

Campus Aquino

Building a residential
community of
Catholic students
in Utrecht





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Campus Aquino is a Catholic student and young professionals residential community in Utrecht. It seeks to gather young people who wish to grow in faith, character, study and work. Consisting in houses and apartments surrounding the Saint Gerard Majella church and the priory of the Brothers of Saint John, *Campus Aquino* offers a family-like environment based on faith, fellowship and formation, keys to the growth of each person. The concept has been successfully tried and tested since 2010, with nearly 80 young Catholics. In this brochure a few of the residents will take you on a tour of the community for those interested in participating in it or supporting its future spiritually or financially.



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A home in a busy city

Residents at *Campus Aquino* live together in houses and apartments a stone's throw from each other, the church and the priory.

Having a place to live which is also a welcoming home to return to in the evening is a vital foundation for all aspects of life and provides the necessary basis for growth as a person. Cooking, praying, laughing, talking, thinking together are a part of daily life at *Campus Aquino*, as well as the sharing of trials and joys. The students, spread across a number of apartments and houses, gather weekly for a community evening of fellowship, prayer and formation. The young professionals do so monthly.

If life could be compared to climbing a mountain then *Campus Aquino* is a group of climbers in roped ascent, helping each other onwards. The presence, friendship, help, prayer and insights of others who live with you is one of the best means for growth.

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During a typical weekly community night students will cook, eat, share, pray and learn together, all of which offers plenty of opportunity for music and conversation.

Photo: housemates Caroline, Emily and Marije getting in some praise and worship.



Before I moved to Utrecht and the student community, I knew that I didn't want to live alone, but I wasn't sure whether community life would really be something for me. After more than a year of living here, I can confidently say that it absolutely is! Our everyday life is filled with many jokes, conversations and shared meals. During the community evenings we share about how life is going, about our faith and thus deepen the relationships in the group. While being a believer is not always easy, the community is a great place to seek for answers and reflect on the troubles we have in our student lives and our lives of faith. On top of all of that, I am deeply grateful for the friendships I am making within the community. I am sure that they will last way beyond my time in Utrecht. I feel at home here!

Caroline

Comes from: Bielefeld, Germany

Studying: Philosophy, Politics and Economics



I didn't want to live alone but I wasn't sure whether community life would be something for me

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Growing in faith through teaching, discussion and guidance

The desire to learn about the Catholic faith ranks consistently high in the priorities and wishes of the residents.

Emphasis is placed on two means that have proven to be the most useful: teaching and discussion. The brothers strive to teach the Catholic faith through the homilies, catechesis and courses available at Katholieke Studenten Utrecht, the Saint Gerardus Majella parish and the JohannesAcademie - the formation institute of the Brothers of Saint John. The residents at *Campus Aquino* gather regularly for discussions in small groups, seeking together to deepen their faith through the sharing of questions, knowledge, insights and texts from the Bible, Church teaching and authors on faith or on human wisdom for life. This is a great way to go further both in understanding and confidence in

one's ability to advance and to contribute. Residents regularly help lead Alpha Courses or with charitable work in other parishes in Utrecht. The young professionals have set up and run Katholieke Young Pro's Utrecht with and for others in and around Utrecht - a lively platform for encounter and formation, reaching out to others. Finally, students and young professionals are often in search of guidance in order to progress in personal questions, issues or choices related to faith or the challenges life can present. The brothers provide spiritual advice and guidance, and can help those who need it to find other forms of coaching or help.

Getting the chance to share one's thoughts and seek answers to questions is a crucial part of growth. Living near each other and the brothers provides many opportunities for this.

Photo: Maria Teresa in discussion with Fr. David.



I moved to Utrecht a year ago and was fascinated by the community living in the *Campus Aquino*. I wanted to experience the same for myself since it struck me that it would help me in my growth both as a person and spiritually. I have personally been helped in my journey towards God and the Church a lot by the Brothers of Saint John and I deeply appreciate the way that they go out of their way to help people, especially the student and young professionals community. One of my most beloved and blessed experience has been the possibility to attend Mass. This is made possible by the Brothers who make sure there are enough Masses available during the weekend and on weekdays, as well as all the other prayers to help the Church be strong and faithful even during difficult times. I come from a Hindu background and am preparing for baptism along with other adult candidates. This involves a lot of reflexion and learning about the content of the Catholic faith but also about the philosophical and theological foundations to it. I'm grateful I'm able to do this in a setting where I can ask all my questions. The humility, zeal and fervour with which the brothers serve God has been very inspiring for me personally and I hope and pray that they can continue in their mission with the same enthusiasm and passion.

Ashish

Comes from: Calcutta, India

Working in: Computer Engineering



Living at *Campus Aquino* helps me in my growth both as a person and spiritually

Develop lasting friendships

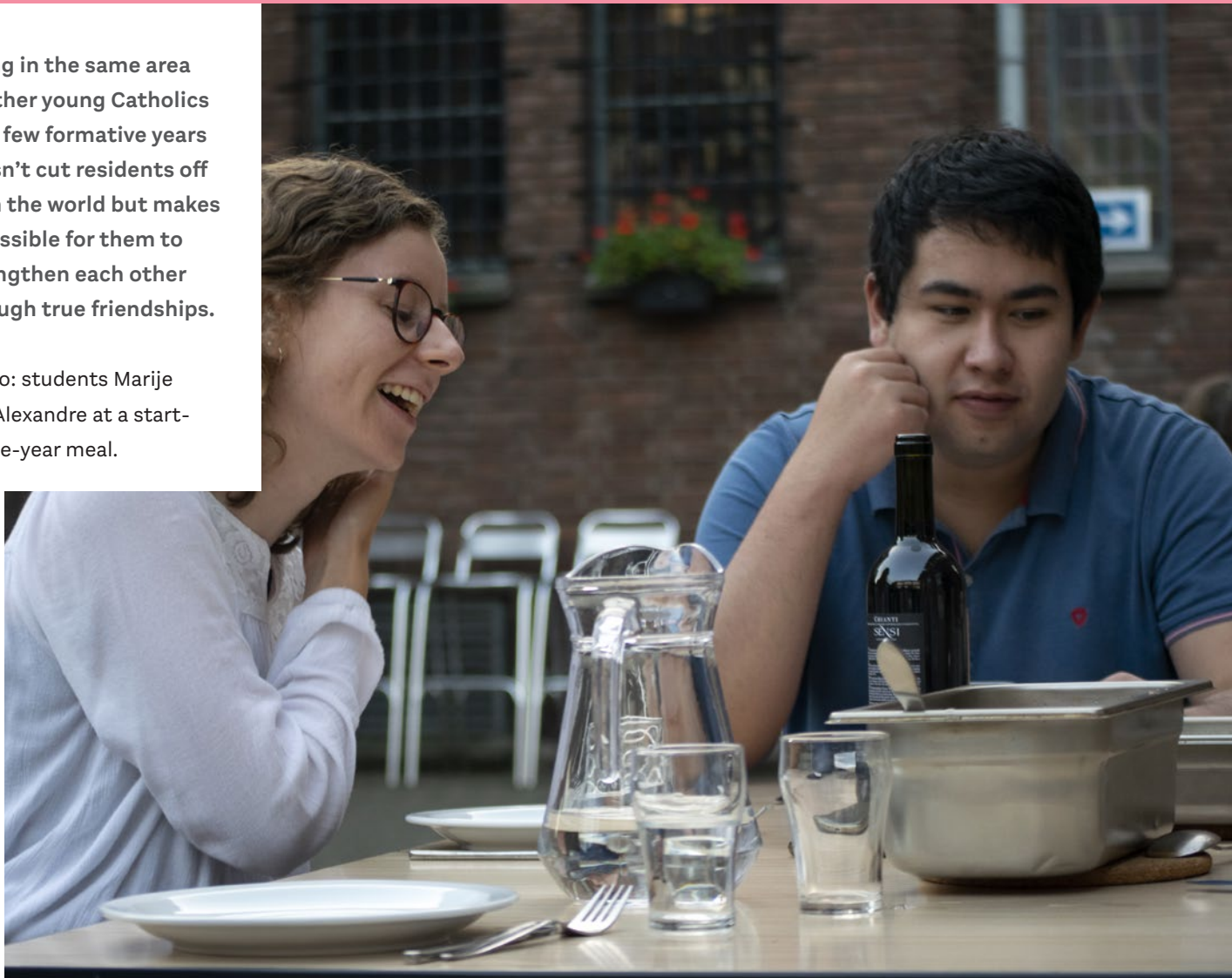
Young adults need to be able to talk about their faith freely and help each other in developing a life in Christ.



In our day and age it is challenging to share about your faith with fellow students or colleagues. Although this certainly presents many opportunities for witness to Christ, to venture out into one's young adult life as a Christian is one thing when one has like-minded friends, and all together another when one does not. Furthermore, in our era of social media, chances to meet peers in reality, to develop the social skills and the art of friendship are getting rarer. The friendships at *Campus Aquino* tend to run deep and to last as the residents leave and move on.

Living in the same area as other young Catholics for a few formative years doesn't cut residents off from the world but makes it possible for them to strengthen each other through true friendships.

Photo: students Marije and Alexandre at a start-of-the-year meal.



When I moved to university I was really pleased to be able to live in the student community. It's a friendly environment which helped me to take the step of leaving home. It soon also became clear to me that this is a place where you can develop close friendships which will last long after you finish studies. With time it also helped me to progress from a faith based solely on childhood habits towards a more mature, personal faith. I haven't ever distanced myself from my faith during my years at university but I have struggled with the question of whether it is really "my" faith and not simply loyalty towards my parents. The answers to these questions didn't lie just in my chemistry studies but in finding out how faith and science can walk hand in hand. At those moments it was great to be living close to the church where there's so much opportunity for prayer (and especially, for me, silent adoration) and formation, to have the brothers within reach to whom you can always go with questions, and to have friends who are also involved with the faith. Later on I also learned that however great community is, things don't always go smoothly. But that's also a valuable experience: learning about how you react in the less pleasant circumstances, to hold on to what's important and to not give up. I think these skills will be useful later in life, for example in marriage or in work. I'm now finishing my graduate studies and live in a house with students where I'm the "experienced" housemate. I'm grateful for the chance to share my experience but I also just enjoy all the fun of living with students!

Maaiké

Comes from: **Amstelveen, The Netherlands**

Studying: **Chemistry**



It soon became clear to me that this is a place where you can develop close friendships which will last long after you finish studies

An environment favouring study and work

In order to succeed in study or in your first steps in finding work, an environment of mutual support and encouragement is highly valuable.

Alone the distractions can be many and the motivation sometimes lacking. At *Campus Aquino* the students often gather for study sessions in one of the large living rooms, or strengthen their grasp of their subjects through in-house interdisciplinary discussion! Over the years almost all university and college faculties have been represented here and this provides a constant, healthy and stimulating mingling of perspectives.

The young professionals are just as varied in their disciplines, nurses living alongside software writers and HR assistants, doctors mingling with bakers, theologians, psychologists, chemists and translators.

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The houses at *Campus Aquino* include living areas making it possible to easily study together in small groups.

Photo: one of the regular study sessions at a community house.



Living in the student community has a lot of benefits. Besides the enriching friendships, the formation in faith and the room for personal growth, the community provides a motivating environment for study. Our studies take up most of our daily life. We share with each other the joys, enthusiasm and difficulties we encounter in our courses. The fact that we can do this generates a lot of motivation since you know that you're never alone! We often arrange study sessions together and help each other to get through them.

As well as the studies, which are central to our lives here, we also talk about and pray for our future vocation, our master courses or career options. By sharing with each other what we're doing we develop strong bonds of friendship. We hear each other's perspectives on things and include each other's advice in our discernment. The community therefore helps you to discover what you're called to, with all your talents and qualities. For example, for me personally it has become clear through talking with people here in community and through prayer that I'd love to get into teaching. I have a strong sense that this is my personal vocation. In short, living at *Campus Aquino* provides you with much support for your studies and a motivating and forming environment which all contributes to an amazing time at university!

Maria Teresa

Comes from: **Arnhem, The Netherlands**

Studying: **French and Spanish**



The community helps you to discover what you're called to, with all your talents and qualities

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Seek for truth in life's big questions

One of the main elements of the charism of the Brothers of Saint John is the seeking of truth. The human person can do this in two main fields: through faith in Revelation and through the human intelligence able to question our experiences of life in order to understand ourselves and God better.

This is a spirit which the brothers are keen to share with the young people at *Campus Aquino*. Whether alone with a book from the campus' library, in a one-on-one conversation with a fellow student, young professional or with a brother, or during a group discussion or speaker's night... it is always deeply life-giving to make progress in understanding oneself, life, the faith, God or the world around us. Everyone has something to contribute in our search for truth. Discovering one's ability to think, seek, learn from others,

past and present, and to find answers is an essential tool for life ahead. We foster this endeavour in each person and seek to provide means which can help it: group discussions, courses at the JohannesAcademie, personal guidance and our library, to name a few.

The students at *Campus Aquino* together run the organisation *Katholieke Studenten Utrecht*, involving activities with and for students seeking to deepen or discover the Catholic faith.

Photo: participants during an Advent retreat organised by *Katholieke Studenten Utrecht* and given by one of the Sisters of Saint John.



I'm pleased to be living since last summer opposite the Saint Gerardus Majella church. My choice to live here has three reasons. Firstly, it stimulates me to go regularly to Mass and to silent Eucharistic adoration; two things which in my experience are nourishing for my interior life. So it's very nice that the church is only 50 meters away. Secondly, I think it's very important to be a part of a faith community. Faith is something you live together with others. The social contact and sharing within the community are very valuable. Thirdly, I'm drawn to the brothers' spirituality. The "search for truth" touches me. It's shown me a lot in life, especially about how our intelligence comes from God and is able to understand reality ever more deeply. I think everyone is searching for what is most real and true. Through this search for truth the brothers connect with the questions people have in our times.

Kees

Comes from: **Utrecht, The Netherlands**

Working as: **Baker**



I think everyone is searching for what is most real and true

Learning to pray and to live with God

Living near a church and priory offers many daily opportunities for prayer. Daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, confessions and a church open all day make it possible to spend regular time with God in an environment of prayer.

The brothers maintain a daily presence of prayer in the church and the ready availability of the sacraments but they're not the only ones to create times of prayer. *Campus Aquino* residents organise regular adoration evenings of praise and worship, and often gather in their own homes for evening prayer or the rosary. At community evenings residents pray together and for each other, and often share things they especially need prayer for. Prayer is also a learning curve and the brothers offer help in learning to open one's heart and mind to God and to develop a strong regular life of prayer. Praying gradually aligns one's heart and life with God and opens one up to His Holy Spirit.

This always changes our lives for the better and Jesus leads us to to live ever more truly as sons and daughters of the Father. The Christian way of life is beautiful and demanding and residents seek to allow God to transform their lives and their persons into the Christians of today. This is helped by mutual example, advice and through spiritual guidance.

During my time living at *Campus Aquino* I have learnt about God's love and how it is being shared among all the people that surround us; from a warm "good morning!" that I always receive from my housemates to prayer before meals and the gatherings to talk about God, life, music, doubts and worries that commonly end in a prayer for each other. Sharing the meals with the brothers, learning how to become a follower of Jesus with all one's heart, having the example of the brothers and of the other students and young professionals... To live in a faith community is one of the best ways to experience God's love! I will cherish the moments of getting together to sing praise songs, learning how to play new instruments with the help of my housemates and friends, and playing board games in the evenings. In all these moments Jesus has been present guiding our hearts towards His through prayer, sharing and fun!

Cristy

Comes from: **Veracruz, Mexico**

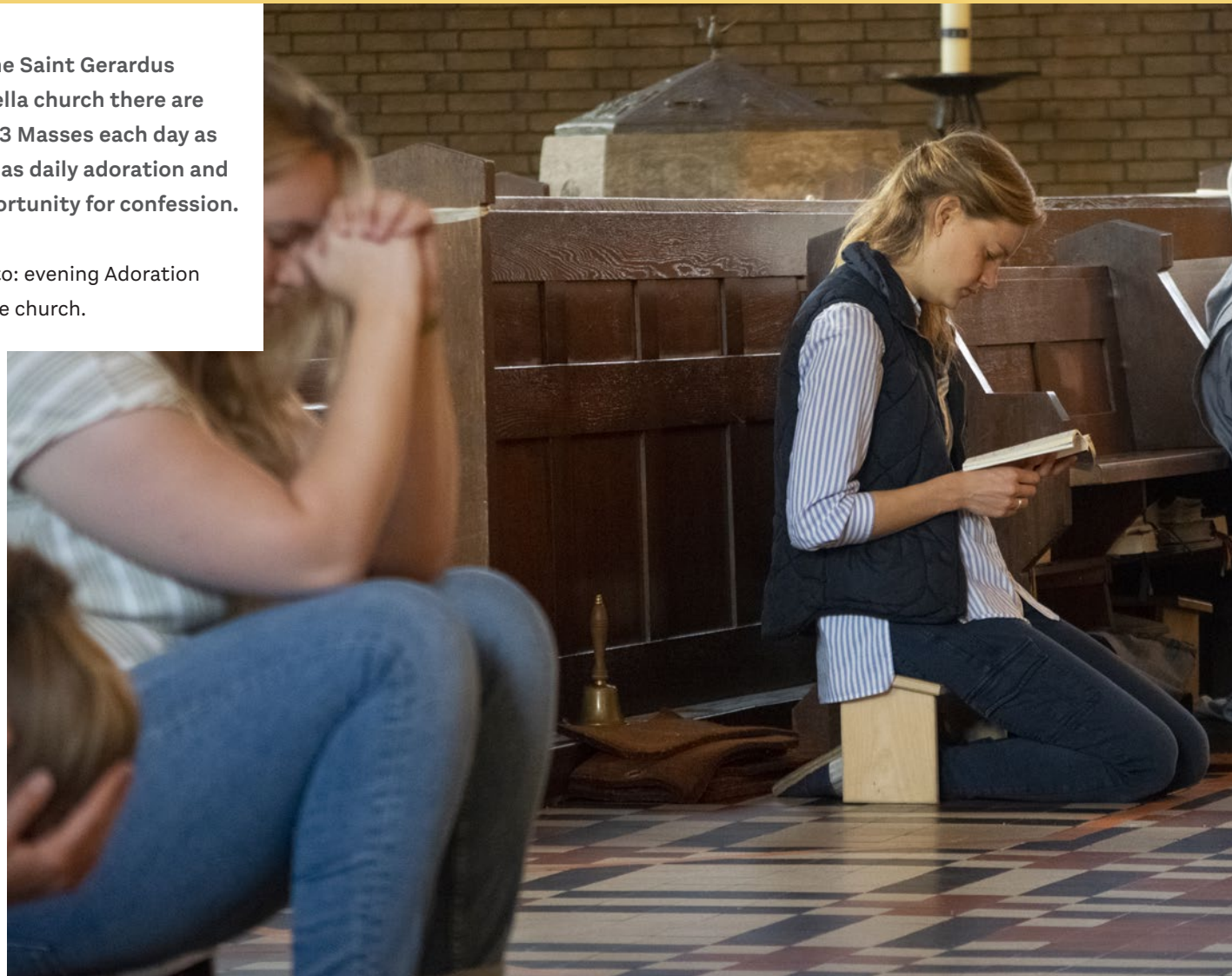
Studying: **Earth Sciences**



To live in a faith community is one of the best ways to experience God's love

In the Saint Gerardus Majella church there are 2 or 3 Masses each day as well as daily adoration and opportunity for confession.

Photo: evening Adoration in the church.



Developing a spirit of service

One of the most beautiful discoveries for many people is that they can bring about real and good change in other people's lives.



Whether this be through serving the materially needy, helping out in a parish event, leading the student ministry or the young professionals organisation, visiting the sick or elderly, teaching the faith, organising a course or a prayer night down-town, supporting a fellow resident going through difficult times, or by taking time to pray with or for someone... It's a means to contribute in a real way to others' well-being, recovery or growth in a life of holiness. Living together in community bears fruit in what residents of *Campus Aquino* can do together for others and thus witness to God through charity.

Since *Campus Aquino* is beside the parish church and the brothers' priory, there is no shortage of occasions to serve by volunteering for events and projects.

Photo: Cristy and Minke cooking for a large group.

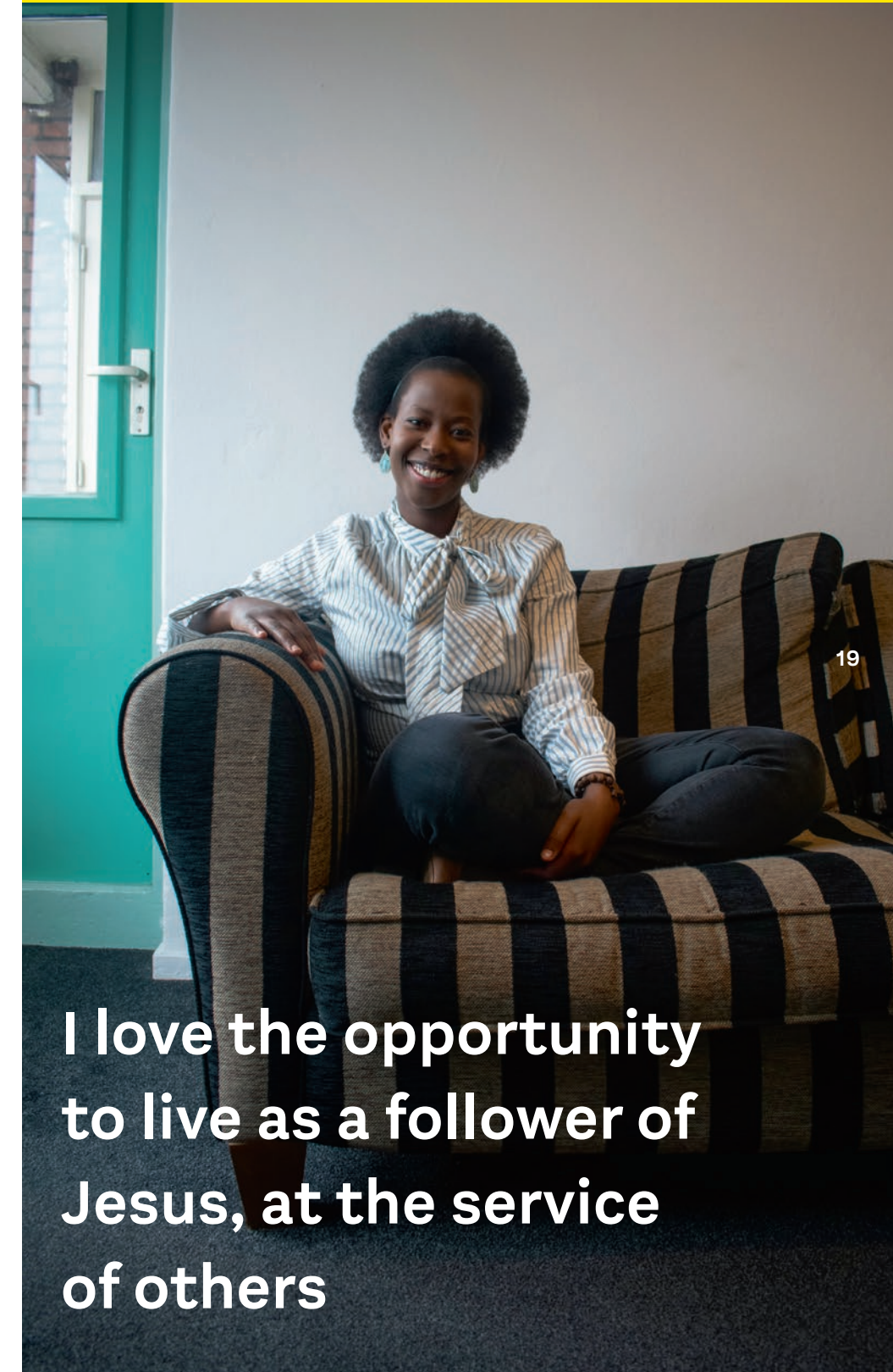


I came to live here at *Campus Aquino* in order to live close to the church with other young believers. Living close to the church helps me to develop my faith as a priority. I didn't want my faith to be a side-issue in my life but wanted to learn to put it at the centre of what I do and who I am. Living here gives me more opportunities to grow in my faith. In The Netherlands there aren't many young Catholics and being a part of this community with other young people provides me with accountability in my faith and stimulates me to keep practicing. We help each other and support each other in the amazing but also challenging life as young Christians today. Living in community means we grow in participation in the Church through helping each other discover our talents and skills. It's great to have so many opportunities to help and serve, and a church community provides a platform for meaningful help to each other and the people who look to Christians for help. Whether it be at my work in Human Resources, with my fellow community members, at an event in the church, or simply reaching out to someone who's come to the church seeking help, I love the opportunity to live as a follower of Jesus, at the service of others.

Alice

Komt uit: **Utrecht, The Netherlands**

Working in: **Human Resources**



I love the opportunity to live as a follower of Jesus, at the service of others

Taking steps towards vocation, healing and the big choices in life

For young adults, making choices and taking certain directions in life is clearly of great importance. Time has shown that *Campus Aquino* is a place which helps with that.

While several residents have found their husband or wife here, and others a vocation to religious life or priesthood, all residents have taken major steps towards their future lives: discovering where talents lie, what line of interest or work one wants to develop, what one's strengths and weaknesses are... and seeking to open oneself to God's calling. Important decisions are made in these things and the environment of prayer, fellowship, learning and guidance all helps. This process often involves the discovering of wounds and struggles within oneself and which require special time, attention and help.

Campus Aquino is also a place of shelter and recovery where residents look out for each other and are there in times of need.

The brothers seek to help all residents in the discernment and pursuit of God's vocation in their lives through prayer, guidance and sometimes, where deep healing is needed, in combination with appropriate health care professionals.

In the past ten years on mission here with the students and young pros I've noticed how important it is for young people at this stage in life to have the opportunity and means to gather together and take steps in giving shape to their lives. Young adults are at the stage of making choices for themselves which will affect the rest of their future and those of others. Choices require learning, seeking, praying, receiving advice and guidance, and having the support and encouragement of friends. The brothers consider it a privilege to be able to provide much of that here and it's one of our lasting joys to see the younger generation grow in their faith. Several residents have received a vocation to priesthood or religious life and others have found their spouses. It's wonderful to see the church growing and being renewed in this way. While not every resident receives their specific vocation during their time here, the environment here provides the tools for a good discernment. The students, young pros, brothers and parishioners also see it as a part of our mission to support those of us who are going through hard times. It's deeply moving to see how a home and friends can help us to reach out to God and to traverse life's difficulties and receive the healing and growth we all need in order to be Christ's Church in today's world.

Broeder John Mary Jesus

Comes from: Maidstone, Great Britain

Member of: The Brothers of Saint John



The environment here provides the tools for good discernment

The front room of the brothers' priory is often a place where personal guidance, small-group teaching or community gatherings take place.

Photo: Fr. John with a small group preparing for reception into the Church.



Are you interested in applying
to live at *Campus Aquino* as a
student or young professional?

Could you support us
financially with a gift to help
expand our accomodation?

Please get in touch!

Campus Aquino

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