

Campus Ministry

Meeting young souls on their turf to find answers through Jesus



The statistics are daunting. By the time Catholic college students reach their senior year and prepare to graduate, 75 to 80 percent are no longer actively involved in the Church. Indianapolis Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin says statistics demonstrate that unbelief in the United States is being driven by young people.

"We do a very good job in K through 12, but once many of our young people leave our Catholic high schools, they are left to their own devices," said Archbishop Tobin, who also serves as the chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Catholic Community Foundation (CCF). "We've got to be able to reach out to them. Pope Francis tells us it's part of our mission and he invites the Church to a mission of mercy on the margins. Frequently, the world of young people is a margin where the Church needs to be."

Matt Faley, director of the Office of Young Adult and College Campus Ministry, has seen first hand how the modern young adult requires a modern campus ministry program that is built around seeking, not waiting for them to come. He says they need to be introduced, or re-introduced, to the Church.

"Without the funds and investment and people believing in the need and the mission of campus ministry, it would be very difficult to reach those souls we are losing – those 75 to 80 percent," Faley said. "They know the need to be connected to the Church as a college student, but they also want to see their friends. What happens is the Church and Jesus become just another choice among choices."

Since the Office of Young Adult and College Campus Ministry was established seven years ago, several investment gifts of seed funding have been made through the Catholic Community Foundation for the campuses at Butler University, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, and the University of Indianapolis. Faley said additional investments have been made in the last three years that have allowed the campuses to reinstate chaplaincies, bring missionary-based young adult teams to IUPUI, and hire a full-time campus minister at Butler.

"Without the funds at CCF, those seeds would not have been able to see the fruits we are already starting to see from investments," said Faley. "Without these resources, it's almost impossible to fully invest in our students. We only have them for 4 to 6 years, and without the financial and people power to go out and seek and find them, it becomes very challenging to have a campus ministry program."

This concentrated time and environment of college is how people can invest in the present Church, Faley added. "It's common to think that these young adults are the future of the Church. But if we're able to call out the gifts that God has given them, we're able to develop a more vibrant Church."

Even with the high statistics of inactive young adult Catholics, the paradigm is slowly shifting back in favor of the Church. Faley believes campus ministry is playing a pivotal role, and it's because of college alumni who are also active members of parishes around the archdiocese who want to give back and who want to see an investment in the young Church.

"God calls us all through our gifts and through our resources to give in various ways, but the uniqueness of campus ministry is that we are building the present and the future of our Church," he said. "To be able to address that need, great things have already happened through the endowments. But with more resources, we can do numerous things that God is calling out of these young souls when we are able to serve and walk alongside them."

(For information on how to leave a gift to campus ministry through the Catholic Community Foundation, contact Ellen Brunner at (317) 236-1427 / (800) 382-9836, ext. 1427 or by email at ebrunner@archindy.org.)

