

Campus ministry helps faith to mature

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

As a hotel administration major, Cristina Ramos is laying the groundwork for her professional life by attending prestigious Cornell University.

"I felt very busy both semesters; my schedule was pretty packed most of the time. And, I had a job," the 19-year-old sophomore said, recalling her freshman year.

As all-encompassing as her academic demands may have seemed, this has not been Ramos' sole area for personal growth. She credits the staff at Cornell Catholic Community for fueling maturity in her faith journey.

"It was something I think I needed," she said of her campus-ministry activities. "I think I'm coming to understand a little more not necessarily what it means to be Catholic, but what the focus should be — what my life should be focused on."

Ramos serves as an example of how the college years can see one's faith brought into adulthood. Shannon Loughlin, diocesan director of young-adult and campus ministry, describes this shift as slowly evolving from "external; something (in childhood) I was told I should do — to something that's internal, what I want to become as a Christian. It takes time, and is incredibly important."

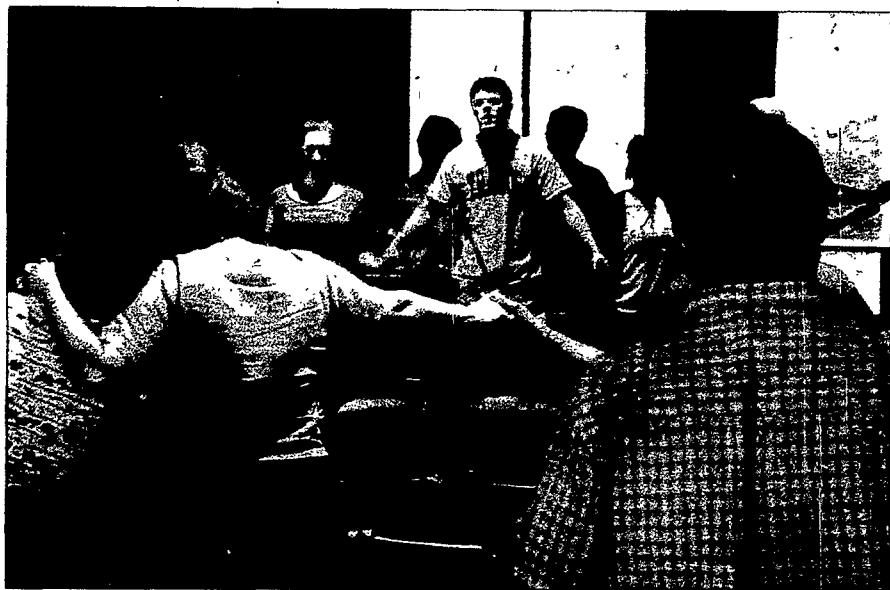
"A lot of students don't understand yet what it means to be an adult Catholic," agreed Sister Donna Fannon, MSHS, a chaplain at Cornell University.

Arriving at this understanding is one of the many challenges of college life. "It's a very different faith experience and a very different culture," Loughlin said.

For instance, college may mark the first time that a student's childhood religion is challenged by peers — and, it's also quite possible that the student may be undergoing his or her own questioning. Loughlin said that during these times, Catholic campus ministry provides "support to ask questions in a safe environment."

Another major benefit of campus ministry is that students can become highly active and visible in their church — often for the first time. "It's their community, not their parents' community," Loughlin said. She noted that although staffing and activities vary widely from school to school, every college in the Diocese of Rochester offers some form of Catholic campus ministry.

For Ramos, her affiliation with Cornell Catholic Community "puts



Colleen White/Catholic Courier

University of Rochester student Amanda Holt (left) and 2004 graduate Mark O'Hara attend Mass Aug. 8 at the university's Interfaith Chapel. Both have regularly attended Mass on campus since they began attending the school.

me in contact with some really awesome people who believe what I believe, and have the same goals." Ramos sings and plays bass guitar for the community's praise-and-worship band. This spring she also took part in the campus ministry's annual service trip to rural Kentucky.

Brad Ayres, 20, a junior pre-business engineering major at Cornell, was received into the Catholic Church after going through the campus ministry's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process as a freshman. "It is easy to feel overwhelmed here, given the rigorous nature of the university's academics. My involvement in the Cornell Catholic Community has provided a good balance against this stress," he said.

Among Ayres' current activities

are serving as hospitality minister during Sunday Masses, as well as participation in Cornell's chapter of Bread for the World, a Christian social-justice organization. During the RCIA process, Ayres recalled, "I spent time thinking about my life through the context of my faith, and

Young Adult

realized that at some point I wanted to use my talents to further the cause of social justice."

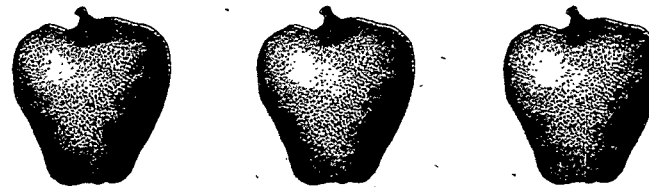
Whereas Ramos and Ayres aligned themselves with campus ministry early in their freshman years, Sister Fannon observed that it may take longer for others to surface.

"It's very interesting — a lot of students we don't see. They may have felt pressure in high school and just waited for their freedom. But we have kids who somehow find us," Sister Fannon said. She added that "a lot of freshmen just get buried in academics right away. Kind of the mantra here is, 'We don't have time.' But a lot of kids find they need something in their life to keep them grounded."

Sister Fannon said that to better promote Cornell Catholic Community's availability, this school year four students have been hired part-time to work with the chaplains in providing outreach.

"That's our challenge, being visible on a huge campus and letting them know we're there," Sister Fannon remarked.

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