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Successful Campaign Breathes Life into the Oratory



First Men's Night in the newly renovated Student Center, January 2025.

By Fr. Michael Darcy, C.O.

I have shared this news with countless people, countless times, but I never get tired of saying it: our Magnify the Lord capital campaign was a brilliant success! We met and exceeded our goal. We hoped to raise \$4.5 million and by the time we concluded the campaign we had raised slightly more than \$5 million. I have also said “thank you” countless times since then, but I am happy to say it again here: Thank you for your help, whether that took the form of a financial gift to the campaign, a prayer, or even just a hope for our success. We are grateful for all the help—big or small—that we received.

The campaign occasioned a lot of discussion about the Oratory and the mission of its ministries, bringing me to reflect upon something my older brother said to me a few years ago. As his daughter was preparing for college he remarked, “You know, so much of college life seems ordered to driving out of you whatever decency your parents managed to get into you.” I mentioned this in a homily once and two-thirds of the heads of those present began nodding vigorously. Statistics confirm it. Studies show that during their time in school, roughly 70% of college students leave the faith they received and practiced with their families.

The good news is that among those who manage to hang on to their faith during college, an overwhelming percentage remain faithful to it for the rest of their lives. It is one of the greatest blessings to me as a priest to be involved in a community whose ministries not only help young people hold on to what they have received, but also strengthen it and pass it on to others. Among the young people who have spent time with us, there is an increasing number who have gone on to serve as missionaries with FOCUS and to work to build faith communities in parishes around the country. It is wonderful and powerfully

encouraging to witness. The success of our capital campaign will magnify the Lord by magnifying this work among the Oratory faithful.

In the early stages of the capital campaign we conducted a study designed to gauge the interest of long-standing benefactors and those frequenting the Oratory. The results were slightly different than what we expected. Among us Oratorians the most exciting project associated with the campaign was our plan for a new organ for our chapel. This was the most audacious aspect of our campaign projects inasmuch as it called for the construction of a new choir loft whose engineering would require some creativity (we recently had an organ dedication in our chapel and I noticed that the architects and project managers took seats directly under the loft—I took that as a good sign). The study revealed that the organ, choir loft, and general expansion of our music ministry were not among the highest priorities of those we received feedback from. We expected it would be the feature of the campaign that generated the most excitement. It was not the case. Some expressed concerns that the organ would be too loud or would otherwise not be suited to our worship space.

The study revealed instead that the project our faithful valued first were our ministries. Next came the care of our buildings and physical plant. Some mentioned that money ought to go to the well-being and care of us Oratorians (thank you!). Enthusiasm for our musical plans came last. This is not to say there was no enthusiasm. A great many participants in the poll indicated a willingness to let us priests decide where the resources would be allocated. So we had a great deal of support even if not quite the precise kind of support we were expecting.

As I thought more about the results of the poll it dawned on me that this was exactly the right way to prioritize

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Fall 2024: A Semester Unlike Any Other

By Hannah Naylor, Campus Minister

The weeks of eager anticipation finally culminated as new students began moving into their dorms, and returning students settled back into campus life, whether for their first year or their final one. We had been strategizing on how best to connect with as many freshmen as possible. Through tabling and chalking around campus, we promoted a free pizza dinner (specifically for freshmen) and the turnout exceeded all expectations. Nineteen pizzas were ordered but I was constantly thinking to myself, “We’ve probably ordered too many. There’s no way we’ll get enough students to eat all of this.” But then I was reminded of the Lord’s faithfulness. Over 80 students attended the Freshman Pizza Social, with such a huge turnout that we actually ran out of pizza! I then realized how misguided I was to underestimate God’s provision and trust in His majesty. He works in all things, even in simple chalking events on campus.

In the week following freshman orientation, we hosted a variety of exciting events on campus and at the Oratory. The assistance of Br. Matthew and Br. Kurt, who provided support, hard work, and encouragement during my first weeks as the new campus minister, was very much appreciated. Organizing events for 100-150 people was a new experience for me, especially when it came to making sure there was enough food for everyone, and the Brothers were generous in showing me the ropes! With the Newman Center still under construction, we had to get a bit creative. On Wednesday evening we had our 9:00pm Mass at Heinz Chapel, which was followed by an impressive feast of over 1,000 chicken wings. To solve the logistical challenge of where to serve that many wings, we set up right outside the chapel, allowing students to enjoy a delicious spread immediately after Mass. Every event that week – from Rita’s to Rabbits on CMU’s campus to Friday Feast – was a tremendous success.

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Fr. Thomas and Newman Center students talk with new students at Pitt's Activities Fair.



Students show off their new Newman Center t-shirts at the first Newman Night of fall 2024.



Hannah and students celebrate at the Octoberfest-themed First Friday Feast.



Record numbers of students gather on the Oratory lawn to enjoy picnic foods galore at the First Friday Cookout during Welcome Week.



Celebrating and Dedicating New Organ
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Meet the Seniors

Newman Center Class of 2025

By Hannah Naylor, Campus Minister

I have had the pleasure of walking with this senior class through their entire college career. This was the first freshman class to return to a ‘normal’ school year after the disruptions of the Covid year prior. Serving as a missionary at the time, it was my first time getting to know the students without all the barriers of Covid. I found that students were eager and hungry for authentic friendships, and it brings me so much joy to know that so many of them found it here at the Newman Center. The class of 2025 is a big reason why the Newman Center was able to bounce back so quickly after Covid. Their enthusiasm, zeal for souls, and willingness to help build up the community continues to inspire me and has only increased over their years of college. I am honored to introduce to you a handful of the students who I have had the pleasure to know through their involvement at the Newman Center.



Anne (middle) at the first Newman Night of Fall, 2024.

First up we have Anne Norris! Anne served as the 2024 Board Secretary for the Newman Club at Pitt, and she also designed the new Pitt Newman

Club logo that highlights how, for the students in the Newman Club, Christ is the center of not only their hearts, but also their college campus! Through her role of secretary, she also runs Pitt’s Newman Club social media where she highlights all the events and introduces different students in the club. She became involved with the Newman Center to reconnect with her faith and build meaningful friendships after feeling unfulfilled in her studies. Through the friends she made at the Newman Center, Anne discovered the true value of virtuous friendship, which she believes was first modeled by Jesus Christ. This experience inspired her to follow Christ more closely, and she credits the Newman Center with helping her along that path.

One of Anne’s favorite memories at the Newman Center was her second Fish Fry. At her first Fish Fry the year before, she had the chance to simply enjoy the event—food, fellowship, and fun. But the second time around, she was involved in serving and running the event, which gave her a deeper appreciation for the amount of work that goes into such activities. It was a moment where she recognized the importance of giving back after having received so much from the Newman Center. Anne is especially grateful for the variety and quantity of events the Newman Center offers, which allowed her to stay engaged in a faithful community despite her busy student schedule. Looking ahead, she’ll miss seeing her friends at Newman Night every Sunday—along with the free

pizza! As she prepares to graduate, Anne reflects on the importance of staying involved in the Church. She emphasized that no matter where life takes her, she will carry with her the knowledge that the Catholic faith is universal that “will follow you if you follow Christ.”



Nathan (left) enjoying the newly renovated Student Center with Br. Kurt and fellow student Eddie.

Meet Nathan Deyak! His connection to the Newman Center began after Fr. Stephen personally invited him to Newman Night, where he was struck by how welcoming and “normal” everyone was. This sense of community made him realize that “following God is more fun when you have friends walking with you.” One of Nathan’s most memorable experiences at the Newman Center was his first Carnegie Mellon retreat at Rednal, which provided a much-needed break from the time spent within the four walls of a classroom chasing after due dates that won’t stop coming. A short time spent away was the start of a lot of growth in his spiritual life.

He also expressed deep gratitude for the ease with which he could access the sacraments at the Newman Center, recognizing how rare it is, even for

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Fr. Peter Interviews

Newman Center Alumna, Sr. John Mary Elizabeth Lucas, OSB



Sr. John meets with Fr. Peter at her Benedictine Abbey in Westfield, Vermont.

Sr. John (formerly Mary Liz) was a student at Pitt who graduated in 2020 with a degree in Biology, a minor in Spanish and Chemistry, and a certificate in Medieval Studies. She’s been at the Abbey of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for over four years, having taken first vows November 2023 on the Feast of Christ the King.

Sr. John, what makes your story unique?

My background was very secular and very worldly. I was involved with all the mainstream currents of a liberal university. But all of that was eclipsed by this encounter with Jesus Christ, and everything zoomed down and such a bigger perspective overwhelmed all the other stuff.

My brother was a senior when I was a freshman. He was in Newman Club and he succeeded in dragging me to one or two events, when I was being a worldly freshman. My sophomore year, I ended up living in the Catholic women’s house, The Manor, through a providential series of circumstances. And all throughout college, I was involved in a number of groups, not just Newman, but other Christian groups, martial arts, origami, and all kinds of fun things.

Can you speak to the importance of Catholic friendship and community?

The strongest testimony in my life to the love of God for me personally has been the friends which He’s given me throughout my life. Without them, I would never know what it means to be loved by another person and to love another person. These kinds

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Sr. John (left) with friend Julia at a Newman Center Friday Feast, Dec 2019.

A Heavenly Home on Earth: Student Reflection

By Concetta Bochicchio, Junior at the University of Pittsburgh

Entering my third year at the University of Pittsburgh, I have a level of certainty of what makes college a ‘home’. It is not how darling the neighborhoods are nor how vibrant the nightlife is. It is not the school spirit nor how top notch the athletics are. Home, in my understanding, is our Lord meeting us through the sacraments in His home. He takes us into His home and generously lets us call it ours. The light in the sanctuary lamp flickers, and we know that He rests in the tabernacle. Without the Oratory, I am aware that I would not be enlightened of this fact. The Oratorians have graciously allowed God’s will to work through the immense accessibility of the sacraments.

I had gone to the Oratory a few times growing up, but I had never been to Mass consistently in my teen years. When I got to the University of Pittsburgh, I had a growing feeling that this chapel was going to become more familiar to me. The Lord compelled me to get more involved, and I started to recognize the gift that is resting right on my campus.

Now, each day I walk into the Oratory knowing that the Lord is waiting for



Concetta (left) with friend Lydia playing volleyball with the Newman Center on the Cathedral of Learning lawn.

me. Whether that be in the Holy Mass, confession, or adoration, He is there, ever present. The Oratory has given me the green house to catalyze my spiritual growth on an overwhelming and secularized campus. There is such a high importance of consistent and ongoing accessibility of our Lord through the sacraments. He is there for me at 7:00am Mass before a long class or in adoration after a difficult exam. It is so necessary in a world like ours to be stabilized by our sacramental lives. The sacraments allow me to reorient myself to the eternal perspective that I ought to incorporate into my daily life.

The Lord’s provision through the Newman Center is more than I am capable of understanding. Being a Catholic student on a secular campus has taught me the value of finding

a community that supports me both academically and spiritually. I count on other students to compel me each week to pray, study, commune, and attempt to be holier together. No matter what time of day, the student center is occupied with wonderful people ready to spark up a conversation. I am blessed to be able to attend weekly events through the Newman Club where students convene to share in fellowship and their love for the Lord. Here, I have found a space to grow in virtue, as well as develop truly authentic friendships pursuing the Lord and His goodness. This community is extremely unique in that we all are all devoted to growing closer to Jesus and support each other even as we fail over and over.

It is a blessing to know what a real ‘home’ can be. Where the Lord dwells, we ought to dwell with Him. God has led me to the Oratory to find this home for myself so that I may know him more deeply. He has given me another family of sorts that is so special it has to be shared.

“This is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.” Psalm 27:4

Oratorians Everywhere

From classrooms to campuses to hospital hallways, you can find the Oratorians serving in all ways.

St. John Henry Newman says an Oratory is “a sort of native body in a town. . . it is, as it were, the growth and fruit of a place.” Newman in his own life as an Oratorian is described as becoming part of the fabric of Birmingham. Here in Pittsburgh, within the heart of the major universities, we have our Oratory dedicated to the spiritual care of the colleges as well as the surrounding community. As part of the fabric of Pittsburgh, the Oratorians are stretched out across the city - and even temporarily into Ohio and Indiana - in the spiritual life of those around us. See below how each Oratorian invests in this great city and beyond - while also tending to the ministries of the Oratory.

Fr. Mike teaches Theology at Central Catholic High School



“This year marks my fourth full year as a teacher at Central Catholic high school (I began in January of 2021). It has been an unexpected blessing in my life. I feel like I am getting the hang of it, and I enjoy the students. As to the good I am doing, I make no great claims for myself! I remind myself to be like the sower in Jesus’ parable, sowing seed always, regardless of whatever might seem like the result. I have made many friends there among the staff and faculty. It is a fun and exciting little corner of the Lord’s vineyard.”

Fr. Joshua teaches Latin at South Hills Catholic Academy



“‘Gaudeamus igitur iuvenes dum sumus – Let us rejoice then while we’re young!’ A classic Latin song from the Middle Ages my students at South Hills Catholic Academy learned this year. St. Philip, the ‘gentle guide of youth,’ always reminds me to keep the practice of joy central to all my lessons!”

Fr. Reed continues doctoral studies at Notre Dame



“I continue my studies for the PhD in Theology at the University of Notre Dame. A highlight of this semester is that Fr. Thomas came out to visit me at Notre Dame. I offered him a window into my life by proposing we spend 12 hours straight in silence in the library. We went to a football game instead.”

Br. Matthew studies Philosophy and Theology at Franciscan University



“My time at Franciscan has been a success so far! I’ve definitely settled into a routine commuting to campus, classes are interesting and I am looking forward to the rest of the semester. Go Barons!”

Fr. Thomas, Br. Kurt, and Fr. Leo minister to the sick as hospital chaplains



Fr. Thomas: “I remain at St. Margaret hospital, visiting patients, praying with them and their families, and offering them the sacraments. It has been a joy this year to have Br. Kurt joining me once a week. As an instituted acolyte, he has been faithfully fulfilling his duty to bring the Eucharist to the sick.”

Br. Kurt: “It is a great gift to serve the sick and dying in our hospitals; I have been emboldened by many holy patients. . . Truly the souls who will soon see the face of God are oft most open to the work of the Holy Spirit.”



“At the end of the summer, I began serving as chaplain at West Penn Hospital, a bustling neighborhood hospital in Bloomfield that serves Pittsburghers from infancy to end of life care. Here I am pictured outside of the hospital chapel where I offer Mass. In addition to Mass and the other sacraments, I visit patients and spend time with them and their families as they receive treatment.”

Fr. Peter brings the Oratory to the greater Pittsburgh community



“I’m blessed to be part of the community at Aquinas Academy where I offer Mass every week, as well as Most Precious Blood Parish where I assist as often as I can with hearing Confessions. I also make my way out to Ligonier most weeks and have dinner with families in the area and offer Mass.”

Fr. Stephen enriches the souls of university students through campus ministry



“I continue to enjoy my role in campus ministry, providing the sacraments here at the Oratory, spending time with students at all the many events we hold, and meeting with them for pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.”

Magnificat anima mea Dominum:

Opus 52 Makes Its Debut *Elevating Hearts and Minds with New Pipe Organ and Expanded Sacred Music Ministry*



By Nicholas Will,
Director of Sacred Music

It has been a busy season thus far for the Oratory’s sacred music program. The Oratory Choir welcomed a number of new and talented Vocal Fellows and volunteers to its ranks and now numbers thirty members. Additionally, Sarah Richards (a 2023-2024 Vocal Fellow) and John Sereno have joined the Oratory staff as Professional Core members in the Oratory Choir. These new developments, as well as the continued dedication of long-time singers in the choir, have enabled the group to rise to new levels of musical achievement and repertoire. While most church choirs rehearse for two hours per week for one choral service, the Oratory Choir rehearses for less than two hours per week for at least two choral Masses. I am extremely proud of their progress, and if you haven’t heard them lately, I highly suggest attending the 11:00am Sunday Mass or the 9:00pm Wednesday Mass at Heinz Chapel to see what the buzz is about. Highlights include the Feast of St. John Henry Newman (October 9), All Saints Day, All Souls Day, and all Christmas liturgies. But all of the Masses at which the Oratory Choir sings feature treasures from our Catholic tradition.

We are especially thrilled to be singing in our new gallery, made possible by the generous supporters of the *Magnify the Lord* campaign. For the first time in the Oratory’s history, our choir is able to sing in the same space occupied by the organist, with its sound unencumbered by walls. The difference in the Oratory Choir’s clarity and ability to lead is immediately apparent, and we are grateful for the vision of the Oratorians and the generosity of the donors who made it possible.

Speaking of choir lofts – anyone who has visited the Oratory within the last month has already seen (and hopefully heard) the glorious new pipe organ which adorns our chapel. Suffice it to say, it has exceeded our (high) expectations, and it has already had a tremendous impact on our

music-making. The process of getting to know the organ and exploring its range and capabilities has been for me a tremendous joy, as I know it has been for our musical program’s organ fellows and students. Our fervent hope is that it serves as an aid to our communal prayer life for generations to come.

The arrival of our new organ has also been an opportune time to expand our musical offerings at Oratorian liturgies. As soon as the organ was assembled in early October, it was put to use at the Sunday 4:00pm Masses, then the Saturday 4:00pm Masses as well toward the start of Advent. It continues to be utilized at the two Sunday morning Masses (9:00am and 11:00am), at Solemn Vespers (Sundays at 5:15pm), as well as on feast days and solemnities throughout the year.

In all that we do musically at the Oratory, we strive to glorify God and to edify His faithful. Our music program, now under the patronage of St. Gregory the Great as the *St. Gregory Institute of Sacred Music at the Pittsburgh Oratory* is making tremendous strides. We thank God for His many blessings, for growth and for fervent devotion to honing our skills. Please pray for us as we strive to aid our entire community in worshipping in beauty and in truth.


Paul Fritts & Co. Opus 52

Hopefully by now, most reading this article have seen and heard our wonderful new pipe organ built by Paul Fritts & Company—one of the country’s premiere organ-building firms, located in Tacoma, Washington. I’d like to take this opportunity to explain some of the features and more technical aspects of the beautiful instrument which now adorns our chapel.

Organ builders, like composers, often assign an “opus number” to each of their works, giving an indication of when in the course of an organ builder’s career the work of art was created. It should be noted that, while Mr. Fritts has enjoyed a decades-long career as an organ builder, his opus list is relatively small. This is a testament to the time-consuming reality of building instruments from scratch, as well as Paul’s dedication to excellence. With the exception of a few small electrical items, everything in our organ, including the playing mechanism, keyboards, and pipes, was constructed in Paul’s impressive shop in Tacoma.


The woodwork, including the African mahogany case and hand-carved pipe shades, are perhaps the most immediately striking aspects of the instrument. Inside, however, one can see the hundreds of pipes handmade by Paul and his craftsmen. Lead-heavy alloys, based upon metallurgical secrets passed down from masters of centuries

gone by, are carefully mixed in molten form, poured into sheets, and then carefully rolled, formed, and soldered into the pipes that eventually will make music. The organ-building firms in the United States which construct their own pipes can be counted on one hand.



The keyboards themselves are things of beauty. The white keys are covered in cow bone from the Czech Republic (only two key covers can be harvested from one shin bone). The black keys are of precious ebony. Coupled with the sensitive mechanical action, they make for an extremely satisfying experience for the player, which ultimately translates into a more beautiful musical performance.

Our organ features what is known as a “mechanical action.” This refers to the fact that the keys played by the organist activate the instrument’s pipes by means of an intricate array of levers, wires, and rods. Indeed, the only electricity involved in our instrument is that which powers the wind supply and lighting for the organist and service technicians. The experience for the organist is thus intimate and makes for extraordinarily sensitive gradations in “touch,” or attack and release. Each of the hundreds of small parts involved is handcrafted from wood and other worthy materials and is designed to operate, relatively maintenance free, for generations. For centuries, pipe organs have been counted amongst man’s greatest engineering feats. A quick view at the innards of our new instrument validates that sentiment, even in the 21st century.



It is worth noting that our instrument is the only instrument by Mr. Fritts in the area—the closest being in Columbus, Ohio. Not only will it be a gift to our community, but will serve as a treasure for the wider sacred music community in Pittsburgh and beyond. We are grateful for the generosity of Gregory and Meredith Dolan which made it possible, and are honored to play it as dedicated to the great Oratorian, St. Francis de Sales.

Successful Campaign Breathes Life into Newman Center

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our activity. Of course our ministry should come first, then the care of the physical buildings on which our life and work depends, and only when those are taken care of, the beautification of our worship. Now that all is said and done it is wonderful to realize that we did not have to choose between these goods. Thanks to your generosity we have all of them!

As I already mentioned, we hosted Bishop Waltersheid at a wonderful event where our organ was dedicated and blessed. There was a particular moment in the blessing of the organ that caught my attention, one that I thought about many times in the days that followed.

The ceremony began in the usual way: we processed into the sanctuary and the Bishop led us in prayer. The organist began to play and filled the chapel with sound. Connoisseurs of wine will describe it by the different tastes they detect (somehow wine never seems to taste like “wine”), and I found myself doing the same thing with respect to the sounds of the organ. At different points in the playing I thought I was hearing the playing of flutes, at other times something like birdsong, and other times, when the volume picked up, trumpets and brass instruments.

After a little while I opened my eyes and was surprised to realize Bishop Waltersheid was gone from the sanctuary. I looked up to my left towards the choir loft, and there he was, circumambulating the organ as it was being played, incensing it as a priest would incense the altar at Mass.

I was struck by the fact that the organ was being blessed in the course of being played. As I have thought about it since I have had a hard time coming up with anything else blessed while in use. Rosary beads, equipment of all kinds, even the fire of the Easter Vigil: these are all blessed in preparation for use rather than while in use.

While thinking about this in the days that followed the blessing and dedication, an old theological maxim crossed my mind: “The sacraments are for the living.” Only a living person can receive the sacraments, and it was as though the organ could be blessed only in via, while doing its thing. I thought too of a line from John Milton, who described musical instruments as “dead things, with inbreathed sense.” The organ could not be blessed while “dead”; we had to bring it to life, get it animated, before we could do the blessing properly.

The same is true of our campaign. The money has been raised, the building projects are nearly completed, but the work of magnifying the Lord will most truly begin when the work of our ministry breathes life into the improved spaces of Oratory. That day of blessing is coming soon, and for that we thank you!

Magnifying the Lord in All We Do

Celebrating Success: *Oratory Organ Dedicated to St. Francis de Sales*

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

One of the great achievements of our *Magnify the Lord* capital campaign was the acquisition of a proper organ for our rapidly expanding program of sacred music. You can read all about the technical aspects of the organ in Nick’s adjoining article; I offer here some reflections on the dedication of our new Paul Fritts organ, dedicated in honor of St. Francis De Sales.

Much like we bless vestments, chalices, or altars before we use them for the liturgy, so too we bless an organ for use in the liturgy. Like these other holy objects, the pipe organ serves an important role in the worship of God. It supports the singing of chant, hymns, and, sometimes, choral music. It can also function on its own by playing instrumental music, whether a stately processional, a meditative offertory, or an epic recessional. In all of the different use cases, the purpose of the organ remains the same: to help lift our hearts and minds to more sublime and noble realities. As such, a church pipe organ deserves to be blessed and set apart for use in the sacred liturgy, where it will serve an integral role in the worship of God.

On October 25, 2024, we were able to do just that: we welcomed Bishop William Waltersheid, auxiliary bishop of Pittsburgh and great friend of the Oratory, to bless our new pipe organ. The blessing involves not only prayers, but also the incensing of the organ, which signals that the organ is a holy thing, just as we incense the altar, the offertory gifts, and the people during the

Mass. This blessing serves as a “solemn dedication” of the organ “to its proper aim: the glorification of God and the strengthening of faith” (Pope Benedict XVI at Regensburg’s Alte Kapelle, September 13, 2006).

Following the formal blessing of the organ, we were delighted to welcome Dr. Olukola Owolabi, Professor of Organ at the University of Notre Dame, to perform a guest recital, celebrating the blessing of the new organ. He played five pieces dating from the 16th to the 20th century, which showcased the flexibility and musical range of the Oratory’s new organ.

Pope Benedict XVI tells us that “the organ has always been considered, and rightly so, the king of musical instruments, because it takes up all the sounds of creation...and gives resonance to the fullness of human sentiments, from joy to sadness, from praise to lamentation. By transcending the merely human sphere, as all music of quality does, it evokes the divine. The organ’s great range of timbre, from a soft *piano* through to a thundering *fortissimo*, makes it an instrument superior to all others. It is capable of echoing and expressing all the experiences of human life. The manifold possibilities of the organ in some way remind us of the immensity and the magnificence of God” (ibid).

We hope that as you come to the Oratory with the full range of human sentiments, “joy to sadness” and “praise to lamentation,” you can find nourishment and consolation in the sounds of our new pipe organ, and that the St. Francis De Sales organ will raise your heart and mind to the divine.



Bishop Waltersheid blesses the new Organ.



(from left to right): Fr. Reed, master organ maker Paul Fritts, friends and donors Meredith & Gregory Dolan, Oratory Director of Sacred Music Nicholas Will



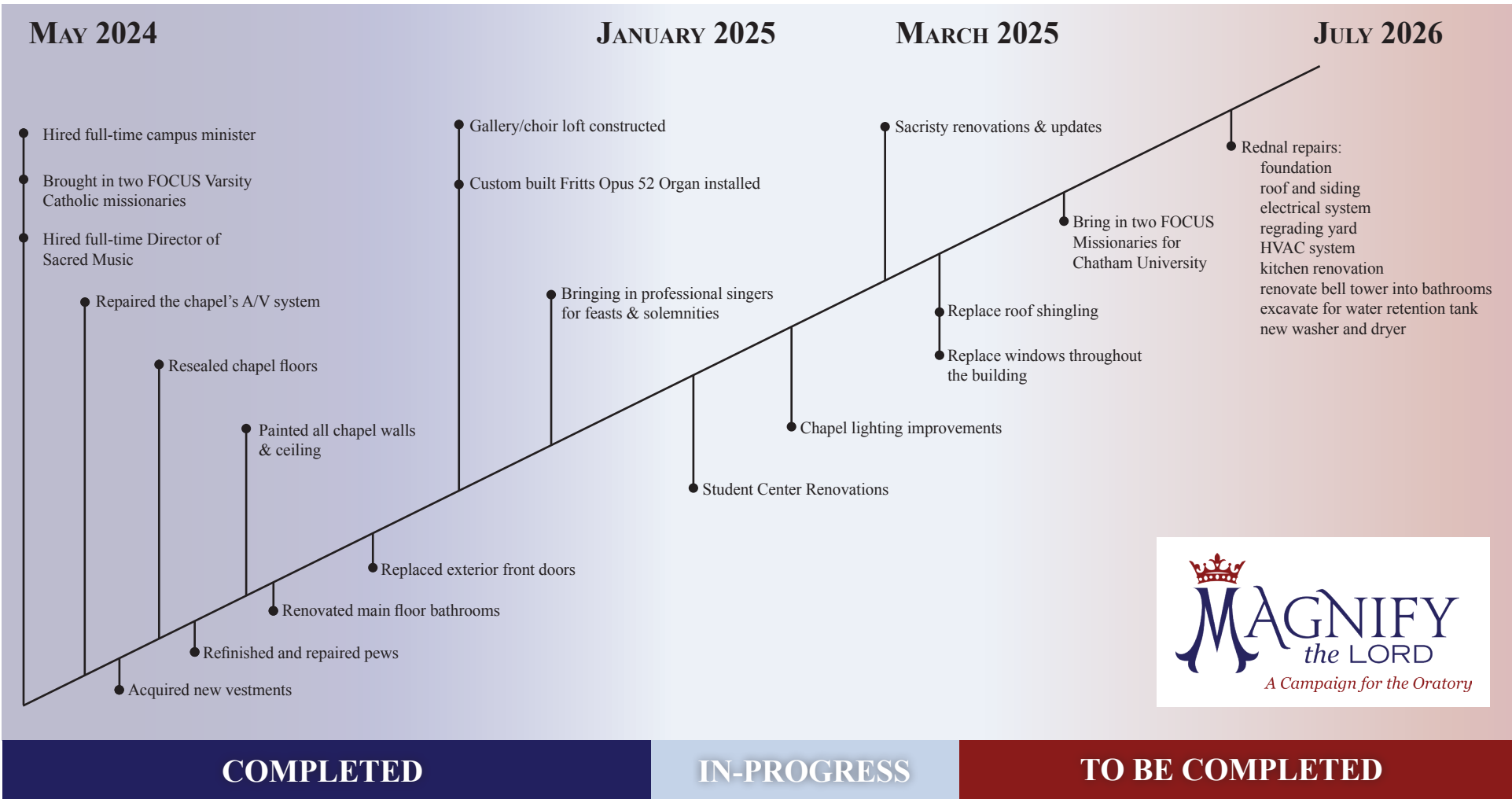
(above): Nicholas Will directs an expert choir of vocalists in the new Choir Loft during the dedication of the St. Francis de Sales Organ.



(below): Dr. Olukola Owolabi performs a guest recital, expertly showcasing the newly dedicated Organ.



Magnify the Lord Capital Campaign Projects Timeline



Under Mary’s Mantle

Fr. Thomas in Mexico City

By Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

On December 12, 1531, St. Juan Diego anxiously rushed to find a priest to give the sacraments to his dying uncle. He attempted to avoid the Blessed Virgin Mary, who had appeared to him atop Tepeyac hill in the days before, lest she delay his mission. However, Our Lady met him along this alternative route with consoling words, telling him that his uncle would not die and that she would provide a sign for the bishop to believe Jaun Diego’s message. Then she asked him: “Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?”.

At the end of October, I had the opportunity to spend a few days in Mexico City with a pilgrimage group led by Chris and Molly McMahon, friends of the Oratory. We spent most of our time with the Sisters of Mary at their Chalco Girlstown, established by Venerable Aloysius Schwartz in 1991.

The Sisters of Mary go into the poorest regions of Mexico to find girls whose education would otherwise stop at the end of elementary school. These girls - roughly 3,200 of them - are able to spend the next five years with the sisters. Some of them come from such extreme poverty that their original homes are nothing more than a makeshift tent, and many of them have endured trauma and abuse, and have lost or been abandoned by one or both of their parents.

However, at the Chalco Girlstown they have the loving care of the Sisters of Mary. They have a safe home, a bed, three square meals a day, an education

that equips them with vocational skills to find a job after graduation, sports teams, music programs, and friends who care for them. They have Mass, catechism classes, and Eucharistic adoration. In a word, they are in the folds of Our Lady’s mantle, in the crossing of her arms.

In the short time that I spent at the Chalco Girlstown, the peace was profound. They welcomed us with a cultural song and dance which gave us more joy than the best shows on Broadway, and inspired us with their devotion to Our Lord as they sang beautiful Eucharistic hymns and knelt before the Blessed Sacrament. The girls and the sisters both radiated a contagious peace and joy, which stayed with us as we were able to visit the nearby shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

As we entered the basilica, we immediately went to the tilma, which has borne the miraculous image of Our Lady for nearly 500 years. I was struck by the strange combination of simplicity and complexity. At first glance, it is very simple. It looked exactly like the pictures that I had seen so many times before. Our Lady is standing with hands folded, wrapped in a turquoise mantle studded with stars, with the moon under her feet, and rays of sunlight behind her. Passing before the image, it does not look much more impressive than other paintings or mosaics around the world.

Yet, with faith in our God and a bit of historical knowledge, there was an encounter of something more. Unlike paintings and mosaics, the natural

work of human beings, this image was created by a supernatural act. Those who have studied it know the details of how the image appeared after the unseasonal roses were folded within the tilma, how her eyes capture those who were present at it’s first unfolding, how she appears with the characteristics of the people in that particular area, how her attire indicates that she is an expectant mother, how the poor fabric should have disintegrated long ago, and how millions of conversions trace their origins back to this miraculous image. Similar to how the Eucharist appears to be one thing to our eyes but is truly Our Lord, the tilma appears to be a simple devotional image but it is actually the means by which Our Lady has wrapped many souls under the protection of her mantle.

The peace that Our Lady’s presence can bring and the graces of her motherly intercession that are experienced daily by the girls under the care of the Sisters of Mary is, I pray, the same peace that all souls find by visiting the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe or by turning to her intercession from anywhere in the world. Thus, if you are in the midst of doubts or struggles, turn to Our Lady who says to all of her children: “The thing that frightens you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing: do not let it disturb you...Am I not here, I who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?”



The Tilma of St. Juan Diego, bearing the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Fr. Thomas and fellow pilgrims enjoy a meal with the students of Sisters of Mary, inspired by their hosts' contagious joy in Our Lord.



Fr. Thomas and his fellow pilgrims join in praying the Mass with the students and Sisters of Mary.

Fall 2024:

A Semester Unlike Any Other

Continued from Page 1

The remainder of the semester was filled with a variety of events, including a highly successful freshman retreat – the largest I’ve experienced during my time here. We hosted Newman Night with Bishop Zubik, which drew an impressive crowd of 150 students; and one of the largest barn dances in Rednal history. In addition, we turned the garage into a temporary Newman Center (lovingly nicknamed the Catacombs) so the students had a place to gather until the renovations were completed, organized multiple cookouts, celebrated Oktoberfest, and held weekly Masses on campus. We also hosted numerous other activities that would make my section of the Oratory times entirely too long! It’s clear that the Newman Center is a vibrant hub where students can engage both socially and spiritually. The club continues to thrive, fostering an environment where students can grow together in their spiritual lives within a vibrant community of faith.

It’s hard to believe that the fall semester has already come to an end. It feels like just a month ago we were busy planning our Freshman Pizza Social, and now we’re several weeks into the spring semester! As I stepped into my new role as campus minister, I had a general idea of what to expect, but I wasn’t entirely sure what it would entail. While I had attended many events over the years as a FOCUS missionary at the Oratory, the logistics of setting these events up and executing them felt quite unfamiliar to me. I am immensely grateful for the Brothers, Priests, and staff at the Oratory for their support, which has made this transition incredibly smooth. The Lord has been generous in his graces and gifts in this transition, and they are certainly a part of that. It is truly a remarkable blessing to be able to offer so much for our students, drawing them to the Newman Center and, ultimately, to Jesus through the sacraments. I am excited for all to come this current spring semester and the powerful ways in which students’ lives will be transformed by their encounters with Christ!



Even through construction inhibiting use of the downstairs Newman Center, students' zeal prevails as record numbers attend Newman events throughout the fall.



Meet the Seniors

Newman Center Class of 2025

Continued from Page 2

urban areas, to have three daily Masses, perpetual adoration, and almost-perpetual availability of confession. As he prepares to graduate, Nathan reflects on what he will miss most at the Newman Center, saying, “I will miss every single person I’ve met here, without a doubt” and plans to carry with him the lesson that he doesn’t need to wait to live for the Lord.



Jenna (left) wins a partial scholarship toward the Seek2025 conference at a Luau party hosted by our Newman Center FOCUS missionaries!

Next up is Jenna Toth! When asked about what brought her to the Newman Center, Jenna shared that it was a FOCUS missionary who first invited her to attend. Once she started participating in events like Newman Night, Barn Dance, and Heinz Chapel Mass, she quickly found a sense of belonging. Through these activities, Jenna developed deep, authentic friendships with others who shared her desire to place Christ at the center of their lives. Some of her best friends are people she met here, and together, they’ve supported each other in growing their love for Christ and encouraging each other to live out lives of faith on a college campus.

Jenna’s favorite memory at the Newman Center is the annual Barn Dance held at Rednal, the retreat house in Ligonier, PA. The event is filled with a big feast, square dancing, apple bobbing, fireworks, and more. This year, she particularly enjoyed a tug-of-war competition that was introduced for the first time—and her team ended up winning! One thing Jenna will miss about the Newman Center is the weekly Heinz Chapel Mass every Wednesday night at 9 PM. Over the past three years, she has had the privilege of singing in the Oratory Choir at this Mass, and she will miss being part of such a talented and supportive group of people. As she looks ahead to graduation, Jenna hopes to carry with her the zeal to continue pursuing her faith and serving others in her future endeavors. She is deeply grateful for the resources and community the Newman Center provided to help her grow spiritually, and she plans to continue living out her faith after graduation.



Jake (right) celebrates with his fellow soon-to-be graduates at the Newman Center Senior Dinner, Nov 2024.

Meet Jake Price! His connection to the Newman Center began soon after he arrived on campus, when he visited to receive the sacrament of reconciliation—a sacrament he had been unable to receive during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was there he met Father Reed, and from that moment, he says “the rest is history!” Jake stayed involved with the Newman Center because he experienced genuine love within the community, and he was eager to reciprocate that love to others himself. He is especially grateful to the priests and brothers of the Oratory for their guidance and support, with a special mention of Father Stephen, who had an immeasurable impact on his life.

Jake’s favorite memory at the Newman Center is the annual Rorate Mass, and as graduation approaches, Jake expressed that he will miss singing at the 9pm Masses with Brother Kurt and Sean. He plans to carry with him two key lessons from his time at the Newman Center. First, he will take with him a deeper devotion to the sacramental life of the Church. The second thing Jake says, “is a bit nuanced: As someone who has a speech impediment, I’ve always had difficulty with verbal expression. Singing, however, (within the context of the mass) has given me a renewed and beautiful way of expressing myself—a very special ‘thank you’ to Father Peter for his support and encouragement within this endeavor, and to Mr. Nick Will for his dedication to enhancing liturgical beauty through music.”



Nelly (left) enjoys German food and fellowship at the Octoberfest-themed Friday Feast, Oct 2024.

To close out seniors highlighted in this article, **I’d like to introduce Nelly Hadlaw!** Her connection to the Newman Center began the moment she arrived at CMU when she met a FOCUS

missionary who helped her move into her freshman dorm. This missionary immediately encouraged her to join a Bible study and invited her to several Newman events. “From that moment on, the consistent invitations and the generosity of the missionaries helped me discover an incredible community filled with virtuous friendships,” Nelly shared. These friendships, she said, inspired her to live a life of loving Christ and to be a witness of His love. Oh, and the free food and barn dances weren’t that bad either!

One of Nelly’s most cherished memories with the Newman Center was the Rome pilgrimage during spring break of the 2024 semester, organized by Father Thomas the pilgrimage took about 20 students and missionaries to Rome and Assisi for a 10-day spiritual journey. “For me personally, this trip was a significant part of my reversion to being a practicing Catholic,” Nelly explained. The trip included daily Mass, prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and visits to important churches and saints’ shrines, all of which deepened her faith and strengthened her relationships with fellow Newman members. “I am forever grateful for this journey, which will always hold a special place in my heart for leading me to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Nelly will miss the moments of joy, conversation, and laughter about the Newman Center. From spontaneous conversations and games of pool to deep philosophical discussions and filling grilled cheese with several random ingredients and challenging friends to eat it, Nelly appreciated how the Newman Center is a place where people can have a great time simply by showing up. As she prepares for the next chapter in her life, Nelly will take with her that “The Lord deeply desires for us to find community, for it is through authentic relationships that we come to know Him more intimately.” The Newman Center has taught her the profound value of community in living a life centered on Christ, and she hopes to continue seeking out a Catholic community in her future as a FOCUS Missionary. “My prayer is to continue seeking a community of Catholics who will walk with me in faith—not to replace the cherished one I’ve been blessed with in Pittsburgh, but to build upon it.”

And that’s just a glimpse into the lives of these extraordinary seniors who have called the Newman Center home. For me personally, what I will miss most is their genuine care for others, their passion for what is good, true, and beautiful, and their constant witness to a sacramental and prayerful life. They have inspired me to deepen my own reliance on Jesus, and I am renewed in my understanding that through prayer, the sacraments, authentic friendships, and a desire to learn, a life in Christ is abundant beyond measure. These seniors are truly saints in the making, and I am so proud of all they have accomplished.

Picture Spotlight:

See more of what’s been happening at the Oratory!



The newly renovated Student Center officially opened for use this January, and the students have been loving the new space.



Br. Kurt gives his second installment to the Oratory Lecture Series, discussing the Council of Ephesus and Mariology in the early Church. September, 2024



Oratorians, staff, and students excitedly help carry in the new pipe organ piece by piece, as it awaits assembly and tuning by master organ maker Paul Fritts himself! October, 2024

From the Ambo:

A Homily from Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

September 25, 2024
25th Week in Ordinary Time, Year II
Gospel: Lk 9:1-6

Today’s gospel is crazy. St. Luke doesn’t spell all of this out, but we can see that Christ tells the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to cast out demons, and to heal the sick. I have to imagine that the disciples probably wanted to say, “Hey – wait a minute, Jesus. We can’t do that. You’re the one who casts out demons and who heals the multitudes of sick people who are brought to you. We’re the ones who watch you do those things. You are asking something impossible of us!”

Then, what St. Luke does spell out for us, is that it gets even crazier: “take nothing for the journey,” Jesus says. In other words, “Yes, I am asking you to do things that you’ve never done before

and which you would have no chance of doing on your own. Additionally, even though you have the ability to make this journey a little easier, I don’t want you to bring anything with you: no walking sick; no sack; no food; no money; and don’t even think about taking a second tunic.”

The apostles had a hundred reasons as to why they should say no: “This is impossible; this is imprudent; we don’t know what we’re doing; what if nobody welcomes us; what if we fail miserably – listen, Jesus, we just can’t do this.” And perhaps they wanted to say these things. Perhaps they wanted to say no.

But, thanks be to God, they didn’t. They said yes to this seemingly impossible task. And because they said yes, other people came to believe in the Kingdom of God. Because they said yes, people who were possessed by demons

were freed. Because they said yes, people with crippling or life-threatening illnesses were healed. Because they said yes, God was able to reveal that He wants us to participate in His work. Jesus could have gone out to preach to those people and to heal them himself, but he wanted his power to be active in his apostles – he wanted his authority to be effective through those whom he sends.

Can you imagine if the disciples had said no? The story of the gospel, the innumerable good things that Christianity has given to the world, the multitudes of saints who rejoice in heaven because they received the good news of Jesus Christ, and our very lives could have been so different. Can you imagine if the apostles had clung to just one of the many reasons right at their fingertips to refuse what God was asking of them?

My brothers and sisters, what is God asking of you? Is He asking you to leave behind some sin, or to remove yourself from relationships that lead you into sin? Is He asking you to ask for help? Is He asking you to join a Bible study? Is He asking you to attend some conference, or to go on a mission trip? Is He asking you to bring Him your sins in the sacrament of confession, perhaps for the first time in a long time? Is He asking you to take that next step towards entering the Catholic Church, even though it is frightening? Is He asking you to apply to seminary; to visit a convent; to become a missionary? Is He asking you simply to stretch your heart in charity towards someone whom you find hard to love? What is it that God is asking of you, which seems impossible, but which – with His power – can be done? Whatever it is, I beg you to please say yes.

Fr. Peter Interviews Newman Center Alumna, Sr. John Mary Elizabeth Lucas, OSB

Continued from Page 2

of friendships allow me to see my own identity in the light of truth and redemption. My time in the Manor was very blessed and full of grace, where this close proximity to these eight women who all had very different backgrounds but were united by the love of Christ, all the things that taught us – both in mortification and sacrifice, but also in love for one another – was an initiation in monastic life in many ways. Learning how to deal with other people’s shortcomings and learning to accept them was something that living in Catholic housing and just in the campus ministry taught me. Also, it gave me the courage to accept correction in fraternal charity, knowing you are often as imperfect as your neighbor.

What about the Oratory and the Newman Center prepared you for religious life?

I took a 3am Holy Hour very early on a Tuesday night, and I kept it for three years. Having that time in complete silence without distractions with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament allowed me to hear God speak.

Seeing my worldly friends with their mental health, their physical health, their view of the future of hope and despair, versus coming to the Newman Center and seeing human beings that were actually thriving – this was such a night and day difference. Not that people who are devoutly Catholic do not have very serious trials and not that we are not all on our path to sanctification at different points, but especially in areas of despair and hope, my secular friends had absolutely no hope towards the future. They despised themselves and others. But when I came to Oratory, I saw human beings as they should be.

Do you have any stories or experiences of note during your time at the Newman Center?

Two days before the 2019 Rome Pilgrimage left, I called Fr. Stephen and asked if I could go, even though I had not been to any of the information meetings. He said “sure” and gave me the plane number. That was a major point of change in my life, because being on the pilgrimage made me realize that I had to have a daily prayer life. Before that I was not praying every day necessarily. Encountering the history and the presence of the Church through pilgrimages in different localities and cultures and the sacrifices financially and physically of being on a pilgrimage is incredibly fruitful.

I have so many wonderful memories at Rednal of spending authentic time with friends and the Lord. Rednal is simply a paradise on earth. Once we were up at Rednal for All Souls Day, and we looked online and found a cemetery two miles away. We decided to walk there on foot. On the way back, Josh House and I got in a freestyle rap battle, in which I was utterly demolished.

Another story that sticks out, once when we were on our way to Fuel and Fuddle and I had the hiccups. Having the hiccups gives other people license to do terrible things to you to attempt to cure you. In this instance, it was the crow season, and Sam Taylor went ahead and hid in a hedge across Fifth Avenue. When I was walking along, he jumped out and grabbed my leg in order to cure me of the hiccups. It didn’t cure me, but it did scare me, and the crows reacted by going crazy, as crows do.

How did it happen that you entered religious life? What advice would you pass on to other young women who are discerning religious life?

The biggest thing in my discernment – and the biggest advice I will give anyone discerning a religious vocation – is to visit as many communities as possible. You are only going to be able to discern the broadest strokes of your vocation in the Adoration Chapel. You have to get out there and see what’s out there. I never thought I would join a community that had Latin, but I came here and fell in love and was very happy. I knew I wanted to be a Benedictine – I didn’t know what a Benedictine was, but I know I wanted to be one – so I visited many Benedictine communities throughout the United States.

I was actually waiting for a bus on the way from a job interview. I had some time before the bus, so I went to St. Stanislaus in the Strip District. I had this realization that if I take this job, I would not have opportunities to visit religious communities anymore. I said, well, I actually have to visit another one before I start working. So I called the Abbey and asked if I could come up tomorrow. So I bought a plane ticket. When I was here, I got a call offering me the job, and I said “No, I’m going to be busy.”

You described the Abbey as an Eden. Can you unpack that?

The goal of all monasteries is the sanctification of their members. And

personal sanctification, because we are a body soul composite, always incorporates the reconciliation of the physical creation to God. Just like the Laudate psalms, which we chant every morning at Lauds, we are sanctifying creation by calling upon it to praise God. In the same way, we take the physical area of our Monastery and give it to God in a tangible way. The deer don’t eat our vegetables. We’ve tamed chipmunks and songbirds – they’ll land right on our heads. We have no problems with predators and our chickens. We all get along very well.

What are you most grateful for from your time at the Newman Center?

I am most grateful for the people who privileged me with sharing their life. The experience of having a strong large Catholic community was in many ways like being born into a large family. Now, I have family members all over the country who I know are praying for me and who I can rely on to help me.

Anything else you would like to add?

To anyone reading this, Jesus is real and He loves you. Often it doesn’t seem like that, but it’s true. My entire life here – every day – is a testimony and witness to that. Nobody would move to the middle of nowhere Vermont, unless the crazy love of Jesus was real.



Sr. John (middle) with friends at the Newman Center Barn Dance, fall 2019.