

BROWN-RISD CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

FALL 2024 EDITION



CONTENTS

1 A Note from the
Chaplain

2 New Staff and Pastoral
Council Updates

3 Fall Retreat
'Learning to See'

5 Student Witness:
Brian Nguyen '24

6 Fall Semester
Highlight Events

8 Alumni Reflection:
Louisa Conwill '17

9 BRCC In NYC
Mass & Social

FALL 2024

BRCC UPDATE

Official Newsletter of the Brown-RISD
Catholic Community

A Note from the Chaplain



Grace and gratitude have the same root. They go together. A grace is a gift freely given and gratitude is the proper response. When we receive a gift from someone we *give* thanks back—*thanksgiving*. In gratitude, our hearts are opened in a joyful recognition of another's love for us. God, the best giver, gives to us his divine life—the highest grace and the best gift. And God continues to do this for our Catholic community on College Hill. I have only been here a few months but I have loved my time so far at the Brown-RISD Catholic Center and am thankful to God for how he sustains and blesses our students. Many students are coming to know the Lord Jesus and his Church within a loving community. And this is happening in a variety of ways: weekly worship in Mass and Adoration, RCIA for those entering the Church or receiving sacraments, FOCUS Bible studies, Munderground, intellectual formation, service opportunities, pro-life work, prayer, a pilgrimage, retreats, graduate and medical student events, and good Christian friendship. For all of this I give thanks to God. I also give thanks to you and all who generously give to the BRCC. The Catholic center is a beautiful place conducive to graced friendship with God and neighbor. It is a second home. It is a place where students find their rhythm with the Holy Spirit. By way of example, one of the students in our large RCIA class this year mentioned she was attracted to the faith because she was graciously welcomed at the BRCC when she arrived on campus.

BRCC regulars reached out to her, invited her to events like Munderground and Bible studies, and befriended her, which led her to investigate what was behind these gestures: the living faith. The Holy Spirit is moving here and raising up joyful student leaders in the Catholic faith. We continue the tried-and-true BRCC ways like Munderground, Bible Studies, and daily worship in Mass and Confession. We also have new initiatives including a meet-and-greet with RISD students first thing next semester, in collaboration with the student engagement office there. We will take students on a backcountry leadership trip in the Moab Desert, Utah, over spring break. We had an open mic night where students could perform music and even some standup comedy. We are expanding our service opportunities to the poor and elderly. We hosted medical students at the beginning of the year with a barbecue. But we could not run and enjoy this special place without generous benefactors. I am thankful to God, our amazing students, our staff, and you. I hope these open pages help open your heart in thanksgiving to God who continues to bless us. Know of my prayers for you and gratitude for your generosity.

Peace in Christ,

New Staff and Pastoral Council Updates



Our Pastoral Council (left), consisting of six Brown University undergrads, kicked off the year with various fall outreach events, including a breakfast for dinner event, which brought over 60 first year students to the Catholic Center. Their leadership continues to bear fruit as they creatively and energetically lead programming in the BRCC, which is helping bring students into fellowship with one another and God. Adrien Durantel '27 and Oge Iwuchukwu '26 co-chair the council. Alex Chang, Fabio Villatoro, Kaylen Aguilar, and Phoebe Grace Aseoche, all in the class of 2026, serve in their respective roles to help elevate the community in various fellowship, outreach, and worship events.

There are many new faces at the Brown-RISD Catholic Center among our staff members including a new chaplain, new executive assistant, and three new FOCUS Missionaries.

Our new executive assistant is Diana McIntyre. Diana is an alumna of Providence College where she worked in the office of institutional advancement for two years before coming to College Hill. Her experience in Campus Ministry as an undergrad and fundraising in advancement have been vital to this year's success. Our new FOCUS Team Director is Gabriella 'Gabbie' Thomas. She joins us from her two-year stint at Harvard as a FOCUS Missionary. We have two other new FOCUS missionaries, John Paccassi, who graduated from Virginia Military Institute last year, and Andres Donovan, who graduated from Steubenville University last year. And we are blessed to have Mary Krynitski for her second year on staff here. The missionaries do amazing work in inviting our students into deeper friendship with God.

Munderground Continues

It is a Monday evening during the fall semester, and the Catholic Center transforms from a place of quiet study to a lively event space as students pour into 51 Prospect Street to attend our weekly Monday night dinner and talk series, 'Munderground.' For those who are not familiar with the roots, Munderground, or Monday's Underground, started as a talk series in the lower level of the Roberts Student Center.

Fast forward five years later, Munderground continues, now "above ground" in our Catholic Center with 40-60 students attending each week. Dinners are typically catered by a local restaurant followed by a talk from the guest speaker. The Fall 2024 semester theme is *Friendship*, inspired by John 5:15: "I have called you friends."



The first Munderground of the year kicked off on Sept. 9, with now Archbishop of Boston Richard Henning as the guest speaker. His talk was titled "I Call You Friends: Love and Friendship Language in the Gospel of John", and was a great foundation for the rest of the semester as students learned about the scriptural foundations of Christian friendship. Over 60 students and staff attended. The great talks and crowds have continued over the semester.



FALL RETREAT: LEARNING TO SEE

Over 30 Students Break from Campus to Reset, Pray, and Worship in CT

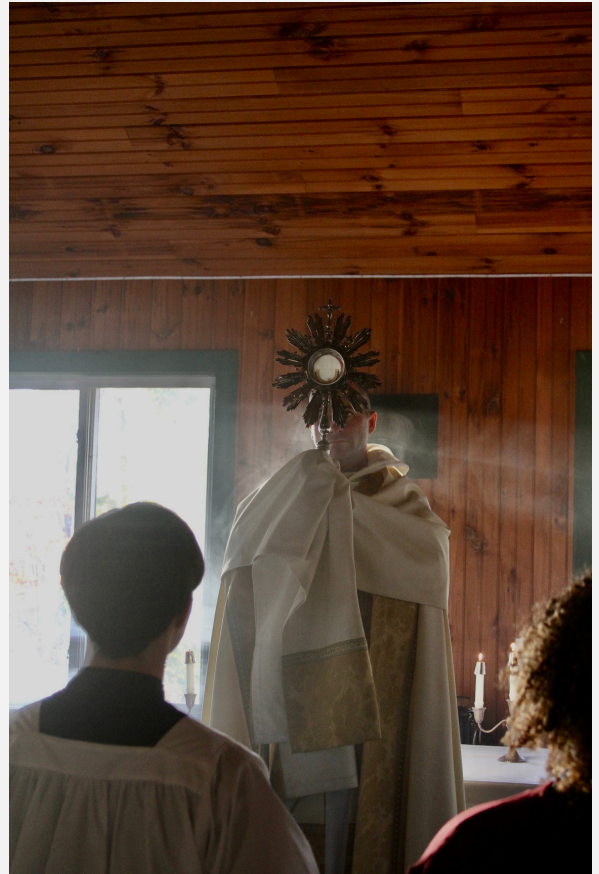
A group of over thirty students left campus Friday, October 18, for Camp Woodstock in Connecticut to pray, rest, and worship together in order to draw closer to Christ. Once they arrived, Oge and Adrien (Pastoral Council) spearheaded BRCC Bingo as a way for students to get to know each other. After the activity, students participated in the first conference given by the guest preacher, Fr. Paul Clarke, O.P.

Our fall retreat this year was titled, "Learning to See," inspired by Luke 18:41: "Lord, that I may see." The retreat was broken up into three conferences: *The Vision of Man: Seeing in the Dark*, *Learning to See: Grace and Ascesis*, and *Face to Face with the Living God: The Vision that Makes Us Alive*. Fr. Paul drew from Scripture and theologians like Josef Pieper and Bishop Robert Barron to help us reflect on the meaning of vision, the ways our desires direct our life, barriers that prevent us from seeing and desiring well, and practices such as the Rosary and Adoration that train us to see and desire the good things God has planned for us. And he inspired us in our thinking about Heaven as the *Beatific Vision*. Additionally, various witnesses were given by the FOCUS missionaries and by Pastoral Council Students. After each conference, a small group was led by the BRCC staff.

Later on Friday night, students had the opportunity for Confession and to pray during all-night Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. If students were not in Adoration, they were hanging out near the bonfire making s'mores or singing songs, while Fr. Justin strummed his guitar in accompaniment. A few students even set up a tent to camp out near the fire to sleep outside!

All-night Adoration finished around 8:00 am on Saturday morning with Morning Prayer before Benediction. Throughout Saturday, we held two other conferences and small groups. We celebrated Mass. Quiet time was also built in to the schedule so students had time to rest, explore the beautiful grounds, or journal. We had some time for games including Crossnet (a hybrid game of both four square and volleyball). Before the group left to return to campus, all 40 people on the retreat prayed a Rosary together. The fall retreat typically happens at a time during the semester when the students are in need of time off campus to pray and reset before they finish the rest of the semester. This fall retreat was no exception. It was received well by our students and many are already looking forward to the spring retreat held on Ender's Island, CT.

Learning To See - Fall 2024



STUDENT WITNESS

Brian Nguyen '24

When I arrived at Brown, I had no interest in Christ or His Church. My faith, which had once been nurtured by my parents, had grown stale by the time I reached high school. I sought the world's promises—social status, material wealth, and pleasure—making these my primary goals. I intended to use my education at Brown to achieve them, which meant avoiding anything that reminded me of the sacred, particularly anything Christian. Despite this, my mother continued to insist that I attend Sunday Mass. Out of respect for her, I went, though it felt like a burdensome chore.

Then, during Lent of 2022, a series of events began to shift my perspective. Father Edmund McCullough, O.P., our former chaplain, started preaching a message I had never truly heard before: I was created for eternal communion with God, and all things in this life were meant to help me achieve this. The pursuit of worldly goals felt increasingly empty in light of this reality. After each Mass, I felt unsettled—everything I had been chasing seemed hollow. I began to yearn for something deeper, sensing many barriers I needed to be freed from.

That Lent, an upperclassman, Kyle Nunes, invited me to a Lenten Bible study. Though hesitant, I agreed, and that decision profoundly impacted my life. In the study, I met men who shared their struggles and stories of seeking Christ's mercy, particularly through a meditation on Psalm 51. Their openness and humility in admitting their faults moved me deeply. It encouraged me to reflect on my own life and examine my conscience for the first time in years. I began praying personally to God again, and soon, I sought reconciliation through the sacrament of confession. That confession marked the beginning of a powerful transformation in my life, opening the floodgates of grace.

As the weeks passed, I became more aware of God's mercy and goodness. I began attending daily Mass, seeking out Adoration and other prayer opportunities, and pursuing a deeper connection to my faith. By the fall of my sophomore year, I found a community at Brown of like-minded Catholics who supported each other's spiritual growth. Fr. McCullough, Kyle, and others like Dominic Fatzinger and the FOCUS missionaries played a key role in helping me find my place in the Brown-RISD Catholic Community. I became involved in various campus ministry activities, including being an altar server, chorister, and Bible study leader, and felt an overwhelming joy in sharing Christ's love with others.



The Catholic community at Brown became a source of strength, especially in the face of a secular education that often overlooked the spiritual dimensions of life. The Eucharist, daily Mass, retreats, pilgrimages, and events like Munderground provided me with the formation I needed to live as a faithful disciple of Jesus. During Fall Retreat, I experienced profound renewal through talks, fellowship, and quiet moments of prayer in Adoration and the peaceful woods.

As my journey continued, I became more involved at the BRCC in helping others experience Christ's mercy and love through accompaniment, discipleship, Bible studies, and virtuous friendship. The joy I experienced in being forgiven by God overflowed into efforts to make Him known on campus. I am incredibly grateful for the many people who have helped me on this path—my chaplains, Fr. McCullough and Fr. Bolger, the FOCUS missionaries, and countless members of the Brown Catholic community who have sharpened me as iron sharpens iron.

Looking ahead, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the ways God has transformed my life. I am now preparing to begin full-time work as a research analyst at UCSF, and continue discerning my vocation. I've felt a call to religious life, particularly as a priest, inspired by the example of the Dominican Friars. I ask for your prayers as I discern this call.

Finally, I am deeply thankful for the Brown-RISD Catholic Community and the support of everyone who has been a part of my journey. Please continue to pray for the young people at Brown, that they may come to know the loving Fatherhood of God through Jesus Christ. Your prayers and efforts are making a lasting impact.

FALL 2024 HIGHLIGHT EVENTS

Fall Outreach



Fr. Justin speaking with a first year student at the New Student Resource Fair.



Fabio '26, Kaylen '26, Oge '26, and Mary at a BRCC table at the Fall Activities Fair.

Breakfast for Dinner



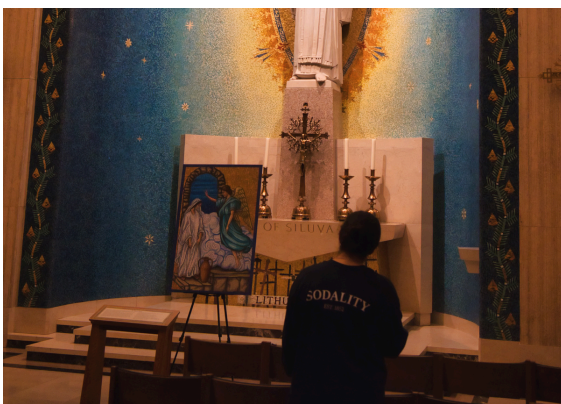
The Pastoral Council hosted more than 60 students for their back to school event, Breakfast for Dinner. The P.C. made pancakes, bacon, and eggs for those students who joined them at the event.

Service Opportunities



Students have joyfully taken opportunities to serve local Providence communities at Little Sisters of the Poor, My Brother's Keeper, and other charities.

Dominican Rosary Pilgrimage



A student prays at the Our Lady of Guadalupe shrine chapel at the National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.



Fr. Justin performs with his band, the Hillbilly Thomists, at the Pilgrimage. Fr. Thomas Joseph White '93 (left) is pictured playing the banjo.

FALL 2024 HIGHLIGHT EVENTS CONTINUED

Women's Brunch



Over 20 female students in the Brown-RISD Catholic Community attended a fall themed Women's Brunch, hosted by Gabbi and Mary.



Students and FOCUS missionaries prepare a fall-themed breakfast together for Women's Brunch.

Open Mic Night



Oge '26, Paola '27, and Izzy '26 perform a song at Open Mic Night.



Students watch as their friends perform songs, stand-up comedy, and beat-boxing.

Yale Vita et Veritas Pro-Life Conference



9 students and 1 FOCUS missionary attended the Yale University Vita et Veritas Conference, a pro-life conference which includes over 50 college pro-life groups for talks by renowned Catholic speakers, opportunities for service, and time to meet other pro-life clubs on a national level.



Jack (MS3), Kaylen '26, and Oge '26 make blankets for pregnancy resource centers in the New Haven, CT area at the conference.

Alumni Reflection

Louisa Conwill '17

The BRCC played a major role in my growth in spiritual maturity. Before I came to college I was a practicing Catholic but my prayer life was not strong. Through opportunities provided by the BRCC, I grew more in the main habits of Christian discipleship outlined in Acts 2:42: prayer, fellowship, intellectual formation, and (more frequent) reception of the Sacraments.

Though I made incremental steps in each of these habits throughout all four years at Brown, a pivotal moment in my spiritual life occurred over winter break of my senior year, when the FOCUS missionaries on campus invited me to attend the SEEK conference. At SEEK I had an encounter with the Lord in prayer where I experienced the deep joy of living in relationship with Him. This moment was critical for the salvation of my soul: the most important goal of life. Brown and RISD are campuses where it can be easy to lose your soul to the secular culture, but I've seen so many students experience conversions and deeper conversions because of the efforts of the BRCC.

Even as a PhD student with a smaller budget, it's important to me that I tithe monthly to the BRCC because I am so grateful for its impact on my life and desire to pay it forward so that other students can experience all the good that the BRCC is doing on College Hill. I know that my gift helps directly impact the spiritual lives of students at Brown and RISD through keeping the lights on at the Catholic Center, helping to pay for retreats and other formational events, and attracting students to the community with the welcoming offer of free food.



Louisa is currently in South Bend, IN. Now a computer science and engineering Ph.D. candidate at the University of Notre Dame, she most recently served as FOCUS Missionary at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh, PA. Louisa has served on the Thomas Becket Foundation Board of Trustees since 2017.

Continue the Legacy Like Louisa

Make Your Gift Today!

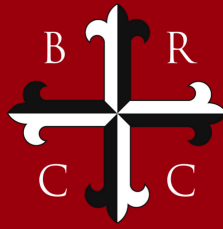
For Online Giving:



*A gift of any size makes a difference
in the lives of BRCC students.*

For Mailing a Gift:





Mass & Social in NYC

December 17 · 4:30-7:00pm

Please join us for a special BRCC event in NYC! Fr. Justin and Fr. Albert will celebrate Mass at 4:30pm at St. Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village. Following Mass, we will gather at Monte's Trattoria for refreshments, light bites, and a short program featuring some words about the BRCC from current students.

Tickets are \$50, and include one drink ticket and food throughout the evening.

We hope to see you there!

Contact Diana McIntyre, diana_bilotta@brown.edu, for any questions.



Scan the QR code to
reserve your ticket
today!

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Brown-RISD Catholic Community



Reach out to Fr. Justin:
justin_bolger@brown.edu



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