

Strengthening Catholic Identity

8TH OF A SERIES: SPIRITUAL AND LITURGICAL LIFE

Many college students today proclaim themselves “spiritual but not religious.” This description evokes both alarm—stemming from the rejection of religion by so many young people—and celebration—spurred by the recognition that a majority of students harbor a deep and abiding thirst for spiritual growth.

Approximately 7 of every 10 students want their college or university to help them develop their personal values. Nearly half of all students want their campus to encourage personal expressions of spirituality. On Catholic campuses, this latter proportion rises to nearly 60 percent. Addressing questions of meaning and supporting students in holistic personal growth remains essential to the mission and reflects the core values, beliefs, and commitments of Catholic colleges and universities.

Catholic colleges and universities excel in supporting the development of human flourishing and promoting vibrant liturgical life. The integration of intellectual development with spiritual growth stands as a hallmark of Catholic higher education. Our challenge lies in creating respectful and effective opportunities for spiritual transformation.



Avenues for Spiritual Development

Spirituality in Higher Education, a longitudinal study conducted at the University of California, Los Angeles, identifies five areas to illustrate student spiritual development:¹

- Spiritual Quest
- Ecumenical Worldview
- Ethic of Caring
- Charitable Involvement
- Equanimity

Catholic institutions in the United States provide opportunities for growth in each of these areas. Working together, faculty and administrators, campus ministers and student affairs personnel

¹ Jennifer Anne Lindholm, Ph.D. “Students at Catholic Universities: Their Spiritual Development,” in John Wilcox, Ph.D. *Revisioning Mission: The Future of Catholic Higher Education* (2013), pp. 117–144.

integrate spiritual development into courses, extracurricular activities, and community-based learning. They provide inviting, experienced-based, and challenging forums for engagement and reflection.

Spiritual Quest. Faculty consistently introduce pertinent discussion of life's "big questions" into the classroom. Interdisciplinary panels address current topics like evolution and intelligent design. University leaders openly pursue their own spiritual quests and encourage the inner work that facilitates such growth among others on campus.

Catholic institutions also provide space for these pursuits. Home to an amazing range of sacred spaces, our campuses offer areas that range from interdenominational prayer rooms, to intimate chapels, to grand basilicas. The array of liturgical architecture hosts a rich spectrum of devotional practices: meditation, contemplation, and varied styles of worship. Many campuses provide Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim students with dedicated sacred space for prayer. Some institutions provide open, non-denominational areas for general use.

For those who, in their spiritual hunger, recognize a call to faith in Jesus Christ, the invitation to full and active participation in the source and summit of the Catholic faith awaits. Catholic



campuses consistently provide evocative music, substantive preaching, and graceful ritual. The liturgy, as celebrated on campus, demonstrates an active expression of vibrant faith. The call to ministry that flows through baptism gives practical expression in the training and involvement of greeters, lectors, song leaders, and Eucharistic ministers. Catholic campuses welcome students into multigenerational communities of faith who gather in meaningful worship and go forth in love and

service to the world.

Ecumenical Worldview. A large number of Catholic campuses sponsor study abroad and immersion trips to expand student perspective and alter the horizon of their universe. Classes in world religions and student discussions of how various traditions approach events like marriage or death help students appreciate the complexity and interrelatedness of being human. Student awareness becomes awakened by visits to different faith communities around the campus. Developing an ecumenical worldview marks a critical aspect of preparation for living as responsible citizens in our diverse and frequently fragmented world.

Ethic of Caring. Personal involvement and conversation with people from a range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds deepen the awareness of our interdependence. Guided reflection on the effects of personal choices pushes students out of their comfort zones and raises questions about their worldview and attitudes. Retreats provide opportunities for honest reflection on the contrast between a self-centered life and an ethic of caring.

Charitable Involvement. Service learning and participation in community outreach provide firsthand experience in working with those in need. Professional schools at many Catholic colleges and universities provide direct assistance through clinics for health care, law, and financial counseling. Interaction with clients prompts questions about the systemic causes of poverty and inequity that compel one to move beyond charity to work for justice. In all these endeavors, prayerful reflection continues to affect career choices and inspire lifelong commitment to charitable involvement.

Equanimity. A sense of peace and equanimity emerges as a consequence of personal meditation and communal reflection. Through campus ministry, students have access to spiritual directors, and alumni bear witness to the influence of these professionals on vocational choices.² Catholic higher education advocates a delicate balance of mind, body, and spirit that brings a stability and composure to living life abundantly.

By providing opportunities for prayer and worship and in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, Catholic colleges and universities not only address today's hunger for spirituality but also actively contribute to the new evangelization called for by the Church.



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² Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "The Influence of College Experiences on Vocational Discernment to Priesthood and Religious Life," (September 2012), p. 5.