



A community of faith on campus

Annual Catholic Appeal

When Ben Flanagan arrived at the University of Maine in Orono last fall, one of the first connections he wanted to make was with campus ministry.

“They were the first table I went to on Accepted Student Day and when I was here visiting during orientation,” he says. “I immediately knew, regardless of how many other social activities I have, I could always have this place to come to and to have as a regular touchstone for my week.”

Ben was active in youth ministry at All Saints Parish in Brunswick and didn't want to lose the connection to his faith.

“This is picking up where that left off, but here, in a completely new environment, it's something that I'm leaning on a lot more because there can be a lot of stresses and anxiety,” he says.

Ben isn't alone. **Jackie Walsh**, originally from Stamford, Conn., says her priorities when she first arrived three years



Ben Flanagan

ago included choir and the Catholic Church.

“In high school, I was really involved in my youth group, and I liked having that core group of people whom I could go to with whatever issues were on my heart at the time. So, up here, because I was so far away from home, I'm like, I know I need my own little family up here,” she says.

Supported by the Catholic Appeal, campus ministry is offered at eight colleges and universities around Maine. **Father Wilfred Labbe**, the diocesan coordinator, says its importance cannot be overstated.

“We're talking about men and women who are navigating the swirl of the culture, and trying to find where they fit, and how they belong, and what's good for them, and

what's going to help them be the best they can be,” he says. “This is where you can come to be holy and extraordinary. This is where you can come to find something that is not going to change tomorrow.”

“Of the many things the Catholic Church does, I think campus ministries are one of the most important in America,” says **Luke Shotton**, a sophomore economics major. “I think this is stuff that is very important, because in our culture, we have a situation where people don't even think about Jesus anymore.”

At the Newman Center on the Orono campus, Mass is celebrated every Sunday. Eucharistic adoration is offered weekday afternoons, and Father Labbe, who also serves as campus chaplain, hears confessions every Friday.

“Confession and adoration is every Friday, and I go somewhat regularly,” says Ben. “That's a nice entrance point to my weekends.”

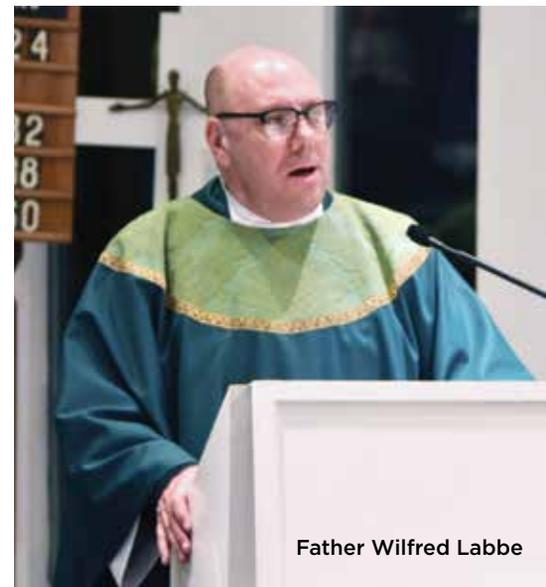
Students can also lead or join Bible study groups, share in Wednesday or Sunday night free suppers, or participate in the women's and men's discussion groups, which meet Sunday evenings.

“We're doing one right now about the true meaning of beauty, called ‘Beautiful You,’” explains Jackie, co-chair of the women's group. “We sometimes do a craft, or sometimes, it's as simple as a hot topic or a guided discussion on something like love, relationships.”

Father Labbe is assisted at UMaine by Campus Minister Audrey Ouellette and FOCUS missionaries. FOCUS, an acronym



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Father Wilfred Labbe



Luke Shotton



Jackie Walsh



Nicholas LaJoie

for Fellowship of Catholic University Students, is a program that places young adult missionaries on college and university campuses, where they invite students to get to know Jesus and encourage them to reach out to their peers.

“One of the first things I did was sign up for Bible study that the FOCUS missionaries had,” says **Nicholas LaJoie**, a junior originally from Van Buren, who is majoring in computer engineering. “I think that really kind of catapulted my faith, and since then, it’s kind of a natural thing to want to be here with this community and do the different events.”

LaJoie says coming from a small town, there weren’t many other youths active in their faith,

so it’s been helpful to be with students who have perspectives similar to his own.

“I’m very, very fortunate,” he says. “There have been such wonderful people I’ve met, and just seeing their example, seeing that they can be students and full of faith and striving for holiness, I think that was the biggest thing for me, seeing that example and also wanting to do that.”

“I have a group of guys who meet every week, and we’re always texting each other, pray for me for this, or I’ve got a test coming up, relationship troubles, whatever it is. You can lean on each other, and I wouldn’t have that without the Newman Center,” says Ben.

Father Labbe says the number of students active in campus ministry

declined a bit this year. Although he’s not sure why, he is concerned that it might be a result of the divisiveness in the country, highlighted by the recent election.

“It’s concerning that it’s become all encompassing,” he says.

Father Labbe says that just means there is more work to be done.

“We need to be right there with the truth, with a message that says you belong,” he says. “The most important thing with campus ministry, as with all ministry, is to introduce people to Jesus and help them to get an intimate relationship, and that way, they can begin to grow into who they are supposed to be, be perfect as they are called to be.” †

Middle school rallies focus on building bridges

Middle school-aged youths from around the diocese gathered at rallies in Augusta and Presque Isle this March to celebrate their faith and the gifts they bring to the Church, and to be encouraged to share those gifts with their peers in their home communities.

“I thought it would be a good chance to meet new people and to grow closer to God,” says Haley Martin, from Corpus Christi Parish, Waterville. “It definitely did.”

The theme of the days was “Build a bridge, love your neighbor,” and that is what keynote presenter Mike Patin tried to help the young people understand how to do.

“You have to figure out what you have in common with people who seem different. We both may like ice cream. We both might like the Patriots,” he said.

Patin, a former high school teacher and coach who travels around the country speaking to youth groups, told the young teens that everybody has struggles in their lives, and that is why it’s important to be supportive and not judgmental.



“Everybody here is searching for something, and everybody here has a story, not a label but a story,” he said.

He encouraged them to be bridge builders because bridges don’t build themselves, a message that seemed to hit home.

“It’s important to show mercy to others because there are a lot of people going through things you don’t know about, and not to judge others,” says Julia, from Good Shepherd Parish, Saco.

“It’s important to be a bridge,” says Anthony, from Christ the King Parish, Skowhegan.

“I took away that it doesn’t really matter who you are, you can still help someone,” says Leah, from Saint Rose of Lima Parish, Jay.

“You have to help everyone, no matter what they look like, because it’s good to help people,” says Hannah, also from Saint Rose of Lima.

During the rallies, which were sponsored by the Office of Lifelong Faith Formation, the young people also contributed to giant murals, sharing their individual impressions of what it means to build bridges and love your neighbor.