

Strengthening Catholic Identity

2ND OF A SERIES: VISIBLY CATHOLIC

As Catholic colleges and universities, we have the wonderful opportunity to proclaim our Catholic identity and vision to all. Upon entering our main campuses, visitors will sense an inviting hospitality and a welcoming spirit that make tangible our abiding commitment to the human dignity of all members of the community. The beauty of the architecture, both old and new, the care taken in preserving the grounds and statuary of the university's founders or patron saints, the artwork throughout our campuses, the hope and warmth on the faces of students, faculty, and staff convey how we regard our stewardship of God's creation. Catholic higher education's rigorous commitment to the pursuit of truth is complemented by its deep appreciation for beauty, the arts, music, and the spiritual life, a 2,000-year tradition that is both rich and dynamic.

More than simply providing beautiful images or teaching opportunities, beauty through the arts is an integral and inspiring part of the Catholic view of reality. Catholic colleges and universities can celebrate this aspect of our identity by bringing an intentional focus to the visible signs and symbols of our faith. This pamphlet in our Strengthening Catholic Identity series is offered as a resource for enhancing the life-giving beauty embodied in the art, symbolism, and visible presence of our shared faith tradition.



Hospitality

When there is a welcoming ethos that permeates campus life, we manifest our commitment to engage with, learn from, and collaborate with the richness of diverse communities. Indeed, hospitality is a central component of Catholic belief and our intellectual tradition. On our campuses, openness to the newcomer incarnates the welcoming spirit of Christ. The fact that persons from diverse religious traditions, of the Catholic tradition, or of no faith tradition are equally valued as members of our campus communities makes evident our belief that we are all created in the image of God.

Student events, organizations, and publications can make this reality visible. Of parallel importance are the campus-wide programs that welcome and orient new faculty and staff not only to the campus itself, but also to their respective departments and divisions within the institution. Who we welcome among us, how we welcome them, and the extent to which this way of being becomes institutionalized in our campus traditions and practices make overt this dimension of our Catholic ethos.

Worship and Contemplative Spaces

At our best, Catholic colleges and universities offer multiple opportunities for nurturing the spiritual life of our students, faculty, and staff. The chapel itself is ideally a beautiful, prominent, and inviting place where all campus members can gather to celebrate their faith. For people of all beliefs, having multi-faith meditation spaces (indoor and outdoor) on campus that are themselves beautiful and inspiring fosters an awareness of faith in God and the presence of God's spirit. For Catholics, the availability of the tradition's sacramental life, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, will be facilitated by prominent postings of Mass times throughout campus and on university web portals. For those of other faith traditions, publicizing their services on campus or in the wider community speaks to our respect for diverse faith traditions. The frequent availability of retreats and other contemplative opportunities for all (students, faculty, staff, and administrators) underscores the institution's commitment to the spiritual life.

Art, Architecture, and Campus Space

Campuses that lift our spirits and encourage community offer all who enter the opportunity to consider the glory of God through art, architecture, and beautiful spaces. Magnificent and prominently displayed religious art and outdoor sculptures or grottoes contribute to this priority. Devoting precious institutional resources to updating and renovating these, as necessary, sends a powerful signal throughout the campus about their importance. Naming buildings and campus thoroughfares after saints, founders, or other important figures reflective of the institution's particular charism or founding order is another way to make the tradition visible. Classrooms can contain imagery and artwork that reflect a Catholic university's pursuit of both faith and reason.



Communications

Institutional communications, electronic and print, offer a dynamic glimpse into the life of the university. Publications, stationery, admissions brochures, and program advertisements can carefully proclaim the unique identity and mission of the institution. The selection of beautiful images that promote and reflect the special aspects of the university presents another opportunity. The ways in which the institution describes itself in advertisements for faculty, staff, and administrative openings offer an additional chance for articulating its characteristics and priorities.

What Else Do People See?

Beyond considering what our architecture and art, publications and websites convey, it is helpful to reflect on what else people notice about us. A look at the programs we offer, the context and content of our curricula, the priorities expressed in our budgets, and the ways we engage with our neighboring communities all reveal dimensions of our Catholic identity.

Stepping back and looking at ourselves through a stranger's eyes can help us come to a sharper understanding of our image. There are indeed many ways to be visibly Catholic.

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#2: Visibly Catholic

March 2012

How do you visibly promote Catholic identity on your campus? Please share with us your practices so that we might in turn share them with others. Send them to us at accu@accunet.org.



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