College freedom comes with moral choices and responsibilities

By Kamilla Benko

"College is one of the most selfish times of your life," said Danny Shine, a junior in college. "You wake up when you want to. You go to parties when you want to. At college, freshness will probably experience more freedom than ever before. College students have full control over their schedules, who they want to see, and what they want to do. And at college, there is plenty to do. People say you go to college to have fun and you do, but not in the same way. It's a different kind of celebration with its own time of excitement, fun and faith."

Laziness, poor time management hinder students from attending Mass

By Kamilla Benko

While Friday and Saturday nights at college are filled with partying and the latest music, Sunday nights are reserved for a different kind of celebration with its own laughter and songs. The Mass is done, and it's time for students to attend Mass. It's 8:30 p.m., almost everyone would get up, go to Mass, and go to bed. It was time for Mass.

"I think having an open mind is always important. But having an open mind is different from what you believe. It's willingness to listen and truly trying to understand where others come from. I've been at the University of Notre Dame in northern Indiana. I know the boys will be laughing on the pews and it's just really lively." — Elizabeth Flood, a sophomore at Indiana University in Bloomington.

"It's easiest to attend Mass if you go often enough, eventually it will click. " —Lillian LaMagna, a 2008 graduate of Xavier High School in Indianapolis.

"When asked why, he gave a crooked smile. "I don't know their explanations for the lack of self-control on college campuses. "So much of the problem with people in society is that they don't know their identity," he said. "People are confused." —LaMagna said she still managed to have fun on the weekends without needing to attend every party.

"Don't be naïve. I under -" —LaMagna explained. "I think that my college experience was different from what most people experience. My dad gave me four pieces of advice before I went to college. They were: 'Stand up for your identity, make a mistake, have a good time. Finding the balance is the key to an awesome college experience.'"

"It makes it easier being with those people who could just go with the flow. But she said sometimes it's hard not to do anything the things (my friends) were doing would be doing." —LaMagna said she still managed to have fun on the weekends without needing to attend every party.

"My dad gave me four pieces of advice before I went to college. Take the start, good things happen to good people. If you have more to be happy than you go often enough, eventually it will click." —LaMagna said she still managed to have fun on the weekends without needing to attend every party.

"Don't be afraid to stand up for your faith. It may be hard to do in college being immersed in a new atmosphere and surrounded by different people wherever you come from and those people you have learned growing up."

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College Catholics

—students living Catholic faith on campus—

There are 4.5 million Catholic students attending post-secondary schools in the United States.

To help the Class of 2009 prepare for their journey into college, The Criterion interviewed Catholic sophomores and juniors in college to get their thoughts and advice about this transitional period.

In this special section, they offer helpful hints to make the freshman year safe and fun, and share personal stories of their faith. There is also advice to help parents adjust to their child's absence.

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Parents, not just students, face changes

By Kamilla Benko

This fall, Mary Schaffner will see her fifth and youngest child off to Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind. From her position as the program coordinator for young adult ministry in the archdiocese and as a mother, Schaffner offers some advice to parents whose children are heading off to college for the first time.

Step back...

“You have to give your children their freedom. As a parent, you want to love them, but ultimately they belong to God. Recognize that they are their own person.”

... but be there for them.

“Ask your sons or daughters about what they are experiencing. At this point in their lives, you don’t need to check up on them. Ask the questions because you are excited for their lives. ... Affirm your children in their goodness and uniqueness as a child of God.”

Prayer

“The most important thing parents can do for their children as they head to college—pray for them!”

The Catholic presence on campus

By Kamilla Benko

At a Catholic universities like Marian and Notre Dame, it is easy to find Catholic students. But even at large secular universities like Purdue and Indiana, it’s possible to find Catholic students. Near every large Indiana college is a Newman Center. “The Newman Center is the Catholic voice and faith in secular universities,” said Dominican Father Robert Keller, pastor of St. Paul Catholic Center in Bloomington.

“We are doing the archdiocese’s ministry in the university.”

The Newman Centers are places to form Catholic ministry. It is the address where, in the community and participate in discussions on the faith.

They are also a place for young Catholics to gather together. In West Lafayette, Ali Carson, who will be a sophomore at Purdue University, said she found the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Center to be extremely helpful in keeping in touch with the Catholic community.

“St. Tom’s is really good in making its Masses in the evening and coordinating them with the students’ schedule,” she said.

“There’s always lots of stuff going on at St. Tom’s, like ice cream socials and Mass every day about things—like sports—that connected them at home. E-mail them about the mundane things, the ‘dinner table talk’ that bonded you as a family.”

Be compassionate.

“You need to be excited for the kids, but also have compassion for their transition. There is a lot of anxiety on the child’s part. You want to recognize that the transition is going to be kind of rocky in the beginning, but things will settle into a pattern.”

Be excited.

“My husband and I can’t wait to have our own time. When we want to, we can just go away for the weekend, and I think that’s helpful for the kids to see. While we’re out of our kids, we are able to connect with other couples, our parish and doing things like that.”

One thing that is going to be (like) home for the kids is Mass. We are the universal Church. It is comforting as a parent to know that we are all united in the Mass. We hear the same words and are able to spread the same Gospel each week, just in different places.”

Stay connected.

“My husband e-mails our children every day about things—like sports—that connected them at home. E-mail them about the mundane things, the ‘dinner table talk’ that bonded you as a family.”

Junior makes life-changing decision

By Kamilla Benko

Danny Shine, a graduate of Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis stands with his mother, Kate, father, Kevin, and younger brother Will. Danny is attending Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Maryland this fall.

Junior makes life-changing decision

By Kamilla Benko

Danny Shine has heard the same question many times over the last couple of months. Girls come up to him and ask, “Can you marry me?”

But they’re not proposing to him. It’s the most common response from his female friends when Shine tells them he is entering the seminary, the first formal step to becoming a priest.

When he tells them of his decision, the first thing the girls ask is if he will be the priest at their weddings. But the question always comes out a funny, “If I die, where were you six months ago?”

Shine is a member of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Carmel, Ind., in the Lafayette Diocese.

He decided to enter the seminary after—months of discernment. He said the seeds of becoming a priest were planted during an eighth-grade retreat. Then-senior Retreat Father Christopher Shocklee, who is now a priest in the Lafayette Diocese, jokingly told him that one in every three men is called to be a priest.

Father Shocklee told him to think of his two best friends.

“Could either of them be a priest?”

Father Shocklee asked.

“I was like, ‘Dude, I’m not. Shine. ‘Then [Father Shocklee] said, ‘Well, I guess that leaves you!’ ”

Shocklee is a member of the Carmel Diocese. He has a continued discernment while he attended Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis.

The 2007 graduate ran cross country and starred in the spring musical during his senior year.

He also joined the student group Students Encouraging Religious Vocations (SERV).

“Becoming involved with SERV helped me in speaking openly. It sort of made vocations something I could speak about without fear,” he said.

But he was not ready to commit to seminary and enrolled as a history major at Purdue University in the fall of 2007.

“Freshman year, I continued [my discernment], but I was more focused on adjusting to that new situation,” he said.

Shine said that speaking with friends and praying helped him with his life-changing choice. He encourages people to pray for college students who are entering a religious vocation.

“We as a community need to be praying for college students,” he said, “and we need to be living our lives to the best of our abilities so [students] see they don’t have to compromise.”

Catholic collegians get introduced to new cultures and share own beliefs

By Kamilla Benko

When K’athleen LaMagna, 10, went college searching, she always wrapped up the campus tour with a final question: “OK, where’s the church?”

With that question, LaMagna was preparing to live a Catholic lifestyle in a place where Catholics are not the majority. For many incoming Catholic freshmen, college will be the first time they interact with people of different cultures and beliefs. It may be the first time they meet a Muslim or speak with an atheist. It may be the first time in their lives that their religion is not practiced by the majority of the student body.

But as a 2008 graduate of Carmel High School in Carmel, Ind., LaMagna was prepared for being in the minority.

“I was comfortable enough from high school to be able to enter college knowing that I was still going to uphold a moral Catholic lifestyle,” said LaMagna, who finished her freshman year at Indiana University in Bloomington.

She recalled walking on Wednesday in middle school when she was called on during class by a substitute teacher to explain why there was a smudge on her forehead.

“Since I didn’t go to a Catholic school, my parents would take [me and my siblings] to 6:30 a.m. Mass on days of holy obligation [and other feast days],” LaMagna said.

For Ali Carson, it was a different story. At Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, she was surrounded by other students with similar backgrounds, and attended school-wide Mass once a month and on holy days of obligation.

Going from Roncalli to Purdue University was a bit of a culture shock, she said.

“At a Catholic school, I was pretty much surrounded by people with the same beliefs and morals as me,” she said. “At Purdue, it’s definitely not like that.”

To help new students adhere to the Catholic lifestyle at college, LaMagna recommended finding a friend with a similar background at the outset of their college career.

“I think it’s really valuable to find someone you can talk with about [the Catholic faith],” she said. “It’s so nice to not have to explain yourself to people who understand why you feel that way. There are no questions asked.”

At college, many Catholic students will find that questions are being asked about their religion by non-Catholic Freshmen Catholic students, it will be the first time people ask them to describe their faith.

“I didn’t realize how many people are—I don’t want to say unaccepting—but just...
Faith helps family adjust to college life
By Kamila Benko

While students unpack their bags and adjust to a new routine and rigorous academic schedule, families at home must grow accustomed to one less person at the dinner table.

“Our family dinners were a little more quiet with one less child in on the conversation of the day,” said Teresa Carson.

Her eldest daughter, Ali, left for Purdue University to study pre-veterinary medicine in the fall of 2008.

“I missed seeing Ali’s beautiful, smiling face every day, and sharing in her day and mine,” said Terese Carson, a vice president at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

And while it’s a hard adjustment for all families, for the Carson family it was especially poignant.

At the start of Ali’s senior year of high school, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. When Ali left for college, her mother was still undergoing radiation and surgery.

“It was hard leaving my mom, but I knew she was in good hands,” Ali said.

It was also difficult for Ali to leave her sister and best friend, Kate, who will be a senior at Roncalli this fall, during that stressful time.

But, Ali said, “I knew Kate could handle it.”

Instead of getting mad at God for what was happening to her family, Ali said her faith grew.

While Ali admits she did not attend Mass every single Sunday at college, she said Mass was a comfort because it was the same liturgy her family was attending at home.

Her mom also drew comfort from her faith.

“My faith changed a lot during my illness,” said Teresa Carson.

“I am much better at prayers of thanksgiving so I am sure to thank God every day for my health and my family. I just thanked him for helping me through the next phase, whatever it was.”

With all the changes in the Carson family, both Ali and her mother said technology was extremely helpful to stay in touch.

“We used video chat a lot so we could talk in the evening and still see each other,” Teresa Carson said.

Though technology helps, it doesn’t make up for not being together.

“I would always look forward to the next time Ali and I would be home for the weekend,” said her mother, whose cancer is now in remission.

“There were even days when I just drove up to Purdue to take her to lunch and buy her groceries.”

And that helped with the empty kitchen chair at home. 🆕

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