



## The Case for a Permanent Catholic Campus Ministry Location At the College of Charleston

***Bad company ruins good morals.*** 1 Corinthians 15:33

### The Need

The college years are often seen and feared by parents and the public as a time during which the secular world erodes the Christian faith of students. In fact, Mass attendance is declining among all age groups. Yet longitudinal studies of young Catholics have found that eight out of ten students enter college with the spiritual desire to deepen their faith.

Perhaps more than previous generations, studies find that today's college students resist structure. They seek a comfortable safe place, a home, among peers. As is well known, the current college generation is more bound than any prior to electronic devices linked to digital communities and social networks. They have grown up in homes gathered in living rooms with each family member intently involved with their personal devices. The paradox of communal isolation is a hallmark. Other interfaith studies have found that students with spiritual longing gain the most from shared experiences with peers through study, service, and one-on-one peer interaction.

Many traditional structures and processes of Catholic youth outreach are often not aligned with the needs of today's college students. However, the longstanding Newman Center model stands out because it offers the home and faith community environment that students want and need. The key elements of the Newman Model include a permanent gathering place that is comfortably like home, large enough space for gatherings of forty or more people, close proximity to the college campus and a Catholic Church; and a kitchen available for large meals and off-hour and late-night snacks. In short, it is a loving Catholic family home away from home.

This conceptual and empirical depiction of what a Catholic campus ministry center should be is affirmed by the testimony of the former and current students involved in Campus Ministry at the College of Charleston. In what had been the temporary center called the Upper Room, one former student said that you would regularly find ten to fifteen students gathered in this "comfortable and safe space" to study at any time of the day or night. Because upperclassmen would naturally become peer mentors for underclassmen, students with demanding class and study schedules would retreat to the Upper Room for peaceful fellowship and quiet study rather than the library. According to the students, these one-on-one relationships were vital to deepening the students' faith because they saw their peers living as quiet witnesses to the Gospel. As one said, "You become more like the people you spend time with."

The students who spent their days in the Upper Room also regularly attended Mass at Saint Patrick's, inviting Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Many non-Catholic friends became regular Mass attendees. The students who shared their experiences came from homes that were both very and not very devout. Yet they all found that their experience in campus ministry through the Upper Room deepened their faith and made them truer followers of Christ.

Today, Campus Ministry is without a home. Saint Patrick's Parish continues to offer a student Mass and provides meeting space for a weekly community meal. Yet the program is without ongoing meeting space. With deep concern for the spiritual well-being of young people at the College of Charleston and interest in ensuring that the ministry finds appropriate permanent space to renew the program and feed the spiritual hunger of young people for the Truth found only in Christ, a group of lay Catholics have joined to provide support for the ministry and work with the parish and diocese to find an acceptable permanent solution.



***Be demanding of the world around you; be demanding first of all with yourselves. Be children of God; take pride in it!*** Pope Saint John Paul II, World Youth Day, Czestochowa, Poland

## **The Solution**

The “Newman Center” model continues to be the most effective and distinctive approach to Catholic college ministry on large and mid-size campuses. This model stands out because it offers the home and faith community environments that students want and need.

The key elements of the Newman Model dedicated center include:

- Close proximity both to the college campus within well lit, safe walking distance for late night travel (St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, our parish home away from home parish, could not be better located)
- Permanent gathering place that is comfortably like home – dedicated only for campus ministry use
- Large enough “living room” space for gatherings of forty or more people (e.g., movie nights, speakers, discussions, etc.)
- Two bathrooms – handicap accessible
- Main entrance and at least ground floor handicap accessible
- Kitchen available for prep of large meals and off-hour and late-night snacks
- Study rooms adequate for private and small group study
- Private ministry office for both workstation and pastoral counseling
- Multiple electric circuits, outlets, and charging stations for the “wired” generation
- A small quiet meditation prayer room
- Total space requirement of about 3,000 – 4,000 square feet