

Spreading the Joy of Being an FVM at UGA

By Matthew Johnson

Below is a reflection from the associate director of the Province's Franciscan Volunteer Ministry about a recent trip he and two FVMs took to the University of Georgia.

From February 6 to 10, I took two FVMs — Tim Quinn of Philadelphia and Grace Kincaid of Camden — to the University of Georgia for a speaking engagement at the Catholic Center at the University. We stayed with **Thomas Vigliotta, OFM**, and **David Hyman, OFM**, for the weekend and had an amazing time. FVM has been making a recruiting trip to the University for about six years now, and has resulted in six FVMs from UGA.

We were asked to speak to students at an event called Thursday Night Theology. The event is a weekly gathering of Catholic students to discuss books, readings or topics, such as volunteering. We were greeted by a great group of students who were eager to learn about the program, and they asked Tim and Grace tons of questions about what they were doing. TNT has a great atmosphere because it is laid back and is a great chance for students to interact with our FVMs.

After a day of wandering around campus, getting a good idea of just how big UGA is, Tim and Grace both spoke at the 5 p.m. Mass. Being allowed to speak from the pulpit is such a great experience for the FVMs as well as the congregation because it gives the FVMs a platform to let others know what they are doing in a spiritual setting, and a chance for the congregation to hear about the amazing work these kids are doing. We had an action packed Sunday, speaking at all three Masses on the schedule, ranging from an 8 a.m. Mass that had no music with a generally older crowd, to the 5 p.m. Mass that was packed with students and the brilliant student choir.

During the Masses, Grace spoke about Pope Francis's Lenten prayer and challenge that we become physically closer to the poor and to love the poor because that is what God's logic is. The logic is to love. She then spoke about a person she has become friendly with in Camden, and how the struggles of being poor in Camden, without support from the government, affects him negatively, and her struggles trying to walk with him on his journey.

When Tim spoke, he mentioned his time in a Franciscan high school and at Siena College, and how it was a great starting point to his Franciscan lifestyle, but living in Kensington as an FVM was a totally life changing experience. Tim mentioned how he never cooked at home or at college, but is now one of the cooks at St. Francis Inn, where he prepares food for more than 300 people daily, and how he has grown both personally and spiritually over the past year and half.

Our trips to UGA are one of the highlights of my job. We get to see old friends and meet some great people. It is such a joy to see young people who want to live their faith and

share their gifts with others. We are grateful to Fr. Tom and Fr. Dave for allowing us to speak with the congregation directly to let them know the opportunities out there to continue living their Catholic and Franciscan faith. It makes such a difference being able to hear from the FVMs as opposed to a brochure or notice in the bulletin about FVM.

Since heading down to UGA, we have struck a good friendship with the great people of the Catholic Center and, just recently, have been able to get them to come up to some of our sites for alternative spring break trips. Two years ago, we had a group volunteer with the Romero Center in Camden, and during that week, the group made their way to St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Camden to help with the community garden and Francis House. Students from UGA will be back in Camden this spring break and, in 2015, will be volunteering at the St Francis Inn.

I cannot wait to go back next year!

— *Matt is associate director of the Franciscan Volunteer Ministry.*