



 **Newman**  
Catholic Community at RIT

**SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER**





# Cool Thoughts

## Building a Faith Movement at RIT

Something extraordinary is happening at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The Catholic Newman Community is not just growing—it is thriving. What was once a quiet presence on campus has become a dynamic and evangelizing movement, engaging over 2,500 students and sparking a renewal of faith among young adults hungry for Christ.

Through intentional outreach, transformative programming, and deep commitment to discipleship, we are witnessing a spiritual revival that is setting hearts on fire. Every Sunday, hundreds of students gather in the chapel for Mass, where our 30-member choir lifts spirits with vibrant praise and prayer. Mass attendance has soared by 30 percent over the past two years—an undeniable sign that the Holy Spirit is at work on our campus.

One of the **driving forces behind this renewal has been the Big/Little Newman program**—an initiative unlike any before in Newman history. This mentorship program has deepened friendships, strengthened faith, and created a true family within our community. By pairing incoming students with older mentors, participants experience smoother transitions into college life while staying anchored in their Catholic identity.

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**“... we are not done.  
The mission is just beginning.”**

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The hunger for Christ-centered friendships and spiritual encounters is undeniable. We witnessed this at our most recent **Kairos Retreat** at the Notre Dame Retreat Center, where nearly 40 students stepped away from the busyness of college life to experience a profound encounter with Christ, themselves, and one another.

This hunger is also evident in our **Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA)** program, where eight students are preparing to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church this coming Easter, April 20, 2025. These students are a testament to the power of evangelization at RIT and the support offered by hundreds of alumni, parents, and friends who believe in this mission.

Our commitment to the Gospel extends beyond spiritual formation into acts of service. Addressing food insecurity on campus and in the greater Rochester community has become a crucial part of our mission. Thanks to a generous grant from the **Sisters of St. Joseph**, our **Tiger Stripes** initiative has expanded its outreach, providing meals and essential supplies through partnerships with Bethany House, St. Joe's House of Hospitality, and RIT FoodShare. Students are stepping forward not just to receive, but to serve, embracing the reality that faith without works is dead.

But we are not done. The mission is just beginning. Our vision for 2025 includes:

- Launching a **weekly community meal**, providing a place where students can be nourished both physically and spiritually.
- Expanding our sacramental life to ensure more students have access to the **Eucharist** and the grace of **Confession**.
- Introducing new forms of **evangelization** to make our presence on campus even stronger and more visible.

This work has been blessed beyond measure, but it requires the generosity and commitment of those who believe in the power of faith to transform lives. On **ROAR DAY** this past October, thanks to the leadership of Mark Saunders, Gene and Theresa Yang, and Katie Linendoll we raised a record-breaking **\$20,000**, placing **#1 among Student Affairs groups** and **#7 across the entire university**. This overwhelming support reflects the deep impact of our mission.

You fuel this movement, strengthen our outreach, and ensure that more students can encounter Christ in a transformative way. With you, we are building a faith movement—one that is bold, alive, and transforming RIT from the inside out. Imagine that!

Peace,

Director

## Tiger Stripes Is Hungry To Expand



The Tiger Stripes Program is entering a new phase, expanding its efforts to address food insecurity both on and off campus. With support from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, Tiger Stripes is deepening its partnerships and increasing its impact through service on campus and off.

For six years, student volunteers have provided meals, chapel services, and donation drives at Bethany House, St. Joe's House of Hospitality, and The Margaret Home. This year, the program continues at these sites while is strengthening its focus on hunger through partnership with RIT FoodShare to support students on campus. Newman is sponsoring a dedicated shelf stocked with essential non-perishable items donated by students at mass along with volunteer time assisting in the upkeep of the on-campus food pantry.

In addition to hunger relief, Tiger Stripes is supporting Bern's Closet clothing events to help equip students with professional attire for job interviews, co-ops, and career opportunities. By addressing these needs, student volunteers are not only serving the community but also supporting their peers in achieving success.

At its core, Tiger Stripes is about faith in action. Every meal served and donation collected is an opportunity for students to live out the Gospel and deepen their commitment to justice and service. We are grateful for the continued support of the Sisters of St. Joseph, which allows this initiative to grow its reach and making a lasting impact.



## Faith Meets Reason



Collis Institute Cornell University

This November, ten students from the **RIT Catholic Newman Community** attended the **COLLIS Conference at Cornell University**, an event designed to foster the integration of faith and reason, empowering young Catholic scholars to think deeply and transform both the world and their campus communities. Founded in 2022 by Cornell faculty, the **COLLIS Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture** aims to enrich intellectual and spiritual formation by exploring how academic disciplines can glorify God and contribute to human flourishing.

The conference featured two insightful keynote talks. **Dr. Stephen Bullivant**, professor of Theology and Sociology at **St. Mary's University in London**, presented "*The US Church in an Age of Secularization: Past, Present, and Possible Futures*", examining the growing number of religious "nones." He emphasized, "The challenge of secularization is not just about numbers—it's about how we respond as people of faith, offering hope and meaning in an increasingly fragmented world."

**Dr. Angela Franks**, a Theology professor at **St. John's Seminary**, delivered "*Theology and Identity in Modernity*", where she explored Catholic identity in today's society. She noted, "In a world obsessed with self-creation, our true identity is found not in reinvention, but in the knowledge that we are created and loved by God."

Students traveling from over an hour away were provided free lodging at the **Canopy Hotel by Hilton** in Ithaca on November 15, 2024. The conference, welcoming both undergraduate and graduate students, featured breakout groups fostering meaningful discussions and connections. Meals were provided, creating a strong sense of fellowship.

Reflecting on the experience, **Justyn Niemczyk '25** shared, "This experience deepened my understanding of integrating faith and reason." **Christis Shepard '25** added, "It challenged me to engage campus life more intentionally through our Catholic faith."

**Fr. Brian Cool** highlighted the significance of the event: "COLLIS equips students to think about big issues from a Catholic perspective, shaping them into leaders who can transform the world and the RIT campus." Events like COLLIS inspire students to merge intellectual inquiry with faith, empowering them to be agents of meaningful change.



# ROAR DAY

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**Historic Success**

**#1 Among Student Groups**

**#6 in Donor Affiliations (across All RIT)**

**\$19,775 RAISED!**

The Catholic Newman Community at RIT has once again demonstrated the power of faith, generosity, and community through the incredible success of ROAR Day! Thanks to the support of 64 generous donors, we raised an astounding \$19,755, securing the #1 spot among all student groups, #6 in donor affiliations, and ranking 7th overall across the entire university. This achievement is a testament to the dedication and commitment of our students, alumni, and friends who believe in the mission of Catholic Campus Ministry at RIT and all we do to build the Catholic faith among and with students!

We extend our deepest gratitude to Mark Saunders BS '18 and RIT parents, Gene and Theresa Yang, whose generous matching contributions helped inspire even greater participation. A special thank you also to Katie Linendoll '05, who is our biggest champion and supporter figuratively and literally with her annual video appeal and technical graphics that encourage all to ROAR for Catholic life!

## THE IMPACT

*"The opportunity to help lead the OCIA program with Newman has allowed me to guide other people on their faith journeys, as well as furthering my own."* -Brendan Roberts '25

*"Newman is constantly giving me ways to love God and His people, so that I feel blessed even as I face the unending struggles of college life."* -Chimamanda Eze '28

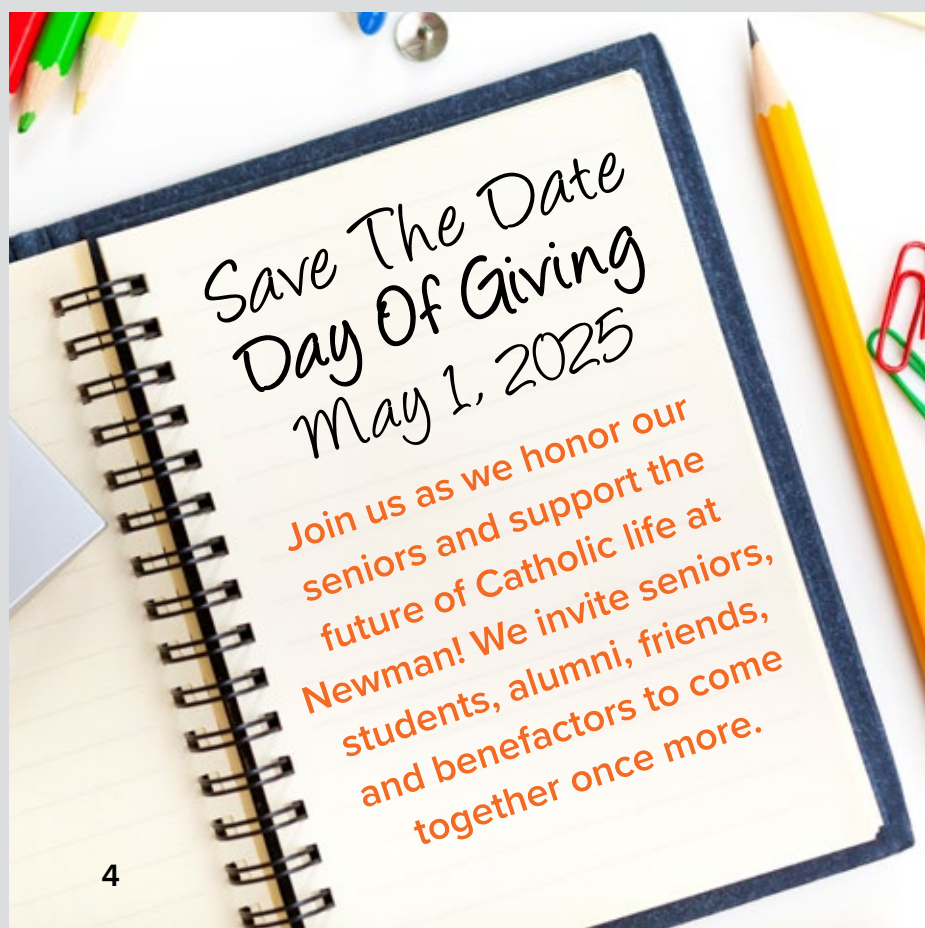
*"I was really nervous leaving my home parish but I immediately connected with members of the Newman community and feel like at home at Newman."* -Mickey Sosa '29

## Thank You To Our Donors!

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### Special Thanks to Our Sponsors

**Gene and Theresa Yang, Mark Saunders, and Katie Linendoll**



# Tiger Stripes Corner



Moni Chavez '25  
Albuquerque, NM

What motivated you to become an active member of Tiger Stripes ?

- My motivations for becoming an active member of the Tiger Stripes Volunteer Ministry were quite simple as I truly believe that the Lord put us here with another to help another get through this life, and we as believers of such a Great God must help him and be messengers of his work. When people need help, God needs help.

What did you learn?

- I learned that there is much more to be done to help one another and I need to keep doing it.



Brendan Roberts '25  
McKinney, TX

What motivated you to become an active member of Tiger Stripes ?

- I wanted to help out communities in need.

What did you learn?

- Helping people in need in this way helped me to be more grateful for all the blessings I have in my life.



Christis Shepard '26  
Bayonne, NJ

What motivated you to become an active member of Tiger Stripes ?

- I wanted to help people. There's really nothing else about it. I heard that Theresa was in need of volunteers and I had the time so I offered to help. Furthermore, faith without works is dead and I want to extend what I can for others.

Was there an encounter that you experienced that had an impact on you?

- A lot of the women in the Bethany House have come from difficult circumstances but they all seem so happy at dinner. It was astonishing, honestly to see them all so happy.

This year, Tiger Stripes is focused on bringing awareness to homelessness and food insecurity in the world as well as our own campus. In the Rochester community, we visit

Bethany House to feed and spend time with the guests at the house. We do this through meals once a month, as well as board game nights to show the guests our appreciation for them. On campus, we are working with RIT's FoodShare to help maintain reliable access to nutritious food for over 1,000 students. In addition, we are working to raise awareness about food insecurity, challenging stereotypes and highlighting the significance of campus

food pantries. By strengthening connections between FoodShare and our Catholic Newman Community, we aim to broaden awareness and ensure all students know they can rely on this essential source.



Our collection bin for FoodShare donations is placed outside the chapel every Sunday.



## Level Up: Student Leaders in Action!



Left to right: Justin Vanstrom '26, Theresa Haas '25, Alex Velez '25, Charles von Goins II '26, Chimamanda Eze '28

The E-Board of the RIT Catholic Newman Community is a dedicated group of student leaders who work together to support the spiritual, social, and service life of the ministry. Elected each year at the Evening of Discernment held at the end of the spring semester, these students commit their time and talents to serve their peers and foster a welcoming and faith-filled community. With guidance and supervision from the campus ministry staff, the E-Board takes on the important responsibility of ensuring the Catholic Newman Community thrives through thoughtful planning, collaboration, and leadership.

Throughout the academic year, the E-Board meets weekly to organize and implement a wide variety of events and programs that bring students together for worship, fellowship, and outreach. These meetings are shaped by the leadership and guidance of Campus Minister Kristen Smith, who accompanies the students in their roles and helps them connect their work to the greater mission of the Church. Kristen provides valuable insight, mentorship, and pastoral care, helping the E-Board discern how best to serve the needs of the community while growing as leaders themselves. Whether it's coordinating retreats, service projects like Tiger Stripes, or social gatherings after Sunday Mass, these student leaders work behind the scenes to create opportunities for others to grow in faith and friendship. Each officer brings a unique skill set to their role, contributing to the smooth operation and vibrant energy of the community, while also listening to the needs and hopes of their fellow students.

For the current academic year, Alex Velez serves as President, guiding the vision and direction of the E-Board with support from Charles von Goins II, Vice President for Internal Affairs. Theresa Haas serves as Secretary, keeping the team organized and informed, while Justin Vanstrom manages the financial aspects of the ministry as Treasurer. Chimamanda Eze, Vice President for External Affairs, helps maintain relationships with other campus groups and outside organizations. Together, this E-Board exemplifies servant leadership, working not only to keep the Newman Community running smoothly but to ensure it remains a place where students encounter Christ and support one another on their faith journeys.

## KAIROS 44: GRAPHING LIFE

At our Kairos XLIV retreat, held February 21-23 at the beautiful Notre Dame Retreat House, we had the blessing of welcoming Elena Markham, a 2019 graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology, to share the Life Graph talk. Now living and working in Rochester, Elena remains closely connected to the RIT Catholic Community, offering a powerful witness of how a life of faith continues to unfold well beyond the college years.

Elena's Life Graph traced the journey of her relationship with God, showing our retreatants that the inevitable ups and downs of life are not setbacks but rather sacred moments that draw us closer to Christ and His Church. Through the lens of her own experiences, Elena set her life story in a wider context, helping our college students see that faith isn't a straight line—it is often messy, unpredictable, and beautifully redemptive.

She began by recalling her baptism as the spiritual starting line, calling it her "entry ticket" into the faith. However, she was honest about the lukewarm years that followed, when her faith felt more like a family obligation than a personal relationship. Like so many, her middle school and high school years were focused on fitting in, and faith easily slipped into the background.

It wasn't until a priest invited her to the "March for Life" that things began to shift. That invitation opened her eyes to a bigger, bolder Catholic Church, filled with young people who believed deeply. For the first time, Elena began asking herself what she truly believed, not just what her family practiced.

College brought a fresh start. In the RIT Newman Catholic Community, Elena discovered the joy of choosing her faith. Surrounded by others seeking truth and goodness, she experienced the freedom of building a life centered on Christ—through Mass, confession, friendships rooted in faith, and ongoing learning about what it means to be Catholic. Those years became a time of real spiritual growth, grounded in both community and personal commitment.

But Elena didn't shy away from sharing how faith is tested in adult life. After graduation, she navigated the loneliness and uncertainty that can come with new jobs, new routines, and the absence of the campus faith community that once supported her. She spoke of the importance of intentionally seeking out new ways to stay connected to the Church, like joining young adult groups and Bible studies, and how those efforts have sustained her.

Elena's Life Graph wasn't a perfect, upward-sloping line. It was full of twists and turns, victories and struggles. And yet, she shared with conviction that through it all, she trusts God is at work. Even in the chaos, God is leading her forward—drawing her deeper into His love and the life of the Church.

Her testimony was a gift to our Kairos retreatants, a living example of the power of witness. In seeing Elena's real, ongoing journey of faith, they could glimpse what might be possible in their own lives—reminded that God writes beautiful stories in the squiggles.



# Bishop Makes Annual Visit on Ash Wednesday



Bishop Matano meets with OCIA students, who will be received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil.

## RIT Spring 2025 Calendar Events

March 2 – Hangout, 6:00-8:00PM

March 5 – Ash Wednesday Mass, 12:30PM;  
with Bishop Matano 5:30PM

March 26 – Lent Day of Confession, 4:00-  
7:00PM

March 30 – Hangout, 6:00-8:00PM

April 4 – Eve Away Retreat

April 9 – Agape Latte

April 11– Newman Night Meal

April 17 – Holy Thursday Mass, 6:00PM

April 18 – Good Friday Service, 12:00PM

April 19 – Easter Vigil, 8:00PM

April 20 – Easter Sunday Mass, 9:15AM and  
5:00PM

April 25 – E-Board Evening of Discernment

April 26 – Imagine RIT

May 8 - Baccalaureate and Ascension  
Thursday Mass, 5:00PM

### WEEKLY

#### Sunday

Mass 9:15AM (ASL  
Interpreted)

Mass 5:00PM

#### Tuesday

Exploring the  
Scriptures with Fr. Bob  
5:30PM

#### Wednesday

Adoration 4:30PM

Mass 5:30PM

OCIA 7:00PM

#### Friday

Rosary

5:30PM



# Around Newman



Fall Clean Up Day Service



December Coffee Hour Preparation



Extraordinary Minister Training



Christmas Cookie Day



Sunday Mass



Tiger Stripes Service Day



Newman Hangout

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