

College chaplains offer advice

PHILADELPHIA – Staying involved in church activities and with campus Newman centers is key to students keeping the faith while in college, according to college chaplains.

“First and foremost, as in all things Catholic, go to Mass,” said Father John Nordeman, chaplain of the Newman Center at Pennsylvania’s West Chester University. “It is a staple. It is something that we can always count on as being the same, and it is where we go to meet our Lord.”

He also stressed the importance of prayer, saying that “even five minutes can change your day.”

Father Edward Windhaus, chaplain of the Tri-College Newman Cluster of Bryn Mawr, Haverford and Swarthmore colleges in Philadelphia, encourages students to expand their prayer lives through the Liturgy of the Hours and contemplative prayer.

Prayer without words – just putting oneself in the presence of God – can do wonders, he said, suggesting that students “find a quiet space – a niche in a library, an empty chair in a study room” or even to pray while walking to campus.

In an interview with The Catholic Standard & Times, Philadelphia’s archdiocesan newspaper, he said college students are transitioning to adulthood and “have to find, as all adults do, their time and place to put God into their daily routine.”

Another way to keep Catholic on campus is to seek out other like-minded Catholics. “When they’re at Mass, they’ll see other students there,” Father Nordeman said.

He also advised checking out the campus Newman Center.

To help students find and keep their faith-based footing early on, orientation at Neumann College in Aston gets to the heart of the college’s roots by teaching the charisms of St. Francis and St. Clare, said Franciscan Sister Marguerite O’Beirne, the college’s vice president for mission and ministry.

Students are encouraged to immerse themselves in their Catholic faith in a variety of ways, including stepping up to serve as a lector, extraordinary minister of holy Communion or as a retreat leader.

Serving the less fortunate outside their campus boundaries is also encouraged through many campus-sponsored service projects for those in need.

The Catholic faith can be a great comfort to those who are apprehensive or angst-

ridden about being out on their own for the first time.

"There's not going to be anyone there reminding them to go to Mass," Father Nordeman said about new college students. "It's a watershed moment."

He also has advice for students who may be tempted to skip Mass once they are away from home for the first time, adding that he often hears the complaint that Mass is "the same thing, over and over again."

"I think they're going to find that they're going to be happy that Mass is the same. They're going to realize that it is something that has been consistent in their life," the priest said.