



THE ORATORY TIMES

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Heaven Meets Campus *Sunday Mass Returns to Heinz Chapel*



Distribution of the Eucharist on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

The Pittsburgh Oratory is once again offering a weekly Sunday Mass at Heinz Chapel at 11:00am. This is an intentional spiritual strategy: by bringing the Holy Eucharist to the heart of campus, we make it easier for students to remain close to Christ and to invite their friends to encounter Him. We are not simply maintaining faith on campus; we are multiplying it.

Our return is also part of a longer story. When the Oratory was founded in 1961, Heinz Chapel was the locus of our campus ministry efforts. Its soaring fourteenth-century French Gothic architecture, and its stained-glass windows depicting St. Philip Neri and St. John Henry Newman

alongside figures from American and Church history, have always made the chapel a place that seems to yearn for the meeting of heaven and earth in the Mass. Fr. William Clancy, C.O., so beloved by generations of students, is remembered in the great oak tree planted in his honor beside the chapel after his death in 1981. For decades, students encountered beauty, reverence, and even the beginnings of their own vocations and marriages within those walls.

When the Oratory later paused weekly Masses at Heinz Chapel to focus on renewing campus ministry – a strategy that has borne abundant fruit – many felt the absence as a real loss. That longing for a regular Sunday liturgy never fully disappeared.

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St. John Henry Newman, C.O. Declared Doctor of the Church

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

By canonizing some of the faithful, the Church solemnly proclaims that these individuals practiced “heroic virtue” in his or her own life and “lived in fidelity to God’s grace” (CCC 828). In so doing, the Church holds them up as witnesses and models – who show that holiness is possible in every age, in any circumstance, and in all vocations – and she declares them as warranting public veneration and public request for intercession (CCC 956).

On occasion, the Church sometimes declares a canonized saint as belonging to a particular subset of the saints, called the “Doctors of the Church.” These saints are not those saints who worked as physicians, nor are they those who somehow demonstrated holiness to a degree greater than the “regular” canonized saints. Rather, the doctors of the Church are those who had such extraordinary learning that through them “the darkness of error was scattered, dark things were made clear, doubts resolved [and] the difficulties

of Scripture opened.” (See Benedict XIV, *De Canoniz.*, trans. Addis). These saints are those who contributed so significantly to the doctrine of the Church such that how the Church understands the reality of Christ and His loving work in the world will forever be influenced by their teaching. This select group of 39 Saints are the “heavy



Portrait of St. John Henry Newman, C.O.

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Bishop Eckman Visits for Newman Night

By Hannah Naylor, Campus Minister

With the recent pruning of our numerous weekly events – to allow more space for Bible studies and intentional evangelization – “Newman Night” has become the staple weekly gathering for the Newman Center. Every Sunday at 7:00am, students from universities across the Pittsburgh area come together for pizza, fellowship, and a talk from a Catholic speaker. Topics range from proclaiming the Gospel and sharing personal testimonies to discussions on angels, saints, and the mystery of suffering with Christ.

This year, we were especially blessed to welcome the newly installed Bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, The Most Reverend Mark Anthony Eckman, who graciously came to speak to our students. At his installation Mass on July 14, 2025, he declared his intention to visit every parish of the diocese to share the vision encapsulated in his episcopal motto, “Serve in faith and charity.” That he

included our students in this pilgrimage of pastoral care is a courtesy for which we remain deeply grateful.

Roughly 120 students attended Newman Night with the Bishop. After greeting and conversing with many of them, Bishop Eckman took the microphone and shared the same heartfelt vision he has offered to parishes throughout the diocese: a desire to cultivate in all the faithful a renewed love for the poor.

He reflected on the powerful words of Matthew 25: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me... whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” He emphasized the dignity of every human person and our call to see and serve Christ in the poor – whether in Oakland, downtown, or any corner of our city. He spoke not as a distant administrator but as a man convicted that each unloved soul

of Pittsburgh bears the image of Christ.

The Bishop then opened the floor for questions and suggestions from students, and the conversation was so lively that he would have stayed longer if time had allowed. He remained after, blessing many religious items, meeting our favorite Newman Center baby, Gemma, and conversing more with students.

In the days that followed, students

approached us asking about organizing a sock drive, assembling care bags for the homeless, collecting winter jackets, and how to volunteer with the Red Door downtown. To awaken a desire to serve the poor is to awaken a desire for deeper virtue and a more intimate friendship with Christ – and we are grateful to His Excellency for inspiring that momentum here in Pittsburgh.



Students gather for photo with the Bishop after his talk at Newman Night.

Meet the Newman Center Senior Class of ‘26

By Hannah Naylor, Campus Minister

I vividly remember my third year as a FOCUS missionary thinking, “There are so many students at Carnegie Mellon becoming involved so quickly at the Newman Center.” My first year of mission work took place in the midst of COVID, when we faced restriction upon restriction. By my second year, some of those limitations had eased. While many students – especially at Pitt – were active, we still had to fight for time and navigate the lingering COVID challenges for students at CMU.

Then came my third year, the first without any COVID restrictions, and what we witnessed was grace upon grace, fruit upon fruit. The senior class of 2026 was entering college life as it once was, yet with one significant difference: a deep longing for community, belonging, and authentic relationships that lingered in the wake of the pandemic.

This class has left an enduring mark on our Newman Center. Many have served as Bible study leaders, mentors, and warm, welcoming faces within the community. Their dedication to prayer and genuine relationships has drawn more and more classmates into the life of the Newman Center – we now have more seniors involved than we did when they first arrived as freshmen. That growth is due in large part to their evangelization and powerful witness of faith.

It is my joy to introduce you to some of these remarkable seniors!

First, meet Abby Myers! She chose Pitt because she wanted the full experience of a “big school” – cheering for a football team, exploring a new city, and earning her nursing degree in four years. Raised Catholic, Abby came to college with a desire to continue pursuing her faith, knowing this was her moment to claim it as her own. She kept returning to the Newman Center

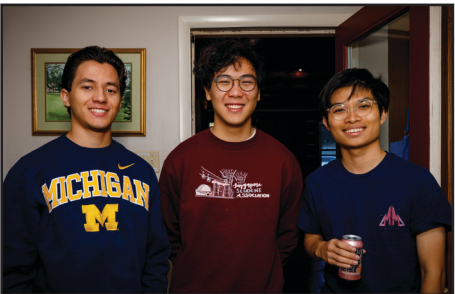


Abby (right) enjoying the 2025 Newman Center Senior Dinner with her friend, Lydia.

not only to deepen her relationship with Christ, but also because of the genuine friendships she formed – thanks in particular to the FOCUS missionaries who invested deeply in her and helped her grow in prayer.

Abby shared that her greatest takeaway from her Newman experience is a desire for ongoing growth in her prayer life after college, especially through Eucharistic Adoration. One of her favorite Newman memories is the annual Spring Soirée. She loves getting dressed up and dancing the night away with friends! And I can personally attest – she’s a talented swing dancer!

Meet Xavier Lien! Initially, when deciding to join the ranks of scholars at Carnegie Mellon University, Xavier was only thinking about academic opportunities because he wanted a rigorous Computer Science education. It wasn’t until later that he did some research on the Catholic scene here and was encouraged by the presence of the Oratory and Newman Center. He shares that he was “drawn by a combination of desiring to stay close to the Lord and to continue to be formed by Him as well as



Xavier (middle) and peers on CMU Retreat at the Rednal Retreat House.

a desire to contribute to the building of God’s kingdom here at CMU.”

Many of his favorite memories over the years reside at Rednal! The CMU retreats highlight the deep fellowship amongst the Tartan Catholic community with an ordered mix of working hard and playing hard! Xavier expresses his gratitude for the accessibility and frequency of the sacraments at the Oratory and will deeply miss the people that make up the Newman club community!

Next up is Shelly Chen, a newly baptized Catholic! Shelly originally chose Pitt purely for academic reasons, and it wasn’t until her junior year – after being introduced by the missionaries – that she discovered the Newman Center. Once she found it, the Christ-centered friendships are what made her stay. “Meeting and loving new people meant a lot to me, and it’s wonderful to support others the same way they have supported me,” she shared.



Shelly (middle) and peers at Senior Dinner 2025.

Beyond the sanctifying milestone of becoming Catholic, Shelly’s year in the Newman community has been filled with cherished memories – especially at Rednal! From learning to ski for the first time, to cooking meals for everyone, to learning Spanish card games, to playing chess, to spending quiet moments with the Lord in Adoration, those ski trips and retreats became a source of both rest and spiritual growth for her.

Shelly expressed that “words cannot describe how sincerely thankful I am

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Heaven Meets Campus at Heinz Chapel

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The desire for a restored presence in Heinz Chapel has long been shared by the university itself. Beginning in 2019, leaders at the University of Pittsburgh repeatedly encouraged the Oratory to consider returning to the chapel, recognizing its value for the student community. FOCUS missionaries at Pitt voiced the same conviction. Last year’s team director, Marykate O’Brien, put it simply: the single most effective way to help more students practice their faith was to offer Sunday Mass at Heinz Chapel. Their instincts were right: we are already seeing the fruit.

For the past three years, we offered a mid-week night Mass on campus—a cherished anchor for our most committed students. Moving to Sunday has broadened our reach without losing depth. What was once a gathering of dozens has become a congregation in the hundreds. Our first Sunday Masses drew nearly 200 students, and we’ve seen attendance ebb and flow between 300 and 150 – far more than the 96 our Oratory chapel can hold. Students serve as lectors, servers, ushers, and choir members, creating an atmosphere where their peers immediately feel at home. For many, even the short walk to St. Paul Cathedral or the Oratory can feel like a world away, while an on-campus Mass lowers the barrier for those who are uncertain, searching, or returning to the faith.

The Mass itself has taken on a distinct beauty. The sanctuary is filled with devout student servers whose reverence sets the tone. The student ushers help ensure a practical and prayerful Offertory, preparing ciboria based on the number in attendance so that the proper number of hosts is consecrated – a necessity, since the Blessed Sacrament cannot be reserved in the chapel. Sacred music, with the Oratory Choir led by Mr. Nick Will and the Sacred Music Fellows, lifts hearts and minds with a beauty that matches the chapel’s Gothic majesty.

Students are responding. Many who wander in out of curiosity now return week after week. Several have shared that this is their first real encounter with Catholic worship.

This year, thirty-six students have expressed a desire to receive the sacraments of initiation – a striking sign of God’s grace at work on campus.

Christ calls His disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Celebrating Mass in the midst of a secular university is one concrete way we answer that call. Yet the mission unfolds most powerfully after the final blessing, as students carry the love they encounter in the Mass back into the life of the campus, into their classrooms, clubs, and conversations as missionaries. The Lord continues to draw souls to Himself – and we are beyond grateful to be workers in His harvest.

Growth in Bible Study Attendance New Strategy Pays Off

By Dan Tully,
Pitt FOCUS Team Director

In the 2024-2025 Academic Year, August through April combined, FOCUS at Pitt racked up an official headcount of 180 Pitt, Chatham, Duquesne, and Carlow students who attended at least one Catholic Bible Study at the Newman Center. In this Academic Year, we surpassed that total on October 22.

But this progress did not arise from the FOCUS missionaries simply spending more time tabling on campus or offering more enticing snacks than we did last year. This newfound fruit has come because the “master of the harvest” has sent out more “laborers for his harvest” (Matthew 9:38) in the form of student leaders willing to sacrifice their time and energy to lead their own Bible Studies.

FOCUS missionaries lead excellent Bible Studies. However, growth in student participation at the scale we’ve seen this year can only come when student leaders take zealous ownership over their baptismal call to missionary discipleship and begin to actively invite others to encounter and get to know Christ as they do.

Student leaders have enduring access to many corners of the campus social fabric that missionaries seldom encounter. They consistently invite students to their Bible Studies who otherwise may never have set foot in the Newman Center or spoken to a missionary.

Student leaders are also often more relatable and approachable. A Bible Study invitation from a fellow sophomore studying engineering can often surmount a student’s interior walls

of hesitation far more than an identical invitation from a missionary would have.

The Bible Study participant headcount, though potentially misleading in the implication that one can quantify miracles such as conversion of heart, is a sturdy testament to the hard but abundantly fruitful work of our student leaders this Fall.

The growth at Pitt is echoed by the growth at CMU, where there are over 128 participants in Bible Studies. Led by Abbie Hedglen and the CMU FOCUS team, they have quietly been living out the Lord’s invitation to make disciples, with great clarity and conviction.

The “master of the harvest” has blessed us this year with generous, magnanimous, and zealous “laborers for his harvest.”

Barn Dances Welcome Record Numbers to Rednal

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

The Oratory hosted not one, but two Barn Dances at Rednal this fall – each one bigger, louder, and more joy-filled than the last. Students, young adults, families, alumni, and friends packed the grounds for a full day of fall festivities: games, hearty food, bonfires, square dancing, apple bobbing, and fireworks that lit up the Ligonier sky. Estimated attendance for both Barn Dances combined are over 400!

The Young Adult Barn Dance on October 18 enjoyed warm, golden weather – the kind of fall day that feels tailor-made for Rednal. Young adults, graduate students, and alumni brought incredible energy. The competition was fierce but cheerful: alumna Lea Koroly took home the limbo crown, while graduate student Rinu Sebastian proved unbeatable at apple bobbing.

One week later, on October 25, it was the undergraduates’ turn. Students

from Pitt, CMU, Chatham, Duquesne, Penn State, Lock Haven, Franciscan, Johns Hopkins, and Columbia made the pilgrimage – some traveling hundreds of miles – to experience what has quickly become the greatest day of fall fun you can have on an 87-acre Catholic retreat property. The men of the Fratican roasted a whole pig (to rave reviews), while football and tug-of-war filled out an already packed schedule. CMU alumna and FOCUS missionary at Columbia Nelly Hadlaw won limbo, while Cole Mason narrowly edged out AJ Markiewicz of Penn State in a tightly contested showdown of 64 contestants.

Square dance calling was provided by David Richman and John Hill, who tag-teamed to keep the dancers moving (mostly) in sync.

Each evening ended the way every Barn Dance should: warm cider in hand, as Fr. Peter’s fireworks lit up the sky, reflecting the glow in everyone’s hearts.



Prodigal Students Encounter Father’s Love at Rednal

Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

The parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32) is paradigmatic of our spiritual lives. The son asks for his inheritance early, intentionally rupturing his relationship with his father, so that he can go off to a foreign land and squander his inheritance through immoral living. As the land is struck with famine, he eventually comes to his senses and decides to return to his father’s house, simply hoping to be a servant. However, as he returns, the father is waiting for him. After seeing him at a distance, the father runs to his son, embraces him, places symbols of belonging and honor upon him and instructs his servants to prepare a great feast to celebrate his son’s return.

As fallen human beings, we constantly relive various aspects of this parable. Through sin, we squander our inheritance and by repentance we return to God the Father.

In November, about 25 students had the blessing of attending “The Father’s House” retreat at Rednal. Jack Crisafi, the East Area regional director for FOCUS, was on site to facilitate the weekend and to cook some amazing meals for us all. Many rightly commented that this was the best that we had eaten in months! The talks, primarily given by Jack and our FOCUS missionaries, walked us through various spiritual insights contained within the parable of the prodigal son.

First, we looked at the views of God. We may tend to impose upon God the

fallen aspects of humanity that we have experienced in numerous ways, while in truth, the Father extends his unconditional love to each of us. Then we considered where we may look to find love, and how this can sometimes go astray. Yet, as the Father is always eager to welcome us home from a foreign land, we next looked at how God heals us – primarily through his sacrifice upon the cross and the closeness with Himself that God offers us. Finally, the retreat concluded with considering the goodness of living within “the Father’s house” and how we can continue to do that going forward from the retreat weekend.

Throughout it all, our time was filled with prayer and friendship. On Saturday alone, the students must have spent

more than two and a half hours before the Blessed Sacrament! Outside of prayer, the games and laughter were certainly abundant, extending for some into the early hours of the morning. In short, it was a weekend of many graces, which will hopefully help us to live in union with our Father in heaven.



Students participate in small group discussion after a retreat conference.



Jack Crisafi gives a retreat conference.



Group photo of students participating in the Father’s House Retreat.

Sacred Music Fellowship Program Bearing Remarkable Fruit

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

“St. Philip Neri was profoundly convinced that there is in music and in song a mysterious and a mighty power to stir the heart with high and noble emotions, and an especial fitness to raise it above sense to the love of heavenly things.”
– Cardinal Capecelatro,
Life of St. Philip Neri

The Saint Gregory Institute of Sacred Music at the Pittsburgh Oratory seeks to preserve and foster the venerable tradition of Catholic sacred music by equipping young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to appreciate, understand, and produce sacred music of the highest quality while adding dignity and solemnity to the liturgies at the Oratory itself.

Thanks to the enhancements to our Sacred Music Program made possible by the Magnify the Lord Campaign – especially the acquisition of our St. Francis de Sales, C.O. organ – and to the generosity of our benefactors, the Oratory is able to offer eleven competitive fellowships for advanced training in Sacred Music (eight in singing, two in organ, and one in choral conducting).

Working with Nicholas Will, our Director of Sacred Music, and our Oratory Choir Professional Core Members, the Institute’s Sacred Music fellows gain a familiarity with the essential elements of Catholic music:

Gregorian chant, choral polyphony, organ music, and hymnody, all the while developing a skill set enabling them to render this music at a high level on a weekly basis at the 11 AM Sunday Heinz Chapel Mass each week.

The Sacred Music Fellows are provided a modest stipend each semester, which enables them to invest meaningful time and energy into improving their artistry. In this way, the effects of the Institute extend far beyond the Oratory or even Pittsburgh. When Sacred Music Fellows graduate, they will have the passion, skills, and knowledge to positively impact the practice of sacred music in their parishes across the country.

Already, recipients of the fellowships, who are mentored closely by the Oratory’s unusually talented Nicholas Will, are contributing meaningfully to Sacred Music programs around the country. Ryan Seaver, who held the Fr. Edward Caswall, C.O. Organ Fellowship for two years is now the Associate Organist at the Cathedral of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Knoxville, where he accompanies liturgies and is himself serving in a teaching and mentoring role within the Cathedral Academy of Music.

Looking back, Seaver describes the fellowship program as “easily one of the most valuable of my professional career” and “the most valuable experience of my time in college.” He said that his time working with

Nicholas Will, who provides direct and hands-on mentorship and teaching to all the fellows, was extremely valuable “professionally, musically, and a great help to my human formation in my time as a college student.” In this, he is not alone. Jenna Toth, who now serves as a FOCUS Missionary at Johns Hopkins University, says that the fellowship program has helped her to become a much stronger musician, especially in sight reading complex harmonies and chant. Now, she is starting a choir of college students to sing for Mass, which would not have been possible without the formation she gained during her time with the Oratory Choir. Toth, who describes Will as “an incredible choir director and musician” says that she has carried many things that Will

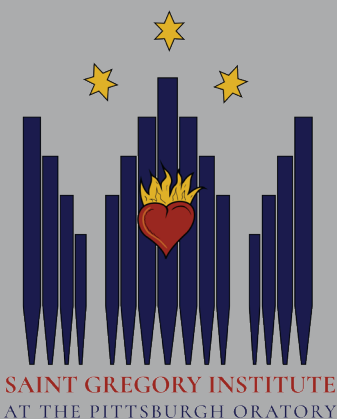
has taught her into her new musical endeavors. Seaver also praises Will as “one of the most competent and accomplished individuals I have ever had the opportunity to learn from, and his experiences in Rome combined with his general knowledge of both ecclesial, secular, and musical history went a long way to helping me get a more complete picture of the Catholic Liturgy and the musical heritage we as Catholics have received, as lived out through the Liturgies of the Pittsburgh Oratory.” Toth, too, states that she will be “forever grateful to have been able to worship the Lord with the Oratory Choir.”

We Oratorians could not agree more, and we are proud to play a small role in carrying on the great musical tradition of the Catholic Church.



Nicholas Will conducting the choir at Heinz Chapel Mass.

GET TO KNOW SACRED MUSIC AT THE PITTSBURGH ORATORY!



Saint Gregory Institute at The Pittsburgh Oratory

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Nicholas J. Will, Director of Sacred Music, oratorymusic@gmail.com

OUTLINE OF MUSIC AT ORATORY MASSES:

- Saturday & Sunday 4:00pm Masses*
- Simple Gregorian chant, English hymnody, and organ masterworks
- Sunday 9:00am Mass*
- Simple Gregorian chant, English hymnody, sacred solo vocal music, and organ masterworks
- Sunday 11:00am Mass*
- More advanced Gregorian chant, choral polyphony, and organ masterworks
- Sunday 9:00pm Mass*
- Quiet Mass with no organ
- Feast Days & Solemnities*
- The 5:15pm Mass on feast days features simple Gregorian chant and organ music in the vein of the Church’s long-standing tradition of the “Organ Mass.” On solemnities, the presence of a cantor further enhances congregations’ singing.

Magnify the Lord Capital Campaign Update

By Fr. Michael Darcy, C.O.

A few weeks ago I had a brief experience that was a poignant indication of the success of the Magnify the Lord capital campaign. I was coming home from my morning of teaching at Central Catholic High School. I rode down the Oratory’s back driveway and parked my bike in the basement. Coming through the basement door into the student center I was startled to see what seemed like fifteen or twenty students gathered in the main conference room. I moved past quickly so as not to disturb whatever student gathering was going on. As I hurried by I thought, “We never used to schedule meetings for student groups in the morning.” A moment later I thought, “Wait a minute: what group would arrange to meet in the morning on a weekday? Most students have classes.”

I doubled back to take a look at what was actually going on, and sure enough, it was not an organized meeting. It was simply a group of students who gathered to study and socialize. This was a new sight for me. The Newman Center in the morning is usually a ghost town. A morning stroll through the basement might involve bumping into a student or two, but nothing more than that. The bustling activity I had come upon was more typical for an evening, and a weekend evening, at that.

I realized that what I was seeing was the difference made by the improvements to the basement as a result of the Magnify the Lord campaign. The structural improvements and changes to the decor provided by the capital campaign resulted in a space more hospitable for our students than had been the case previously. And I have discovered that this was not an isolated incident. Since the refurbishment of the Newman Center, students are far more inclined to gather and spend time with

each other, their studies, and the Lord waiting for them in the chapel upstairs. Helping things further was the completion of the student center’s kitchen, which was delayed by permitting issues. I tell people from time to time that the “iron law” of campus ministry is, “If you have food, people come; if there’s no food, no one comes.” With our fully equipped kitchen, food is plentiful and easy to prepare. That further sustains the student presence.



Students eating Chick-fil-A after the celebration of the St. John Henry Newman Mass in the newly renovated conference room.

The improvements to the student center are only one aspect of the refurbishments paid for by the capital campaign. The Oratory’s windows were redone, which was badly needed (I no longer need to wear a ski hat at my desk when it is cold outside). I might mention how much the organ has benefited our worship, but I have done that many times already so I will restrain myself. The music program as a whole, directed by our Director of Sacred Music, Nick Will, has hit its

stride. The music at our Masses is better than ever. And thanks to the campaign, much needed improvements to Rednal will take place in 2026. As I mentioned earlier, the campaign concluded in the early fall of 2025. That is when we exceeded our goal of \$4.5 million by raising slightly more than \$5 million. As of the middle of November, 79% of our pledges have been redeemed. In other words, we have gathered nearly 80% of the money that was promised to us in the course of our fundraising. We have been told by our fundraising consultants that this puts us way ahead of schedule. It allows us to proceed with our renovation projects much more freely, which has been a great blessing. The campaign has been a great success, and we owe that success to so many of you. Your generosity has provided us with the means to expand the ministry that we love, beautify the worship that we love, and serve the Church that we love. We will never cease to be grateful for your help, and we will remember you in our prayers. God bless.

*"Jesus has made Himself
the Bread of Life to
give us life. Night and
day, He is there. If you
really want to grow in
love, come back to the
Eucharist, come back to
that Adoration."*

- St. Teresa of Calcutta

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Oratory Hosts All Saints Party for Families

By Mary McLeod, Friend of the Oratory

Although much of the Oratory’s ministry focuses on university students, it also caters to the spiritual needs of the “Little Oratory,” which includes the monthly Holy Half Hour for children. My children always look forward to this, admittedly because they get to play with candles, see their friends, and eat cookies afterwards. My goal in bringing them to adoration is, of course, to raise Carthusian monks and nuns happily bereft of the gustatory delights of this world in exchange for the incomparable sweetness of divine contemplation, but for now I’m using cookies.

Similarly, moving through the liturgical year with children often involves attempting to convey lofty theological concepts with the things that speak to them most: crafts and/or treats. In the age of big box Halloween stores, mountains of trick or treating candy,

and gory yard displays, the Catholic aspect of All Saints Day is easily obscured. Especially as my littles get a little older, I wanted them to understand why this holy day exists, and have a counterbalance to the “Halloween” they experience out in the world. Thus, I offered to help the Oratory bring back their All Saints’ Day party, and provide an opportunity for everyone to celebrate this beautiful solemnity. The party focused on what All Hallows Day, and consequently All Hallows Eve, truly commemorates: the holy men and women who have gone before us, whom we strive to follow home to heaven. Another mom in attendance, Angie Lemaire, remarked, “The All Saints Party was a perfect way to get both adults and kids engaged in this important day for our Catholic faith. We had a great time honoring some of our favorite saints in our lives!” Embodying the Church Triumphant

in a tangible way by dressing up as a favorite saint, vanquishing St. George’s dragon piñata, and finding the cross like St. Helena helped bring these holy heroes to life. We also incorporated some creativity with a saint bookmark craft, and a bit of competition with saint-themed candy guessing jars. Finally, a costume contest, which was won by a one year old St. Benedict. I hope these celebrations helped us “taste and see that the Lord is good,” (Ps 34:8), and someday my children

will understand that that means Jesus is better than cookies. Especially as we meditate upon the last things at the closing of the liturgical year, may we strive daily to follow in the footsteps of the saints, and arrive at the true joy of the heavenly banquet.



Families making bookmarks and other saint-themed crafts.



Kids take turns playing St. George by slaying a dragon piñata.

St. John Henry Newman, C.O. Declared Doctor of the Church

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hitters” of Catholic theology, and they have left an ineradicable mark on the Church’s tradition.

As many have no doubt heard, His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV solemnly declared the Oratory’s own beloved St. John Henry Newman, C.O. a doctor of the Church on November 1, 2025, a declaration which was received by Oratorians around the world with great joy.

As far as I can see, all such declarations serve at least two purposes for the faithful. First, they offer a reminder that the truly extraordinary scholars are those whose learning is in addition to, rather than a supplanting of, their Christian devotion. That is, the doctors of the Church are all first and foremost heroically virtuous, and only secondarily learned. The reason the doctors contribute to the Church’s doctrine so significantly is not only because of their learning – indeed, many heretics are quite well studied – but because their learning was transformed by their love for Christ.

Second, such declarations offer to the faithful indications of theological lodestars to whom they can reliably turn to learn more about their faith. When exploring a theological concept or doctrinal point, Catholics can always find in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* a “sure norm” for understanding the faith, since it offers a synthetic presentation of the entirety of the Church’s tradition (See John Paul II, *Fidei Depositum*, 3). However, for Catholics looking to understand something even more deeply, the doctors of the Church are the next great resource. As such, for one looking to

understand the Trinity more deeply, he may turn to St. Augustine’s *On the Trinity*. For one hoping to deepen their relationship with the Holy Spirit, she may turn to St. Basil’s *On the Holy Spirit*. For the student looking to understand the whole of Catholic theology, and how each aspect of the faith relates to the others, he may turn to St. Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae*. For one looking to understand the spiritual life more deeply, she may turn to the Oratory’s other doctor of the Church, St. Francis De Sales, C.O.’s *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Now that St. John Henry is a doctor of the Church, for what might the faithful turn to him?

Probably the same things for which they have already turned to him for more than a century. We can say, with little to no exaggeration, that St. John Henry’s *Idea of a University* serves as the most influential text on Catholic education today. His *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* has facilitated innumerable conversions to the Catholic faith, and provided generations of theologians with a framework through which they can understand the Church’s doctrine as it progresses through time. His *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* offers such fecund soil for contemplating issues of natural and religious knowing that it serves as something of a cornerstone of modern Catholic religious epistemology (a field which studies human knowing). And perhaps I show a little home team bias here, but I believe St. John Henry’s vast collections of homilies are the richest and most penetrating homilies to be written down and collected since the patristic period.

I was asked to reflect on how St. John Henry’s doctorate will impact

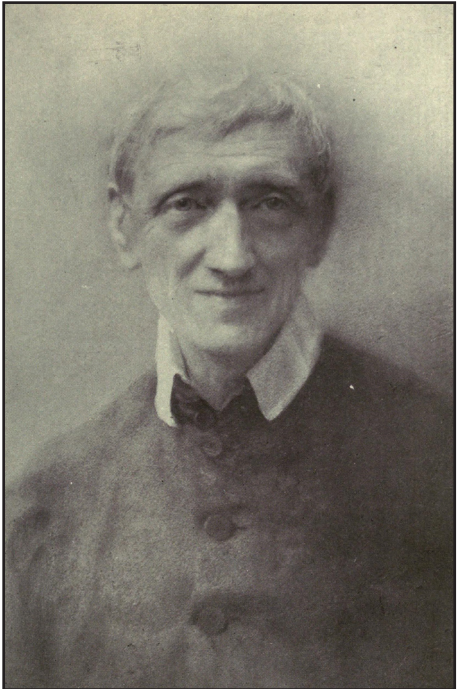
us at the Oratory and the Newman Center. I hope it does not seem trite if I suggest that the impact will be mostly negligible. This is not because we do not hold St. John Henry in high estimation, or that the doctorate means nothing to us. Rather, the impact will be negligible because we have already been treating him as though he were a doctor of the Church for decades. St. John Henry already plays such an integral role in who we are as Pittsburgh Oratorians, and the ministry we offer to our students, that his impact could scarcely become, in principle, larger. Indeed, substantially more than half of reading that novices do at the Pittsburgh Oratory are works from St. John Henry. His addresses to the Congregation of the Oratory are an irreplaceable treasure for how we understand our life as Oratorians, and even the ritual we use to receive a new novice into the house was crafted by St. John Henry. His impact on us will become larger only by each of us learning to live out his presentation of the Oratorian ideal more deeply.

Nevertheless, the declaration of doctor of the Church is a tremendous gift to the Church. I speak for all the Pittsburgh Oratorians when I express my deep gratitude for all those who contributed to the cause of making St. John Henry a doctor of the Church, including, and perhaps especially, those who have worked at the National Institute for Newman Studies right here in Pittsburgh, who were instrumental not only in the cause for canonization, but also the cause for the declaration of doctor of the Church.

As for the Cardinal himself, I suspect he cares not too much that he was made a doctor. Indeed, he probably rejoices

that his works have brought people close to Christ, but St. John Henry certainly did not consider himself a great saint: “I have nothing of a saint about me as every one knows, and it is a severe (and salutary) mortification to be thought next door to one. I may have a high view of many things, but it is the consequence of education and a peculiar cast of intellect – but this is very different from being what I admire. I have no tendency to be a saint – it is a sad thing to say so... People ought to feel this, most people do. But those who are at a distance have exalted notions about one. It is enough for me to black the saints’ shoes – if St. Philip uses blacking in heaven.” (See Ward, *Life*, 1:7).

Yet, the declaration of St. John Henry’s doctorate serves as a sure indication that he is not only a man of “heroic virtue,” but that he has “become what he admired” in St. Augustine and St. Athanasius: a great saint, and a great theologian.



PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE

Diaconate Ordination of

Br. Kurt Kessler, C.O.



Saturday, May 16, 2026

St. Paul Cathedral

A photograph of the interior of St. Paul Cathedral. In the foreground, a person in a white robe is lying face down on the polished floor. The background shows the ornate architecture of the cathedral, including a large altar with many candles and a balcony with a white railing.

Meet the Newman Center Senior Class of ‘26

Continued from Page 2

for everyone at the Newman Center – the missionaries, Hannah, and the Oratorians.” The friendships she has formed, the laughter and the tears, all hold a special place in her heart. As she looks ahead to graduation, she knows that Christ – and the people who have loved her here – will remain with her always. “I know that in my professional career and beyond, the light and love of our Father will continue in the relationships I form with others. Whether it be through the next Newman Center at my dental school, the patients and peers I befriend, or even a stranger, I invite myself and everyone to continue loving and caring for others like Jesus did.” Shelly is forever grateful that the Newman Center helped her come home to the Catholic Church.

Next in the lineup, I’d like to introduce you to Anthony Chaer! Attending Pitt for college was a given and having grown up in the Pittsburgh area, Anthony was already familiar with the Pittsburgh Oratory before coming to college. He expresses deep gratitude for “the support of the Oratorians, who do so much for all Catholics – but especially for college students – to help them get involved.”



Anthony (right) joined by Fr. Thomas at Senior Dinner 2025.

Anthony has loved forming friendships and making countless memories at the Newman Center, particularly during our classic game of team movie charades, a community favorite. Though his time as a college student at the Newman Center is nearing its end, he looks forward to continuing to live out his faith through prayer in Adoration, attending daily Mass, and going to weekly Confession. Anthony leaves us with a joyful confidence that the habits he has built here will continue to shape his life well beyond graduation.

Next, let me introduce you to Bella Woodard! Bella chose CMU not only for its world-renowned engineering program but also for the chance to experience life in a city far from her home state of Texas – an adventure that pushed her beyond her comfort zone. Though she initially feared not knowing anyone, the warmth and inclusion she felt at her very first Newman Night immediately made her realize that the Newman Center was not only where she wanted to be, but where she needed to be.

One of Bella’s favorite memories is the Newman Fun Run Half Marathon. She recalls staying up late the night before with a small group of students, blowing up countless balloons and spending far too long hanging a banner. But, as

she said, “it was all worth it the next day when we saw the entire Newman community gather in excitement to run.”

Bella is deeply grateful for the incredible Catholic professional and vocational connections within our Newman Center. From religious sisters



Bella (right) at the SEEK '24 Conference with fellow student, Natalie.

to judges, she has witnessed the many beautiful ways people live out their faith in the world – an invaluable gift as she discerns her own vocation and plans for her future. What she will miss most is perpetual adoration and the Newman chapel, where she fell deeply in love with the Blessed Sacrament. Knowing she can always be with Jesus – on both the joyful and the difficult days – she plans to continue seeking out time in Adoration long after graduation.

To wrap up, I’m delighted to introduce Ava Gargiulo – known affectionately among our many “Avas” as Ava G! Pitt was initially a toss-up for her, but a combination of factors – friends choosing Pitt, the flexibility for an undecided major, and being accepted into the Honors College – all contributed to her decision to become a Panther.

It was the encouragement of a “wonderful friend” and Fr. Peter that



Kyra (left) and Ava G having donuts in the Newman Center after a Heinz Chapel Mass.

first brought her into the Newman Club as a freshman. She attended a few events in the fall, but it wasn’t until the spring – after a transformative experience at SEEK, forming deep friendships, and discovering a renewed appreciation for the Sacraments and a thoroughly Catholic environment – that she became truly involved.

Ava recently completed her term as a Newman Club officer, serving faithfully as secretary. But her service didn’t stop there. Among the many post-event shenanigans with friends, one of her favorite memories is helping two alumni, Lucas and Rich, set up and cook for a Friday Feast in spring 2024. Ava is deeply grateful for the “truly kind people” who make up the Newman community. She shared that without them, she “would have never learned as much or grown in [her] faith and knowledge of Catholicism.” Through her time in the Newman Club, she says she learned again and again how good God is – and how deeply He loves and cares for each one of us. Ava’s witness brings a beautiful close to this celebration of our seniors!

What strikes me most in these students’ reflections – especially knowing them all personally over the years – is how distinct their stories are, yet how clearly the hand of God is visible in each one. Across these testimonies of the now-veteran members of our community runs a common thread: fellowship, prayer, and the sacraments. Their testimonies speak eloquently to the truth that, through the Pittsburgh Oratory Catholic Newman Center, they have drawn closer to Jesus by devoting themselves to “the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” Is what I have written on this page not precisely what the early Church Fathers described in Acts 2:42? Is this not the very way Christ forms saints?

I am convinced that these seniors – just a small glimpse of the many here – are becoming extraordinary saints through the faithful living of ordinary lives.

Campus Ministry Picture Spotlight



Bishop Eckman joys in the sight of baby Gemma, daughter of Pitt FOCUS missionaries Dan and Julia Tully.



Oratorians “dress the part” for Undergrad Barn Dance 2025.



The elevation of the Holy Eucharist during Mass on St. John Henry Newman’s feast day.



Students at the November First Friday Feast at the Newman Center.



Students and FOCUS missionaries tabling on campus.



Cheering on fellow Newman Center student Bella Woodard at a CMU volleyball game.



Fr. Leo joins students in the Newman Center game room.



Hannah (front middle) joined my CMU students and missionaries at Senior Dinner 2025.

Lessons from Fr. Wim Sabo’s Visit

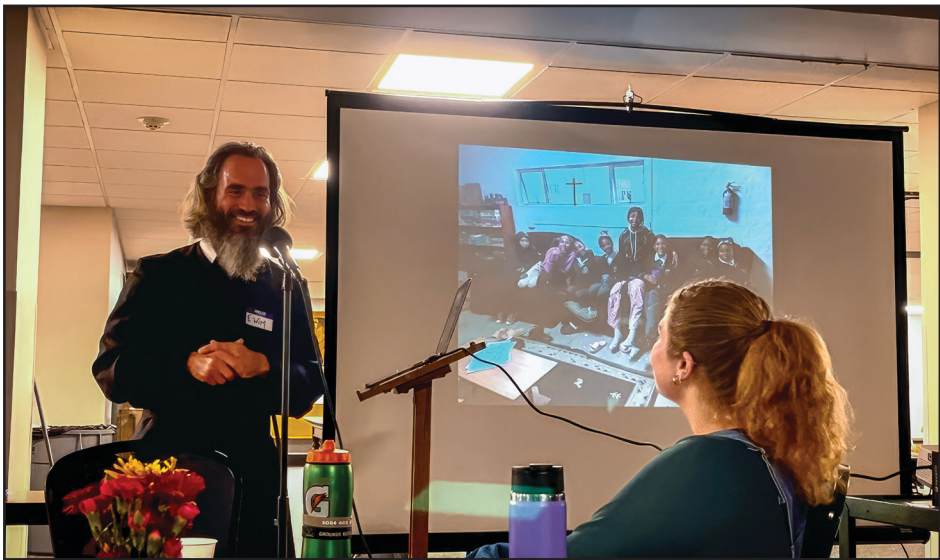
By Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

In October, the Oratorians were fortunate to welcome a friend from the Oratory in Oudtshoorn, South Africa. Oratorian literature speaks about how every Oratory is different from the next. While each Oratory shares a love of St. Philip Neri and strives to imitate the example he has left us, each house develops its own personality within the charism of St. Philip. Fr. Wim Sabo, originally a diocesan priest in Belgium who eventually joined the Oudtshoorn Oratory, has certainly helped to confirm both the friendship and the diversity of life that we can find in St. Philip. While speaking to our students at Newman Night, Fr. Wim shared many fascinating details about the life of an Oratorian in Oudtshoorn. Gangs are rampant in their city, drawing in nearly every young man and making the streets

very dangerous and violent. In the midst of this, the Oratorians provide a home for young men and another home for young women, seeking to give them a place of refuge. Fr. Wim shared that one of his brother Oratorians, Fr. Mark, is often called in the middle of the night to assist one of his spiritual sons who has gotten into trouble, perhaps even needing to be taken to the hospital. In their homes, people are often uncertain where their next meal will come from. Thus, the Oudtshoorn Oratory provides home-cooked meals for many people each day. Some of their meals come from one of the many animals that they have on the Oratory’s farm. Their farm not only contains what we would think of as “usual” farm animals, but also more exotic animals, like peacocks. To the horror of some of our students, Fr. Wim told us how he recently learned how to slaughter a peacock and would be slaughtering a pig soon after he returned

home! On a more heartwarming note, Fr. Wim also oversees the bakery as well as the construction of the new Oratory chapel. Throughout all of this, the Oudtshoorn Oratorians are seeking to create a spiritual oasis in a culture where Christ seems to be very unknown. While we learned a lot from him, Fr. Wim was thankful for his time with us. He spoke extensively with

our students and was impressed by the spiritual depth of our ministry. He said his visit gave him a lot of ideas that he was eager to put into practice in Oudtshoorn. Thus, although the spirituality is largely the same, each Oratory truly has a life and personality of its own. We are grateful to Fr. Wim for reminding us of this – and even more for his friendship and his witness to Christ as a son of St. Philip Neri.



Fr. Wim speaks at Newman Night.

JOIN THE MONTHLY GIVING SOCIETY!

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→ *Why should I join?*

This is the most effective way to support the Oratory and its mission. This steady support allows us to care for students, celebrate the sacred liturgy, and carry forward the life of the Oratory with confidence and foresight.

→ *How to join:*

Visit pghco.org/annualfund or scan the QR code to the right to set up your recurring monthly donation of \$50 or more!



From the Ambo: *Homily for the Annunciation - Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.*

“The Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us!’”

This prophecy was first said by Isaiah to King Ahaz. What was the context? Ahaz and his people were in a very dark place. At the time, the kingdom of Israel had been split in two. There was the Northern Kingdom of Israel (composed of ten of the tribes) and there was the Southern Kingdom (composed of only two tribes, Benjamin and Judah). Ahaz was king of the Southern Kingdom (the generally smaller, weaker kingdom). In the time of Ahaz, the Northern Kingdom had partnered with someone else and decided to attack his weaker, Southern Kingdom. Ahaz and his people knew that they were no match for this battle. Yet, in the midst of this darkness, the Lord assures Ahaz: “Remain calm; do not be afraid; do not let your courage fail!” (Isa 7:4). I will be victorious over these nations that are attacking you – just trust in me! But Ahaz presumably wasn’t convinced, so God (in His mercy) goes further.

And this is where our first reading picks up today: “Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying: Ask for a sign!” (Isa 7:10-11)... You don’t believe me? Fine, I will give you a sign to assure you. And Ahaz essentially responds, Eh, no thanks. And God persists, Please! Let me give you a sign: “The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us!’” (Isa 7:14). Still, Ahaz doesn’t listen. Instead of trusting the Lord with his weakness and present darkness, Ahaz decides to take matters into his own hands. He rejects the word of God and forms an alliance with Assyria. While this helps him in the short term, it greatly harms him and his people in the long term. This leads to them being oppressed by the Assyrians, their supposed ally. This leads to them worshipping other gods. This leads them away from the Lord who had promised to save them. However, in the gospel today, we have a wonderful fulfillment (and in some ways, reversal) of this Old Testament prophecy. “The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called

Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph” (Lk 1:26-27). Unlike Ahaz, Mary was not – by any appearance – a powerful or influential person. She was a humble virgin in a small, unknown town. But, like Ahaz, she was probably very aware of the darkness that surrounded her. Politically, her people were oppressed by the Romans, and in her sinless state, she surely would have been aware of the greater evil that surrounded her: for centuries, humanity had been sitting in darkness; trapped in sin; engaged in a battle with the devil that it had no chance of winning on its own. In the midst of this darkness, the Word of God comes down: “Do not be afraid, Mary... you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus” (Lk 1:30-31). Unlike Ahaz, Mary places her trust in the Lord. She does not doubt, but gives everything to God. The Holy Spirit overshadows her. The True God becomes also true man as he is virginally conceived in her very womb. God has come to the aid of our mortal frailty by assuming our mortal frailty. Instead of seeking to protect herself in

her lowliness, Mary gives her weakness to the Lord. She provides a body for him, so that he can gain a definitive victory over our enemy by his passion and death upon the cross. The salvation which we are offered has its beginnings on this day: the day that the light of Christ began to scatter the darkness; the day of the Incarnation of the Lord; the day of the Annunciation of the angel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. So, if you find yourself in weakness and darkness (weighed down by sin; immersed in the darkness of this world; wondering if there is any hope), then remain calm, do not fear, and do not let your courage fail. The Virgin has conceived and borne a son: Jesus. Emmanuel. God-with-us! Our weakness and darkness are not obstacles to him, but the very channels by which he comes to us. He is Son of God and Son of Mary; and he will destroy our ancient enemy by offering his Body, first conceived in the womb of Mary, upon the cross. So, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, place your trust in the Lord, and simply say to Him time and time again: “May it be done unto me according to your word.”