

# THE CATHOLIC PHOENIX

ELON CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026

## LASTING IMPACT

Students share how the Catholic faith and community at Elon impact their journeys on campus and beyond.

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*Students reflect on their experiences at the five-day, national SEEK conference in Columbus, Ohio.*

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*Senior Abby Krause remembers how checking a box on her college application changed her life.*

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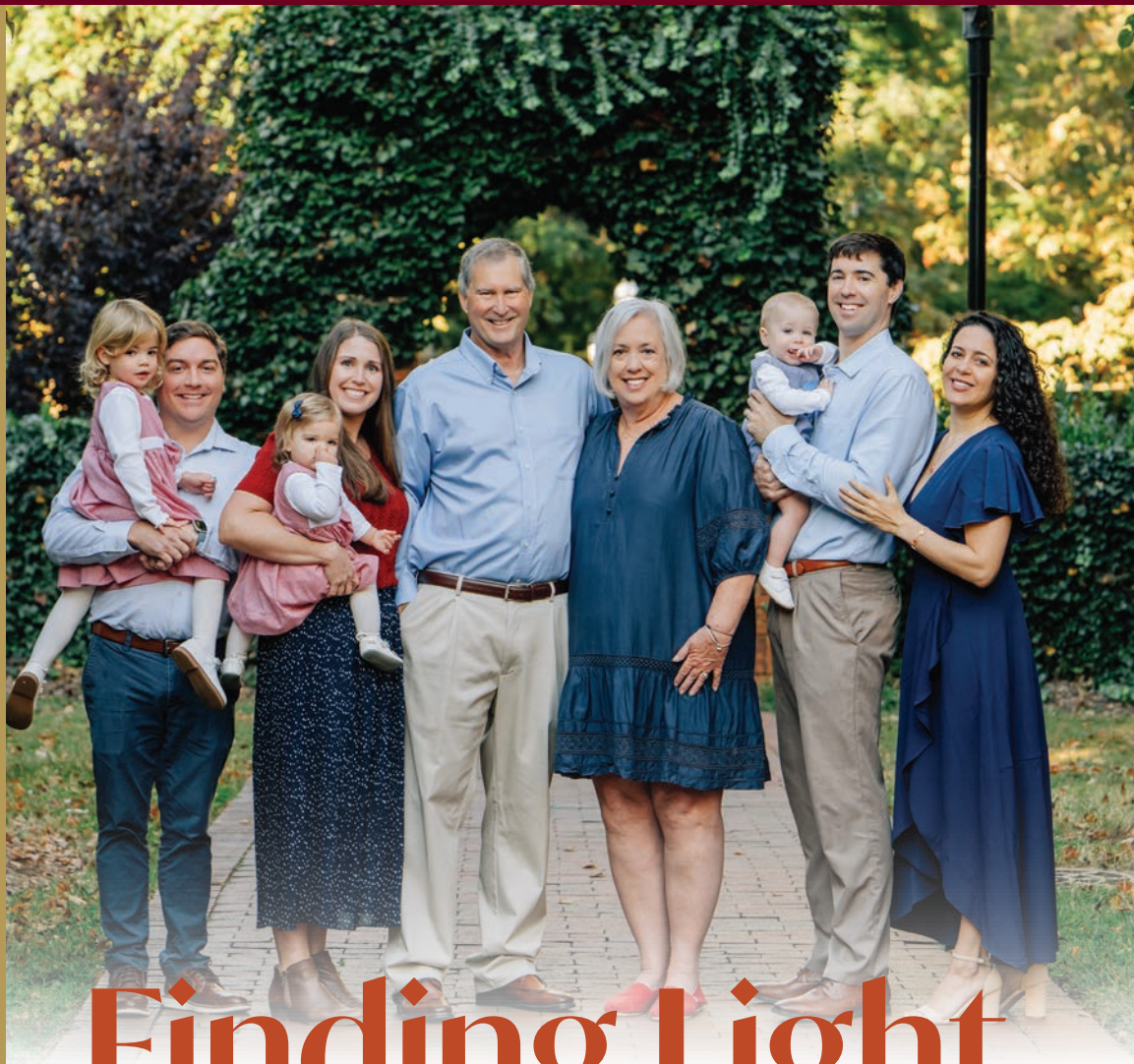
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# Finding Light

## A decade of faith and family with Catholic Campus Ministry

*By Ann Bullock, Dean of the Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education*

Ten years ago, I made a decision that would transform not just my work life, but my entire family's spiritual journey. When I joined the Elon community in 2016, my husband and I knew we wanted to attend Mass on campus and become part of the Catholic community. The idea of integrating my work and spiritual life in the same place was very appealing. The cornerstone of this decision was the leadership of Father Peter and the presence of Elon students, whose deep faith and commitment give me and others much hope for the future of the Church and our world.

Mass in the Numen Lumen Pavilion Sacred Space has become a special place for our family. Both of our children were married in this space. Father Peter was the priest for our son's wedding and also baptized our grandson. These personal connections provide a deeper connection for our family to CCM's presence on campus. During my faith journey over the past ten years, I have experienced personal growth, both through hard times and good times. The intellectual, clear, and "real" messages at Mass have contributed to my enlightenment as a Christian and a Catholic. They also contribute to my sense of purpose as an Elon administrator and as a human in the broader world.

Having this special space and the Catholic community at Elon in my life brings my family and me much joy. Here, you'll find a welcoming community ready to walk alongside you.

# SEEK 2026 *to the heights*

*Father Peter accompanied several Elon students to begin the new year in Columbus, OH, with thousands of young Catholics at the SEEK conference.*



*By Kasey Miller, Catholic Life Staff*

“I can’t believe I almost missed it,” shared Gabe Waits ’28 after his return to campus. “I had really looked forward to being home and spending time with family, but I knew this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance, so I had to go.”

Gabe, along with Father Peter and six other students, chose to give up the last portion of their winter break to participate in SEEK, a transformative conference hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). Since the early 2000s, SEEK has been a cornerstone event, drawing together college-aged people and young adults to deepen their faith, discover service and career opportunities, build community, and worship. This year’s conference, held simultaneously in Columbus, Ohio; Fort Worth, Texas; and Salt Lake City, Utah, welcomed over 26,000 attendees nationwide. The students from Elon were able to participate in the conference thanks in large part to several donors to Elon Catholic Campus Ministry.

A major highlight of SEEK is its lineup of highly regarded presenters. Participants listened to keynotes from speakers such as Father Mike Schmitz, a campus minister at University of Minnesota Duluth and a bit of an internet sensation. His engaging videos and the popular “Bible in a Year” podcast have encouraged millions worldwide. Along with Father Mike, fellow priests, religious sisters, and Catholic influencers delivered powerful messages centered on love, mercy, and overcoming shame. Even Pope Leo shared a special video message to all in attendance!

“The overwhelming message was that you are wanted, you are loved,” shared Father Peter Tremblay, Associate Chaplain for Catholic Life. “Students face so many challenges and often carry burdens of shame. Hearing keynote after keynote address these topics left our students feeling seen, valued, and hopeful.”

Anna Morelli ’29 echoed this sentiment: “SEEK was a great reminder that God is a loving God, and He knows everyone so personally and deeply.”

The seven students who attended the conference gathered for a lunch in McEwen a week after returning to campus. As the conversations and reflections wound down, the lasting impact of SEEK was evident. Even after returning to the bustle of life at Elon, students continue to carry the experience with them. Gavin Michaud ’26 shared, “SEEK helped me realize that after graduation, staying connected to a Catholic community will be essential. Seeing thousands worship together made living out my faith—wherever I go—feel much less daunting.”



*Bottom left: Anna Morelli ’29, Savanna Bell ’28, Nick Brillo ’28, Abby Siegal ’29, Liam Dupas ’26, Gavin Michaud ’26, and Gabe Waits ’28 represented Elon at the SEEK Catholic conference.*



# RISING TIDE

## CCM sees record attendance matching national trends

By Kasey Miller, Catholic Life Staff

Catholic ministries across the United States are witnessing a rising tide of young adults participating in religious services, with many joining the Catholic Church. This was evident at Easter Mass on Sunday, April 5, held in Alumni Gym at Elon. Catholic Campus Ministry welcomed more than 550 students, families, and community members for worship, filling the gym floor and overflowing into the bleachers. CCM has witnessed continued growth in Easter Mass attendance, from 268 in the spring of 2023 to over 550 this year.

“Young people have grown disenchanted with the superficial promise of happiness that our culture offers,” said Father Peter Tremblay. “They are seeking a deeper connection to truth and beauty.”

The story is about more than just those attending Mass; eight students received Sacraments on Easter, including a baptism, two professions of faith, and Confirmation for all. Easter is traditionally a time when new members are welcomed into the Catholic Church through the Sacraments after a year of attending classes in the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA).

Lorelei Lowen '29 shared, “I was interested in receiving my sacraments, so I emailed Father Peter before coming to Elon, and he connected me with T and the OCIA program.” Maggie Blakeney '26 added, “OCIA has allowed me to face some of the

most difficult doubts and questions in my faith journey. It has taught me that faith isn't done alone, but with others.”

Local dioceses in Raleigh and Charlotte have noticed a similar trend of college-aged adults participating in the OCIA process. Campus ministry has played a crucial role in fostering this growth. Through welcoming communities, retreats, small groups, and conversations with the chaplain and ministry staff, students find opportunities to explore questions of faith, life, and meaning.

“CCM has shaped not only my experience at Elon, but it has transformed the way that I think about life and the circumstances that are thrown our way,” said Savanna Bell '28. “CCM was simply the light in the darkness that chained me to my past life. By placing myself at the center of it, literally, the friendships are what have made me Catholic. I would have never gotten so deeply rooted in the Sacraments if it weren't for the smiles that greeted me each time I walked into the big church doors.”



Eight students received their Sacraments of Initiation at Easter (from left to right): Maggie Blakeney '26, Meredith Marks '28, Savanna Bell '28, Denali Cubillo '29, Savannah McElroy '28, Lorelei Lowen '29, Roxanny Difo Rojas '28, and Abby Siegal '29



Lorelei Lowen receives the Precious Blood during her first Communion.

# Class of 2026

## In their own words



*Andrea Perez*

"I am grateful for the welcoming community that CCM provides. I started becoming involved with CCM as a junior, which is later than most. Despite this I immediately felt an overwhelming sense of community and support. I have been able to meaningfully grow in my faith and develop lifelong friendships with people who genuinely care about me and the Catholic faith."



*Liam Becker*

"I am grateful for the community that CCM has fostered which has kept me engaged in my faith not only when I go to Mass, but also with the friendly faces around campus and the events that I always know I am welcome to attend."



*Erin Hroncich*

"CCM has given me friends and faculty who are always so welcoming, a way to grow in my faith while being a busy college student, and amazing food and snacks, of course. From game nights to confession, CCM has always offered exactly what I needed before I knew I needed it myself!"



*Julien Dupas*

"I'm really grateful for the friendships CCM has given me. It's been a place where I've felt supported in my faith by literally everyone and surrounded by people who genuinely care about one another and want to see one another flourish, not just spiritually but in all aspects of life."



*Erin Pitman*

"Over these past four years, CCM has given more than I could have ever asked for. CCM showed me what true community looks like. Each day, the students and the staff showed me the overwhelming and beautiful love of Christ. CCM began as simply another student organization I was interested in being involved with and, over the years, became my family. I will always cherish all the people I met and the experience made possible by CCM."



*Liam McGarry*

"I have never been alone with CCM. Like others, I had walked in not knowing what to expect and left feeling like I belonged. There is something rare about a community that welcomes you without conditions, where you do not have to prove your place or perform a version of yourself to fit in, but rather understand the real you and what a healthy life with Christ and community looks like."



*Grace Stetler*

"CCM provided me with stability and a sense of community. Every Sunday, I had something consistent to look forward to in going to church. What I found, though, was more than just routine; it was a true sense of belonging. I felt genuinely welcomed and valued within the CCM family, which helped me find my place at Elon. What I am most grateful for is the foundation CCM gave me, not only to grow in my faith, but also to grow as a young woman in confidence. CCM is a community deeply grounded in faith and love, and it has had a lasting impact on my college experience."



# FOREVER CHANGED

*Senior Abby Krause reflects on her time with  
Catholic Campus Ministry*

*By Abby Krause, class of 2026*

As graduation and the bittersweet emotions that come with this next chapter of life inevitably approach, one question I am often asked is, “What has been the highlight of your Elon experience?” For me, the answer remains the same. It has been and will always be my time spent with Catholic Campus Ministry.

Ever since my time as President came to a close in December, I have struggled to find the words to truly capture what this ministry and the people within it have meant to me over the past three and a half years. To be honest, I’m not sure I ever fully will. There are rare moments in life when an experience leaves you speechless, and this has certainly been one of them. How could I possibly summarize something that so beautifully and profoundly changed my life?

Coming to Elon felt like the beginning of something new, a fresh start, if you will. While I was raised Catholic on my mother’s side, I largely spent my days going through the motions of what it meant to

be Catholic. Attending Mass when it felt necessary, begrudgingly participating in religious education classes, and embracing a very “cultural Catholic” lifestyle. When I arrived at Elon, however, I was faced with a choice: to pursue my faith or to leave it behind entirely. Thank goodness, I chose the former.

At the time, I felt lost and disconnected from anything that truly represented even the mere idea of faith or what it meant to be faithful. I didn’t yet know what it meant to believe in something greater than myself, nor did I fully understand what I believed. I knew who Christ was, but I didn’t truly know Him. It wasn’t until I found CCM, or, perhaps more accurately, until CCM found me, that I finally felt at home.

Walking alongside other like-minded individuals who were struggling, questioning, and growing was incredibly refreshing. I learned that faith does not have to be a one-size-fits-all experience or a perfectly straight path. It’s okay to stumble, to question, and to

*Abby Krause '26  
(second row, second  
from left) at the  
Servant Leader  
Appreciation brunch  
in December to  
conclude her time as  
CCM President.*





*Abby has been an incredible part of CCM during her years at Elon. She loved especially her time on retreats and service trips. From top left, counter-clockwise: Elon Awakening 8 Retreat, CCM Welcome Dinner, Beach Retreat, and the spring break service trip to Blessed Assurance, Jamaica.*



learn along the way because that's what faith is truly about. For so long, I believed that in order to feel God's presence or be worthy of His love, I needed to know the Bible cover to cover, memorize every prayer, and fully understand every aspect of Catholicism, but it's deeper than that, and CCM helped me realize none of that determines our worth. We are all deserving of God's love, no matter where we are in our journey.

Beyond being a safe space and a home away from home, this ministry opened the door to opportunities I could never have imagined. I have had the privilege of attending and leading multiple retreats, participating in service trips, forming lifelong friendships, and discovering a deeper, more personal relationship with Christ. Sure, I've also grown in leadership, public speaking, and teamwork skills, but the most meaningful growth I experienced through CCM is reflected in how I love, care, listen, encourage, and meet others where they are. The greatest testimony of God's love that I hope to leave behind from my time in CCM leadership is how I have tried to embody that love in my service to others.

If you had asked naïve 17-year-old Abby whether checking the box "Roman Catholic" on her college application would turn into the best decision of her life, simply because it led to invitations from interns and emails from staff, I probably would have laughed

in your face. But isn't that how the Lord works? When we least expect it, He provides opportunities with the power to completely change our lives. For that, I will always be grateful.

While I am deeply saddened that my time with CCM is quickly coming to a close, I am excited to savor these final moments and witness the incredible fruits of the next generation of leaders. I am endlessly proud of the student leaders who dedicate themselves to this ministry. CCM would not be what it is today without their devotion, and I feel incredibly blessed to have played even a small role in this community. My hope is that future Elon students, faculty, and community members will experience the same beauty and love that I so deeply encountered during my time here.

So, if you are fortunate enough to ever experience a place like Elon's Catholic Campus Ministry, embrace it. The years pass quickly, but the relationships and memories will last a lifetime. I owe who I am today to the people and experiences within this beautiful ministry, and I am forever thankful for the ways it guided me toward the grace and love of our Lord.

**Catholic Campus Ministry**

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