



UNIVERSITY
CATHOLIC

Proposing Jesus Christ and Forming His Disciples



FALL 2024

A MASTERCLASS IN FAITH

Contemporary Christian artist Matt Maher shared a lifetime of wisdom

Earlier this semester, University Catholic at Cumberland University hosted a one-of-a-kind event with a very special guest: Matt Maher! For those who might not be familiar with Maher’s work, he is a contemporary Catholic musician who has written numerous widely-acclaimed songs such as “Run to the Father” and “Your Grace is Enough”. Over his 20 years of being a professional faith-based musician, he has acquired invaluable experience and wisdom that he gladly shared with the students of University Catholic in a singer-songwriter masterclass.

The event, which took place on Thursday, September 12th, attracted over a hundred students representing multiple schools and faith backgrounds. Hosted in the historical Baird Chapel at Cumberland University, Maher interspersed acoustic renditions of his most famous songs with a personal interview about his journey as a Catholic in the music industry. During the interview, he highlighted his beginnings in music, his time as a college student, the time he spent working in youth ministry at



a local parish, and his eventual break into the contemporary Christian music industry. He also underscored the necessity of discipline, faith, and perseverance through his many anecdotes.

One of the most inspiring moments during the interview, however, was when Maher recounted the inspiration behind one of his most notorious songs. Maher expressed that he wanted to write a song from the perspective of a college student. Meditating on the many struggles that these individuals encounter daily from financial difficulties to temptations to relationship issues, he began writing a simple prayer that started with these words: “Lord, I Need You”. As he transitioned into the song, the entire audience, full of college students, began singing along. For those present, it was an unforgettable experience and left many in awe and wonder at the simplicity and depth of Maher’s writing. Although it was saddening to see the end of such a beautiful presentation, everyone left the masterclass with a renewed sense of Christian zeal to embrace their talents and use them for the good of the Kingdom!

MATT MAHER



For many students, University Catholic is the place where they begin taking their Catholic faith more seriously or come to know the faith for the first time, and for Margo Hartley, her encounter with the ministry changed her life forever:

“Around a year ago, I was in a deep struggle with my faith. I was losing all hope in Jesus and struggling to keep afloat in my spiritual life. I did not pray. I did not read scripture. I did not attend any church, and I had created my own form of Christianity where every sin I committed was justified. Eventually, this led to little belief in any god at all.

I was raised in the free-will Baptist church. My parents were, and still are, very faithful Christians. I was always in church, was knowledgeable of the Bible at a young age, and built a strong foundation in my faith. When I graduated high school and came to Cookeville, I was in search of a church I could call home while I was getting my degree at Tennessee Tech. This was very hard because every church was different and none of them felt right. I ended up

A LIFE CHANGED

by Margo Hartley

attending a few churches during my first few years, but it never felt quite right. I felt convicted that the way I was worshiping was not pleasing to God. After going through a crisis of faith that led to the elimination of my belief, I made an emergency decision to find my faith again. This led to studying the history of the Church and expanding beyond the faith I had learned growing up. I wanted something entirely different, so I decided to look outside of Protestantism.

I went to St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Cookeville on a Sunday and decided to keep going. I had a Catholic friend, Noah Rodriguez, that I had known for several years, so I talk with him about my questions, and he gave me a book to read: *Rome Sweet Home* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn. I read it and started attending Thursday Suppers at UCat at Tennessee Tech. After immersing myself in the Catholic faith, I still had several questions and reservations, so I went to our campus

minister, Zack Smith, with several questions, big and small. After that conversation, every question was answered, and every reservation was eliminated. Just a few days later, I started OCIA.

My grandmother joined the Church a few years before I was born. She helped me while I was inquiring about the Catholic faith. Growing up, I was not allowed to attend church with her because it was “different.” Her and my late grandfather were both converts to the faith and loved being a part of the Church that Jesus started.

While in OCIA, my faith began to come back to life. With the help of my catechist, Zack, I was shown the full beauty of the Catholic faith through a thorough study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. I loved going to Adoration and Mass whenever I could, so I could see Jesus and worship Him. On August 24th of this year, I joined the Church while my whole family attended. Coming into the Church has changed my life entirely, and even through the struggles of college, I find joy in knowing that there is something much greater that I am living for.”

UCAT presents

UCAT Gala

at THE CATHOLIC PASTORAL CENTER

APRIL 5 2025

Save the Date!

EXPANDING OUR REACH

A message from our Diocesan Director

Summer is an interesting time for campus ministry! Despite not having our students on campus, we keep ourselves busy preparing for the coming semester. It is a time of great expectations to receive new students and welcome back familiar faces. After much prayer and consideration, we decided to make some changes to our UCat structure to better serve our students and different chapters. Now, we have a presence, in some capacity, at 14 different campuses throughout the Diocese of Nashville. Because of our limited staff, we have had to find creative ways to Propose Jesus Christ and Form His Disciples throughout all these chapters.

As part of this, we have established different phases in which each UCat chapter is categorized. Each phase has different benchmarks that need to be reached, and each chapter will be assisted in progressing through the phases according to its needs. If you want to learn more about our ministry plan, please check it out at universitycatholic.org/phases. We also decided to have the focus of University Catholic Nashville be on serving Belmont and Vanderbilt students. The other Nashville campuses will be connected to the Diocesan Office as an opportunity for growth. Of course, other Nashville students are always invited to the Frassati House and UCat Nashville activities.

This past May, we said our farewell to a couple of UCat Nashville staff members, Katheen Cordell, Nick Aguirre, and Mariana Pimento. Kathleen retired after being an essential pillar at UCat for over a decade. She helped to implement and run UCat under our chaplains: Fr. Baker, Fr. Fye, myself, and Fr. Bolster. Kathleen was indeed our “UCat Mom”, and we miss her dearly. We are grateful for her and wish her well on a well-deserved retirement as she takes up being a full-time grandmother. Nick Aguirre left UCat as well, but did not go that far! Nick is working in the Faith Formation Office as the Assistant Director for Youth and Young Adult Formation. Nick is sharing his gifts and talents with our youth and young adult ministries in our diocese. We could not be prouder of him, and we still see him when we go to the Catholic Pastoral Center. Mariana Pimento also left UCat to pursue other endeavors. Fr. Bolster is now serving as the Director of Campus Ministry and Chaplain for University Catholic Nashville. We were blessed to hire Lucy Honner, CRC as the Assistant Director of Campus Ministry for UCat Nashville. Lucy brings a lot of experience with working in campus ministry and has been a great asset to this

chapter. Lucy is a lay-consecrated member of Regnum Christi. Welcome to our team, Lucy!

UCat at MTSU has gone through some changes, as well. We welcomed to our team the newly-ordained and full-of-energy Fr. Seth Reed as a Chaplain. In addition to him, this chapter has been blessed with a full-time campus minister, Ross Strasser, and a full FOCUS team to serve the MTSU students. The St. Martin de Porres House is their place to encounter each other and Jesus Christ, and we are excited about where the Holy Spirit is leading this chapter of UCat.

With the exponential growth of University Catholic, we decided to make another major change to help facilitate fundraising for the ministry. The Diocesan Office of Stewardship is now working with University Catholic to spearhead its efforts to connect with our Partners in Mission. At University Catholic, we have never had a full-time position to help us with our fundraising needs. With the growth of our ministry, we saw it was time to let the professionals help us with our fundraising efforts. As you may have noticed, we have now inaugurated our Partner in Mission Fund. This is another way we are working with the Stewardship Office to guarantee funds to advance our mission at University Catholic. Thank you for your love, and support. We appreciate it, and we could not do it without you!

Let me finish by sharing a little encounter I had recently. I encountered Eddie, a student who has been coming to FIDEI (Catechism Night) at Tennessee Tech for the last semester. Eddie is not Catholic but has shown a lot of interest in our faith. He just came back from Awakening Retreat. When I met Eddie at the Aquinas House in Cookeville, he had tears in his eyes and told me: “Father, I am ready. I want to become Catholic.” I gave him a big hug and told him, “Welcome home!” Laughing a bit, I said, “I knew this was coming!” We cannot be more excited to receive Eddie into the full communion of the Church in the coming months! Encounters like this happen quite frequently on our campuses, and because of your generosity, we can help so many college students to encounter Christ. Thank you!

In Christ,



Rev. Gervan Menezes, M.Div.
Diocesan Director of Campus Ministry



SPOTLIGHT ON UCAT MTSU

With the recent additions of a new chaplain and campus minister, University Catholic at MTSU is “Proposing Jesus Christ and Forming His Disciples” like never before in Murfreesboro!

When Fr. Seth Reed was told that he would be the chaplain for University Catholic at MTSU, his first response was one of trepidation. As a recently ordained priest, his seminary training never gave him any experience working with college students. Despite this, Fr. Reed has not wasted any time in jumping right into his new assignment. While balancing his other assignment as the associate pastor of St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Fr. Reed has been offering spiritual direction to the students and leading the various sacramental and formational activities at the campus.

Like Fr. Reed, Ross Strasser, campus minister for UCat at MTSU, is a newcomer to college ministry! As a lay Dominican, Ross has a deep love for prayer, study, community, and sharing the teachings of the Catholic Church. Previously, Ross has served as a catechist for confirmation

students, an OCIA instructor, and a young adult ministry leader. As Ross assumes his role in University Catholic, he is seeking to continue to develop that love of truth and build community in the students of the ministry. Recognizing that many of the students have lacked proper formation and catechesis prior to coming to college, he is ready to make up for that lack by empowering them through his leadership and teaching to know and serve the Lord!

The programs of University Catholic at MTSU are primarily threefold: Sunday Supper, Veritas, and Contemplatio. Like its predecessor in Nashville, Sunday Supper is an opportunity for the students of MTSU to gather as a community for the celebration of Mass and the sharing of a home-cooked meal at the St. Martin de Porres House. For many students, this is their first experience of the ministry, and it provides an invaluable forum for students to share their lives and faith with one another.

On Tuesdays, students have the chance to participate in Veritas, which is Latin for “truth”. During this event, students are able to dive

deeper into the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition of the Church while experiencing enlightening instruction and discussion on the mysteries of the faith. Later in the week, on Thursdays, is the event called Contemplatio, Latin for “contemplation”. Through sacramental experience and fellowship, the aim of this event is to help students recognize the work of Christ in the Church, their neighbor, and ultimately, themselves.

With all of this in place, Fr. Reed and Ross are both working tirelessly to ensure that the students of University Catholic are able to have an experience that is aimed towards encountering Christ, encouraging fellowship, and being formed spiritually and intellectually in the Catholic faith. With their combined set of skills and experience, it is their sincere hope and aspiration that this ministry will continue to grow and bear fruit, giving more and more students the opportunity to find friends, form virtue, and develop positive, meaningful relationships with each other and most importantly, Our Lord.

REIGNITING FAITH LEADS TO LOVE

Introducing George and Hannah Carter

Growing up in a Catholic home, Sunday Mass was something George Carter V never questioned. However, his faith at the time lacked the depth that he needed for security in it. During his first two years as a student at Belmont University, he began to question why he believed in Catholicism. Allowing the ideas and actions of his non-Catholic peers to inform the way he lived, his free time quickly changed from an opportunity to pray, attend daily Mass, and grow in virtuous friendships to indulging in the world's version of the college experience. As is to be expected, this path led to palpable emptiness in his life, but after making contact with University Catholic in Nashville, the personal investments of other UCat students, FOCUS missionaries, and the chaplain were enough to begin turning his life around.

Running to confession and the sacraments, the UCat chaplain encouraged George to attend a weekend retreat called Awakening. Slowly but diligently, that same chaplain accompanied George and filled his life with a new message and purpose rooted in a personal relationship with Himself and His Church. This experience of Christ's love was so pivotal that George resolved to give his whole life to Him. For him, this journey right after

he graduated Belmont University in 2022 by joining the Catholic missionary organization called the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). That following semester, he was sent to Florida Atlantic University to serve as a FOCUS missionary for his first of two years. Despite the difficult work of sharing the Gospel with college students there, he received many graces and blessings from the experience, and so he decided to continue this important work with FOCUS, but this time, a little closer to home!

In July 2024, he married Hannah, the "love of his life" who he first met while helping lead an Awakening Retreat during his time in University Catholic at Belmont. Additionally, they moved back to Tennessee where George now serves as the Team Director with FOCUS at Middle Tennessee State University. Reflecting on his experience so far, this is what he had to say: "It has been a joy to work with University Catholic this semester, a ministry that helped change the trajectory of my entire life, and to have the opportunity to walk with young men and women whose lives are being transformed by the Gospel of Christ." Please congratulate and welcome George back to the University Catholic family!



WELCOME!

Lucy Honner joins the team

University Catholic is excited to welcome the newest member of our campus ministry staff, Lucy Honner! Lucy assumed her role as Assistant Director of Campus Ministry at University Catholic Nashville in September, and in her short time with the ministry, she has not wasted a single moment in getting to know the students and leading them closer to Christ!

Originally from Adelaide, South Australia, Lucy's journey has taken her across the globe and into a life dedicated to serving the Catholic Church to build and nurture faith-filled communities. Lucy started her professional career as an architect, but after several existential crossroads, she made a life-changing decision in 1997 to serve a year as a missionary with Regnum Christi. It was during that time that she experienced a profound call from God to commit her life fully to Our Lord as a lay consecrated woman of Regnum Christi.

After earning an undergraduate degree in Organizational and Educational Pedagogy from Anáhuac University in Mexico and a graduate degree in Religious Sciences from Regina Apostolorum



in Rome, she has had many unique and varied experiences that have shaped her as a speaker, spiritual director, integrated health coach, and retreat leader.

Before joining the University Catholic team, Lucy was the Associate Director for the Duke Catholic Center in Durham, NC. While there, she worked closely with students and staff, helping to foster a vibrant Catholic community. Commenting on her new position at University Catholic, she had this to say: "I'm passionate about creating environments where faith, individual growth, and community flourish, and I am excited to bring my enthusiasm for personal accompaniment and organizational health to my new role with UCat. In my short time here, I have been overwhelmed by the warm

welcome from students, staff, and FOCUS Missionaries."

When she is not serving the students of University Catholic Nashville, Lucy loves spending time with her friends, hiking, traveling, pilates, and anything that has to do with horses! When asked about what is the most exciting part about working with University Catholic, she said, "It is our mission to form and accompany Christian leaders and apostles, and I look forward to working more closely with the team, contributing to the dynamic ministry, and continuing to build Christ's kingdom."

If you see Lucy, please be sure to welcome her to University Catholic and thank her for the service she renders Christ's Church through her vocation!



After three long months of summer break, thousands of students from all across the country begin returning to the Middle Tennessee area to prepare for their upcoming semester, and for University Catholic, it is the most exciting time of the year: Welcome Week! With fourteen campuses spanning the entire diocese, University Catholic had no shortage of events and activities for this year.

Kicking the semester off were the annual move-in Masses at Vanderbilt and Belmont. With hundreds of students and parents in attendance, this opening event provides a great opportunity for University Catholic to make that first

contact with the students that proves invaluable as the semester progresses. During that same weekend, the students of University Catholic at St. Vincent de Paul Parish began their semester with a prayer breakfast, reflecting on the experiences of the summer and looking ahead to the graces in store.

Throughout the week, dozens of hours were put into “tabling” on campus and hosting recreational sports games with the goal in mind to help students make their first contact with the ministry. Halfway through the week, students from Tennessee Tech University had the opportunity to hear from an alum, Fr.

Michael Hendershott, about his vocation story and being an apostolic college student for the Catholic faith. Not to be outdone though, Our Lord made his appearance a couple days later during an on-campus Mass and Eucharistic Procession that attracted over 60 students, not including other parishioners and faculty/ staff! As the first week drew





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Welcome Week



to a close, Cumberland University welcomed new students on campus with some intense games of spikeball and cardboard cutouts of Pope Francis and Bishop Spalding at the Freshman Fair. Meanwhile, University Catholic at MTSU was celebrating at the annual President's Party where they were able to make their first contact with hundreds of new students!

With the addition of so many new

campuses in University Catholic, Welcome Week not only lasts just one week now, but two! As hikes, brunches, and more tabling continued to happen well into the second week, students at Austin Peay hosted their first gathering of the semester on Wednesday evening with a free dinner and conversation on the faith! Of course though, it would not be a proper beginning to the school year without the notorious Alley Party hosted at the Frassati House. Attracting students from all chapters of University Catholic, the event provides an essential opportunity for students to grow in their familiarity with each other and plant seeds of virtuous friendship that will be watered through their continued involvement in the ministry. To close out these two weeks jam-packed with events

and activities, Bishop Spalding celebrated Mass at Sewanee for their Sunday Supper with a chapel full of new students, faculty, staff, and community members who cherish Bishop's annual visit to the campus!

Little to say, this year's Welcome Week might have been the most exciting and engaging yet, and it was not without its fruits! Across all of our campuses, over a thousand students made their first contact with the ministry, and many of those have continued to be actively involved in the regular activities that the ministry hosts throughout the school year. For University Catholic, the long hours of planning and executing Welcome Week is absolutely worth it because these precious few days are where the seeds of faith are planted that will flourish for years to come!