

YOUR CATHOLIC FAITH ON CAMPUS

A Pastoral Message from the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania

Dear Catholic Students,

The colleges and the universities across Pennsylvania have been preparing to welcome you to a new academic year. You have, we hope, been refreshed and renewed during the summer days; you have been finishing the tasks of registering for classes, moving into your residences, and obtaining your books. You have been making new friends and renewing friendships already begun. We, your bishops, want to greet you warmly in this joyful time and give you a special message of encouragement and challenge. Perhaps you are wondering: "What is it that the bishops can tell me that I have not already heard from parents, teachers, pastors, alumni, resident advisors, coaches, classmates, and friends?" We do understand that you have already been given plenty of sound advice from many important people in your life and that you will have more than your share of "required reading" in the days ahead. As the chief shepherds of the dioceses of Pennsylvania, we want, however, to express to you, dear students, the fundamental importance of linking your studies, your work, your leisure, and all the advice you have already received to the special demand of the Gospel to be a follower of Christ. It is Jesus who calls you to be faithful and joyful as you grow in "wisdom, age, and grace."

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

- Romans 12:2

Your college years are a time of both transformation and renewal. They will hold both joy and challenge. The opportunity to grow in knowledge, to learn new skills, and to explore new ideas will open exciting horizons for your future. You will develop wonderful new friendships in an atmosphere of greater independence and freedom of life. At the same time, this freedom will call forth on your part even more personal responsibility. Use this opportunity not simply for specialized professional training and broader social experience, but also for the development of yourself as a person of faith, virtue, and culture. Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, encourages you to continue in the search for truth and meaning throughout your lives when he says: "the human spirit must be cultivated in such a way that there results a growth in its ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgements, and to develop a religious, moral, and social sense" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #23).

"Do not conform yourselves to this age."

- Romans 12:2

Your effort to develop your potential to its fullness will not be an easy task, nor unfold automatically; it will involve the hard work of integrating different kinds of life experience. To come to genuine fullness requires integrating your growing awareness of God's place in your life. This is not always appreciated in today's world. We live in a culture that often pushes aside faith and the spiritual



life. Too often, greater emphasis is given to the pursuit of material things, to interpretations based on worldly perspectives, and to values which are contrary to the Gospel. You no doubt will experience all of these temptations in your life, and you will be no stranger to them during these years of higher education as you interact with persons and ideas from diverse backgrounds. Remember that Christians look at the world differently because Christ has revealed to us God's intention for human life in the world.

In your college experience you will have the chance to respond to the basic human question that persons of every generation have faced: "How shall I live my life?" As you respond to this essential question, our hope is that you will recognize how important it is for you to remain close to Jesus Christ and his Church. As a person of faith, baptized in God's Spirit, you have been blessed with the life and grace of God. It is this life of faith that will enable you to do the will of God and to achieve with great success all that God has planned for you.

*"We, though many, are one body in Christ."
- Romans 12:5*

As your bishops, we care deeply for you. One way in which we attempt to express our solidarity with you is through your Campus Newman Center or Campus Ministry Office. These provide many occasions for you to worship God and to meet other Catholics who share your love for God and your journey of faith. We hope one of the first things you will do is find out the schedule for Sunday and weekday Mass, Confession, and special devotions. Please get acquainted with the community service opportunities and pro-life activities that the Campus Ministry Office can provide. Be active participants in Campus Ministry activities. The Newman Center/Campus Ministry Office is a place to meet other Catholic students for fun and relaxation or for a quiet place to study and pray. It will be, we hope, "a home away from home."

*"Judge what is God's will,
what is good, pleasing, and perfect."
- Romans 12:2*

Your college years should be a time for you to deepen your relationship with Jesus. The gift of human friendship is a wonderful blessing. However, we should be ever mindful of St. Augustine's insight that our hearts will always be restless until they rest in the Lord. College is a time when your relationship with Christ will be tested by novel ideas, convincing arguments, and well-intentioned skeptics. Remember that Christ's loving embrace of humanity has stood the test of time and that his love for you is steadfast and abiding.

When deciding what path you will follow in life, when exposed to ideas that are contrary to your faith, when faced with challenges that will test your values, your decision-making ability, your faith and maturity, there is no greater wisdom than that which comes from a growing relationship with Jesus. There is no friendship you will have in life that will give you more confidence, more self-assurance, or mean more to you than your friendship

with him. Imagine what students could achieve if they had the experience of the all powerful and loving Jesus strengthening them throughout the day.

Many college students have discovered this already. We encourage you to grow in this relationship through personal prayer, the sacraments, especially going to Confession regularly, and, above all else, participating at Mass and receiving Holy Eucharist often. Take advantage of all your Church has to offer to help you live life in Christ. To enjoy a close relationship with God, be attentive to the wisdom of our Church about the spiritual life. To build close relationships with fellow students in greater personal integrity, be responsive to the wisdom of our Church about the moral life. The Church has been called an "expert in humanity," and she offers her wisdom to help you grow in your love of God and neighbor.

*"Cling to what is good."
- Romans 12:9*

During the college years, students often struggle with questions about their faith. Some questions are the result of deliberate attacks on the Catholic faith by those who do not understand or respect it. Other questions arise from personal difficulties which prompt the students to address new and serious life issues. Still other questions are prompted by the poor example of fellow Christians. The Church encourages you to persevere in searching for the Truth. Know that many Catholics before you have struggled with these same questions and found the Church to be the "pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). We encourage you to be patient, honest, and courageous in your search. Trust that the Lord has provided you with a faith that is rock solid and a Church that is true.

*"Be fervent in spirit;
he whom you serve is the Lord."
- Romans 12:11*

Each of us - at whatever stage of life we find ourselves - has the responsibility to live the great commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind ... [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-38). For many in the college community, you will be an example of what it means to be a Catholic and a follower of Jesus. Consequently, you should never underestimate the power of your words and actions to influence and deeply touch the minds and hearts of those who come to know you. Jesus calls you to be a living witness of God's unchanging love and to bring others to know Jesus Christ. By living your faith daily, not only will you be following Our Lord's command to "let your light shine before all," but you will also be affording yourself the unparalleled opportunity to embrace for yourself in a new and vibrant way the religious heritage that you have received. In doing so, you will come to experience personally the power, strength, and peace that comes from living the values of the Gospel.



Throughout these years of study, we commit ourselves to pray for you so that the riches of our Catholic faith will be ever more rooted and experienced in your lives and in your hearts. May our gracious God bless and bring to successful completion all your endeavors.

*"May the grace of our
Lord Jesus Christ be with you!"
- Romans 16:20*

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