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Seek Conference Energizes Ministry

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

On January 2, 2023, fifty students from the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University boarded buses for the annual Seek Conference hosted by FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). Groggily getting off the buses in downtown St. Louis, the students had no idea what to expect – it had been four years since the last Seek Conference and no students present had yet to experience what was about to happen.

Seek is a five-day conference of rich spiritual and theological talks, daily Mass, Adoration, and Confession. Attending with 17,000 other college students is deeply moving for our students, inspiring them to take their faith seriously and spread the Gospel.

“Seek shines hope and beauty into the Church and allows students to see that they are not alone in living their faith on the college campus,” says MaryKate O’Brien, the FOCUS team Director for Pitt.

When I attended one such conference as a freshman at Pitt, that was my experience. In the “communion of



Fr. Stephen & Newman Center students excitedly reunite with Sr. Elfie Del Rosario, FMA at Seek. Sr. Elfie visited the Oratory and spoke at “Newman Night” last fall.

saints” of thousands of other students, I began to see that I was not alone, nor was I ever alone. That conference was for me a real flashpoint in my spiritual life, which set in motion my growth in the love of God and eventually discernment of the priesthood and the Oratory. I was so blessed to come back from the conference to a vibrant community grounded in authentic friendships with Christ and with others.

It is an amazing blessing to see that same flashpoint occur in the lives of our students now. I’m seeing students

return from Seek sparked with the desire to spread the truth of Christ’s Gospel. This is not mere emotional zeal but a lasting invitation to live out our faith in all sincerity.

I’m already seeing the effect in new students being invited to share in Christ’s love. More and more students are committing to Adoration, daily Mass, frequent recitation of the Rosary, and attending and leading Bible Studies. More and more students are taking up the cross of personal healing and rediscovering their identities as

sons and daughters of God the Father. More and more students are living in that freedom that can only come from Christ and desiring to live out their faith for the rest of their lives.

Nick, a sophomore at CMU, said, “At Seek, there were a couple talks that really convinced me: God cares about me. God wants to work in me. God really does love me. I need to rely on him. No longer am I saying ‘I trust in God, *but...*’ Now, I’m letting go of that ‘but’ and just trusting in God. Seek has awakened that in me and I’m really grateful for this week.”

Teresa, a sophomore at Pitt, recounts her experience: “I have been pretty active in my faith my whole life, but Seek made me realize that I have been holding back in a lot of different ways. I experienced an incredible sense of peace and joy during my time there, and upon leaving, I fully decided I fully decided - this is so amazing, I WANT to go all in. I need this for the rest of my life.”

St. Philip Neri once said, “Give me ten truly detached men, and I will convert the world with them.” After Seek I find myself wondering, what could God do with fifty?

What to Know Before a Diaconate Ordination

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.



Br. Leo will be ordained a Deacon on May 27th at 10am at St. Paul Cathedral.

The Catechism tells us that “Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time.” Our very own Br. Leo Dornan, C.O., will be joining the ranks of those who participate in this ministry of Christ beginning this May 27. At that time, Br. Leo will be ordained a deacon, the first grade of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and we hope you are able to join us for this wonderful celebration. Here are some things to know about the theology of the diaconate and the ordination itself before attending:

The Theology of the Diaconate

1) The deacon is configured as a servant forever.

The diaconate is characterized by a life of service to the people of God. In the Book of Acts, St. Luke tells us of Christians widows being neglected

in the daily distribution, and the need for the apostles to call forth men to serve as assistants in the care of the needy widows. They chose “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) for the task. Through prayer and the laying of hands, these deacons received, and all deacons now receive a permanent mark on their soul, meaning they will be deacons forever, even in heaven. Their whole life is to be oriented towards Jesus, and this orientation should characterize their every word and deed from here forward.

2) Jesus Christ is a deacon, and serves as the model for all deacons.

This heart of service finds its model in Our Lord Himself. The almost paradoxical character of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is that the God of all of the universe became the servant of all in order to show us God’s love for us. Much like a tender mother, God shows his love by serving us. Pope Benedict XVI, of happy memory,

tells us that “He, the Son, became our deacon. This is a central aspect of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the fact that the Lord of us all is deacon: a servant who goes around and serves us and thus reveals to us the mystery of God’s love.”

3) The diaconate is the first grade of the single sacrament of Holy Orders.

Holy Orders is unique among the sacraments insofar as there are different degrees or levels of participation in this one sacrament. Whereas one is either married or not, baptized or not, confirmed or not, one can have more or less of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

The fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders was given to the Apostles in order to carry on the mission of Jesus on earth after his Ascension. To assist them in this ministry, bishops have unfolded the sacrament to allow for two degrees of helpers: priests and deacons. Br. Leo will be entering into the first grade (the diaconate) as a step

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Unprofitable Servanthood: Reflections of a Hospital Chaplain

By Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

“When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’” Luke 17:10

This verse used to bother me. Should the servants not be rewarded for doing what they were told to do? Is the master not being a little harsh? Of course, any verse should be interpreted within the whole of Sacred Scripture, which includes other parables wherein the faithful servants are indeed rewarded upon their master’s return. Nevertheless, I remained bothered by the passage about “unprofitable servants.”

Then I began working as a hospital chaplain. Most of my time at the hospital is spent going from room to room visiting with patients that have listed their religion as Catholic. I knock on the door, hope that I am not interrupting precious sleep, give my usual introduction, and begin talking with the patient if they are so kind as to welcome me in.

A majority of these conversations are uneventful. They share a little of what they are going through, we make small talk for a few minutes, I say a quick prayer, and then leave the room. Other



Fr. Thomas at UPMC St. Margaret Hospital Chapel in Aspinwall

visits, however, are not so routine.

The suffering that patients go through can sometimes make their hearts beautifully open and receptive to God. There have been many tearful conversations where patients will pour their hearts out and share the burdens that they carry. There have been confessions where patients have received the mercy of God for sins that have been with them for years. There have been very devout souls who gain notable strength and encouragement through receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion. And, of course, there have been times where someone

receives the sacraments for the last time before going to meet the Lord.

The list could go on, but for any of this – who am I to be present, let alone to perhaps be an instrument of God in these lives? Who am I to be “sent by God” when I simply went to the next person on the list? Who am I to tell them the good news that God forgives them for a sin that has plagued their conscience for so long? Who am I to give the Blessed Sacrament to people in dire moments when other priests have labored for years to make the individual so devout? Who am I to administer Last Rites in one of the final

waking moments of a long and well-lived life?

In any manner of Christian service, one aspect is the end reward that we await for our fidelity. It is hoping to eventually sit at the Eternal Banquet so that our master can wait on us (Lk 12:37). It is longing to hear the words “well done, my good and faithful servant... enter the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21). However, another aspect is the reward of the present moment. It is the mysterious joy of being filled with life only as we lay our lives down. It is the privilege of being part of a plan that is far more beautiful and loving than anything we could come up with ourselves. It is the gift of participating in the salvation of souls, something infinitely beyond our own capacity.

Whatever our Christian vocation may be, it is a gift to serve the Lord. We are “unprofitable servants” not because of the futility of our work, but because our “profit” is really our Master’s work. We are “unprofitable servants” not because of the selfishness of God, but because of His unfathomable generosity in letting us be His servants at all. Thus, being an unprofitable servant is not something bothersome. Rather, it is itself the reward and wonderful reality that we enjoy when serving Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Stephen Petrany, 2023 Newman Award Winner



Stephen and his now wife, Becca, in the Oratory Student Center Library shortly after they had just gotten engaged.

By Fr. Michael Darcy, C.O.

Since 2014 our yearly calendar has included the celebration of a Baccalaureate ceremony for our graduating seniors. The evening takes place at the end of April and consists of Mass, which this year we will celebrate at Heinz Chapel, and then a dinner in honor of the students. The dinner features the presentation of an award... of sorts. It seems strange to call it that; perhaps we should call it an “acknowledgement,” although that does not seem to have quite the right ring to it. Its name as things stand now is, “The St. John Henry Newman Award for Christian Witness.”

We used to call the award, “The St. John Henry Newman Lifetime

Achievement Award,” but we decided that sounded a bit too much like a premature canonization. In fact, one year we gave the award to a long-time friend of the Oratory and graduate of the Newman Center who is a father to young children. He mentioned in his address to our students that he felt a little uneasy with the notion of receiving a lifetime achievement award when his life’s work was clearly very much in front of him. His point was not lost on us.

The idea of the award as we conceive of it now is simply to acknowledge an alum of the Newman Center who practiced and developed his or her faith while here with us and has since carried it with him into his post-undergraduate life. It also provides us with an occasion

to bring graduates of our campus ministry back to Pittsburgh to talk about their experience of faith-after-the-Newman Center and to encourage those about to leave us to think about their own practice of the faith as they make their way in the world.

During their time at the Newman Center, our students become collaborators with us in ministry. As they grow in their knowledge and practice of the faith we encourage them to take on roles of peer ministry. We intend the Baccalaureate dinner to mark not the end of this collaboration with us, but the beginning of a new phase of it.

We encourage our graduates to maintain a connection with us, and to think of the Oratory as their spiritual home so they can keep close touch with the grace they received here and continue to be inspired by it. The Baccalaureate dinner also provides an occasion to ask our graduates to remember the Newman Center in their charitable giving. In this way the Baccalaureate dinner marks the beginning of a new form of collaboration between us and our students. By supporting us financially, our graduates help ensure that the ministry that gave to them can continue to give to others.

This year’s recipient is Mr. Stephen Petrany. Stephen is originally from Huntington, West Virginia. Following his years at Pitt (2007-2010) where he earned a bachelor’s degrees in Economics and Political Science,

Stephen attended Yale Law School. After graduation, the newly minted lawyer served as a law clerk to Judge William Pryor, who is the Chief Judge of the US Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit, located in Birmingham, Alabama. Stephen then went to work as an associate lawyer for the multinational law firm, Jones Day. From 2017-2018 he returned to clerking, this time for the Supreme Court Justice, Samuel Alito. In 2019 he returned to Jones Day until 2021 when he accepted the position of Solicitor General of the state of Georgia.

The website of the “Office of the Attorney General” in Georgia indicates that Stephen “oversees the office’s appellate and multi-state litigation in state and federal courts,” and “collaborates on all phases of significant litigation with other attorneys at the Department of Law and advises the Attorney General concerning matters of national interest that may have implications for the state of Georgia.”

Stephen played a role in the state of Georgia’s application of Dobbs vs. Jackson, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to reverse Roe vs. Wade, the court decision that established access to abortion as a constitutional right. Stephen argued that a Georgia judge’s attempt to overrule a recent ban enacted by the Georgia legislature was unconstitutional in light of the Supreme Court’s Dobbs decision. In Stephen’s legal petition he wrote, “This Court

An Interview with Andrew Thompson

Andrew is a senior at the University of Pittsburgh. He studies Pre-law and has accepted a position as a missionary with FOCUS after he graduates this spring, where he will continue to serve on a college campus, accompanying future generations of college students in their relationships with Christ.

How did you start getting involved at the Newman Center?

I started taking my involvement at Newman seriously when I met Ethan Giebmanns. Ethan was advertising events for the Newman Club outside of the William Pitt Union and I happened to run into him. I had some form of understanding of the faith at the time, but I didn’t have the conviction to practice it. As Ethan put it, Newman offered one of the greatest goods a club can offer; a loving community that is centered on communion in God. I decided I would at least try one event, that being the cookout to start off the Fall semester in 2021. After talking with so many students that were open and honest about their faith, I felt like I didn’t have to hide my faith any more. Here, I could live out my faith and strengthen it even further through the help of the Oratorains and students. Eventually, Ethan would not only be a good friend, but a good housemate at the Fratican, a men’s Catholic fraternity where we challenge ourselves to live out our faith.

Tell me more about your time at Pitt and your involvement in the Newman Center.

Last semester I started a Bible Study that centers on the Letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians. This study provided by FOCUS emphasizes how to maintain discipline within the faith so that those with a strong foundation may effectively spread the word of Christ. My Bible Study goes hand in hand with discipleship led by Keith Mockry, a fellow FOCUS missionary. Here I learn how to become a stronger leader in my study and skills to invite new members to learn about Scripture. Discipleship taught me the importance of attending Adoration



Andrew (left) and several friends enjoy a snowy day-in while on the Men’s retreat at Rednal Retreat House.

so that I can open myself more in Christ to strengthen my relationship with God. If I can’t find the time for Adoration, I try to find the time for Mass.

How did the Oratory and Newman Center form you and continue to form in your spiritual life?

That honesty that I mentioned previously was shown by individuals that were in love with their faith. One of those individuals is Manny Basnet. Manny, my good friend and housemate at the Fratican, taught me the Rosary, which is a great way of growing one’s spirituality and community through prayer. Once you are committed to the Rosary, asking for the intercession of Mary means that God, in turn, will send people for you to pray for in your life. There are people without homes that are suffering on the street, believing that God has forgotten them. Some have had a negative experience with the faith and view the papacy as something sinister. A fellow student might be right at the door of entering their faith, but do not know how to take their first step. Fear not. If you ask Mary for her intercession, she will send those people into your life so that you may pray a rosary for them so that they might be saved through God’s guidance.

What is “The Fratican”? How has living at the Fratican been formative for you?

Catholicism is faith through good works. The Fratican cultivates community through prayer and challenges us to take our faith to new heights that we never thought possible. Through fraternity, we encourage each other to invite people to the Newman Club, pray the rosary and start rosary groups, create Bible Studies, volunteer at Newman events, or actualize an idea that you want to become possible at Newman to bring closer to God. We ask ourselves questions centered on bettering ourselves in faith: What does it mean to be a man practicing faith? How can I be a good husband to my spouse? How do I convince my friend to attend a Newman event? If you are interested in knowing what it means to be a brother at the Fratican, you might just get invited to one of our dinners.

Why did you decide to become a FOCUS Missionary after you graduate?

As Keith put it, “If you have even the smallest desire in your heart to explore FOCUS Missionary, then you should explore that interest.” Being told this at a FOCUS testimony event is what started my personal journey to become a FOCUS Missionary. I told myself that all I would do is fill out the application and then think about attending recruitment weekend. However, I was enthralled and challenged by the questions the application posed. These questions were focused on my relationship with Christ, how that has changed, and how it changed how I acted as a brother in Christ. At recruitment weekend, I was given the challenge to try to aim for Heaven, but as Catholics our goal should be for us to go to Heaven and to bring everyone else there as well. There are those that will be scared of our beliefs and even those that want to see the end of the Church. We might call these people our enemies, but let God worry about who should be judged as such. This

is a challenge for us as Catholics to be compassionate towards them and to show them the goodness of Christ’s teachings. In truth, those we might perceive as “enemies of the Church” are individuals with the potential to be evangelized. Everyone has the potential to be saved.

What aspects of your time involved in campus ministry here do you think will stick with you in your life going forward? What are you most grateful for from your time at the Newman Center?

I was once told to be careful to ask God for patience, since He may take a while for things to make sense for you as you live your life. However, seeing a person slowly open up to Christ’s teachings or becoming Catholic is like a pressure cooker. We place the raw ingredients in the cooker, lock the lid, and wait for pressure to build up over time. We don’t see if the ingredients are being cooked, so we have natural faith in the cooker to create the final product for us to enjoy through the pressure. A meal in the cooker might take a few hours to be prepared, but for someone to be evangelized might take months or years. I’ve watched people come to the Oratory that are skeptical of the Church’s teachings, but by going to Newman events and interacting with the community, their hearts are being slowly warmed by God. By exposing themselves to the beauty of God, whether it is through the sacraments, the teachings of priests, or acceptance of community, their hearts will eventually be able to recognize that beauty. Their hearts will then be set ablaze by the Holy Spirit so that they too can be inspired to do good acts through faith. We must have natural faith in God to let His good works influence those that have yet to realize God in their own lives. I am grateful for the members of the Newman Center to be patient with me and with others in our development in the faith. Now, I can share the faith with others that are also in need of God’s love.



Andrew & friends Pat and Jacob play chess at the St. John Henry Newman Celebration.



While at the Senior Retreat in January, Andrew reads the First Reading during Mass in Rednal’s chapel.

Rednal Benefit Recap: Thank You!

On the evening of February 18th, people of all ages wined, dined, and merrily gathered at the Oratory for the 2023 Rednal Benefit. The night kicked off with appetizers and cocktails in the upstairs private residence of the Oratorian Fathers. Attendees caught up with family and friends as they viewed the picture slideshow of retreats & events at Rednal in the past year, and wagered their luck as they purchased tickets for the raffle baskets. Following cocktail hour, everyone moved downstairs for dinner in the completely transformed, semi-formal dining experience on the lower level of the Oratory. The evening concluded back upstairs with desserts and the long awaited raffle drawings.

A very big thank you to all those who donated to this year’s Rednal Benefit. Because of your generosity, we are delighted to announce that *we reached our \$55,000 goal!* Your support truly makes a huge impact. While these funds go directly toward the important



projects in up-keeping Rednal Retreat House, there is no way to quantify the friendships formed & relationships with Christ deepened at Rednal, all made possible by your support. Thank you so much for allowing the Rednal student retreat ministry to continue, bringing the love of Christ to college students and cultivating Christ-centered friendships.

Congratulations to the Grand Prize Raffle Winners:

Brian & Laura Hall
Prize 1: A 2-Night Stay at Rednal

Kathleen Hudak
Prize 2: \$500 Amazon Gift Card

Bill & Anna Marie Roche
Prize 3: \$500 Henne Jewelers Gift Card

Mark your calendars for next year’s Rednal Benefit:

Saturday, February 10th, 2024

What to Know Before a Diaconate Ordination

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to the second grade (the priesthood). Yet, since he will never stop being a deacon, he is to maintain the diaconal character of holiness of life and a heart of service throughout his priesthood.

4) The transitional deacon promises celibacy, obedience, and to pray for the Church.

While we usually associate these promises with the priesthood, Br. Leo will actually make the lifelong commitment to celibacy, obedience, and fidelity to prayer at his diaconate ordination. The promise of celibacy will allow Br. Leo to orient his heart totally to the service of Christ and the people of God, and allow him to serve as a sign to Heaven, where “people will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (Mt. 22:30). His obedience will place him at the disposal of his superior, the Provost of the Oratory, and his commitment to prayer will be realized primarily through the faithful praying of the Divine Office, a series of hymns, psalms, readings, and petitions prayed five times per day.

5) Deacons preach, teach, serve, and celebrate sacraments.

Pope Paul VI tells us that the diaconate “is not to be considered as a mere step towards the priesthood, but it is so adorned with its own indelible character and its own special grace.” This special grace will be lived out in a particular way as Br. Leo enters into his diaconal ministry of preaching, baptizing, presiding at weddings and funerals, teaching the faith, and serving those in need, especially the sick.

The Diaconate Ordination

1) The minister of the sacrament of Holy Orders is a bishop, who invokes the Holy Spirit, and performs the laying on of hands.

We are particularly excited to welcome Bishop William J. Waltersheid in order



to ordain Br. Leo. As a successor to the apostles, Bishop Waltersheid possesses the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. After he lays his hands upon Br. Leo’s head, the key part of the Ordination Rite will be when Bishop Waltersheid says the words: “Send forth the Holy Spirit upon him, O Lord, we pray, that he may be strengthened by the gift of your sevenfold grace, to carry out faithfully the work of the ministry.” At the moment those sacred words are pronounced, Br. Leo will become a deacon.

2) The litany of the Saints is sung in order to prepare the man for ordination.

Before the prayer of ordination and the imposition of hands takes place, the ordinand lays prostrate on the floor of the Church – an ancient posture that indicates submission and humility. During this time, the congregation calls upon all the greatest saints in the history of the Church - and the ordinand’s patrons -to intercede for this man as his life undergoes a profound change.

3) The clothing with dalmatic is a sign of the new office.

The dalmatic resembles a priestly vestment, but differs insofar as it has sleeves that close around the arm of the deacon. This vestment represents the office of the deacon, and he will wear it for Mass, and other liturgical celebrations in the future. At the ordination, the dalmatic is placed on the deacon by another cleric of Br. Leo’s choosing who has been influential in Br. Leo’s formation, signifying that the office is a gift received from the Church.

4) The Book of the Gospels are handed to the deacon, signifying his new role in proclaiming the word of God.

During the Ordination Rite, Bishop Waltersheid will give the Book of the Gospels to Br. Leo and implore him, “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” With this injunction, Br. Leo receives his mandate not only for preaching, but

for the structure of his whole life moving forward.

5) The ordination is the highest liturgical expression of intercession for the new deacon.

Much of the Ordination Rite involves prayers for the man to be ordained. The whole congregation beseeches the Lord for this man to be made a good and holy deacon. However, praying for Br. Leo should not be confined just to the liturgy in May. We should pray for him now as he prepares, and pray for him after the ordination too, that he remain faithful, and ever increase in holiness and zeal.

Br. Leo and I journeyed through many years of formation together, and I can confidently say that he has been a wonderful brother in the community for the past six years. I speak for all my fellow sons of St. Philip when I say that we are very eager to welcome Br. Leo to the order of deacons. He has already manifested his heart of service so beautifully in his years here. We hope you can join us for his transition to a sacramental participation in Christ’s ministry as His servant.



CMU Ministry Highlights

By Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

At the beginning of January, a group of Carnegie Mellon University students made the trip to St. Louis, MO for SEEK – a conference attended by more than 15,000 college students, hundreds of priests and religious, and renowned Catholic speakers. On the bus ride back to Pittsburgh, students shared some of the graces that they received from the week. One way that God was working in their lives was simple: truths that the students had already believed prior to the conference were now held with deeper conviction and knowledge than before.

It is good that you exist. God cares about you. Trust Him. God is madly in love with you. Five days of being told messages such as these had helped the students to enter more deeply into that *Cor ad cor loquitur* (Heart speaks to heart) friendship with Christ that was so dear to our own St. John Henry Newman.

The deepening of such convictions is not something that only happens at SEEK, but something that is constantly happening through regular events on and off-campus. We begin the week with “Newman Night” on Sunday with pizza and talks on a variety of Catholic topics in the basement of St. Paul Cathedral. On Monday, we go on campus for “Chit Chats” with Fr. Reed.

In the fall semester, he led the students through the Church’s rich teachings on the seven sacraments. This spring semester, Fr. Reed is leading them through St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body. Every Wednesday is “Newman After Hours” with Mass at Heinz Chapel (arguably the most beautiful 9pm daily Masses you will ever find), followed by fellowship at the Newman Center. On Thursdays, we bring the love and mercy of Christ to the students by hearing confessions and offering Mass on CMU campus. Finally, on Fridays we enjoy a meal and fellowship at the Newman Center.

At least once a semester, the students have the opportunity to get away from the city by going to Rednal, our peaceful retreat house in Ligonier, PA. Fr. Reed led the Carnegie Mellon student retreat in November, offering reflections on suffering and friendship, with another retreat lined up for the spring semester. Escaping to Rednal is always a time of restoration and growing in friendship with Christ and with each other.

In all of this, there are big moments and small moments of God entering more deeply into the lives of these students so that they can become the saints that God is calling them to be, and so that they may illumine Carnegie Mellon University with the light of Christ.



Pater Joshua’s Classroom

By Fr. Joshua Kibler, C.O.

“Domine, non sum dingus,” a student dutifully – and not quite correctly – copies in her notebook, in Pater Joshua’s South Hills Catholic Academy Latin class. I let her know to switch the g and the n on this word, as well as on her attempt at “agnus” (“lamb”), sparing her for now a bad joke about beef and lambs. “Sbagliando s’impara,” one learns by making mistakes, goes the Italian proverb, and productive mistakes are largely the way we learn Latin here, as in most things in life.

In class we focus on learning prayers and sacred songs both big and small for the many big and small moments of life, with the rhythm of the Latin sounds forming a kind of tonic for the school day and, I hope, for a lifetime. One hundred twenty-some young souls in my classes – less than a third of the whole student population – have been learning lately to sing or recite the Ave Verum Corpus for Eucharistic adoration, the In Paradisum for prayers at the graveside, the Litany of the Saints for many occasions, and now the Domine Non Sum Dignus in the native language of its original speaker, the centurion of the Gospel, for the liturgy that adopted this language for worship centuries after. They learn these prayers first by hearing, without written text, often requiring a fair amount of repetition, the “mother of studies.” With the written text provided, they copy down in their notebooks, with word-for-word interlinear translations,

the words of the prayer, and begin to get a sense of the strange poetry of Latin syntax.

Questions about noticed patterns, or similarities and differences between Latin and English spelling or phrasing lead not infrequently to lessons about grammar, and perhaps some new insight into the workings of languages generally: word order matters greatly in English, not as much in Latin; sancta, sanctus, sancti, sanctam, sancto are all the equivalent to the English word “holy”, but with several forms for several reasons; “he” and “she” are only for people and animals in English, but in Latin and most world languages they also apply to the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. The sprouting of habits of analogy are exciting to witness in young minds – between regular reminders to sit up straight, cease distractions, and pay attention, of course!

I like to think St. Philip would be pleased with our *modus operandi*, zealous novices in our respective places – tyrones, as he preferred to say, referring to the recruits of the ancient Roman legions. As often as we “dinguses” miss the mark, if we train out of love for God, we tone our mental and spiritual muscles. As St. John Henry Newman could have put it in direct reference to all new teachers and students anywhere: “It is easy to fancy a best way of doing things, but very difficult to find it... for nothing would be done at all, if a man waited till he could do it so well that no one could find fault with it.”

Stephen Petrany, 2023 Newman Award Winner

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should stay the lower court’s decision now, without waiting to overrule it months down the line, while untold numbers of unborn children suffer the permanent consequences.” Stephen’s brief featured some colorful imagery: “No other court has ever held that an overruled judicial opinion can, like a zombie rising from the grave, invalidate otherwise perfectly valid laws.” I guess this means Stephen can add “zombie killer” to his resumé. St. Paul writes that the strong should devote their strength to the defense of the weak. It is wonderful to see a Newman Center alumnus devoting the strength and authority of his office to defense of the weakest and most vulnerable. *Deo gratias.*

I am a little stunned as I write out this impressive resumé. I had the good fortune of knowing Stephen during his years at the Newman Center, and while I admired his thoughtfulness, I can’t honestly say that I saw in his future such a rapid ascent to the heights of the legal profession. My most vivid recollections are of him hanging around the Newman Center, attending our Masses, stopping to pray, and engaging in thoughtful conversations about any number of things. I have particularly vivid memories of discussing movies

with Stephen. In those days, at least, Stephen approached movies with some seriousness. We had similar tastes in that regard and I enjoyed sharing ideas about favorite films.

Also memorable was Stephen’s fashion sense in his undergrad days. In my mind’s eye I can still see Stephen decked out – no matter the weather – in basketball shorts and Teva sandals. Things have improved considerably since then. In all the most recent pictures I have seen it is evident that he has adopted a style of dress more befitting a lawyer.

One of the great privileges of my involvement with young people is to watch the progress of their lives as they make their way in the world as Christian disciples. In Stephen’s case I recall when he began dating his wife, Becca, who was a nursing student at Pitt at the time. They were married in 2015 and now raise their two children, Stevie (3) and Anastasia (1).

God willing, Stephen has a great deal of his life still ahead of him. But what he has achieved so far is impressive. We hope and pray that God continues to bless him through the faith we share. Likewise, we thank God for the opportunity to minister to young people like Stephen and his wife Becca, and we thank God also for the opportunity to have them back with us to celebrate.

St. John Henry Newman Celebration

On October 10, 2022, the Oratory celebrated the feast day of Saint John Henry Newman. His feast day is recognized on October 9, but having fallen on a Sunday this past year, it was celebrated by the Oratory and Newman Center on Monday. The evening began with Holy Mass at Heinz Chapel, enhanced by beautiful, sacred music and the liturgical prayers to St. John Henry Newman that express, so well, our love for him. The Most Reverend, Bishop William Waltersheid was the main celebrant and homilist for this Mass, and all of the Oratorian Priests were present as concelebrants. At least 150 of the Oratorian friends and family were in attendance. Saint John Henry Newman is quoted as saying, “A cloud of incense was rising on high; the people suddenly all bowed low; what could it mean? The truth flashed on him, fearfully yet sweetly; it was the Blessed Sacrament – it was the Lord incarnate who was on the altar, who had come to visit and bless his people. It was the Great Presence, which makes a Catholic Church different from every other place in the world; which makes it, as no other place can be - holy.” Those present at the feast day liturgy received a glimpse of what Saint John

Henry Newman described. Immediately following Mass, everyone took the short walk up to Bayard Street to enjoy food, fun and fellowship at the Oratory. It was a beautiful autumn evening, allowing all to enjoy the outside tents, the gazebo, and the bonfires that enhanced the evening. There were brats, hot dogs, hamburgers, and drinks provided by the Oratory while our guests generously provided a wide variety of delicious side dishes and desserts - a true feast. There was enough food for all to go home with a full stomach and a “to go” box. The children enjoyed coloring books and sidewalk chalk with their friends, while the adults leisurely chatted and caught up with each other. After so much time apart due to the restrictions of the previous years, it was a chance to start new friendships and reunite with those of old all under the mantle of St. John Henry Newman. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”



Become a member of the Little Oratory

If you are involved at The Pittsburgh Oratory and would like to be kept informed of our devotional, charitable, and social events, we encourage you to join our Little Oratory (previously “Secular Oratory”) and share with the Oratorian Fathers the imitation of the life and charism of St. Philip Neri.



Visit pghco.org/LittleOratory or scan the QR code to the right to learn more and become a member of the Little Oratory.



“Be Still, and know that I am God”

By Jack Wagner

“Be still, and know that I am God.”
~ Psalm 46:10

What does this mean? For much of my life, I couldn’t tell you. Like many growing up in the Church in the mid 2000’s, my catechesis was woefully lacking, to the point that I fell away from faith in my middle school years. I didn’t find my way back to believing in Jesus Christ until college, and even then, the confusion of a lifetime of looking for truth in all the wrong places caused a scrupulous unease in my faith. By the time I was reconverted to the Catholic Church, prayer was difficult. I didn’t know how to get closer to God, though I knew I had to for my own good. I wasn’t versed in trusting God either, rather I relied on my own wits and skills to “advance” in holiness. I would look online to find spiritual devotions to try, a terrible idea in retrospect: I became so inundated with disparate information that it paralyzed my prayer life altogether. It seemed that while I was showing external signs of spiritual growth, internally, I was walking two steps back for each step forward. I was running around like a headless chicken, trying to figure out which of my works God would be most pleased by, thinking that my own actions, my own reading, my own efforts would be the answer to my lifelong spiritual questions. The stress of this became unbearable over time. In this context, I was introduced to the Oratory during my last two years at Pitt. After evening classes, I often slid

into the back pew for the 9pm masses. Gradually, I became comfortable enough to go to confession with the Oratorians. I was intrigued by the concept of perpetual adoration. While I rarely sat for more than ten minutes - I am a constant fidgeter - those ten minutes were strangely liberating. Something began to dawn on me. In the silence of the chapel, I didn’t have to read or act or understand anything; I could have been illiterate for all God cared. Here, it didn’t matter what I’d read, or striven for, or agonized over. God didn’t need my action to love me. This was a place where I could be still and know that God was God, something so simple, yet beforehand unattainable for me. In this reverent space, I could sit, do nothing, and be with God, and let Him be with me. Years of spiritual pain and anxiety washed away in sweet, unexplainable moments like that. I was asked to write what I’ve learned about the Oratory, but I felt that speaking only of my few weeks of employment here would be a disservice to how much it has done for my spiritual life. I know many of our readers can relate. My previous views have simply been confirmed by my few weeks working here. I’m grateful that the Oratory exists and that I was able, in God’s time, to learn its nature: a place where one can, in brief visits, accept God as a child does. It is a place of revelation for me, the quiet house of God. In this world of constant motion and confusion, oratories are needed so that God’s booming voice can speak silently to hearts and open them up to Him. Heart speaks to heart, after all.

The Financial Times

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

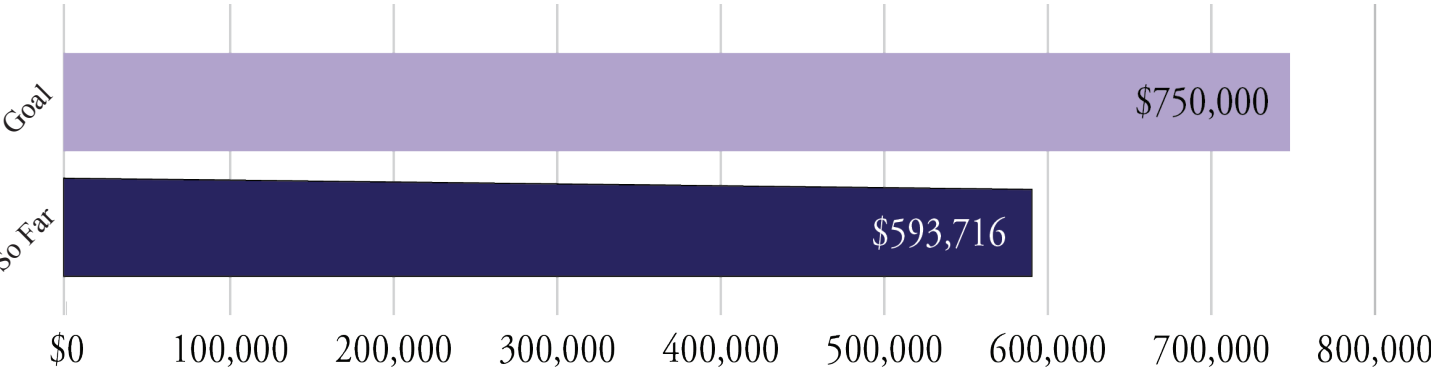
2022-2023 Annual Fund Update

I have a unique privilege of seeing the great fruits of the Oratory’s ministry on a nearly daily basis. I have seen just a handful of the many thousands of people who have passed through the Oratory, and have each experienced the grace of God working in their lives in a particular way, inside these hallowed walls. Perhaps the words of our friends themselves capture this reality better than my own words can.

Amanda, a CMU undergraduate tell us: “The Oratory is a crucial part of the community that I have found since coming to CMU and my “reversion” is in large part due to the availability of the sacraments and the ability to ask the Oratorians anything regarding my faith and life!”

And Jake, a Pitt sophomore, tells us that during his time at Pitt, “The Oratory’s impact on me can be best described in the words of St Augustine: ‘My love for you, Lord, is not an uncertain feeling, but a matter of conscious certainty. With your Word You pierced my heart, and I love you.’”

The Oratory is able to provide a forum in which the Lord is able to pierce the heart, and stir up the love for Him that Jake describes. And the impact of the Oratory extends far beyond just students. Rich DiClaudio is a businessman in Pittsburgh and adores Our Lord here at the Oratory twice a week, despite his busy schedule: “I feel very privileged and grateful for the opportunity to commit to Adore our Lord weekly in Adoration at the Pittsburgh Oratory. What an



awesome blessing and responsibility to sit humbly before our Creator and gaze into His heart. Overtime I have felt strongly called first only to short visits, then to sub, then to commit to Adore Christ, one day and now two days a week. I often long to return at other times of the week as well, and do as my schedule permits. Like all of us, I am busy and have many responsibilities and demands on my schedule. Adoration is preeminent among them all. My few hours there every week anchors my entire life. I simply can not function effectively without frequent Mass, Confession, Rosaries, and Adoration.” The Oratory is able to offer people like Rich a refuge, a place of spiritual growth, and a forum to encounter our Lord.

Your generosity makes these experiences possible.

As the Oratory continues to experience steady growth and is able to provide a place for meaningful friendships with Christ and with each other, our expenses also expand. Some of this expansion has been funded through increased Mass collections, income generated by the Oratory’s

investments, and the salaries of the Fathers who work at schools or the hospital. These funds, in turn, help to fund our in-house ministries. However, it’s you, our friends, who make everything possible.

Our goal for the Annual Fund this year is \$750,000. Your faithful financial support of the Oratory empowers our robust ministry to reach even more people. As of March 1, 2023 we have

received \$593,716, meaning we need another \$156,284 to reach our goal.

Without you, the work we do would quite simply not be possible. We are humbled by and grateful for your kindness and your support of the Oratory over the years.

Thank you for your consideration of a sacrificial gift to sustain and expand the Oratory and Newman Center’s vital ministries.

Legacy, Stock, and IRA Giving

The Oratory is able to accept your legacy and non-cash gifts, which can be liquidated to assist with immediate needs, or invested to support future ministry. Donating gifts of stocks, mutual funds, ETF’s, and other equities or non-cash assets can offer substantial tax savings. Appreciated investments can be donated directly to the Oratory without paying any capital gains tax, increasing the impact of your gift by up to 20%, while still receiving a deduction for the fair-market value of the asset from your federally taxable income. We are also able to receive Qualified Charitable Distributions from a Traditional IRA, which can be especially helpful if you do not need all of the funds for your required minimum distribution. Non-cash gifts are easier to make than you might think.

Leave a lasting legacy and support the ministry for years to come.

Contact Fr. Reed, Oratory Treasurer, for more information at 412.681.3181 or at reedfrey.co@gmail.com.

Please consider including the Oratory in your will.

What’s Going on at Rednal



Students praying in the Rednal chapel while on retreat.



Lasting friendships form and grow during the Freshman/Sophomore retreat this past semester.

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

Just this year, Rednal has seen thirteen student retreats, two packed Barn Dances (one for the undergraduates, and one for alumni & young adults), a Fall picnic, and numerous overnight stays from Oratorians and friends of the Oratory. Most weekends it seems the parking lot is full, and the well water system is stretched to its limits - we are making progress in the septic system overhaul which will optimistically be completed this summer.

Maintaining that eighty-seven acre property and thirty-four bed house is a huge challenge, a challenge that Matt Ketcham has met admirably as caretaker. As the Oratory’s Minister of Rednal, I often experience Rednal as a place of busyness and near constant repairs and updates.

But when I talk to students about why they appreciate Rednal, I am taken aback by their unanimous response. The eclectic building, the vast property, the far away location – these do not stand out to them as much as one thing: their friendships.

Felicia, after attending a retreat as a freshman at Pitt, has this to say: “Going on that retreat last year was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had. I got to see so many women encounter God and from there just take off in the faith. And

I met some of my best friends there. I always prayed for good Catholic friends, and I now have the best friends in the whole world.”

Reflecting on his experience, Aaron says, “Every retreat or event that I have attended there has allowed me to de-stress and grow as a person, make friends, and develop a deeper relationship with God.”

The peace felt at Rednal is such a contrast to their college campuses. Young people are pressed by anxieties, by collegial and familial expectations, by a Godless society, into a life of faceless meaninglessness.

But through their experience at the Newman Center and through retreats at Rednal, these students experience something deeper.

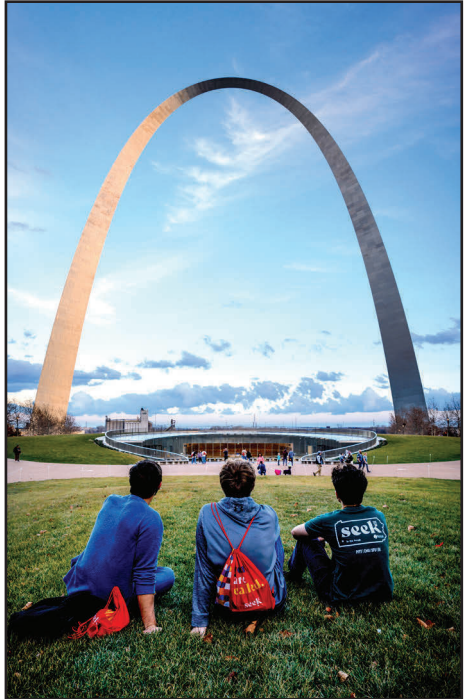
They are made for the cultivation of relationships, and they are made for Christ. For so many, their friendships are first forged in the rolling hills of Ligonier. Thus, the time and effort from both Matt and myself is going to the best of causes. As Pope Benedict said, “There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”

Thank you to everyone who, especially by their overwhelming support at the 2023 Rednal Benefit, help make the late Holy Father’s words a reality.

Your Support At Work for the Kingdom



*Fr. Stephen, Fr. Peter, and Fr. Thomas attend the **FOCUS Seek Conference** in St. Louis with the Newman Center.*



*Undergraduate students from Pitt and CMU attend the **Senior Retreat** at Rednal in January, led by Fr. Peter on the theme “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”*



*Senior students reminisce on their memories at the Newman center and the exciting changes to come at the **Senior Cocktail Night**.*



*Fr. Michael delivers a rousing lecture on the history of the Battle of Lepanto as part of the monthly **Oratory Lecture Series**.*



Fr. Marco Guillen, C.O. attends “Newman Night” as part of his visitation of the Oratory in January.



*This past fall, grad students and young adults gather for a guided holy hour and Benediction with Fr. Thomas, followed by a bonfire at the gazebo with drinks & desserts for the **Young Adult Adoration Event**.*



*While on the **General Retreat**, students grow in friendship while appreciating a fresh snowfall at Rednal Retreat House.*

