

CAMPUS MINISTRY IN MIRIAM COLLEGE- Higher Education Unit

CEAP, St. Paul College, Manila

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Now on its 86th year, Miriam College continues to form women leaders in service, putting all her best efforts to promote and live out the gospel values of justice, peace, truth and integrity of creation. After accommodating male students for some years before the turn of the century, MC decided to remain an exclusive college for women and continued to be a member of a consortium with two other women colleges - St. Scholastica's College and Assumption College.

In the mission of Miriam College to prepare young women to take on productive, relevant and fulfilling careers that serve the needs and aspirations of the Filipino people and the global community, where is Campus Ministry? As in all the other Catholic schools, we are right there in that little corner, trying to make the Gentle Whisper heard by the students amidst the noise and clutter of daily life and within the demands of their academic endeavors. We take on our humble role to contribute in the shaping of the character of around two thousand five hundred students in the Higher Education Unit, so that they not only emerge as competent but caring leaders as well.

Unlike other Catholic schools that are run by religious congregations or by parishes, Miriam College is lay since 1977 when the Maryknoll congregation saw the readiness of the laity to continue the educational mission they had started. From then on, Miriam College has been going through the honest struggle to name and live out a common spirituality that will permeate the curricular and non-curricular areas of Miriam education and the way of life of the whole community. So far, we have articulated this Spirituality as:

*Christ-centered, Catholic, Lay, Missionary,
and Filipino, embodying the Gospel values of truth, justice, peace,
and integrity of creation.*

*Inspired by the Maryknoll legacy, rooted in the person of Jesus Christ,
and lived by Miriam of Nazareth, Miriam spirituality empowers our
community to lead in mission, communion, and service.*

With this background, the Campus Ministry Office envisions the formation and development of committed Christians who are strong in their faith, able to witness the Gospel of Jesus in thoughts, words, and deeds and ready to serve the needs of others joyfully. Its mission is to create a faith-filled community, provide evangelization and formation activities, and to celebrate the faith in various liturgical gatherings. While the Spiritual Development Program is Christ-centered, the office sees to it that the students of other faith traditions - Islam and Buddhism - and those who claim to be atheists and agnostics are given the right to exercise their faith or principles within the context of the prescribed activities. The office is headed by the Campus Ministry Coordinator who works closely with the Campus Ministry Activities Assistant and the office secretary.

That means three office staff is to 2,500 students. The coordinator, who reports directly to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, is usually a faculty member of the Theology department. Hence, aside from campus ministry, he or she is also given a teaching load.

Retreat and Recollection

The CMO is responsible for the planning and implementation of the spiritual development program for all year levels. A program of whole day recollections for the lower year classes and 2-day retreat for the seniors is carried out during the school year. The theme of each year level recollection allows the students to integrate to prayer their learning in their respective Theology classes. The modules are so designed to help the participants discover the relevance of the Theology course in their personal relationship with God as well as in their communal life. Hence, the recollection, which we also call 'day of prayer', is by Theology class. This gives the Theology professor the opportunity to prepare his/her class for the encounter, and also to integrate the recollection experience of the students into the lesson or course.

However, there are special groups who have particular needs, and they are our deaf students and the international students, most of whom are Koreans. The CMO has designed special modules for them.

As regards the two-day retreat for the graduating students, the spiritual exercises and activities incorporate the different themes of the annual recollections. It is concluded with the challenge to live out the core values beyond MC. To prepare the seniors for their retreat, the Campus Ministry Coordinator conducts an orientation that stresses the importance of silence and mindful awareness during the days of prayer.

Attendance in the retreat or recollection is a basic requirement for students. Some students, in the beginning, may drag themselves into the recollection room or retreat house. But at the end of each recollection or retreat, after the students have filled out the evaluation forms to assess their experience and to identify which aspect needs to be improved, you will be delighted when you read their expressions of gratitude for their renewed relationship with the Lord.

While it is the campus minister who designs and writes the modules, a pool of facilitators, some of whom have been with Miriam College for years, are the ones who implement them. Every end of the year, we review the students' evaluation and consider the strengths and limitations of the days of prayer as pointed out by the students vis-a-vis the theme of the recollection/retreat. Here we invite the guest facilitators and discuss with them the possibilities of updating the modules.

Daily and Special Masses

Aside from the days of prayer, what makes the campus ministers alive and kicking are the daily and special masses. The daily mass is held at the College Chapel from Tuesday to Friday. The presiders for the daily mass are contacted at the start of the school year. Although we are lay and we have no chaplain, MC is blessed with neighbors such as Ateneo de Manila University, East Asian Pastoral Institute, Sta. Maria Dela Strada Parish, and Our Lady of Pentecost Parish from whom we get our regular presiders. How do we see to it that there are warm bodies in our daily Eucharistic celebrations? The class who is having its recollection automatically becomes part of the congregation. On the days when there is no recollection, student organizations are invited to sponsor the Mass. As sponsors, they are expected to participate in the liturgy by serving as lectors, commentators or altar servers. Mass intentions may be arranged with the CMO – birthday, healing for the sick, death anniversary, and other special intentions.

Other Services

The other services rendered by the CMO include the special occasion masses, opportunity for Confession, spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, and prayer sessions.

Students and employees are able to read the daily Mass readings with commentaries through a Bible Diary which is displayed in front of the college chapel. This invites the students and employees to pause and be nourished by the Word of God.

The CMO bulletin boards are both informative and interactive. Through the display, the students are updated of the CMO activities, and are led to reflect and express their thoughts and insights. Students get to know the schedule of activities, read relevant biblical verses, and see pictures of retreatants and some of their reflection. There is always a section that invites the students to do something, such as, answering a question for reflection on a sheet of paper, participating in a game, turning a leaf to read a quotation, writing their heart's desire, and the like.

Moreover, in order to lead the college community to become more conscious of the spirit and meaning of the special seasons, the CMO puts up special exhibits during Advent and Lent. These are done in varied ways, such as, displaying biblical texts on the staircase landing of the main buildings; putting up 'freedom boards' where students can write their answers to a question related to the season, and the like.

There are times when we discover that there are college students who haven't had their first communion and who are not confirmed yet. So, the CMO takes charge of the preparation of these students who request for assistance.

CMO-supervised organizations

The Campus Ministry Coordinator also acts as moderator for the MC Liturgical Choir. In this way, s/he works hand in hand with the choir trainer as regards the songs and schedule of rehearsals in preparation for the masses where the participation of the choir is needed. On the other hand, the assistant campus minister takes care of the formation of a corps of student volunteers who assist the CMO staff during masses and other related activities.

Reflection

Prayer life

I went through discernment before accepting to become the next coordinator of the CMO. That was three years ago. It was a big leap from being a classroom teacher to being a coordinator-minister. Aside from having to exercise greater responsibility, I realized one needs to be sensitive, patient, flexible, open-minded, forward-looking, and grounded to one's self. A good sense of humor and commitment to the ministry are essential if one must find meaning in it.

When I look back, I marvel at how God, right in the beginning of my stint as a campus minister, has put into my heart a deep longing for prayer. I always felt the hunger, and I welcomed every opportunity that could satisfy it. I gradually became aware that sitting before the Lord, being still, and allowing myself to be loved and healed and forgiven by God is the only way I could appreciate the ministry. I was made to understand that I do not have the right, and I will not have the means, to accompany another in her God-experience if I cannot be faithful to my commitment to prayer. Being in the ministry certainly brought my spiritual life to greater depth.

Administrator-Minister

I have always been grateful that I was given the chance to do administrative work as a campus minister. The job compelled me to learn skills and to develop capacities that I would never gain as a classroom teacher. There were many instances, though, as CMO coordinator when I felt I was more of an administrator than a minister. You know the feeling in the office - it's like running a small parish. The only difference is that you don't have a priest and you are not the priest. And it is so stressful when requests are hurled upon you from here and there, and there is no ordained minister available.

Office work eats much of your time – making the budget, attending meetings, writing letters, preparing for big celebrations, answering inquiries,

granting requests, reporting to administrators. So, can you imagine how happy I was when there were students who would request to see me for spiritual counseling, or faculty or staff who would suddenly drop by and ask for accompaniment?

Furthermore, in this office, the little details matter: “Is there enough hosts? Has the chasuble been washed and ironed? Have you followed up the facilitator? Where will you get the keyboard? Remember that it has to be with its adaptor! Oh, I forgot to get the CD from the player! Did you tell the students to take their breakfast? Were you able to text Father that the mass is cancelled?” Details!!! Remember, we’re a trinity servicing 2,000 plus students! So, each one of us in the office keeps a “what to do” list for our daily operation as well as for particular activities such as retreat and Mass in the auditorium. We cannot afford to overlook even the least detail.

Trust in God’s faithfulness

“Do not be afraid!” Megan McKenna said we can find this statement in the bible 366 times. Enough for each day, and we have an extra when it’s a leap year. “Do not be afraid; I am with you. My grace is enough for you.” In the classroom, I can almost always control everything that will happen, especially when I am not student-centered. But it is not the case in campus ministry. Everyday, there are surprises – some are pleasant; some render me helpless. And in moments of helplessness, there’s only one thing that I could do: let God take charge. And whenever I do that, God indeed takes charge. You will see wonders! You will marvel at what the Lord can do! But first, you have to be brave to put your trust in God. Do not be afraid!

Prayer life... Administrator-Minister... Trust in God’s faithfulness = **PAT**

Most of the time, we just need the gentle and loving PAT of the Lord so that we can keep going joyfully and meaningfully in campus ministry.



Carry on, JOB WELL DONE!!!