

Campus minister bids adieu

By **RACHEL MILLER**
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A beautiful golf course set behind a mountain range, his daughter's laugh and a good cup of Malibu Yo with hot fudge. These are a few of Campus Minister Thomas Fitzpatrick's favorite things.

"They are indescribable," Fitzpatrick said. "It's the things that kind of take your breath away."

At the end of May, Thomas will become an associate preaching minister at a church called The Hills in Fort Worth, Texas. This role will allow him to help start a new church on the west side of Fort Worth. It will also present him with the chance to create a college ministry group at the church.

But, he sighed, he will definitely miss all the students that he has met over the years.

"In ministry, there's a lot of times when you question and wonder if you're having any impact," Fitzpatrick said. "But once in a while someone will come your way, and it just reaffirms and shows you that there are some fruits for your labor. I try to keep all the thank you notes that people write. So every once in a while if I'm like, 'Oh, nothing's working, nothing's happening,' I have my letters there to show that good things have happened."

Before coming to Pepperdine, Fitzpatrick was a campus minister at the University of New Mexico for about four-and-a-half years. As compared to UNM, Pepperdine has provided more opportunities to spread the gospel to both Christian and non-Christian students, because of its smaller size and ability to integrate faith into the community on campus.

"It was the combination of a Christian school but still a lot of non-Christians at the school," Fitzpatrick said of his decision to come to Pepperdine. "Whereas, at other Christian schools, maybe it's all Christians, so there's not a

lot of opportunity to share the gospel or spread the faith. Here, you have a strong Christian group, but you also have a very large non-Christian group."

Talking to Fitzpatrick, he seems very sure of his faith. But not everyone has reached that point, especially during college. When students begin to question their beliefs, he explained that experiencing struggles are all part of finding your way.



FITZPATRICK

"I definitely try to ask a lot of questions, and find out what's causing the struggle or what their path was that's led them to this point," Fitzpatrick said. "But a lot of it is allowing them the freedom to struggle. A lot of people think that doubting your faith or struggling through your faith means that you're losing your faith, and that's just not true. Doubting it is just a big part of it."

Growing up, Fitzpatrick wanted to be a dentist, starting college as a biology major. His turning point came as the result of two incidences: his lack of excitement for his introduction to biology class, he said with a laugh, and a book he was reading at the time about going into ministry. The chapter title was about "your heart's passion," with an emphasis on "whether or not you should go into ministry full-time," he recalled.

"This man talked about his struggle, about whether or not he should go into ministry, and I really related to that," Fitzpatrick said. "Basically, the line was, 'If you would wonder for the rest of your life what it would have been like to [be a minister], you should probably go do that.'"

After coming to this realization, Fitzpatrick changed his major to communication, and decided that his path was headed for spiritual leadership. Looking back, he explained that his favorite story of the Bible is the woman at the well, in John 4, because it resonates so clearly with previous periods of his life.

"She has a similar story as my own," Fitzpatrick said. "Jesus started talking

about water and how she's thirsty and how he can satisfy that thirst, and I can totally resonate with that – just being very thirsty and drinking a lot of things, but not ever finding anything that really satisfies your thirst."

Now, Fitzpatrick sees his life as one of joy, finding fulfillment in his career and his family.

Following years of large, group-style ministry, he explained that the campus ministry recently changed from a large gathering, Collide, to a more personal setting. Now, they implemented House Groups, where students meet in faculty and staff homes to have dinner together and study the Bible.

"With big groups, it's more impersonal, so you're more talking at them and presenting ideas and hoping that they take something away from it," Fitzpatrick said. "In smaller groups, you can definitely cater the message more to the people that you're talking with. I think smaller groups are definitely more impactful."

Now that his time as campus minister is coming to a close, he hopes that people will remember his passion for God's work.

"I love this place and I will miss it like crazy," Fitzpatrick said. "Hopefully [they will remember] that I love the Lord with all I have, and that I love them too."

What senior Christiana Cha will remember most about Fitzpatrick is his passion.

"Thomas Fitzpatrick is passionate, sincere, open-minded and all-around a fun guy," Cha said. "He's someone who was willing to do everything from spending hours talking with a student who was struggling with an addiction to spending 20 minutes playing pingpong with the guys. Thomas is one of those rare people who can throw all his passion and his convictions into words and make that captivating and relevant for us. I think it's an incredible gift, and I am certain that he will use it well in his new position in Fort Worth."

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