

Millennial Missionaries: How a Group of Young Catholics is Trying to Make Catholicism Cool

Podcast with **Katherine Dugan** (20 April 2022).

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Allison Isidore (AI) 00:00

Hello everybody and welcome to [New Books in Catholic Studies](#), a podcast channel on the [New Books Network](#). This channel and episode were created in collaboration with the [American Catholic Historical Association](#), a conference of scholars, archivists and teachers of Catholic studies. My name is [Allison Isidore](#), and I'm a host of the channel. Today we'll be talking to [Dr. Katherine Dugan](#), Associate Professor of Religion at Springfield College. Kate is the author of [Millennial Missionaries: How a Group of Young Catholics is Trying to Make Catholicism Cool](#), published by Oxford University Press in 2018. In this ethnography, Kate observes millennial Catholics who are stationed on college campuses in the United States, acting as missionaries for the group, the [Fellowship of Catholic University Students called FOCUS](#). These millennial missionaries demonstrate an active and culturally savvy version of Catholicism to college students. As Kate explains, these missionaries promote a faith that interweaves distinctly Catholic identity with outreach methods of 20th century evangelical Protestants and the anxieties of middle-class emerging adulthood. Millennial missionaries examine how these young people navigate their Catholic and American identities in the 21st century. Kate, welcome to the show.

Katherine Dugan (KD) 01:33

Happy to be here Allison. Thanks for having me.

AI 01:35

Yeah, I was wondering if you could begin the interview by telling us a bit about yourself.

KD 01:39

So, I am an Associate Professor at Springfield College, which is a small liberal arts school in Western Massachusetts. We are a really interdisciplinary department. So that means I'm the only religious studies professor on campus. And I teach pretty much any religion course that I can dream up, I teach it, which is fun and exciting. I did my Ph.D. at Northwestern with [Bob Orsi](#) in Religious Studies. And before that, a Master's in theological studies at Harvard Divinity School. And one thing that people always find interesting is I'm from South Dakota. And so, I grew up in the middle of the country and still think about the ways that place matters. And I grew up there, I grew up Catholic. I love thinking about devotional practices, and the methods that I use, I really ethnography. And I think ethnography just has a lot to teach us about the ways of religion in our contemporary world.

AI 02:21

And that's a great transition into our first question, you know, like you said, this is an ethnography. And so, I want to talk a bit about your methodology. So, what methods did you use in your research? What theories did you apply to this work?

KD 02:46

Thanks, Allison. So, *Millennium Missionaries*, of course, was my dissertation when I was in grad school as well. So, I had gotten really invested in ideas of ethnography and I was trying to work out what I can learn about a particular generation of Catholicism based on ethnography. So, I got really invested in participant observation and ethnographic interviews, those are my primary methods of ethnography. So that meant I spent a lot of time with these FOCUS missionaries as you mentioned. One of the things that missionaries do in their work is they spend a lot of time praying and sort of hanging out, they talk about their work as if deep hanging out, which, you know, in some ways is very funny because that's what ethnography often thinks about itself as doing. So, in practice, this meant I was spending a lot of time in chapels. I hadn't gotten to Mass as often as I did during my ethnography at any other time in my life. So, I was praying, praying with them, attending prayer practices, attending Mass doing things at confession, but this also right like, as ethnography does, like there was hanging out like, I am a runner, as many of the missionaries are so I was like spent time running, we drink coffee, there was dinner, that kind of thing.

KD 03:59

And I spent a lot of time thinking about sort of that messy, blurry line that most ethnographers encounter at some point, right? This, this idea that, you know, I was almost 10 years older than the folks that I was studying. I had a kid I was totally in a different stage of life. But you know, these are at some point you're having like shared conversations, like you're discussing things about life. And so, you know, there are people — missionaries that are part of my book, you know, who I'm still in touch with and still count as friends and so there's just like, it's just think that sort of vulnerable, scary line of ethnography is rich and, you know, precarious and really rich for thinking about the ways a religious practice. So, my theories were really focused on sort of what I could learn about prayer life and prayer practices. I'm sort of deep in thinking about [Tanya Luhrmann's book](#) had come out on evangelical prayer practice, and [Niloofar Haeri](#) had written a [book](#) on repetitive prayer practices among Muslim women, and of course, Bob Orsi was thinking a lot about devotional practices. So those kinds of confluences got me thinking about the ways that discipline and creativity really merge together in creative — in Catholic practices. And that's, that's what led to a lot of thinking in my book.

AI 05:13

And before we dive into the nitty gritty of your book, can you tell us about how you came to this particular project? What made you want to look at millennial Catholics and U.S. college missionary work?

KD 05:26

Yeah, right. Well, to assure any grad students listening, I didn't know that this is what I wanted to do. I passed my comprehensive exams; I had a sense of wanting to study us Catholics. I actually started in on I thought, my dissertation is going to be about charismatic Catholicism in the 21st century, I was really interested in that form of prayer. But it turns out in the 21st century, charismatic prayer practices are I needed Tegal, better Spanish, and Creole in order to do that project, and I just don't have it. And so logistically, I needed to switch, switch gears. But I knew that I wanted to study prayer practices and understand sort of thinking about what that work is doing. I had heard a FOCUS; I knew a FOCUS before. It had been in the air in the Catholic spheres that I grew up in. And I somehow, I can't even remember stumbling upon the fact that focus was opening on the campus where I was doing my dissertation. And so, I got permission to sort of to be an ethnographer, as they were opening up this new branch on campus. I had been thinking about young adult Catholic identity for a while I previously co-edited with [Jennifer Owens-Jofré book](#) of essays about being young Catholic women. And I had this sort of growing sense that the sociological data wasn't capturing the breadth of what it meant to be Catholic in the 21st century, I understand and understood the role of nuns that the nones, the non-Catholic nuns as sort of the growing trend in millennial religious identity, but it just seemed to me like that wasn't quite telling

the whole story. So, I was invested in figuring out practices, and then sort of more nuance among young adult religious identity. So that's what that's what really drove me to focus

AI 07:09

And staying with FOCUS for a minute. You know, this is not the run of the mill Catholic group on campus, right. Can you tell our listeners a bit about the history of FOCUS and whose founding of this group?

KD 07:24

Yeah, of course, well actually Allison, increasingly FOCUS will become the run of the mill Catholic organization. But right, so FOCUS stands for Fellowship of Catholic University students. They were founded in 1997-1998, sort of two origin stories. By [Curtis Martin](#), who was — himself he grew up Catholic, he became sort of a lapsed Catholic in college, and had sort of a conversion experience with [Campus Crusade for Christ](#), and then a reversion experience to Catholicism through his [Newman Center](#). So, focus was founded with this intention to sort of catch Catholic students, particularly on public universities, there's a particular interest in making sure that students don't go off to college and become non-Catholic. So, they have this goal to what they say transform college students by what they say, "reintroducing Christ and his Church on college and university campuses." It was the late 90s, Catholic identity among college students was on the decline and it was making people nervous. And Curtis Martin was eventually he was a student at — a master's student at [Franciscan University of Steubenville](#). And so, the history of focus is deeply intertwined with sort of these, the push for conservative Catholic education in higher ed. And so, at Franciscan, Curtis Martin had run into [Scott Hahn](#), who was another sort of — within this subculture, like famous, former evangelical Protestant. And Hahn and Martin decided that they would launch this program that would be very explicitly a Catholic version of Campus Crusade for Christ. So, they end up on [EWTN](#), which, of course, is this large Catholic television channel, they announced their idea to found focus.

KD 09:10

And this new professor at [Benedictine College](#), a small school in Kansas that was really suffering enrollments, [Edward Sri](#) was a professor on campus, and he heard — watch the EWTN announcement and thought, "Gosh, I should I'm gonna invite criticism, Scott out to my campus and see what can happen." And that was the beginning. The three of them sat down with some students at Benedictine and sort of knocked out the first version of FOCUS. It is modeled on gathering students together in Bible studies and training students to be evangelists for Catholicism on campuses. So, it started with four sort of part time missionaries at Benedictine and it's — when I finished my research, there were almost 700 missionaries on almost 150 campuses, and it's just kept growing. So, they really have — they've grown quickly. And one of the reasons they've been able to go quickly is their fundraising model is incredibly savvy, they partner with

Newman Centers. So, Newman Centers, or whatever Catholic body exists on the on the campus supports give some funding, and then missionaries reign rent, fundraise their own salary. And so, the startup costs on focus and are relatively small to what they could be, they aren't providing salaries for all their missionaries. So that's how they've been able to grow so quickly. And so, it's, it's different from other student led organizations on campuses, because it's not really based on campus. It's focused coming in and partnering with the Newman Center, which is also usually sort of an off-campus entity, and then trying to embed itself in the campuses. And, you know, different campuses have had a range of there's some huge programs like [University of Illinois](#) has a massive program, [Benedictine College](#) continues to have a big program, [UT Austin](#). Other places, [University of Illinois, Chicago](#), other places have had fine programs, but that have never really taken off. So, there's a lot of thinking within focus about what kind of campus is the best fit and where to grow from there. But it's sort of astonishing to think about, you know, within 30 years, the growth has really, they talked about it a spiritual multiplication, but really, it's exponential in the way it's taken off.

AI 11:28

And keeping with focuses ideology there. You mentioned in the book, it's a very conservative Catholic ideology that's taking Protestant evangelical methods to shore up these Catholic identities on college campuses. And so, FOCUS is hiring, as you've mentioned, young adults, usually, as you've said, right after they've graduated themselves. And I was just wondering, you know, what our FOCUS's methods in training these students, what are they borrowing from the evangelical Protestants?

KD 12:09

Yeah, it's a great question. So, I should be clear, like, one way to map focus is as sort of Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism painted Catholic. And that may be what it looks like but that is really not the self-understanding. So, focus understands itself as very uniquely Catholic, very sort of singularly — I mean not singularly — but very capable of being a Catholic presence in the world and shaping not only Catholic culture in the U.S. but shaping the culture of America based on Catholic values, right. So, this is like an explicitly Catholic project. But to that end, like in the 1990s, Catholics were looking around and seeing that Protestants were having success in ways that Catholics weren't Campus Crusade for Christ was an example, Protestant youth groups were another example. Protestants were using even like Christian contemporary music, right, Protestants, were doing these things that by the end of the 90s, Catholics were like, "Wait a second. Maybe we could be doing some of that, too." And that's what Curtis Martin and Scott Hahn, and Ed Sri did. So, their tactics, the fundraising tactics are straight up copies of Campus Crusade for Christ, the willingness to approach people on campus, like with an evangelical invitational model, the model of Bible studies as the sort of first unit that students encounter that's very much

a Protestant, Campus Crusade for Christ or evangelical model. The part where it becomes Catholic, though, is in the ways that missionaries are trained, right. So, they, of course, they learned fundraising techniques and evangelizing techniques. But the training I attended, just one week, they have a six weeklong training, and I was there for a week during, my research, and there's a lot of likes, how to pray. There's a lot of how to go to Mass. There's a lot of Catholic theology that they learn about, there's an emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which sounds very Evangelical, but the way that you access it in FOCUS is sitting in front of the [Real Presence](#).

KD 14:16

And so, it's always this sort of like, one point in the book, I was thinking about the musical term of re mixing. And in a lot of ways, that's what these missionaries are doing. They're re mixing evangelical Protestant tactics, Catholic theology, and also like middle class white, higher education modes. So, they use this language of discipleship, which is explicitly evangelical to mean, like, you should follow Jesus and follow one another as disciples. But then what they're doing is they're doing [Lectio Divina](#), which is a Catholic way of reading the Bible, they're going to Mass, they're learning the rosary, they talk in terms of the liturgical season. So, observing the cycles of the liturgical calendar are very important — Lent, as you might imagine, Lent is a huge time have to mark it out. So, when I was there, the group was small enough that they were all in one training at once. Now they've split between two places. But it's notable that they moved their training to [Ave Maria University in Florida](#), which I think speaks to the sort of Catholic subculture that FOCUS is certainly invested in, which is the conservative movement. And, you know, sometimes people wonder why it's important to study FOCUS. Like they're, I'm not making an argument that they're the majority of Catholics. Right, they're still certainly a minority. But I think we have to be very clear that these Catholics have the ear of the US bishops, these are Catholics who have good financial resources. I mean, you can't fund an organization like FOCUS, without lots, lots of money. There's lots of access to resources here that put focus in a position of power, that I think is shaping the way of American Catholicism, even if that power is not in numbers, but their impact is certainly being felt. So yeah, that's, that's part of, I guess, that's a blending of your question about evangelical practices, but that's sort of the impact on American Catholicism more broadly.

AI 16:23

Yeah. And I found it really interesting, that FOCUS has this daily goal to cultivate what they call "Dynamically Orthodox Catholics." What exactly is this? You know, how does focus define dynamically orthodox Catholics? And do you have a different take on their definition?

KD 16:45

Yeah, no, this is a great question. And it's one that I get a lot. And it's funny, because FOCUS uses this term to try to, like, be really clear with it. So, there's, it's two things. One, it's Orthodox, right,

and what they mean by orthodox is like adherence to Catholic teaching. So, like following the truth, as defined by the Vatican, adhering to ideas as taught by the church. But what when they say dynamic, what they mean is that it's like the opposite of staunch, they want to point to the ways that Catholic identity and young adult Catholics can impact the broader culture, right. So, this is to say that focus is not, it's not Catholic, Catholicism, that's boring. They often say, "This is not your grandmother's Catholicism." It's also like, sometimes I've had folks wonder if this is like a throwback to pre-Vatican to Catholicism and it's really not. They are reclaiming some of the practices that that were popular in the 50s and 40s, and 30s. But this is like very clearly 21st century Catholicism, right. Like they, as I often write about, like, they like to drink craft beer. There're all sorts of bonfires, right, like they encourage people to be active in the culture of college campuses.

KD 18:01

But what they're doing with dynamic Orthodoxy is trying to assert a particular interpretation of Catholicism, that validates and affirms Catholicism as the answer. Right. So, focus has identified the problems, right, the problems are sort of secularism on campus, a lack of religious identity, very worried about sexual promiscuity, pornography, hookup culture, binge drinking, these things are very pressing concerns to FOCUS, and to FOCUS missionaries. And the response, the way to correct for that is this interpretation of Catholic identity that, you know, says that you should wait to have sex until you're married, you should not — if you are not straight, you should not get married. And, you know, think about what your life as a celibate human being means, right? Like you should have these particular practices that show your commitment to Catholicism. But at the same time, like they don't want that to be like a boring they, they see that as a solution to a problem. And I think my interpretation of that is it really reflects sort of millennial, and I should say I'm currently a geriatric millennial, so it's not that this is not my generation, but they are, you know, on the other side of the millennial spectrum for me, but they are reflecting sort of this, like angst among millennials, like, you know, other sociologists are pointing out that hookup culture is being increasingly criticized by younger generations. These problems that are identified by focus. Other people have other solutions, but they're not the only ones identifying these particular problems. So, Catholicism is the answer to a wide range of problems as they see it.

AI 19:48

So, for FOCUS missionaries, there are five types of prayers central to their daily practice. Those are embodied prayer, prayer imagination, mental prayer, evangelizing wills, and intercessory prayer. Could you tell us a bit about these?

KD 20:10

For sure, yeah. So let me set the context for these prayers just for a second. So, one of the arguments of my book is that there is this, like, there's a feedback loop between the missionaries and their prayer practices, that the prayers that they perform, are also working on the missionaries. And so like, there's this circle here, right, so that there are very real ways and real implications for prayer practices. It's not just like this other part of their life. Right? They're doing them because there's implications for their life. And as I just sort of mentioned a moment ago, they're not just resuscitating older forms of prayer, right, they are sort of re-mixing them, and making them relevant for their context. So, the first type of prayer that I read about is, I call it embodied prayer. And this is, these are practices that I wish I was — one of the funnier and funnier, but one of the things that took me off — didn't expect to see was the first time I went to Holy Hour, which is an hour that missionaries spend most mornings in front of the Real Presence, they often kneel on the floor, not the kneeler. And I had never, in all my sort of Catholic world, I've never seen that before. So, they're kneeling on the floor. And it was consistent. Like I traveled to several different campuses, I went to large conferences and across the board missionary kneeling on the floor instead of the kneelers. And when I talked to them about it, right, this is like a way to imitate Jesus's suffering to embody the mystery of Jesus suffering for all of humans. So, it's this way of facilitating a personal relationship with Jesus, but always in front of the Real Presence and always like, sore knees, if you've ever. I remember kneeling as a kid, like, it was terrible, right? And so, they're like getting sore knees, and like experiencing that as Jesus is suffering. So, it's just like this effort to feel his pain.

KD 22:02

Prayer imaginations is the term that I use to describe, it mirrors a lot of what Luhrmann writes about as evangelical prayer practices where they're sort of imagining relationships with Jesus, but again, the Catholic take on it is that they use this form of ancient Benedictine prayer called *Lectio Divina*, where they read the biblical passages. And in the book, I outline three different ways that that I was taught. It's not, there's not a static way to do it. But it's that they read these Bible passages and use those passages to imagine themselves in a relationship with Jesus so becomes this very visceral practices. And this is a way that missionaries were clear that Protestants, I was often told Protestants are better than Catholics at the Bible. And it doesn't need to be that way. So, one of it was like a reclamation of the Bible as a Catholic prayer practice. The third practice was mental prayer and that was their term for it. Right? And this is where missionaries developed what they call a relationship with God, right, a relationship with Jesus, were conversation, what was the most important thing I would often hear missionaries talk about how this was the hardest type of prayer for them that they had to like, learn how to wait for a response. And there was a sense that you had to grow into mental prayer, that it wasn't something you could just automatically know. So, a lot of the time that missionaries were working on themselves with this

sort of discipline. It was with the goal of being better at mental prayer. I use the label evangelizing wills to describe the particular prayer practices that missionaries used when they were about to go out in the mission field as they would refer to campus, right. So, they would write down like, very intentional goals, like I want to invite four women to my Bible study tonight. And they would set that on a note card, put it in front of their eyes, and focus on that right with the clear intention that this hour in prayer focused on that would affect that, that their capacity to go out and do that evangelizing. And sometimes it was about like, people, fierce, to my surprise, there were some introverts who were missionaries. And so, there was risky and scary and vulnerable to go out and do this stuff. And so, evangelizing wills was the way of like, cultivating their will to want to go out in sort of Aristotelian, acquaint optimistic way.

KD 24:28

And then the last form of prayer, missionaries were sort of divided on the value of this prayer was intercessory prayer is what it's called, it's the asking for things from God. And some missionaries would refer to this as sort of like immature prayer or like a kind of prayer that you did at the end of your prayer when you were like, exhausted of all the other prayers. But I was always struck by the, again, the word prayer, there were these spiritual depth charts, and you would write down — missionaries and write down the names of the people that they were hoping to work with, right. So, if they had met a student yesterday, and they were hoping to get that student to come to Bible study, or if they had someone in their Bible study that they wanted to invite to a leadership role, they would have them sort of on these cards that they would track, right, and then pray for them. And it was very important to ask for big things, right? Like you weren't supposed to just ask for little things. Like if you wanted to reach out to for students, you should ask God to make sure that you reach out to eight students, right. So, ask for big things, which was part of intercessory prayer. And then the other thing was the intercessory. Prayer was understood as an act of care for other people so that when you were praying for those students, or one of your co-missionaries, I was always struck like that was that was a caretaking mode. But it wasn't just like, thinking about somebody or like it wasn't, you know, in a lot of religious interactions, people will say all pray for you. These missionaries were like legit, like, they wrote that down. That was not a joke. It was very serious, right. And that was part of intercessory prayer was remembering when they had said, I'll pray for you, and write it down. And it takes me a long time to walk through all those prayers, because this was like a lot of energy and missionary spent a lot of time in training, they spent a lot of time learning how to do it. And then when they were missionaries, they spent a lot of time doing it. So much so that like sometimes, they had to, like remind themselves that prayer, it was okay to spend all this time in prayer and not just evangelizing. So, there was like, an effort to understand prayer as important for what they're doing. But yeah, that's those were the prayer practices.

AI 26:40

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Yeah. And I found them super interesting, too. But one aspect of your book that from the start of your introduction into FOCUS I want to know more about was the gendered aspect of FOCUS. Because, as you write in the book, they have separate Bible nights for men and women, it's very gender segregated. And so, you develop a framework called gendering prayer, to examine how particular prayer practices are shaped by gender performance. Can you talk a bit about this gendering prayer and what you observed?

KD 27:20

Yeah, totally. So, you're touching on two things that I was really trying to think through with this framework. One, right is the fact that these gender norms were challenging, right? These listen, you if you are on a college campus, right now, you can go out and see people look like missionaries. These were not these are — I want to be clear, like, they're not just like, long skirt, wearing veil covering people. They're just like normal kids on college campuses. And they grew up in the same sort of, you know, gender expectations that I'm raising my kid in, right that that a woman can do anything. And so, the challenge of Catholic gender norms was very real. And then they — I was trying to think through what the appeal of these gender norms is like, why would you want to cultivate yourself as the kind of woman who is submissive to your husband? Why would you as a man be worried about you know, caretaking for your wife, like, this was not the sort of like cooperative partner language that I hear in other segments of the population. So, prayer was sort of, I realized, a way of cultivating that for mission, right. This is like the disciplinary act of prayer. So, it wasn't just that gender norms were shaping prayer, it was actually that prayer was shaping their capacity to do the gender performance.

KD 28:46

So, one of the ways that this looked right, so that women, and I will say, like, I had limited access to the men's world. So, it's always sort of sort of the positionality of my ethnographic work. But women talked in terms of the feminine genius, which is sort of an updated way of talking about John Paul, the second feminism. And it was an answer to this sort of haunting question of like how to be a woman in the 21st century. And so, it's sort of like a reclamation of women's place in the household being a valued position. But that was hard to square with, they're like, these students, they were like, high achieving college students, they were, you know, they had been raised to do whatever they wanted to do. And so, there was this sort of like tension about how to how to perform that traditional gender role in a way that still felt satisfying. So, as I write about prayer journals were really important for the women. So, sort of like, what they — I mean I didn't see any prayer journals — but what I heard about was that they would write about sort of the tensions they felt about how do I actually embody this version of womanhood? I feel called to do this, but it's hard for me. And I was always struck by sort of the honesty this wasn't Like, it was, they were honest that this was a struggle that this was a hard thing for them. So, this is not just like, I always

want to be really clear that the women in this missionary project are very agentic, right? Like they are very much making this choice, they have seen other options, and decided that they actually don't want it. They don't like the sometimes they describe it as shoulder pad wearing feminism of the 80s. They don't want it right. And so, they are choosing a different option for what it means to be a woman. But that wasn't it wasn't without its challenges. So, prayer helped them sort of work on themselves and be open to that.

KD 30:38

And then for men, it was a different problem that men were facing. I write about [Michael Kimmel](#), the sociologist he writes about this male malaise that men have, maybe not uniquely but that men have been — one of the fallout to the feminist movement Kimmel argues is that men don't know how to be men. And right, we can debate all day about that. But missionaries take this to be fact right like that. Yeah, it does seem like men don't know what to do. And so, what the men did was insist on male leadership as a response to this male malaise, right? And it only works, it only works in this complementarianism model. It only works because you have women who are willing to be the counter to men. And that's why, at one point, that chapter on gendering prayer, I wrote it just as about women. And I realized I couldn't do that. Because without understanding the men's role, it didn't make any sense. Like you can't have women submitting. They just look like submissive, passive people, which is not how I was like seeing them, not how they were reporting their experience to me. So, men have to work on, there's a lot of talk about pornography, like balancing the like sexual desires with the need for self, you know, virginity until marriage, being the leader. I attended a lot of talks about how men should take the lead in dating relationships. And one of the ways that men, the prayer practice that they tended to use was the examination of conscience. So, sort of like self-reflection on what they've done and not done through the model of the examination of conscience and so this chapter, it's always a little tricky to talk about because I want to be clear here that I'm right. I'm an ethnographer, I'm observing what's happening here. And I think that one of the arguments been trying to make in this particularly this chapter, is that these people, these young adults, were, were making choices about their gender performances. And that's what I'm saying about that, that was the choices about gender performances that run counter to our expectation about how millennials act, and yet these women and men were satisfied, happy and eager to do it. And that's what I'm thinking about.

AI 32:58

Right, yeah. And then, as we wrap things up here. So, these missionaries are stationed on these campuses between, you know, two to four years, because right the mandatory length, I guess, is two years, but they tend to add on as you observed more time. And so, these missionaries, you know, go grab coffee, go to the gym, they throw parties, there's a whole variation of college events

that they're attending, or that they're hosting. And I wanted to know, you know, what becomes to these missionaries after they leave these college campuses?

KD 33:43

Yeah, this is a great question. So, I don't have a ton of ethnographic data on it. What I know sort of a little haphazardly is that there are there's an emphasis on family life, a lot of missionaries marry other missionaries or, or students that they evangelize. So, there's a lot of like inter Catholic marriages, there's a lot of focus on kids and raising families. In recent years, there's been, and this is after my ethnographic work ended a move to create parish-based missionaries. So, some former campus missionaries are now working in parishes to do some of the same things as cultivate Catholic community and do some sort of Catholic theological education. And then a lot. Interestingly, a lot of especially the men tend to use their fundraising skills and go into fundraising, they work for nonprofits or parishes or diocese using those fundraising skills. So that's, that's part of lots of big families. And there's a real commitment to parish life, right. Like, I think if someone were to do an ethnography of parish life, you would find that some of the most vibrant connected people, either were Miss Catholic, mission focused missionaries or involved with focus as a student on campus, I just think that they are they're all over.

AI 35:02

And as I look at the time see, we're about to run out and ask, you know, what projects re you currently working on? This book was published in 2018 so it's been a little bit. Are you looking at any lingering questions that are made from the book? Or are you looking in a new direction?

KD 35:23

Yeah, no, I'm totally building on sort of your last question. There actually is, my current project is on Catholics who do natural family planning, which builds right out of the focus missionaries who are really excited to do natural family planning (NFP). And maybe hadn't yet seen where the rubber hits the road on how hard NFP can be. So I've conducted a couple of years' worth of ethnography and ethnographic interviews on Catholic NFP. So that's my current book project. The themes are similar, right, like Catholic identity and the contemporary world. But I've been increasingly interested in what it means to define family life based on like your reproductive choices, sort of this overlap between Catholics who do natural family planning and put unquote, like crunchy hippies who use natural fertility awareness methods, right. So, they're doing the same thing, but for really different reasons. So that's my, that's my current work that builds on some of those themes. And then [Karen Park](#) and I are publishing and co-editing, a book on Mary and shrines in the United States. So, my emphasis on prayer has shifted a little bit to Mary and shrines as we put together this great collection of sort of placed based scholarship on shrines across the United States. So those are the two things I'm working on that build out of there.

AI 36:37

Well, those both sounds really fascinating, and I can't wait to read about them. Thanks for being on the show Kate. It's been a great time talking to you.

KD 36:48

Yeah, the same. Thanks for the questions and have a great afternoon.

AI 36:52

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