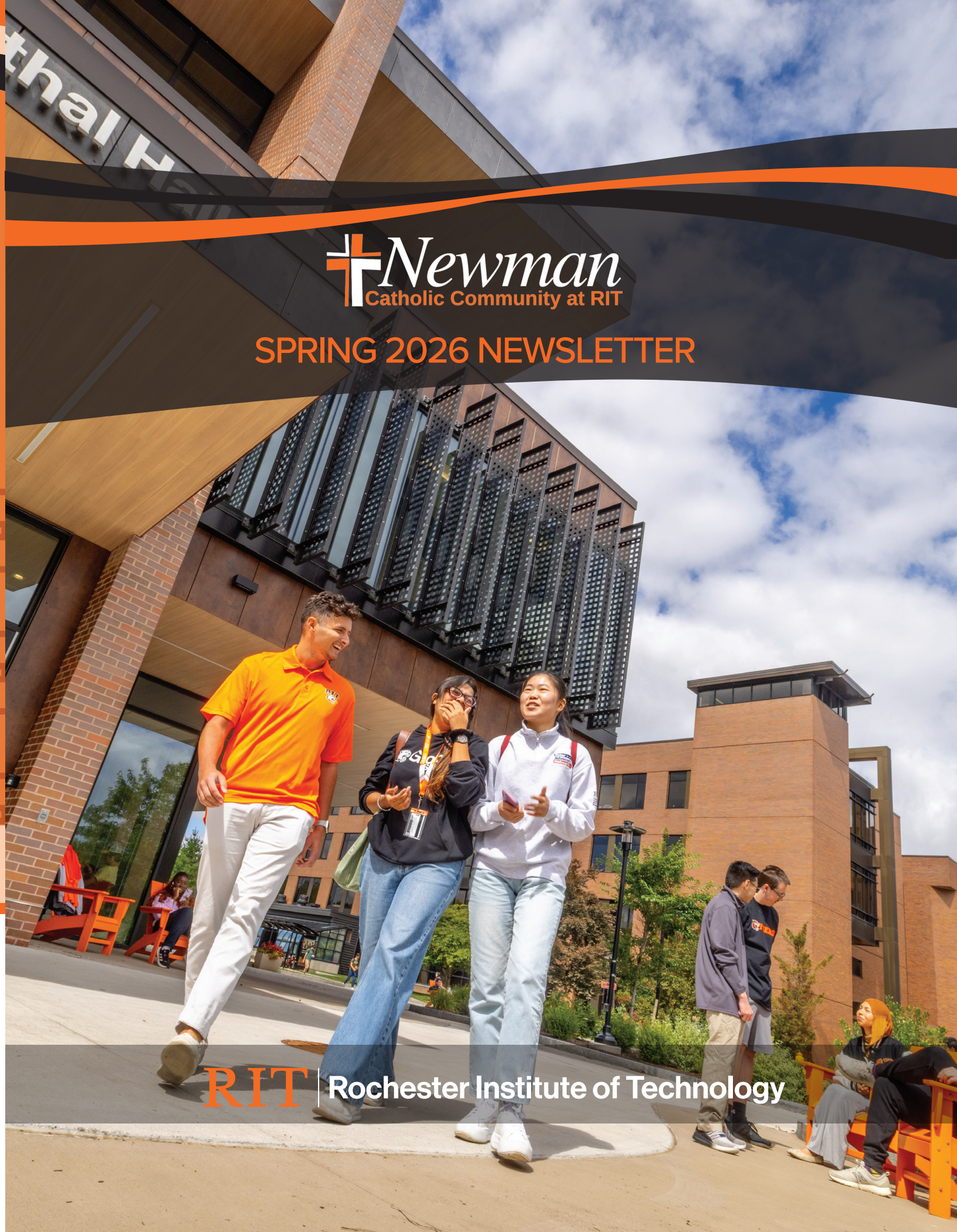


Building Our Future, One Person at a Time

SAVE THE DATE

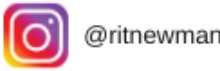
DAY OF GIVING  
5.6.26



Newman  
Catholic Community at RIT

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

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Newman  
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Schmitt Interfaith Center  
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RIT Rochester Institute of Technology

# Community At Newman

Students love to celebrate together! Just as families come together to share traditions, our students love being with classmates during special moments to create a sense of belonging, joy, and shared excitement. Whether it is decorating classrooms, participating in events, or simply spending time together, these celebrations help students build strong connections and lasting memories. Like family traditions at home, celebrating together at school brings people closer, spreads happiness, and makes ordinary days feel special.



Newman students decorate cookies together at the Newman Christmas party, continuing the festive tradition of cookie decorating.

On December 8th, 85 students gathered with our friends at the University of Rochester Newman Community to celebrate Christmas together with Midnight Mass followed by a shared meal, a tradition marking the end of the Fall semester.



Students gather around the food table, filling their plates during the Newman Thanksgiving Dinner hangout held on November 9th.



On Halloween evening, we hosted the third annual Big/Little Newman Halloween party and dinner. Students enjoyed an evening of getting to know one another!



In October, the Big/Little Newman committee and members spent the day in community hiking and taking in the beautiful fall colors together at Letchworth State Park!



28 students gathered for the Eve Away retreat that is offered once a semester.



Karaoke night was a huge hit at the Newman Hangout! Fr. Bob Kennedy joined right in!

# Student Executive Board

*Why we serve Newman...*



**President**

"I serve because I love supporting my peers on their faith journey and seeing them at Mass!"

Charles von Goins '26  
Takoma Park, MD  
Software Engineering



**Internal VP**

"I serve because it was the people at Newman who helped me pursue my faith and I want to give back what was given to me, a family."

Garrett Meehan '28  
Barrington, RI  
Biochemistry



**External VP**

"I serve because Newman is the place where I've grown most in my faith and my friendships, and this is my way of giving back by helping to build a community where other students can do the same!"

Wyatt Pfeil '29  
Lansdale, PA  
Computer Science



**Treasurer**

"I serve to more actively support and strengthen the faith community that has given me such a strong sense of belonging, making it a home away from home."

MaryClare Aroh '28  
Middle River, MD  
Biomedical Science



**Secretary**

"I serve because I want to help other students find a sense of belonging and a home away from home in the Catholic Newman Community, like I did!"

Kelli Lung '28  
Millitoni, HI  
Computer Science

# Templeton Foundation Funds Ex Umbris Grant at RIT



The Catholic Newman Community at the Rochester Institute of Technology is grateful and excited to announce that it has been selected to receive an *Ex Umbris* grant from the Lumen Christi Institute. This generous support marks an important milestone for our community and affirms the importance of cultivating the Catholic Intellectual Tradition at a leading non-Catholic university like RIT.

The grant will support a two-semester initiative, *Cultivating the Catholic Intellectual Tradition at RIT*, a project shaped by listening closely to students' hopes and challenges. In today's academic culture, many students experience a disconnect between faith and reason, science and ethics, and achievement and purpose. At RIT, where scientific and technological excellence is central, students are eager for opportunities to engage deeper questions of meaning, truth and vocation.

Since the pandemic, the Catholic Newman Community has experienced nearly 20 percent growth in Mass attendance and student involvement. While our social, service, and devotional life continues to thrive, this grant enables us to address a longstanding need for sustained intellectual formation rooted in the Catholic tradition. Through this initiative, we will host public lectures by Catholic scholars, interdisciplinary panels focused on science and technology, and faculty conversations exploring themes such as artificial intelligence, justice, and human flourishing.

These events will be complemented by readings, student-led discussion, and guided reflection, helping students cultivate intellectual virtues, a spirit of wonder, and a deeper sense of purpose. We are deeply grateful to the Lumen Christi Institute and the John Templeton Foundation for their vision and generosity. This grant represents an investment in our students and faculty—and in a future where faith and reason illuminate and enrich one another.

## Journeying in Faith: *OCIA at Newman*

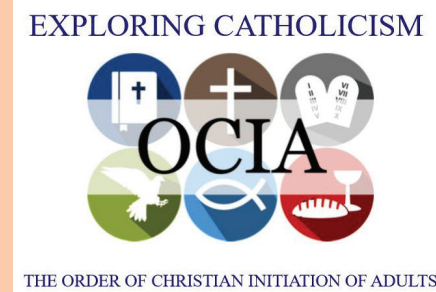
One of the most beautiful aspects of our Catholic faith is the continual call to conversion and deeper relationship with Christ. Here at the Catholic Newman Community at RIT, that call is lived out each year through OCIA, the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.



This year, we are blessed to walk with five catechumens (those preparing for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) and three candidates (those already baptized, now preparing for Eucharist and Confirmation). These eight students have committed to a journey that will culminate in receiving the Easter Sacraments at the Easter Vigil on April 4, 2026.

OCIA at Newman is more than a class and learning experience, it's a community. Through weekly gatherings, spiritual mentorship, and participation in liturgy, our catechumens and candidates are accompanied by fellow students who support them in faith and friendship. It's inspiring to witness their openness, courage, and deep desire to grow closer to God.

As a Newman Community, we are all called to support and pray for these individuals as they take this significant step in their spiritual lives. May we continue to be a source of encouragement and witness as they prepare to joyfully say "yes" to Christ and His Church.



Under the guidance of Campus Ministers Mike Vernarelli and Kathy Darroch, along with a dedicated team of student leaders, OCIA provides a welcoming space for students who are seeking to become Catholic or to complete their Sacraments of Initiation. It's a journey of prayer, study, reflection, and community all leading toward full communion with the Church.

## RIT Newman Events

- March 8-15: Spring Break
- March 22: Newman Dinner and Hangout
- April 2: Holy Thursday Mass 6pm
- April 3: Veneration of the Cross 12:30pm, Stations of the Cross 5pm
- April 4: Easter Vigil Mass 8pm
- April 5: Easter Sunday 9:15am and 5pm Mass
- April 25: IMAGINE RIT
- April 27: Last Day of Classes
- April 28: Reading Day
- April 29: Cardinal Tobin Visit
- April 29-May 6: Final Exams
- May 7: Baccalaureate Mass 4:30pm

### RECURRING

Sunday Mass 9:15am and 5pm

Men's Group: Sundays, 3-4pm

Women of Faith: TBD

Adoration: Wednesdays, 4:30pm

Wednesday Mass: 5:30pm

Exploring the Sunday Scriptures with Fr. Bob: Tuesdays 5:30pm

OCIA: Wednesdays 7pm

Rosary: Fridays 5:30pm



# Cool Thoughts

## There is a Revival Happening on Campus

Dear Catholic Tigers,

Not long ago, the story about young adults and religion seemed settled: belief was fading, churches were emptying, and parishes seemed to be growing grayer. Yet a different story is beginning to surface, and soon it will reach parishes as students graduate and begin families. A major national newspaper recently reported on a "...fervent group of college students" returning to traditional religious practice, describing crowded chapels and full Bible studies on several campuses. Similar reports are appearing around the world.

We see these same inspiring trends at the RIT. This year, more than 85 students have sought the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Eight students are currently in OCIA, preparing to enter or be received into the Catholic Church. Attendance at daily and Sunday Mass has grown noticeably (by more than 30), not only in numbers, but in reverence and attentiveness. Students often linger to sit in silence before the Lord. Two recent RIT graduates are now in seminary formation. The old narrative—that college inevitably pulls young people away from God—simply does not match what we are witnessing.

Why is this happening? Sociologists point to rising anxiety, loneliness, and instability in the broader culture. After years of digital saturation, constant comparison, fragmented community, and broken relationships, many students are hungry for something solid, beautiful, and true. Peer-reviewed research consistently shows that regular participation in religious services is associated with lower rates of depression and substance abuse, and with higher levels of purpose and well-being among young adults. One major review in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* concluded that frequent religious service attendance is linked with "substantially better health and well-being outcomes" for adolescents and young adults.

Others suggest that students are drawn to the clarity and sacramental life of the Catholic Church: a place where confession offers real forgiveness, where the Eucharist is not a symbol but a Person, and where worship is reverent rather than performative. Some come carrying deep wounds and discover healing and truth. Some come because a friend invited them. Others simply wander

in with questions and find themselves unexpectedly moved by grace. Each of these explanations contains part of the truth. But in the end, the deepest explanation remains the mystery of God's initiative, and it is what God has always done and continues to do.

Christ still calls, and now we are listening more deeply. The Holy Spirit still stirs restlessness into desire. The Father still draws His children home. In this light, the "why" matters less than the response. This is why Newman is so important on campus today. This journey home often begins here, where students discover a "home away from home." And it matters deeply.

The Catholic Newman Community staff and I, along with our student leaders, have been given the gift and responsibility of walking with students at this decisive time in their lives. We accompany them as they discern vocations, heal from past hurts, and encounter Christ in the sacraments for the first time—or again. This is work we do with you. Your prayer, witness, generosity, and encouragement create a culture of hospitality, care, welcome, and joy. With our students, I am profoundly grateful for you.

We are not done. There is still much to do, and the future is bright. This revival is grace-filled and exciting, but it also brings new challenges. As more students seek Confession, spiritual direction, retreats, OCIA, authentic community, and the Eucharist, the strain is real. Yet we trust that God always provides for His call.

College years are brief, but they are decisive. In four short years, students form habits and hopes that shape a lifetime. It is a great gift that, in this window, they are encountering the living Christ and His Church.

Here, everything begins to change. Newman is ready.

Peace,

**Rev. Brian C. Cool**, '06W (MS), '21W (EdD)  
J. Nelson Hoffman '55 and Joan Dutcher Hoffman '55  
Director of Catholic Newman Community Pastoral Care

## Community with Families: Newman Parent Webinar

At the start of each academic year, parents and families adjust alongside their students. To support them, the Catholic Newman Community again hosted its annual Newman Parent Webinar—an initiative that began during the COVID pandemic and has since grown into a valued tradition. This year, about 16 families joined live from across the country and around the world.

**“This webinar reminds parents that their sons and daughters have a home and community here.”**



Led by Fr. Brian Cool and Campus Minister Kristen Smith, the webinar offered families a clear overview of Newman’s mission, programs, and vision for the future, as well as the many ways we accompany students in faith, fellowship, and formation. Parents were also introduced to the full Newman staff, helping them

The webinar concluded with a time for questions and conversation, further strengthening the partnership between families and Newman. We remain deeply grateful for the trust and support of our parents and families and look forward to accompanying them throughout their students’ college journey.

connect faces with the ministry that supports their students.

Reflecting on the evening, Kristen shared, “This webinar reassures parents that their sons and daughters have a home and community here.” She added, “It is a gift to walk with students and the families who love them.”

## Raising Our Voices: Newman Choir is Growing!

If you have attended Sunday Mass with the Catholic Newman Community this semester, you have likely noticed something special, the joyful and prayerful sound of a growing Newman Choir.



This fall, the choir has welcomed new members from across campus, bringing with them a beautiful variety of voices and instruments. From sopranos to basses, guitars to violins, and even the occasional flute, trombone and trumpet, the music ministry at Newman is more vibrant than ever. The energy and dedication of the choir enhance the liturgy and invites the entire congregation into deeper, more spirited worship.

Under the leadership of student musicians Kristy Sorochan and Kroh Briercheck, and supported by our Campus Ministers, the choir is more than a group of singers, it is a community within our community. Members gather weekly to rehearse, pray, and grow

in both musical skill and faith. Kroh shares, “All are welcome. Our music ministry is growing in voices and in instruments, and there is room for anyone who wants to lift their heart to God in song.” Whether lifelong musicians or newcomers to liturgical music, everyone brings something unique to the group, making it a joyful and welcoming space for all.

As the choir continues to grow, so does its impact on our liturgical life. Their music lifts our hearts, unites us in song, and helps us to experience the beauty and reverence of the Mass. We are grateful to every member who shares their gifts with our community, and we are always happy to welcome more. If you love to sing or play an instrument or if you simply want to try, consider joining us. There is a place for you in the Newman Choir.

# Kairos 45

Kairos 45 was a weekend marked by healing, hope, peace, and friendships that students will carry with them for years to come. Forty students from the Catholic Newman Communities at the University of Rochester and the Rochester Institute of Technology gathered February 20–22, 2026, at Notre Dame Retreat House overlooking Canandaigua Lake. The quiet beauty of the winter landscape and the peaceful setting of the retreat house created a sacred space where students could step away from daily pressures, breathe deeply, reflect, and encounter God in a new way.

The retreat was a true partnership. Jennifer Hughes, campus minister at the University of Rochester, and Kristen Smith, campus minister at RIT, guided the experience with great care, supported by dedicated student leaders. Their calm presence and obvious love for the students set a tone of hospitality and trust. From the opening talk to the final blessing, the flow of the retreat invited students to step away from stress and to rest in the loving presence of God.

The word Kairos means God’s time. Many students arrived burdened by academic pressures, personal worries, and the noise of everyday life. Over the three days they discovered that God meets them exactly where they are. Moments of silence, prayer, personal witness, and the sacraments opened doors to healing. Some students found freedom from past hurts. Others rediscovered hope for the future or experienced a deep sense of peace that had been missing for a long time. Tears and laughter both became signs that hearts were opening.

One of the most visible fruits of Kairos 45 was the friendship that formed among participants. Students from UR and RIT discovered how much they share in common as young adults seeking God. Honest conversations, shared meals, small group discussions, and simple time together allowed walls to fall. Many remarked that they felt genuinely seen and accepted. These friendships became living reminders that faith is not a solitary journey but one walked together.

“

**“I came to Kairos not really knowing what I needed. I am leaving with a deeper sense of who I am, who God is, and a community that reminds me I do not walk this journey alone.”**

**- Elizabeth Velito '28**

”

**“The word Kairos means God’s time.”**

The setting itself added to the grace of the weekend. The view of Canandaigua Lake invited quiet reflection and gratitude. The chapel at Notre Dame Retreat House provided a place for Eucharistic adoration and Mass where students encountered Christ in a personal way. Peace settled in slowly, like the calm across the water, and students began to recognize the gentle work of the Holy Spirit.

As the retreat came to a close, students returned to campus renewed. They carried with them a deeper awareness of God’s love, a renewed hope for the future, and friendships rooted in faith. Kairos 45 once again revealed that when students step into God’s time, lives are transformed, hearts are healed, and the community is strengthened in ways that endure long after the weekend has ended.