

Bringing hope to campus

New religious group serves the 'spiritually drowning'

STAFF REPORT

ORLANDO | Catholic Campus Ministry students at the University of Central Florida had a busy first week back to school. Their days were filled not only with classes and studying, but with helping freshmen move into their dorms, organizing sports on campus and attending Knightfire — an evening for fellowship, prayer and learning about the faith. The “Welcome Back Week” events culminated in celebrating Mass together Aug. 27, followed by a luau where old friends reconnected and new faces were welcomed. Among the new faces this year are two religious brothers — Brother Adam Neri and Brother John McCabe with the Brotherhood of Hope — who, starting this semester, will be running the Catholic Campus Ministry at UCF and serving the spiritual needs of the students there.

Founded in 1980, the Brotherhood of Hope is a fairly new religious order of consecrated brothers who work to advance the Gospel primarily by reaching out to inactive or uncommitted Catholic students at secular universities. Recently, Brother Neri was interviewed on the Faith Fit Radio show, “Saints Who Lead Us,” about the Brotherhood of Hope, the joys and challenges of doing campus ministry at public universities, and the saints who inspire their work. Excerpts from the interview are below. (Listen to the full interview at www.faithfitradio.org.)

Q: Can you share with us a little about yourself and your vocation story?

A: I’m one of 11 children, the oldest of the seven boys. The faith was something that was a regular part of who my family is and was, but not in a million years did I think I would be in a vocation to the consecrated life, not until I spent an entire year on mission in Costa Rica. It was a

time when the Lord could really speak to the depths of my heart. I encountered love and I had this growing desire to respond. I simply wanted to spend more time with the Lord. I contacted this group called the Brotherhood of Hope who I knew from New Jersey. I had gone on a mission trip to Africa with them and their witness really impressed me. They were men who were joyful, men who were alive in God, and they knew how to have fun. I moved in with them in 2002 and I haven’t looked back since.

Q: One of the ministries of the Brotherhood of Hope is outreach to secular universities. What is your vision of campus ministry?

A: We feel very strongly that our call is to go where nobody else is and to go where the need is greatest. At large public universities, people by the thousands are spiritually drowning. For us to be here at the University of Central Florida, which is now the largest school in the entire country, is just a tremendous privilege. At the same time we realize the need is so profound. There is no way that two brothers and a team of missionaries could adequately reach the thousands and thousands of people who need to know, primarily, that they are loved; secondly, that the Church cares about them; and third, that they have a home. What are we going to do? We’re going to do it one person at a time. We’re going to love the person who’s right in front of us.

We desire that people who come into our campus ministry might experience being part of community life. Our ministry is sacramentally oriented: It’s focused on the Mass, on the Eucharist, and on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It’s evangelistic: We take the words of the Holy Father, “Go to the peripheries and smell like the sheep,” very seriously. If you are a member of our campus ministry you will be trained in what it means to be an evangelizing dis-

ciple. We’ll teach you, we’ll train you, we’ll equip you and we’ll send you out so you can turn around and reach out to your peers. Finally, our ministry is for the Church moving outward. We really hope that by the time you are done with us in campus ministry, you are a leader who is ready and who is equipped to find your place in the Church and in the world.

Q: What are the challenges and blessings of doing campus ministry today?

A: I’ve been doing campus ministry for about 13 years and I have seen culture shift drastically. We’ve seen the loss of the self and we live now in a culture that says, “Me first.” Relativism is all over the place and it’s very hard to combat that. There’s also a sense where students don’t know themselves. If I don’t know primarily that I am a child of God who is loved, how am I going to find myself in a community that is a community of love? When our very sense of self is attacked, a lot of the other things that surround that get hazy and fuzzy.

For me the greatest blessing, the greatest joy in ministry is when I see someone encounter the living God. When they encounter Jesus — the one who loves them best, the one who knows them the most and he speaks truth into their soul and he loves them in a way that no one else can love them — they become transformed. They go on from our ministries to do incredible things for God. Some of them work in the Church, some of them work in the secular realm, but all of them have a deep interior sense that they belong to God first and that is the huge difference maker in the world. ■

For more information about Catholic Campus Ministry at UCF, visit <http://ccmknight.weconnect.com>. To learn more about the Brotherhood of Hope, visit www.brohope.net.



Students of the Catholic Campus Ministry at the University of Central Florida pray over Brother of Hope Adam Neri, center, at a ministry event during the first week of school. (COURTESY PHOTOS)



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Brother of Hope John McCabe speaks with students at a welcome back meal. Beginning this semester, the Brotherhood of Hope will be running the Catholic campus ministry at UCF.