



Keeping the Faith

Maintain your FCA momentum

By Maria Alejandra Cancino

You've packed your bags, strapped on your sandals, and said goodbye to friends and family to make the pilgrimage to college. But you don't want to leave everything behind, especially not your faith. Fellowship of Christian Athletes can be one thing that will help you get through this phase of your life. So, fear not, pilgrim. FCA groups abound at the college level, so you're not alone.

The first pilgrimage stop is the capital of the Sunshine State—Tallahassee. Every Tuesday night, about 35 members of FCA at **Florida State University** meet to sing, praise the Lord, read the Bible, and listen to speakers. Most of the members are part of an athletic team, so FCA members usually meet before games to encourage one another, sometimes with candy or uplifting notes.

FCA at FSU is also involved in helping the community; its members participate in weekend retreats for high school students or one-day retreats for middle school students to help teenagers cope with personal troubles.

You're welcome in this family even if you're not the sporty type. "FCA provides nursing, encouragement, and good solid Christian friends who will pray for you and will make you feel loved," says Karen Gwaltney, a member of FCA's leadership team.

Next on the map is Gainesville. The **University of Florida's** FCA has one of the largest huddles in the nation, and it's the biggest student group on campus with approximately 600 to 800 members. During their weekly meetings, members bring in

speakers, hold Bible studies, sing, and organize different activities from fundraisers to bonfires. Twice a year, Danny Wuerffel, former quarterback of the Gators football team and a very involved FCA member during his college years, visits his alma mater's FCA as a guest speaker.

Taylor Williams, the co-president of FCA at UF during the 2003-2004 school year, was a part of a small FCA group at **Gainesville High School**. Once in college, she decided to continue her affiliation because "FCA is a place to strengthen your relationship with God, to grow as a person, and to meet good people," she says.

Down the road, you'll find FCA at the **University of Central Florida**, where 130 to 150 members share their passion for sports as well as their interest in God in a weekly meeting. Besides their meetings on Tuesdays, the group holds different activities throughout the week. "We like to do lots of things outside of our weekly meeting, including bible studies, intramurals, outreaches to local high schools and middle schools, tailgate parties, social events, weekend retreats/conferences, and reaching out to the athletes and everyone they influence on the campus," says Tim Burkholder, former president of FCA at UCF.

Next stop is Fort Myers. Here you'll meet John Anderson, a campus minister and the founder of FCA at **Florida Gulf Coast University**. The FGCU's chapter started in the fall of 2002. Since then, FCA at FGCU has held weekly meetings during which about 15 students play games, give announcements, and listen to inspirational talks at the student center. "FCA is important for the students because it's a good opportunity for people

who want to find out more about the Gospel to hear about it in a safe environment," Anderson says.

Back on the road again, head south to **Florida Atlantic University**. FCA at FAU started back in 1999 with the help of Coach Howard Schnellenberger and campus sponsor Eliese Angiolillo. Today, FAU's FCA has between 50 and 70 members who meet every Tuesday night. Their meetings include games, ice breakers, skits, student testimonies, Bible lessons given by students or guest speakers, small group discussions with prayer, time for fellowship and food, and if you're lucky, home-cooked meals provided by local moms!

FAU's chapter is also aware of its community. "Each year, we participate in different projects depending on what the students are interested in," says Jeannine Lombard, local FCA staff. "This year, we participated in the Relay for Life, a cancer relay to promote cancer research. The event wasn't mandatory, but many students supported the event because a leadership team member's father had recently passed away from cancer."

"FCA is a lifeline for many of the students. They go away to college trying to find out what they really believe in," Lombard says. "FCA is there in the campus to help share what it means to be a Christian. What's really neat is that the students decide to come and also become leaders. They're challenged to live as a Christian leader."

Your last stop is Miami, where 50 FCA members meet at **Florida International University**. In only three years, they've taken on projects with Habitat for Humanity and the Angel Tree Program, which distributes Christmas presents to children whose parents are in prison, as well as reading programs for elementary school children.

During the football season, FCA at FIU meets on game days and at every practice. Steve Lantz, the chaplain to the football team who started the campus's FCA, believes that faith isn't challenged until the students get to college. "It's in college that they meet intelligent people with an agenda to destroy their faith. This is why it's very crucial for them to be involved in FCA," he says.

This pilgrimage may be over, but the road still has many miles that you can cover. Back in Tallahassee, the **Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University** will have a chapter of FCA beginning in fall 2004. Reggie Hutchins, a campus representative for the national FCA at FAMU, is the one organizing the chapter, which will welcome all students. "Everyone can be involved and be a part," Hutchins says.

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