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Program connects college students with Catholic events

College Connection for Catholics provides information about campus ministries

By Julie Filby

COLLEGE CONNECTION FOR CATHOLICS

Free campus ministry packets for college students

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College freshman experience many new things: new friends, new influences and a newfound freedom that comes with being away from home. An estimated 1.2 million of these students are Catholic.

A program operated by Serra International and National Evangelization Teams aims to bridge the transition from high school to college for Catholic freshmen by getting them involved in parishes and campus ministries.

College Connection for Catholics (CCC) provides students with information about Catholic organizations at the college of their choice—as well as provides campus ministries with the students' information so they can receive invitations to events and liturgies.

"We believe if students get an invitation to a Catholic event early, they're more likely to attend," said Judy Cozzens, CCC chair. "If young people have a friend to go to Mass and Catholic events with, they're

more likely to go."

Last year CCC launched a website allowing them to expand their outreach: www.collegeconnectionforcatholics.org. Site visitors—such as students, teachers, parents, godparents and grandparents—can print a campus ministry packet, personalized to a selected college. After entering the graduate's contact information, such as email address, phone number and mailing address, it is forwarded to the campus' primary Catholic ministry.

"We can't let our young people lose their faith," said Cozzens. "We must do something to fight the horrible trend of 85 percent of college students graduating from college without practicing their faith."

Last year CCC provided more than 10,000 campus ministry packets; and they expect the number to increase to more than 15,000 this year.

"The campus ministry packet makes a great addition to a card or a gift," said Cozzens. "High school graduation is a great time to share the beauty of our Catholic faith—and College Connection for Catholics offers a way to do this at no cost."

The website provides information for 1,250 colleges and universities in 47 states, and the number continues to increase. The program is available to all Catholics: individuals, SERRA club members, Catholic high schools, youth ministers and parish priests. In the Denver Archdiocese, CCC is currently working with J.K. Mullen High School, Holy Family High School and Regis Jesuit High School, both boys and girls divisions.

"A campus ministry packet is a great way to start a conversation for sharing the importance of keeping connected to our beautiful Catholic faith," Cozzens said.

Denver Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., endorsed the efforts of CCC in a letter to pastors and encouraged them to invite the parish's incoming freshmen and their parents to his annual College Freshmen Send-Off Mass. The Mass will be celebrated at 6:30 p.m. June 5 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Denver.

"All recent high school graduates and their families are invited to the event," said Deacon Don Schaefer of Holy Name Parish in Englewood who also serves in campus ministry at the University of Denver.

At the Mass Archbishop Chaput will select the winners of two \$1,000 scholarships. All incoming Catholic freshmen in the Denver Archdiocese, or students outside Colorado who are attending a college in the Denver Archdiocese, are invited to enter. For more information visit archden.youth.org.

"The Serra Club's College Connection and the Office of Campus Ministry at the archdiocese are both making an effort to help students get in touch with the Catholic community so they don't drift away," said Deacon Schaefer. "We want to encourage new freshmen to be part of the Catholic community at college and to join campus ministry activities as soon as they get to school."

Cozzens said studies show college freshman are likely to make their best friends during the first few weeks on campus; and during the first five weeks, most join the organizations they will belong to during their college years.

"We want one of the first organizations they join to be Catholic," she said. "And for some of their best friends to be Catholic."

For more information, visit www.collegeconnectionforcatholics.org, email jcozzens@msn.com or call 651-450-6833 Ext. 44.

