



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

A Dynamic Campus Ministry in the Diocese of Santa Rosa

Left: Deacon John Gai, former professor at Humboldt State University (now Cal Poly Humboldt), puts ashes on the forehead of one of the 70 students attending the campus Ash Wednesday Mass, 2024.

Right: 2013 Humboldt State University (now Cal Poly Humboldt) religious studies graduate Br. Antonio Luevano, OFM (front row, center), shared his vocation story during a visit with current Newman Center members.



By Rhina Guidos

Regina Fosnaugh describes the region where she lives, California's Humboldt County, as the kind of place where one settles when looking to retreat from a busy world.

"It's out of the way. It's kind of hard to get here," she says.

Situated among redwood trees in a rural landscape on the Northern California coast, Humboldt County is more than 200 miles north of the urban bustle of San Francisco in the mission Diocese of Santa Rosa. Here Regina has chosen to live out a challenging mission: spreading the word of God among the youth, as well as the greater community, as the director of campus ministry at Cal Poly Humboldt—formerly Humboldt State University.

Spiritually speaking, it's a challenging community, she says. Much of the local population does not belong to a faith community or religious tradition. The local obituaries reflect this secular culture: about half of those who die in the region have no funeral services. Although the Diocese of Santa Rosa contains wealthy enclaves, Humboldt County "is kind of a poor area," she adds. The diocese, like other dioceses in rural areas with small Catholic populations, receives funds from Catholic Home Missions to support pastoral ministries like Regina's.

Despite those challenges, campus ministry at Cal Poly Humboldt is also where she has led a small but enthusiastic group of young Catholics to form a community focused on simple, visible, and creative ways to follow Christ. While looking for cost-effective means of inspiration, Regina discovered Evangelical Catholic, a program that offers

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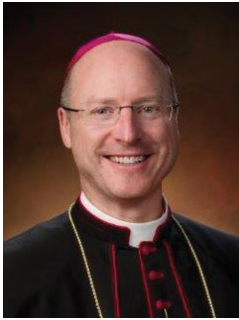
Neighbors

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A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Catholic campus ministry is a vital part of life for students, providing them with the support and encouragement of peers and faith leaders who can help them deepen

their faith, discern God's call for them, and grow in holiness. More than just a social club or extracurricular activity, campus ministry is a genuine ecclesial community, especially for students in rural and less populous places such as the dioceses supported by Catholic Home Missions.

The Catholic campus ministry at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt (Cal Poly Humboldt), in Northern California's rural Diocese of Santa Rosa, is an example of a vibrant Catholic student community. By engaging students and helping them integrate their faith into their lives through prayer, service, and hospitality in the community and among their peers, the Catholic campus ministry at Cal Poly Humboldt is forming young adults who preach the Gospel by example.

Catholic Home Missions helps the Diocese of Santa Rosa and other home mission dioceses sustain this and other vital ministries. It provides the economic resources needed to form missionary disciples for lives of faith and service. On their behalf, I thank you for your ongoing support of the annual Catholic Home Missions Appeal. I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight
Bishop of Jefferson City
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee on
Catholic Home Missions

training for campus ministry and, she says, "focuses on praying intentionally for people, for making your prayer life a priority, first of all, and then letting God guide you to what he wants you to."

By gathering and praying together over time, using the Evangelical Catholic program, Regina and these young people learned that they were asking the same questions: What is God calling me to do? What do I feel like I need to do?

"So I've made it my own thing . . . we've made it kind of our own thing," Regina says of the program. "We've taken their structure and we use it, but then we don't necessarily follow exactly their guidelines . . . I'm like, what are we going to do?"

Those prayers have yielded different answers at different times.

At the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the answer was to create a space to talk about death, a "memento mori group," as she calls it. Folks gathered outdoors at a nearby beach or a cemetery to meditate on death and just talk about it, given the anxieties they, along with the rest of the world, were facing.

"And it was really timely because of COVID. Everybody was worried about death. And so it was just embracing that and thinking about it and discussing that, and it was fantastic," she says.

The focus hasn't always been on growing the group's size, but rather on "trying to really transform the lives of the people in front of you," she said.

After pandemic restrictions lifted, the group began to focus on what to do for others in their midst. One activity entailed befriending and assisting an elderly woman in the community.

"And we're like, we need to help her. We cleaned her apartment. She didn't have a refrigerator for three years. Her milk and her perishables were in

the sink," Regina says. "We donated a dorm-size fridge, and we cleaned her bathroom. We took her garbage to the dump. She was just so overjoyed. She doesn't have family and she wants to live on her own."

Such actions have come about when the students pray about what God is calling them to do, "and they do it," she says.

They feel empowered because it comes from them, instead of someone telling them what to do, Regina adds.

The idea to help the older woman came from the youngest member of the campus ministry. Kieran Stack, 18, shared with the Catholic community something that inspired her: "Why don't we work on the Corporal Works of Mercy?"

"The focus hasn't always been about growing the group's size, but rather about trying to really transform the lives of the people in front of you."

"And so for seven weeks straight, we would do each of those works of mercy. Going out into the community . . . focusing on each of those works and bringing people out and showing them 'you can do this, it's not as hard as it seems' . . . seeing how they can help and all of that," Kieran says.

She says that as they carried out the different works of mercy, the work helped her grow closer to God, making the words and actions of Jesus a "reality" not just in her life, but in the lives of those who participate.

"It's showing me how I can go out and help an elderly woman in our

Cal Poly Humboldt Newman Center members, including Newman Center president Quinlan House (center) and incoming vice president Kieran Stack (right), gather for song and a campfire on Easter Sunday, 2024.

community—not just going and seeing and helping these people, which I’ve always loved doing, but seeing the impact that it’s made on other people in the group,” Kieran says.

Participants included baptized Catholics, but some hadn’t practiced the faith in a while, she says. Kieran was happy when they accepted the invitation to join.

“I’ve seen a shift in them in being able to understand and comprehend what we’ve been saying about our faith and helping others, kind of like a light switch,” Kieran says.

While those they helped expressed gratitude and sometimes surprise, Kieran says, she too is grateful for them—for what she has learned, what she has received.

“I want to build this connection with God, the connection that others have through their stories, like the people we’ve helped. They’ve had a story with God. And just hearing that and hearing their prayer life, I’ve come to build mine more and more. I have a sense more of belonging, of a community, and being able to go out into it and being able to hear what God’s wanting you to do in the moment,” Kieran says.

She adds that she’s happy to plant seeds to help build community between “those who don’t have faith and who do have faith.” That’s part of the reality of living in Humboldt County, which another student, Quinlan House, calls “overwhelmingly secular.”

Quinlan remembers his impression of his first years in the region, where some “have this notion of Christianity that isn’t exactly positive.” But this impression didn’t stop him from wanting to share his religious beliefs with others.

“Evangelization is not a walk in the park,” says Quinlan, who is studying wildlife conservation in his final semester.

Although he was inspired to study conservation because of his religious belief that women and men are called to be good stewards of the earth, he struggled to have his message heard and to convince others that being Catholic also means believing in science.



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He tried evangelizing through the traditional methods, such as sharing information at events. But after a period of prayer, and under Regina’s leadership at the Newman Center, he decided to try something different. He began cooking breakfast on the weekends and inviting a mix of people for fellowship.

“It was focused around community building, and the majority of the people that would come were either like Christian, non-Catholic, non-Christian, or just Catholics that wanted to learn more about the faith and about Scripture, creating a place where people feel welcomed,” he says.

At each meeting, after catching up on happenings in their lives, they read Scripture and discussed it. But what was important was “just entering into people’s lives, no matter where they’re at, and really just sort of accompanying them and being the light of Christ in someone’s life,” Quinlan says.

Another young leader decided to “do boxing” to attract people who wouldn’t necessarily go to the Newman Center, Regina

says. Though modest, each effort by campus ministry leaders yielded its fruits, she says.

For those like Quinlan, the support has helped him look at evangelization and faith in a different way.

“[Regina] really encourages us in our faith, and she’s really supportive of all these more creative approaches to evangelization,” he says. “We carry with us Christ into the world.”

What’s important is loving others as Jesus did and not treating people like a task or “working on someone,” he says.

“Ultimately, my goal is just to plant the seed,” Quinlan says. “At least they’ve heard someone who’s a representative of the Church and cares for them and at least heard the message that God loves them and that Christ is God and has come to Earth for them and died for them. It’s spreading the Gospel and integrating people to feel welcome in the Church.”

As students leave campus to start the next phases of their personal and professional lives, Regina stays to welcome the next set of young Catholics, knowing that the task, in a place such as Humboldt County, is a group effort.

“I do what I do because I think it’s what needs to be done. But the fantastic thing about what’s happening . . . I had to be creative,” she says. “I train the college students to prayerfully discern what God’s calling them to do. And it’s not necessarily what I think they should do . . . and I get all these pleasant surprises, and usually it’s pretty good.”



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DID YOU KNOW?

- Established in 1962, the Diocese of Santa Rosa serves six counties in Northern California that formerly were served by the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the Diocese of Sacramento.
- Although the diocese covers a territory larger than Massachusetts, its population of fewer than 150,000 Catholics makes it the smallest of all California dioceses.
- With support from Catholic Home Missions, the diocese engages in active ministries to college students, Hispanic migrants, and prisoners.

Our work is supported by the annual collection taken up in US parishes. If you missed your parish collection, you may send your donation to: USCCB Office of National Collections | PO Box 96278 | Washington, DC 20090-6278. Please make checks payable to USCCB-Catholic Home Missions Appeal. #GiveCatholicTogether also accepts contributions to support the Catholic Home Missions program: <https://usccb.givecatholictgether.org/organizations/usccb-catholic-home-missions>

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