

## More Than Keeping Them Catholic

Over the past year, we as a staff and board members, along with our FOCUS missionaries and student leaders have been going through the process of strategic planning. This is necessary to determine the direction of our ministry to match our mission. It helps ensure that everyone on the team is working toward a common goal, so there is no wasted energy; so that we are **stronger together**.

One of the questions that we pondered during this process- **Why does the Newman Catholic Student Center exist?**

When all was said and done, the answer to that important question was **We exist for the students at The University of Iowa to know Jesus and His Church and to make Him known to others.**

It is no longer enough to be inside the Newman Center and welcome students as they come in. Nor is it enough to protect them from the world and simply “keep them Catholic.” We are seeing growth. We are making an impact, to the extent that our goal is much more than “keeping them Catholic”. We will always welcome in Catholics coming from all over. We are a **Catholic** student center. But- when we go out on campus, we are hoping to encounter any person that God loves.

We do that with authenticity, looking for ways to build authentic friendship. We create opportunities for engagement; volleyball on the Pentacrest, free hot chocolate on the corner. We host bonfires and welcome everyone who is walking by. We go in groups to the dining halls and strike up conversations. By example, we are teaching students we already know to do the same.

This way of building authentic friendships has tremendously changed my priesthood at the Newman Center. No longer am I meeting new students just during the first weeks of school. This ministry approach means I am meeting new students all throughout the year. This year I have met students who came from no faith background, or from another Christian denomination, several who came from Hindu background and one who is Jewish to name a few. And the reason I met these people is because our students are now finding joy in sharing their faith as they share their lives with roommates, with classmates, and those they have met at Iowa. Once we win them over, we invite them to come to the Newman Center, or they are invited to the library, coffee shop, or a park. The location is not as important as *what* they are invited to join.

Growth does not happen accidentally most of the time. We are being more intentional than ever in what we do and how we do it. We set goals so that we can meet or exceed them. We celebrate the small victories and continue to look for larger ones. As you look through this newsletter, you will see examples of these victories. I hope you enjoy seeing the fruit of our labor and your stewardship come to life through the students at the Newman Center.

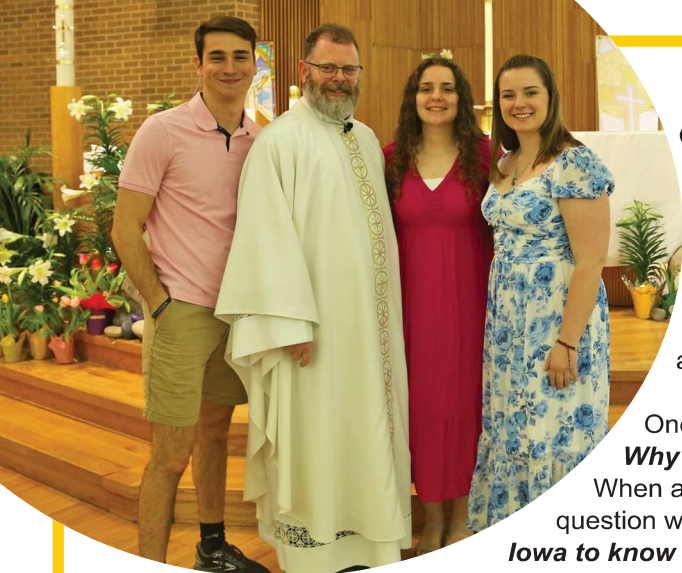
I invite you, as the Church, to invest in the Church that reaches out to those on the campus of The University of Iowa. And you can do that in two primary ways. **Some give by serving. And some serve by giving.** Your financial support serves the mission of the Newman Center by providing the resources for our ministry to the students at The University of Iowa to know Jesus and His Church and to make Him known to others. **We are stronger together.**

Blessings-



Fr. Jeff Belger, Priest Director

Photo Above (L-R): Joe Bussey, Fr. Jeff, Carrie Field, and Anna Kelly.  
Photo to Right: Praying over a student speaker at the 2024 Spring Retreat: Be Not Afraid



### Newman Center Staff

Fr. Jeff Belger

Priest Director

Joe Welter

Deacon

Ronda Lipsius

Administrative Assistant

Mike Leuck

Sacristan/Greeter

Christine Wissink

Director of Outreach & Education

Ann Thomas

Outreach Assistant/Administrative Assistant

Kristie Wert

Director of Development/Director of Operations

Mary Rae Meyer

Development Assistant

Anna Kelly

Director of Liturgical Music

Dan Teets

Director of OCIA

Zita Sibenaller

Bookkeeper

Douglas Herrera

Facilities/Custodial

Claudia Landeverde

Custodial

### Newman Center Board of Directors

Reverend Kenneth Kunz

Reverend Jeff Belger

Reverend Thom Hennen

Reverend Troy Richmond

Michele Brock

Ron Meyer

Colleen Rapp

Roger Reilly

The Newman Center Board of Directors provide leadership, guidance, stewardship and support to help further our mission on the campus of The University of Iowa. We are grateful to them for accepting this call to serve in this capacity.

We are so thankful for our financial partners. Your support is key to our mission to make students commissioned disciples. You may find our Donor Honor Roll on our website at [www.iowacatholic.org](http://www.iowacatholic.org). Thank you!



Ronda began her time at the Newman Catholic Student Center on July 1, 2006 as the Secretary. When Fr. Ed Fitzpatrick was preparing to retire, he began training her in managing the facilities. This was to be a temporary role until the new Director took on the duties. In 2015, Facilities Manager was officially added to Ronda's contract. In 2018, her title of Secretary was changed to Administrative Assistant. In 2020, the position of Business Manager was added to her contract with the other two positions. As you can imagine, Ronda is leaving big shoes to fill. This spring she spent many hours training staff members to take on her job duties.

"I have eighteen years worth of memories, activities, and tasks. I have had many responsibilities with three positions. I have always loved providing hospitality to the students who are away from home and their families by making them feel the Newman Center is their home away from home. This might be by cooking a meal, listening to their problems and helping to solve them, or just being there for them. I also really enjoy remodeling the rooms at the Newman Center and O'Keefe. I can walk through both buildings and see people enjoying their new surroundings and be proud of the work that I have done. I really enjoy decorating the altar for all ordinary time with green plants, Lent with boulders and rocks, and then Easter with all the beautiful lilies, and Advent with purple and pink poinsettias. Then, my favorite of all is Christmas!"

In May, Ronda was honored with the 2024 Newman Catholic Student Center Stewardship Award in thanksgiving for her time and talent in making the Newman Center run smoothly and leaving her mark on the building. We wish her the best in her retirement!

### Zita Sibenaller Retires as Newman Center Bookkeeper

Zita's time associated with Newman began with her taking on the role of bookkeeper for Newman Singers Publications in 1999. From there, she was hired as the bookkeeper for the Newman Catholic Student Center in June of 2006. Zita works one day a week processing the accounts payable and receivable, and managing other financial transactions for the Center, including payroll. "I really enjoyed working with the students during my time with Newman Singers Publications. I made some lifelong friends. Plus, the position was a great way to use the accounting skills I had learned in my first course-work at Iowa."

In her free time, she likes to design stained glass creations. Zita is looking forward to spending more time with family; especially her two granddaughters, ages 11 years old and 8 years old. She also has plans to travel to Colorado Springs where she owns a second home.

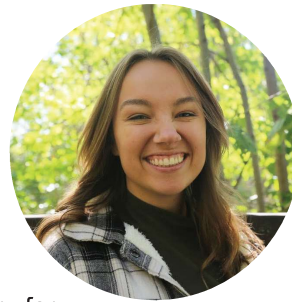


We pray in thanksgiving for all that Zita has done to further the mission of the Newman Center and wish her well in her retirement!



## Meet Our New Development Associate!

Hello! My name is Carly Seiler, and I am ecstatic to be filling the role of Development Associate at the Newman Catholic Student Center starting in July. In 2022, I graduated from Indiana University with a degree in Visual Arts Education. After college, where I rediscovered and fell in love with my faith, I felt called to serve as a missionary with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) and was placed at The University of Iowa. I have been leading students at Newman as a missionary for the past two years, which have been so incredibly grace-filled. From the beginning of my time in Iowa City, I have felt very loved and welcomed by the students, Father Jeff, and the staff at Newman. I recently married Nathan Seiler, also a FOCUS missionary, who will be continuing his mission at Iowa again next year! I have a love for connecting others to our Catholic faith, and am excited to use my passion and experience in art and design to help promote the Newman Center. I am looking forward to what this year has in store, and meeting all those who make what we do at Newman possible through their support. If you ever want to pop by my office or grab a cup of coffee - please say hello!



Best,  
Carly

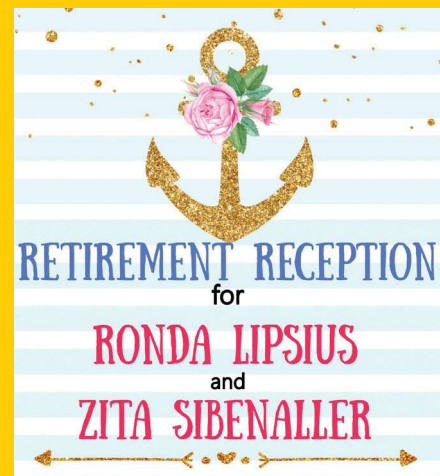
We are thrilled to welcome Carly to this new position at the Newman Center. As Development Associate, she will take on development office duties such as communications, events, marketing, alumni outreach and day to day donor stewardship. She will also help with planning our annual development calendar, a new marketing and communications plan and work on a re-design of our website.



## Two Familiar Faces Take on New Roles

In anticipation of our staff retirements, two of our current staff members took on new roles this spring. Ann Thomas, our current Outreach Assistant, has accepted the additional position of Administrative Assistant where she will be handling the office and clerical functions, Newman Center hospitality, and working as the assistant to the Priest Director. "There are so many times throughout the day I wish I had a few extra hours at Newman, and now that I'm moving from a part time to full time employee, I will be able to accomplish more for our students! I am grateful for all of the work Ronda has done throughout the years, and it has been wonderful to have her training me as I step into this new role."

Kristie Wert has accepted the role of Director of Operations. This new position is an expanded business manager position which includes duties in the areas of financial management, human resources, and facilities management. With the hiring of the Development Associate to coordinate events, communications and marketing, Kristie's development duties will focus on donor outreach and stewardship in areas of fundraising for our sustained giving programs, planned giving, and FOCUS. "In the past two years, I have come to love being a part of the Newman Center, and I am looking forward to moving into this new role. We have a lot of transition ahead of us, but with the recent strategic planning that we have done combined with restructuring our staff, I think we have put together a strong team and vision to build on what has come before us and to continue to grow."



Join us to send off  
our retirees in style!

June 23, 2024 at 12pm  
(after 11am Mass)  
at the Newman Center

Light refreshments will be served.  
All are welcome!

## Anna Kelly to stay on as Director of Liturgical Music

Anna Kelly has been accepted to The University of Iowa graduate program for music. Her leadership and teamwork this past year as Director of Liturgical Music has helped grow our music ministry to new levels. She is already busy planning the next academic year with our Liturgical Music Fellow, Katrina Aljets. We look forward to hearing their fresh ideas!



## MISSION STATEMENT

As a Newman Catholic Student Center, we provide Roman Catholic ministry to those associated with The University of Iowa to promote their development within a faith community and to prepare them as disciples for the Church and the world.

# UNITED IN CHRIST

From Christine Wissink,  
Director of Outreach and Education



Mentoring the Faith Formation Fellow in planning retreats and seeing their ideas come together into a beautiful and fun weekend is always a joy. This year

Matthew Freedlund connected so well with many students to lead and plan various parts of the spring retreat. One of the most memorable parts was the Stations of the Cross on the retreat. Each Station's reflection and prayer was prepared by a different student leader or FOCUS Missionary. I also love watching retreat speakers grow and give amazing talks at the retreats. These examples and that of the 24 hours of Exposition are highlights of the semester because these efforts were student inspired and led. It is amazing what they do **United in Christ** as a community to serve and lead others. They had all the volunteers ready to go before I even asked them how I could help. I think this shows that their relationships with the staff are healthy and they know that we trust them and believe in their capabilities. We want to give them support along with the freedom to run with their ideas in ministry.

This year the Fellows worked so well together as a team. In each area of our ministry, I feel that we expanded and grew to new heights – from communications (interactive Instagram stories, videos) to prayer (24 hour adoration) to Faith Formation and Social Justice (hosting the brand new Christian Healthcare Ethics Seminars monthly) to outreach (hosting bonfires on campus) to music (seeing whole men's Bible Studies in the choir to lead music at Thursday Night Mass). Seeing each Fellow grow in their area of ministry and their confidence is so fulfilling. Another big highlight for me this year was seeing Fellows that I barely knew before this year grow into servant leaders at one of the highest levels I've ever seen in campus ministry. God is working through their "yes" to serve as a leader.

- Christine



The purpose of Ministry Development Fellowships is to provide college students an opportunity to apply their ministry and leadership skills in a particular area of ministry in the life of the Church, develop campus ministry activities to engage fellow students, and lead a team of students in the planning, execution, and evaluation of such activities. Fellows are supervised by the Director of Outreach and Education and collaborate regularly with professional staff



members, other Fellows, and their Lead Team throughout the year. Each Fellow receives a stipend for their service. We are thankful for the 2023-2024 Fellows (pictured left) and their dedication to their ministries and sharing the Word of God with fellow students. Their leadership drives our mission to be relevant to students today.

In John 15:18-20 it talks about how we, as followers of Christ, are supposed to be in this world, but not of it. That is exactly what the Newman Center is to me; it is otherworldly, especially in the middle of a big college campus. The first homily I heard Father Jeff give here, he said, "We are chosen, not for ourselves, but for other people." Here at the Newman Center, an authentic and loving community will embrace anyone, especially those who are lost and haven't yet found their way. Many in college are lost. They are searching for their identity and who they are. At Newman, you have a faithful community and people who have found their identity, and because of that, they can lead others to find their relationship with Christ, too. The first homily I heard Father Jeff give still sticks out to me. He told us that we are a chosen people; we aren't chosen for our sake but for everyone else's. We have been given a gift here at Newman. I have been blessed to find this community, but that isn't enough. I want others to find this community, too.

- Theodore Ahern, Freshmen





## Newman By the Numbers

Sometimes, when we reflect on our year, there are so many memories that come to mind. Our mission is personal and we get to develop authentic friendships with students as we walk with them through college. However, sometime, our numbers make the story even better. This year, after our strategic planning, we set some pretty significant goals to grow our ministry. We have always kept track of these statistics and have shared them in different ways over the years. This year these numbers below from the entire academic year show the fruits of your stewardship and prayers. The mission that God has charged us with is not always easy, however, your financial support makes it possible!

- 4 Bible Studies that lead music at Thursday Night Mass
- 9 Gregorian Chant Choir members (New this year!)
- 10 Mass accompanists
- 19 Sunday Choir members
- 21 Mass Cantors
- 23 Average student attendance at Tuesday Night Prayer
- 30 Thursday Night Mass Choir members
- 31 Graduate students attended a Retreat this year
- 42 Graduates honored at the Baccalaureate Mass (Dec. & May)
- 53 Average daily Mass attendance
- 57 Average Post TNM Activities attendance
- 60 Hours of Adoration music
- 93 Average Thursday Night Mass Attendance
- 95 Students attended Discernment Nights
- 105 Students attended our first 24 Hour Adoration
- 133 Undergraduate Students Attended a Retreat this year
- 270 Attendees at Faith Formation events and presentations
- 340 Pounds of food donated by students for the UI Food Pantry
- 770 Total attendance at Newman Social events
- 2055 Attendance at Ash Wednesday services
- 8960 Hours of music rehearsals for Adoration, Mass, and Choirs
- 9152 Hours of Adoration and Exposition



With an honest heart, the Newman Center was the last place I wanted to visit as a new university student. I had no physical or emotional draw to becoming a true Catholic. My Godparents implored me to check out the Catholic student center, and my first experience here was just to appease them. I had no intention of being a regular at the Newman Center, but little did I know it would become the most important place in my life.

I was lost and broken, a freshly graduated high school student who had a desire for rebellion and no intention of finding out what I was made for. But what a wonderful mistake I made walking through the doors of Newman. I had no idea at the time, but God stirred up something in me and placed a desire that would be quick to blossom.

I met a missionary right as I was trying to sneak out the doors after Mass. I remember feeling frustrated as I told myself 'Why did you come here, you do not want to get involved here'. I was invited for months by people asking me to go to Mass, go on student retreats, and join a Bible study. I was hesitant to join but ended up saying yes to Bible study (still defiant of the student retreats because I was not going to be *that* Catholic). Months passed, and still lukewarm in my faith, I for some reason, decided to say yes to going on the Fall student retreat.

God awakened that desire for Him that He put on my heart as I walked into Newman for the first time. I had never felt such a sense of comfort, community, and love as I did surrounded by those who loved Jesus so deeply. Over the next year, I fell into my faith. I had a desire to do better and to love my Creator deeper. My life radically changed as I found a home away from home. **The Newman Center brought me a family I did not even know I needed.**

From the outside, the Newman Center looks unassuming and ordinary, but the people there give the place life and color. I yearn to go to the Newman Center every day and see the faces of the people who pushed me to grow in my faith. If it was not for the persistent missionary I encountered, on what I planned to be my only day in the Newman Center, I would not have learned to love the life I am living. I pray that other people may take a chance at the Newman Center and discover for themselves the people who inhabit this place make it life changing. I will forever be thankful for Newman, and I desire greatly to reach other people and give back my time and love to a place that changed me so deeply.

- Emily Kolich, Junior

# LIVING BOLD, LOVING & UNSTOPPPABLE



## FOCUS by the Numbers

- **SEEK24:** 80 students came to this national Catholic conference in St. Louis in January 2024!
- **SEEK25:** 73 students have already signed up for SEEK25 in Salt Lake City, Utah!



• **Brazil Mission Trip:** 11 students and the missionary team took a trip to Brazil to serve on mission and practice evangelizing. We did school and home visits sharing the Catholic faith and encouraging others to encounter Christ!  
 "The mission trip drew me closer to God by revealing the notions of my own heart through the encounters with the poor people of Brazil and the intimacy with the Lord through daily Mass and prayer."- Matt King, Sophomore.



**NEW this year!**  
**Run Club:** A weekly group had nearly 50 different attendees with more than ten students attending consistently each week. Ethan (photo above) was

confirmed into the Church in April with missionary Nathan as his sponsor. Run Club was where Ethan started asking questions about the Catholic Faith!

**Rosary Walk** 10-15 students, staff and FOCUS missionaries walk around campus each weekday morning at 8:30am and pray the Rosary.

### Glory Story Time from Kobe Eischeid, Team Director

o **Glory Story:** David was a fraternity member that I met at a bonfire just 8 months ago and through a deep conversion in his senior year, David went from desiring to go into Marketing out of college to wanting to give his full-time job to Christ and preaching the Gospel!!

o **Glory Story:** FOCUS new hire, Luke Farmer (pictured at right), has been leading men in his Bible study and discipleship on "Mini Missions" where they go to the university dining halls, they pray together, and go on a little mission to meet someone new and share the faith with them!

- **Bible study attendees:** 370 students joined a Bible study, an increase of over 150 compared to last year!
- **Bible study attendees:** 250 students attended Bible study at least 4 times, an increase of 80 over last year!
- **Growing Disciples:** 74 students in a period of small group Catholic mentorship learning how to live and teach the faith, an increase of over 40 from last year!
- **Commissioned Disciples:** 51 students who have now started leading other students through Bible studies and discipleships of their own. 10 more than last year!

FOCUS has definitely been one of, if not the most life changing organization that I know. Through its missionaries, Bible studies, and discipleship, I was able to find a community at the Newman Center that allowed me to understand my faith in a way that I had never before. Seeing the way FOCUS missionaries spread the love of Christ to the students they interacted with inspired me to be a missionary as well. I cannot wait to be a part of so many students' faith journey, and change their lives in the way FOCUS missionaries at my campus changed mine."

Kasey Wainewright- Senior

Photo Below: Luke Farmer, Kasey, and David Molfese with Iowa FOCUS Team Director, Kobe (back) will be serving as FOCUS missionaries next fall. Robert Weger, a December 2023 graduate will also be serving FOCUS as well. Three men is more than Newman has ever sent on to FOCUS in one year!







Front L-R: Megan Lally, Katrina Aljets, Emily Kolich, Katherine O'Tool, Jenna King  
Middle Row L-R: Avery Nelson, Ellie Behrens, Joe Heyrman, Tyler Stallman, Josh Carrizales  
Back Row L-R: Joe Connolly (23-24 Athletic Scholarship recipient), Nolan Ballard, Martin Bioche

Thanks to the foresight of many Newman Center financial partners, the Center is able to offer several scholarship programs to our students through our partnership with The University of Iowa. In 2023-2024, over \$50,000 was awarded to Newman Center students across a variety of scholarships in the area of academics, participation at the Newman Center, sports, and Catholic Studies. Pictured at left are our 2024-2025 Newman Catholic Student Center Academic Scholarship recipients. We received forty applications and were able to award thirteen \$1,000 scholarships for students.



## Newman Night Out 2024 hits over \$100,000 in gifts!

God is good- all the time! We are thrilled to announce that Newman Night Out 2024 brought in over \$100,000 for our mission through individual gifts and business sponsorships. In only two years, this event has brought in almost \$200,000 for our ministry. The event featured students giving back to Newman in a variety of ways. Joe Bussey and Avery Nelson (pictured at right) did a wonderful job leading our guests through the evening as our emcees. Luke Farmer gave an inspiring talk about his Newman experience and challenged guests to an abundant prayer life. Our student Fellows were stationed at tables throughout the event to welcome and assist guests and some served on a student panel. Behind the scenes many students handled kitchen duties and photography.



Sometimes, God sends an angel to help us reach our goals. This year, our angelic help came in the form of long time financial partner, Olga Sassine. A former development officer for The University of Iowa, Olga, (pictured at left with students and FOCUS missionaries), offered a matching gift challenge to us. She came to us on the Monday before our event and offered to match up to \$10,000 if we could raise the funds by Friday. Then, along came another group of angels to accept the challenge. We raised over \$17,000 to match Olga's gift. We are blessed by a wonderful network of disciples who share their blessings!

This year's event, featuring a student speaker, a student question and answer panel, and entertainment from the music ministry, brought rave reviews.

*"I love this event so much more than the auction. I come away knowing so much more about the Newman Center and what you are doing there. It is inspiring to see the students being a big part of the evening too. The changes this year with the music and the student panel were great...Fr. Jeff is a gifted speaker. Maybe he should go first!"* (quote from anonymous event survey)

Special thanks to our presenting sponsors, Hills Bank and Lensing Funeral and Cremation Services, for your continued support of Newman Night Out! We pray in thanksgiving for the individual donors and businesses that support our only in-person fundraising event of the year. With the generosity of the business sponsors, all event expenses were covered.

We would also like to mention our Newman Night Out committee who has worked hard to put together a wonderful event and has cut previous event expenses from over \$36,000 to \$14,000 in just two annual events. Thanks to them, more of your donations are available to use directly to fund our mission!

## See you for Newman Night Out 2025!





Newman Catholic Student Center of Iowa City  
104 E. Jefferson St.  
Iowa City, IA 52245

*Be a part of the circle. The team. The mission.*

Your gift today brings the The University of Iowa students  
to know Jesus and His Church and make Him known to others.

