Phone-A-Thon Calls Starting Soon

In the coming weeks, a Newman Center student will be calling you as part of our 2016 Phone-A-Thon. Thank you in advance for taking our call February 21 - March 6.

Phone-A-Thon is not only a unique opportunity for students to share with you first-hand their experience at the Newman Center, but it is also an essential part of our annual budget.

Pledges made during Phone-A-Thon support the life-changing ministries and programs for thousands of college students. Our goal is to raise $130,000 so that students can continue to grow closer to Christ here at the Newman Center.

Thank you in advance for your generosity!

Father Robert Matya and
Your friends at the Newman Center

If you are unable to answer your phone those weeks, a one-time or recurring monthly Phone-A-Thon gifts can also be made by going to huskercatholic.com.
Greetings from our new St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Newman Center! I can not adequately describe to you in words what it feels like to be sitting here with students in front of the Blessed Sacrament in this beautiful chapel. It truly is a dream come true.

Since we dedicated the church on Divine Mercy Sunday, I have been asked over and over by donors and friends stopping by, "How is the new church working out?" And the answer to that question would be, "Far greater than we could have ever imagined."

One of my favorite things that continues to happen over and over is seeing the face of someone who has walked into the church for the first time. The person's jaw usually drops and then a big smile comes across the face, which is then usually followed by the words, "It's beautiful" or "Breathtaking." I will never tire of watching this happen as it makes me smile every time.

When you decide to build a chapel that seats more than double the capacity of the previous one, there are questions about what it will be like when we get back into our routine. Will the Sunday Masses now seem small in attendance? How long will it take to fill the church for a regular Sunday Mass? So with a full semester in the new church behind us, I can tell you those answers. At the first 10:00 a.m. Mass of the school year, we counted 850 in attendance. Yes, that's right! In a church that was built to comfortably seat 650. So that was scary as I knew that someone was going to say, "You didn't build it big enough!" And yes, that happened. But after that first Mass, the attendance at Mass evened out in relatively short order. Our attendance at the four regularly offered Sunday Masses has nearly doubled from the attendance in our old chapel a couple of years ago. None of us here on staff predicted that to happen, but it has.

Here's a side note for you. Since I started writing this piece three paragraphs ago, fifteen students have come into the chapel to make visits and pray. This is so great to observe what is taking place.

Okay, so back to the numbers. The Fall attendance at our Masses has far exceeded our expectations. We really did think it would take more time to build the attendance. It's a tremendous blessing to see the students wanting to come in greater numbers and more frequently to pray.

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Snow for Life: The Idleness of a March

Father Mills, Assistant Pastor

At mile marker 133.6 on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, two buses filled with students from the Newman Center and our friends from the University of Nebraska—Kearney sat idle. Without knowing the extent of the wait, the rumors swirled from the initial couple of hours to clean up the accident to the constant waiting game of an unknown future hour. In all we sat at that now infamous mile marker for twenty-three and a half hours.

How can you pass the time when stuck in one place for 23.5 hours? You get frustrated. I’m pretty sure everyone involved at some point hit a wall—whether that was with the snow, the state of Pennsylvania, the food selection, the people around them or the bathroom. Yet the overall mood I felt on Bus Two was that of kids in a fort. A fort filled with moments of prayer: morning prayer, evening prayer, night prayer, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, Rosaries being said and, of course, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. That is a moment I will cherish in my priesthood, a Father making the best of a situation and bringing our Lord to the snowbound. The Gospel reading from Luke that Sunday included these words from Isaiah the prophet being read by Christ in the synagogue,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

To bring our Lord to these students who desired to stand up for life was powerful. For these moments of prayer and worship, the bus became our chapel, our sanctuary. Interspersing these moments of prayer our students were all over the place. Some went out to shovel snow for hours on end. Others walked around meeting cars and buses surrounding us. There were countless hours of cards played, movies watched, books read, and homework finished. More than a few took nap after nap whenever they reached the point of not

Students proudly show their pro-life signs during the March for Life.

Father Mills celebrates Mass on the stranded buses.
knowing what else to do. We got to know our bus driver Dean and the bus driver of Bus One, Jon. They were incredible to us and persevered through all of the waiting and anticipating.

We left Lincoln late Wednesday night on a journey to March for Life in Washington, DC and encountered around ten thousand others to rally and walk and pray. It was our decision to leave directly from the March and shorten our trip that ended up creating a story that we will all retell time and again. We bonded through this period of purgatory – realizing that we had so much to be thankful for: a warm bus, food, water, a bathroom, electricity and fellowship. We shared memorable moments of the March, of our inner thoughts throughout the idleness, of people we encountered and of inside jokes that we now share. Yet most of all, I think we realized how truly blessed we are.

Father Sean Haggerty, a priest from South Dakota, whom we met while staying the night at St. Thomas the Apostle Elementary School in Bedford after breaking free of mile marker 133.6, wrote a beautiful reflection on Facebook. He likened our journey to our Lord’s crucifixion. He died around 3 o’clock, when our bus first entered into this peril of stand still. Then that night and throughout Saturday we entered into our nowhere of mile marker 133.6, when our Lord was descending into hell. But our Easter Vigil came in our breaking free and finally leaving mile marker 133.6. And the light of the resurrection came as Sunday morning we ventured out at 7 a.m. to journey back to our Promised Land of Nebraska. We survived. More than that, we encountered something powerful—the ability to bond in moments of trial and realize the importance of community and of prayer. Until we meet again mile marker 133.6, we thank you for the lessons learned and voice you gave to us in the news, in social media and word of mouth for this year’s March for Life. Let us continue to strive to do the work of the Lord – bringing liberty to captives and helping the oppressed go free in all walks of life, but especially in the womb. Choose Life!
Many evenings I find myself helping one of my sons with homework. Sometimes it’s literature or math that needs a little extra help. Always spelling! The homework seems endless. Yet often it’s not the subject matter which causes the concern, but the child’s focus that needs the attention. “Almost done and done are not the same thing. You need to finish it” is a conversation we have at least a few times a week.

**Life at the Newman Center isn’t much different.** Now let me be clear, my days are not spent helping Father Matya to understand the difference between adjectives and adverbs. However, the work of serving the college students, planning to build a chapter house for our Catholic sorority and funding the church’s construction seems endless—as it should! St. Paul’s example of laboring for the Gospel sets a rather high standard for us to emulate. “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” (1 Thess. 2:9)

The number of students attending Sunday Mass this year is astonishing. Twenty-two hundred students between our four Masses doubles our attendance from just a couple years ago! Praise God! It’s a cause for great joy, yet also represents a tremendous opportunity for further ministry work to be done. While working to engage the students already visiting the new church, our priests and FOCUS missionaries are poignantly aware that there remain thousands of other students on campus who have not yet seen its interior, let alone participated in the sacraments.

“Almost done and done are not the same thing.” In fact, our ability to more deeply engage the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus is just getting started. Much more work needs to be done, and we’re excited for both the opportunity and the challenge.

Similarly, in 2010, the Newman Center launched an audacious project—an expansion effort so comprehensive that it would permanently change the course of campus ministries at UNL. A vision was cast to acquire multiple pieces of land and build all new, expanded facilities. The construction plans included a Catholic fraternity, a new 650-seat St. Thomas Aquinas Church and a Newman Center that more than doubled our previous size. Finally, we plan to construct a Catholic sorority house. When completed, the new facilities will total 100,000 square feet and position the Newman Center for generations of college students to encounter Christ and His love!

Five and a half years later, by God’s grace we have accomplished many of these goals! Yet we must remain diligent in our efforts to finish the remarkable work already begun. The new St. Thomas Aquinas Church was dedicated last Divine Mercy Sunday. The additional size has quickly been put to use during Sunday Masses,
dozens of weddings and multiple Christmas concerts. Its stunning interior has inspired countless students and visiting guests alike. In fact, it’s rare to walk into the church and not find a student or guest in prayer.

“Almost done and done are not the same thing.” The stained-glass windows for the side aisles have all been designed and are awaiting donor funding. In the future, additional layers of decorative paint will complete the church’s interior design. Similarly, the church’s organ has been prepared for additional pipes to be added when funding allows.

Thus, drawing upon St. Paul’s example, the priests, missionaries, students and staff of the Newman Center remain committed to “work night and day” toward the completion of this project and the advancement of our mission—sharing Christ’s love with today’s students. More work remains to be done. Sometimes it’s a student or the next construction project that needs extra help. Always fundraising! The mission’s work seems endless. Yet, with God’s blessing and guidance, we continue to enthusiastically press onward.

“Almost done and done are not the same thing. We need your help to finish it!” We have already been richly blessed with amazing students, beautiful facilities and remarkable donor support. Praise God and thank you! However, if you’re interested in learning more about how you can “help to finish it,” I would be pleased to visit with you. Programs such as Propelr and the “Mug Club” are simple ways to help fund the missionary work of the Newman Center. Other opportunities, such as funding a stained-glass window or exploring an estate gift, can leave a legacy of your support and invest in the future beauty of our church. Most of all, though, please keep the Newman Center’s students, staff and efforts in your prayers. Be assured of our prayers in return. Thank you.

JUDE M. WERNER
Director of Development

Finally, the $25 million capital campaign goal to support our expansion effort was, perhaps, even more bold than the expansion itself. To date, $20.4 million has been raised and new donors step forward almost daily. We’ve been blessed with prayers and generosity from across the country, from individuals, families, businesses and foundations alike. Our success is a tribute to your faithfulness and stewardship. For this we thank you!

“Almost done and done are not the same thing.” Despite the remarkable success of our capital campaign and our ongoing operational funding efforts, we remain short of our goal. Securing all $25 million, and pushing beyond, is essential for the Newman Center’s fiscal stability. Not fully funding our capital campaign could negatively affect our ability to retire our construction debt and impact our ability to serve college students—those for whom this project was undertaken. More work remains to be done.

The Letts family is pleased and proud to have donated the pulpit and the stained glass window of Gabriel the Archangel to Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church.

The Newmnan Center, the fraternity, the sorority and the weekly Bible Study Groups through the FOCUS Ministries has spread the word of God, not only on the University of Nebraska Campus, but also throughout the entire country!

I have always said that the future of the Catholic Church is with the youth. The Newman Center and FOCUS are God’s instruments to carry-on OUR faith in the church!

For a complete list of available windows and naming opportunities, visit us at huskercatholic.com.

PROPELR • by Kimberly Harper

My husband and I feel incredibly blessed to live in a diocese that is committed so strongly to providing a solid and holistic Catholic education. Propelr affords us an opportunity to help in this mission. I am particularly excited that we can contribute to the mission of the Newman Center. As our children are establishing more independence and in some cases moving away from home, it’s comforting to know there is an organization like the Newman Center reaching out to them with Catholic fellowship and truth.

Find out more at Propelrcard.com
“THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS” Matthew 28:19

NEWMAN CENTER AT UNL: IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL

Answering the Church’s call for a new evangelization, FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, is a national outreach that meets college students where they are and invites them into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and the Catholic Faith.

Beginning in the Fall of 1999, FOCUS came to UNL and since then students have been graduating from UNL and joining FOCUS as missionaries to spread their love of Christ across the nation. In the past 17 years, 107 students have become missionaries, serving at 61 campuses and at the FOCUS national headquarters.

BY THE NUMBERS...

- After the completion of our new St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Newman Center
- Prior to the completion of our new St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Newman Center

2200
Average Sunday Mass Attendance

1200
Students Attending March for Life

200
Average Weekly Mass Attendance

150
Students Attending Spring Break Mission Trips at 7 Locations

65
Students Attending Greek FOCUS

25
Students Enrolled in RICA

68
Students Attending Community Nights

53
Total Number of Students in 7 Choirs

175
20 Students Praying Weekly Outside Planned Parenthood

92
Students Attending Community Nights
13 Students Utilizing a Licensed Counselor

2 Students Entering the Seminary

45 Couples Preparing for Marriage

98 Students in Discipleship

23 Students Discipling Others

70 Students Receiving Spiritual Direction

40 Weddings Performed in the Church
A Journey in Pi Alpha Chi

Coming to campus as an out-of-state student was a challenge that motivated me to join multiple groups around campus. Though I enjoyed the University’s Women’s Choir and Hall Government, I didn’t feel at home until I got involved at Newman. Each time I stepped into the choir room, I was greeted with a smile and a hug from people who were genuinely interested in my life. Eventually, the choir director, Julia DeLaRosa, told me about the Catholic sorority on campus, Pi Alpha Chi, and encouraged me to go to the upcoming recruitment event. I figured that if a girl who was kind enough to take interest in a freshman was a part of Pi Chi, it may be worth checking out. I have never been more right.

The women at the event were some of the kindest, most interesting and God-filled people I have ever met. They immediately sat me down and began to ask me questions about my interests, and tell me hilarious stories about themselves. I immediately knew that I had found my home on campus and that these were women I could call my sisters, my family.

Ever since then, I have done my best to give back to the organization that gave so much to me. The semester after initiation, the sisterhood elected me as the new vice president of recruitment, a position that has grown my leadership and organizational skills each day. It’s also given me the opportunity to meet many amazing young women and talk with them not only about Pi Chi, but about their lives and how I can personally help them. In the new year I hope to transfer a lot of those aspects into the position of Social and Campus Activities Chair.

The sisterhood of Pi Alpha Chi is unlike any other. Not only do you have the familial bond of members, but it is also centered on Catholic principles. The older classes of women have become mentors for me, encouraging me to do my best, and helping me when I need a little encouragement. I love having the opportunity to attend sisterhood Mass and Holy Hour as well as relaxing with everyone on a casual movie night. Regardless of the activity, I’m always happy to be with my sisters, and I know that we will only grow stronger when we have a house to hold all of our various events and members.

Kasia Paprocki is a junior from St. Louis Park, Minnesota studying Business Administration.
LAUNCHING THE NEWMAN INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND CULTURE

A student journey in finding truth

He is making all things new…We are so blessed this year in our new home at St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Newman Center. Newness is a work of the Holy Spirit that brings with it peace, joy, and wonder. Of course what we find new is not new to Him who is all-knowing, but for us it is a deepening, an unraveling of all that is good, true, and beautiful.

One of the many exciting new things happening at the Newman Center is the start of the Newman Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture. The Newman Institute will allow students to take credit classes focusing on the humanities through St. Gregory the Great Seminary beginning this semester.

During my first semester at the University, I enrolled in an introductory philosophy class that shook everything I believed in, even after twelve years of Catholic education and two years of good Catholic formation. Struggling through the class, not necessarily because of the course load but more so because of the interior darkness I seemed to be in, I set out on a search for Truth.

That class and the struggle taught me so much. It taught me through interactions and meetings with my non-theist professor that we are all searching for Truth, and that Truth pierces hearts no matter how hardened they have become. It stirs the heart and sometimes even causes storms at first, but when accepted it brings peace. I have the Newman Center to thank for getting me through the storm.

The priests answered questions that came up both in class and in my heart, the library resources provided supplemental reading to class topics, and the availability of the Blessed Sacrament at all times allowed me to sit and question and be exposed to Truth, changing me without realizing it myself—for one cannot sit in the presence of our LORD and not be changed.

I am so excited for the Newman Institute because it will provide a sure light in the darkness. What will be taught will stir hearts just like my philosophy class, but what will be different is that it will be rooted in and directed toward Truth. I know from the four inaugural lectures that were open to the public last semester that what is presented indeed moves the mind and heart to go deeper to a place where we come to know and learn, but also get taken up into the wonder of the richness and mystery of the faith.

I can only imagine what amazing fruit will come from the Newman Institute! After all, a similar program changed the life of Bishop James Conley, and lead him home to the Catholic Church. The Institute will expose its students to the Transcendental truths, which will lead them to the One Who is Goodness, Truth, and Beauty Himself. The Institute will join the Newman Center in creating a new experience of going to a liberal public university, where “liberal” is not something to be feared or fought. Instead it’s part of the adventure of finding Truth, letting ourselves be found by Truth, and then sharing with others the freedom that comes from His promise of “seek and you shall find.”

Tessa Contreras is a Junior from Lincoln, Nebraska studying psychology.
When I first found out I was going to serve in Nebraska as a first-year FOCUS missionary, I thought there was no way I could ever like Nebraska. I was going far from Yucaipa, California, my home, and I knew the Midwest lifestyle was going to be quite different than what I was used to.

But, when I walked into the church for the first time, I realized what a blessing it was going to be to serve at the Newman Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. I have one of the most beautiful churches to spend my holy hours, celebrate the Mass, and pray with my students. Plus, I have a huge student center right in the palm of my hands to use as my missionary home. I could go out on-campus and bring students back to encounter Christ in new ways.

The Newman Center has become a home for so many activities that I participate in as a FOCUS missionary, from leading Bible Studies, attending RCIA classes, hosting a Missions Fiesta, spending time in prayer, and even playing the occasional game of spikeball in the atrium. The facilities that I have access to here at the University truly make my job as a missionary more enjoyable and allow me the resources to walk closely with Christ with each one of the students I have the honor of working with.

One of my favorite events that the Newman Center hosted this past semester was Night Fever. On this evening, the church was lit up for a night of praise, worship and Eucharistic Adoration. Students went out in teams to invite other students into the church to say a prayer for peace. I had the opportunity to be a part of one of these teams. On this evening, one of the groups of students that I encountered and invited into the church had been searching for a Catholic small group that they could become involved with on campus. They had not yet been inside the Newman Center or the new church and were excited to be invited to come see it. They are now looking forward to getting involved in a Bible study at the Newman Center. I pray that, just like me and the students I serve, these girls will also come to find this place their home.

Jessica Uithoven is a FOCUS missionary serving at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.
FATHER MATYA ARTICLE continued from page 1

But as we all know, it’s not just about the numbers. One of our main goals in terms of ministry has always been to invite our students to encounter Christ in such a way that their lives would be changed by the experience. And that is happening as well. I could already write pages of stories to you that begin with a student saying to me, “Father, when I was in chapel yesterday…”

There are so many great stories. Here is a favorite. As you leave the church, the following words are painted on the arch above the door: “The more we love God, the better our love is.” That quotation is from St. Thomas Aquinas. Makes sense, right? Well at one of our recent weddings, when the bride and groom walked out of the church, the bride stopped the groom at the arch and told him, “Take off your ring.” Of course, he was puzzled and confused. And so she said to him again, “Take off your ring and look at the inside.” Inscribed on the inside of the ring were the words, “The more we love God, the better our love is.” That story still gives me goose bumps.

And then of course there is Night Fever. Night Fever is an event that started in Cologne, Germany where young people go out into the streets and invite people who are out and about to come into the church to light a candle and say a prayer for peace. The Blessed Sacrament is on the altar with the lights low and priests and prayer team members are available for confessions or just to talk. We have had two of these nights in our new church. And again, it’s amazing to see what happens. I remember at our first Night Fever watching three young teenage boys walk up the center aisle with their skateboards in tow. They stood in front of the altar in amazement for a short time before falling to their knees to light a candle and offer a prayer. It was beautiful, and I’m pretty sure when they left home that evening with their skateboards, they had no idea that encounter was going to take place.

Another update. Five new students have walked in to make a visit and to offer a prayer since my last update. I could sit here all night and watch this!

Thanks to all of you for your prayers and encouragement. And in the future, I can’t wait to tell you more stories that take place in this beautiful chapel.

FATHER ROBERT MATYA
Chaplain

Check out
HuskerCatholic.org
for more exciting project updates and images!