

Most Beautiful



"I was predominantly raised in the Southern Baptist, Hispanic tradition," said Ama. "Most of my childhood, I learned about God, and then I saw people in my life being the opposite of what we were taught to be. It always felt like a disconnect. So my mom, sister, and I tried a Methodist church. We eventually returned to the Southern Baptist church, but I honestly started feeling like maybe I didn't believe in this at all. Then I found a Pentecostal church I fell in love with. I did a theology internship there and was still a bit disconnected. People would say things like, 'Oh, you are a progressive Christian, or you can't be gay, or they needed to train me out of that belief.' It worked a little, but then when I got to college, I was like, I have beliefs, but I am also Christian."

Coming from her high school, Ama never heard the term interfaith before. When she arrived at UNF, she attended a program called Quest for first-generation minority college students. There, she learned about job opportunities, and she needed a job to pay her bills. She was hired at the Interfaith Center on campus and immediately met Pastor Sarah. "At the time, I was deconstructing from my Christian roots. I thought she was awesome, but I didn't join right away. After a year of some healing, I was comfortable with my spiritual, non-religious place. I decided to give it one more try. I wanted to find someone I could model my own call after and Pastor Sarah popped into my mind."

Ama has been attending Jacksonville Campus Ministry for about three years now. "With Pastor Sarah, I have been working hard on my journey of figuring it all out. Things about Christianity are still super important to me, and she is still helping me find out things for myself. We are doing a deep dive into the Bible for the group. It is an open invite, and I am super excited for this so I can learn. I am going to church more than I have in a long time. I still feel spiritual nonreligious, maybe I am moving back a little, but she keeps answering my questions."

One of the key pieces of the ministry for Ama was the Alpha program. Pastor Sarah did the program with Ama and two others who are not Christian. Together, they dive into the hard stuff about Christianity. "It was a super intimate setting. We have been doing the heart work to figure things out for me and many other people."

Today, Ama serves as an intern for the ministry. She helps with the behind-the-scenes event planning, and her big project is the giving back serving campaign. They hope to work with the homeless community, beach clean-up, and the domestic violence shelter. She also helps write up the newsletter. "JCM is one of the most unique environments I have ever been in," she shared. "For a Christian space to be so open and all students to journey at their own pace is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. It is a manifestation of God's work. Pastor Sarah is soooo patient, and her religion has shaped how she sees the world and us and it has been so beautiful to be a part of this. So many students needed this to find their way. I see people come and leave feeling more seen and more like they belong."

Your generosity to Jacksonville Campus Ministry allows Pastor Sarah to gather students with the patient care they need to ask questions in a safe place. Thank you for your generosity to this vital ministry to young adults.