



Pro says his strength comes from his faith

Taylor Washington, a defender for the Pittsburgh Riverhounds soccer team, says he keeps God at the center of his life and that even during games when he's in a competitive mindset, he'll often pray a Hail Mary or a Glory Be.

"Why I'm so strong is because of Christ," he said. "Everything that He's done for me and all the blessings I've received in my life are because of Him. At times, it's overwhelming. I just have to give thanks."

Washington attends daily Mass and goes to confession. Before games he reads Scripture

passages and prays a St. Jude chaplet. And before stepping onto the field, he says a prayer to St. Michael for protection.

That wasn't always the case, though.

"God wasn't the center of my life and He might have been the last thing that I would resort to," he said.

But in college he was struggling with a 1.7 grade-point average, suffering with mononucleosis and a diagnosis of dyslexia.

"I remember sitting at a desk — I can't make this up — and I saw a gold light. The weight of everything was just lifted off of me.

'People will tell me that what I'm doing is so great, but it's not really what I'm doing, it's God working through me.'

— Tyler Washington, pro soccer player

"I hadn't thought about church and I hadn't gone in forever, but I just felt compelled to go to church and I didn't miss a Sunday Mass after that," he said.

Last December Washington signed a one-year deal with a club option for 2018 with the Riverhounds.

He said he has been able to enjoy the Catholic environment of Pittsburgh and has gotten to know a few priests.

On most of his off days, he spends time volunteering at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

"People will tell me that

what I'm doing is so great, but it's not really what I'm doing, it's God working through me," he said of his volunteer work.

On his Twitter account, @TBMMW4, Washington posts regular prayers and Bible verses.

"Tweeting about things like Christ's love, God's mercy and church teachings are nothing compared to all the things that he's done for me," Washington said, adding: "The little things I do every day don't amount to any worthiness to Him, but I try to honor Him in everything I do."

— Matthew Peaslee for Catholic News Service



(Photo provided) Some of the youth and adults from the Rockford Diocese who took part in Steubenville Conferences this summer pose for a photo.

Hundreds from diocese get inspired

This summer, 16 Rockford Diocese parishes — many from the Fox River Valley area — sent 339 people to the Steubenville Conferences at four locations.

The conferences are open to all entering freshman in high school through freshman in college. But the summer sessions are so popular, some college students return, as do several youth ministers, adult chaperones, deacons, priests, and seminarians.

This year's theme was "Elevate," based on Rev. 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new."

Conference participants told their pastors or other adults with them:

"The music was awesome!"
"This weekend changed my life."

"The best part was Eucharistic Adoration."

"I am bringing all my friends next year."

"My parents signed me up without telling me and I was not happy but now I am really glad I went."

"This conference allowed me to see Christ for the first time. Throughout the weekend I experienced Him, and all the love and grace he has for me and for everyone else. Because of the conference I have become more devoted to Christ and fallen deeper in love with my faith."

"The room came to life with Christ. I saw my faith in a new light. I began to realize what it means to be a Catholic teenager in this day and age, and what a true and beautiful gift it really is."

In a nut shell, the weekends consist of speakers and sacraments.

National and international Catholic speakers give keynote talks over the weekend. Some of the speakers have been Kris Frank, Father Leo Patalinghug, Father John Parks, Father John Burns, Father Michael Schmitz, Jackie Francois Angel, David Calavitta, Steve Angrisano, Katie Prejean McGrady, Dan Harms, Kyle Heimann.

There are sessions for males and females, small group time, praise and worship, Eucharistic Adoration, Mass, and reconciliation.

There is also music by Catholic worship bands including Sonar and Ben Walther.

— Jessica Cranston, director of Youth Ministry, St. Catherine of Siena, West Dundee

- Parishes at Steubenville**
- St. Mary, Huntley
 - St. Mary, DeKalb
 - St. Patrick, St. Charles
 - St. Rita, Aurora
 - St. Catherine of Siena, West Dundee
 - St. Charles Borromeo, Hampshire
 - SS. Peter and Paul, Cary
 - St. John Neumann, St. Charles
 - St. Thomas the Apostle, Crystal Lake
 - St. Peter, Geneva
 - St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Crystal Lake
 - St. Mary, Elgin
 - St. Mary, Sycamore
 - St. Thomas More, Elgin
 - St. John the Baptist, Somonauk
 - St. Margaret Mary, Algonquin



YO Father is answered by Father Keith Romke. Send your questions to youngobserver@rockforddiocese.org

A Let me begin by saying you sound like a pretty awesome person, so I have a feeling when people meet you, they are going to want to be your friend!

That being said, I totally understand your question and how it can be daunting to seemingly start all over!

Right now, as you are reading this, I guarantee there are other young men and women who will also be attending your college, who are also leaving their state, leaving their friends behind, and wondering how they are ever going to meet new people.

So know you are not alone, and there will be plenty of people who are ready and willing to meet new people and begin some incredible friendships.

I think part of the reason why so many people at church at home might not really reach out and talk to those whom they don't know is because they are set in their groove and their way of how life goes, they are comfortable there, and so they don't reach out.

This won't be the case at college though because everyone will be trying to find friends and something they can belong to.

The greatest and most powerful reason why I'm positive you are going to make some great new friends is the very fact that you say you plan on going to Mass.

Q I'm going away to school for the first time this fall. None of my friends will be at college with me and I'm going out of state, so I won't be able to get home much. I've had most of the same friends since grade school. I plan to go to Mass, but if it's like at home, people don't really say much to strangers. Do you have any ideas about how I can find new friends?

The Church is one of the best places to meet new people and to establish the foundation of your new life in college because you know the people you meet there will more or less have the same values and beliefs as you.

I can't think of a better place to meet people whom you will already have pre-established things in common.

So too, many colleges have Newman Centers which are college parishes geared towards creating a center of Catholic life and fellowship for the students. Here in our own diocese, we have a fabulous Newman Center at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, where Catholic students can deepen their faith while at the same time knowing they are welcomed and they belong to the Church family there.

My hope is that the college you are going to has a Newman Center, and if it doesn't there is at least a nearby parish many students go to.

I'd say a great way to kick things off on the right foot would be to go to Mass the first weekend, and march right up to a few people who look nice, introduce yourself, and see how it goes!

You said most people don't talk to strangers, and just maybe they feel the same way and are apprehensive to reach out.

Break through by stepping forward and introducing yourself.

So too, you can always talk to the priest after Mass and ask him if there are any groups or events for college students, or ask how you can get involved in the parish.

Also, on top of all I've already said, let me assure you the Lord will be with you and the saints are our heavenly friends who are with us always.

Since you are heading off to college I'm going to assume you have been confirmed, which would mean you picked a patron saint.

Let me throw out there that the saints aren't just random people we read about in history. The saints live on forever in heaven and through prayer we can speak to them and befriend them.

So too, we can learn more about their lives by reading books about them, or better yet, by reading their very own writings so we can get insight into what was most important to them.

My guess is the reason we enjoy our friendships with people is because we appreciate hearing their take on things, and we can do just that by reading the writings of the saints.

If you haven't connected with your confirmation saint recently, then I recommend giving them a call (through prayer) and reconnecting. I'm sure he or she will be more than happy to accompany you to college!

So God bless you and be assured of my prayers!

VOCATION CORNER

A prayer for discernment

I believe that often times we can have a desire to pray, but feel like we don't know quite how to do it right. The important thing is simply following the desire to pray in the first place.

However, here is a prayer to give some guidance in praying to follow God's will in your life. Pray it as is or

make it your own.

Lord,

You are all powerful, all loving, and all deserving of all my praise. Without your loving protection and guidance, I wouldn't be able to take a single breath. But you do love me unconditionally which is why you long for me to deeply breath in your Spirit

that surrounds me. Help me with the grace of this same Spirit to trust in your mercy and in the designs for my life that are written in your heart. Help me to trust that if I let go of my plans in an attempt to follow your voice, that I will be led on a path that will ultimately lead to peace and joy. So too, help me to persevere through the trials of life that certainly come to all

who follow in your footsteps. Help me to never lose sight of the resurrection whenever it is that the cross is before me. Most of all, reveal to me what I must do in order to be most pleasing to your heart this day. Jesus, I trust in you. Amen.

— Father Keith Romke, Diocesan Director of Vocations, kromke@rockforddiocese.org.