're in the wrong place. It's like Fr. Boxie--you know, he finished law school, was practicing law, and he had a nice condo in downtown Washington. Now, he loves being a priest. I wanted to respond to God's goodness by giving back.

PARTING MESSAGE...

First, God, then your family, then do things that are meaningful to you, and serve the community. Dcn. Bell was very big on this because of the racism issues--it's up to your generation now to help heal some of these wounds and enable things to happen so that the evils will be dealt with.



The Shepherd's Peace: On Spring Retreat

by Seminarian Anthony May

This March saw the HU Bison Catholic gathering together for the Spring semester retreat. As in the Fall, this retreat was held virtually on Zoom on a Saturday with two sessions and a small break in between. Both sessions began with engaging ice-breakers, led by a one of the team members. This helped the whole group to share and learn new things about one another.

The retreat director was Father Ebuka Mbanude, parochial vicar at Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Kensington, Maryland. Our theme was "Mindfulness of God's Will: What is God's Will For My Life?" Fr. Ebuka spoke to students about God's will by recalling his own experiences discerning God's will. Before immigrating to the United States, Fr. Ebuka gave up the opportunities of medical school in order to enter the seminary. To this day, the fruits of his choice to follow God's will are clear as he serves the Archdiocese of Washington.

Part of Fr. Ebuka's talk discussed the basics of the Ignatian spiritual exercises. The first few of these rules are intended to help someone discern God's will by an awareness of peace in their life. Often, our desires reflect peace when divinely inspired, but turmoil and disquiet when not so.

Discovering God's will in this manner should usually be done with the aid of a spiritual guide, but it nonetheless is helpful to hear about these steps when first beginning to consider what God's will is for each of us. God's will is not easy, but it does come from His love. An essential part of God's will is for us to accept and follow it. It is through our obedience to God's will that we reach peace and our true reward.

What else is there that keeps the faithful alive but the love and the will of God? We know that to follow God's will is to find peace, and so in this way, we can survive another season of caution and protocols. It is so aptly like being a sheep led by the shepherd. The wilderness of the world, the uncontrollable, the frightening, the truly dangerous, is not something that we can survive if we travel without listening to the shepherd's call. Therefore, following behind Him, *that is*, following **His** will, we can have every hope of finding peace.



Anthony May
Diocese of Raleigh
Theological College/CUA '21

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Kunmi Otitaju' 05

HU MEMORIES...

I moved from Lagos, Nigeria directly to DC and became a student at Howard from 2001 to 2005. I have a few memorable experiences from Howard with classes, school activities, and the Newman Club. I really enjoyed Calculus and Freshman English for Engineers; the Homecoming fashion show in 2003 with Venus and Serena Williams walking the runway; and assisting in the kitchen with Fr. John Raphael and Bro. Harry after Mass once a month, cooking up all those delicious Louisiana dishes and hanging out together while playing board games.

I was glad to easily find the Newman Club at Howard. We did quite a bit of volunteer work. As part of Alternative Spring Break, about ten of us would volunteer in some part of the country, accompanied by our chaplains. We worked with Native American communities in North Carolina; with K-12 children in New Orleans; and did cleaning projects at an archival museum in Cleveland. My time at Howard was greatly enriched by these experiences.



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POST-HOWARD LIFE..

After Howard, I attended graduate school at Virginia Tech and worked as an information architect at a company called ICF in Fairfax, Virginia. I studied in Paris and later relocated to study art in Spain, which has had an interesting history with the Catholic Church. Finding a church community similar to what we had at Howard has been challenging. Not many young people here go to Mass. Shortly after moving to Spain, I started a leather goods company called, Minku. In 2014, I was one of Forbes' 30 most promising entrepreneurs under 30 (Africa). And I'm the mother of a little toddler too!

ADVICE FOR YOUNG ADULTS...

My faith has helped me stay grounded in all my experiences, given me hope, freed me from worrying about the future, and provided me with a wealth of happy times. If you're aware of the positive impact your faith has on your everyday life, it becomes easier to seek ways to stay connected to it.

HU-UMD JOINT RACISM DISCUSSIONS

BY APONGNWU FOPENAWOH

“Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights.”
- Brothers and Sisters to Us, USCCB, 1979

Amidst the many issues in our country that we are facing, the continuous unrest in regards to the sin of racism was certainly one to be brought to prayer, reflection, and discussion. In solidarity and with the responsibility of being stewards of the unconditional love of Christ, HU Bison Catholic and the Catholic Student Center at the University of Maryland-College Park engaged in joint collaborations surrounding the sin of racism. We discussed a multitude of topics, including: defining racism according to the Church, how it manifests itself, systemic and institutional racism, the history of race, current events on shootings and hate crimes against minorities, criticisms and microaggressions, and ways in which we can combat this grave sin and transform our culture and campuses.



Apongnwu Fopenawoh
HU Campus Ministry Assistant
Co-leader of discussions

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AFTER THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD, I, LIKE MANY PEOPLE, WAS UPSET AND WANTED TO DO SOMETHING TO MAKE A CHANGE. AFTER HEARING FATHER BOXIE GIVE A TALK FOR THE CSC, I REALIZED THE ROLE WE HAVE AS CATHOLICS TO END RACISM, AND I WANTED TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION. WITH THE HELP OF MY WONDERFUL CO-LEAD APONGNWU, I THINK WE LEAD SOME REALLY WONDERFUL DISCUSSIONS AND HELPED PEOPLE TO LEARN A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT RACISM AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO BE ACTIVELY ANTI-RACIST. I HAD A GREAT TIME, AND I HOPE WE CAN CONTINUE TO HAVE THESE IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS!

”



These discussions were rich and fruitful for several reasons: the diversity in those who participated and the uniqueness of their life experiences; the openness of young people to go deeper themselves in dissecting such an uncomfortable and challenging topic; and the willingness to learn as well as to strive for what truly matters, which is being able to see in each human being as the image of God and love them as such. Each of our meetings focused on a particular resource. We began reading and discussing *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, a pastoral letter written by the US Bishops in 1979, which most students agreed could also have been written in 2020. For our second meeting, we listened to the first 2 episodes of the podcast “Seeing White,” a great podcast by Scene on Radio that focuses on history, biological facts, and the social realities of racism. Our last meeting invited students to refine their knowledge and engagement on these topics, as well as empower them to be better allies through some practical tips, in addition to providing other helpful resources going forward.



Katherine Krantz'21
University of Maryland
Co-leader of discussions

Chaplain's Corner

by Fr. Robert Boxie, III

What a year it has been! So much has transpired these past fourteen months, so many adjustments to our ministry... BUT more importantly, so many blessings to be grateful for because God has guided us through this unprecedented year. There have been challenges, but there have also been real moments of grace. Through it all, we have strengthened even more our resolve and became even more committed to our mission of forming the next generation of Black Catholic leaders, and using all the tools at our disposal to do just that and engage our students.

We certainly had a full year of ministry. We made the transition to the virtual space quite well, with our Thursday night Fellowships, Sunday Masses (in-person and livestream), Fall and Spring retreats (both virtual), in addition to a new Monday night Bible Study—all to foster community and connect with students. And our joint collaborations with UMD tackling the sin of racism were a real highlight.

I am very proud and grateful to our ministry team for their hard work and commitment to the very end, with Dcn. Joseph Bell, Sr. Barbara Bartlett, SHCJ, seminarian Anthony May, ministry assistant Apongwu Fopenawoh, and website coordinator Peace Aku. Everyone showed up week-in and week-out, despite the frustrations of ministering in this virtual environment. I have observed how we grew together as a team and a family, and I look forward to building on this year's successes.



Sadly, this year marks the end of Sr. Barbara's time with us at Howard. We thank her for her 15+ years of service to our students, and she will always hold a special place at Howard and at HU Bison Catholic. Also, Apongwu will be moving on as she begins medical school later this summer. A dedicated member of our team, she was involved in nearly every aspect of ministry—from liturgies to planning events to leading Bible Study to communications and everything in between. I know her impact will be felt far behind this past year. Her love for the Lord is evident, and we have all benefited from her passion for the faith and for winning disciples for Jesus Christ. Along with Sr. Barbara, she will certainly be missed but will always be a part of HU Bison Catholic.

Even with the challenges we faced, we finished the year strong. The final Mass honoring our graduating students was followed by a wonderful celebration with food, fellowship, and refreshments in the courtyard of Immaculate Conception. The joy of all the students who came was evident, and it reminded all of us of how we in fact do need one another and how we must work to stay connected to each other, and most importantly with God, who sustains us in all we do. Congrats to all our graduates!

I want to express my gratitude to Fr. Charlie Gallagher, pastor of Immaculate Conception, for allowing us to use the Church for our Masses and events all year. We do not have our own space for ministry *yet*, but we are actively working towards that goal and will need your prayers and support to make that a reality. God bless you and have a wonderful summer!

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