

STRIVING FOR WHOLENESS AND HOLINESS

August 2026

Dear Students,

Welcome to The Catholic University of America! You are joining a community of scholars and students that for over a century has, in the words of our founder Pope Leo XIII, provided the Church worthy ministers and our Republic her best citizens.

I am Bishop John O. Barres of the Diocese of Rockville Centre in New York, and I serve as Vice-Chair of the University's Board of Trustees. As a successor of the Apostles, I take great interest in your success, your happiness, and especially your holiness—your becoming ever more like Christ during your college years. Know that the other trustees, the University administration, and your chaplains share that same interest in your flourishing.

As you prepare to arrive on campus, I would like to offer a few words of advice. I add them to the advice that your family and friends have already given you.

I recognize that our incoming students come from many different faith traditions and backgrounds, and that not everyone shares the University's Catholic faith. Please know that you are warmly welcomed into our community. The Catholic University of America is a place where every student is invited to pursue truth, grow in wisdom, serve others, and flourish as a person. While the reflections that follow are rooted in the Catholic faith that animates our University, I hope each of you will find something meaningful in them as you begin your college journey.

For those who share the Catholic faith, I encourage you to make your spiritual life as much a priority as your academics, athletics, and friendships. To that end, I offer the following twelve points for your consideration. They are intended to help you strive for wholeness—including holiness—and thereby become the person God has created you to be.

1. BE RADICALLY FAITHFUL TO SUNDAY MASS

As you plan your weekly schedule, make attending Sunday Mass the top priority. Form this resolution right now and fulfill it every week of your life. Mass is easy to find at Catholic University. Campus Ministry offers four Masses every Sunday. You can also attend Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Dominican House of Studies, the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land, the St. John Paul II Shrine, St. Anthony of Padua Church, St. Matthew's Cathedral, and so many other churches and shrines around Washington, D.C. Sunday Mass keeps you anchored, focused, and directed on the mind, heart, and life of Jesus. Live the rhythm of Sunday Mass—a rhythm of giving and receiving—in your daily life. Consider going to daily Mass. Remember with Saint Ephrem that when we eat and drink the Eucharistic Body and Blood of the Lord, we eat and drink "Fire and Spirit."



2. PRAY DAILY

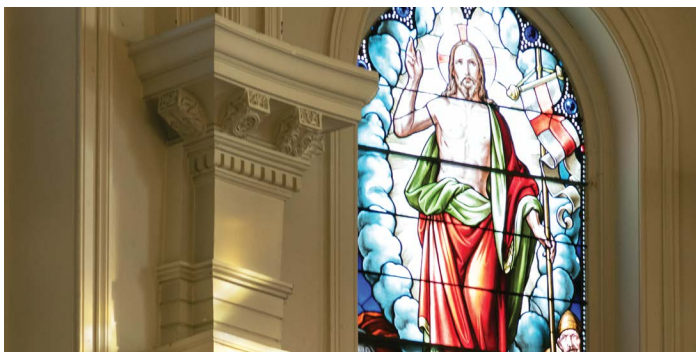
Carry a small copy of the New Testament everywhere you go. If you need a copy, contact Campus Ministry and ask for one. You can also download the New Testament on your phone. Read, meditate, pray, contemplate, and live the inspired Word of God regularly. Set aside 15 minutes a day to pray in silence. When you can, visit the Sacred Heart Chapel on campus and pray quietly in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Take notice of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit moving through your thoughts and emotions, illuminating your soul. In a social-media-addicted world, daily prayer becomes ever more necessary. Attend deeply to God in silence, and attend deeply to others with the face, eyes, ears, empathy, concentration, and compassion of Jesus Christ. Listening to God in prayer, and listening to God through your neighbor, is the best way to discern your educational, career, and vocational path.

3. EMBRACE AND LIVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

God has given us the Commandments as the revealed path to happiness. Learn the Commandments and follow them. At the same time, reject moral relativism—the belief that there is no right or wrong. Avoid relativism's destructive separation of freedom from truth. Remember that authentic freedom requires forming our consciences with the truths of Jesus Christ. Embrace the objective splendor of truth contained in the Sacred Scriptures, the Creed, the Sacraments, Catholic moral teaching, and the teaching of the saints and mystics on prayer and charity. Become a man or woman of the Beatitudes.

4. MAKE FREQUENT USE OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

When celebrated with humility, the Sacrament of Confession offers us an experience of Christ's infinite mercy and never-ending forgiveness. We also receive grace to grow and persevere in virtue. Be forgiven as often as necessary and become a courageous forgiver and instrument of the Divine Mercy of Jesus Christ in the world. Campus Ministry offers over 15 scheduled hours of Confession each week. You can also request the Sacrament from a chaplain at any time.



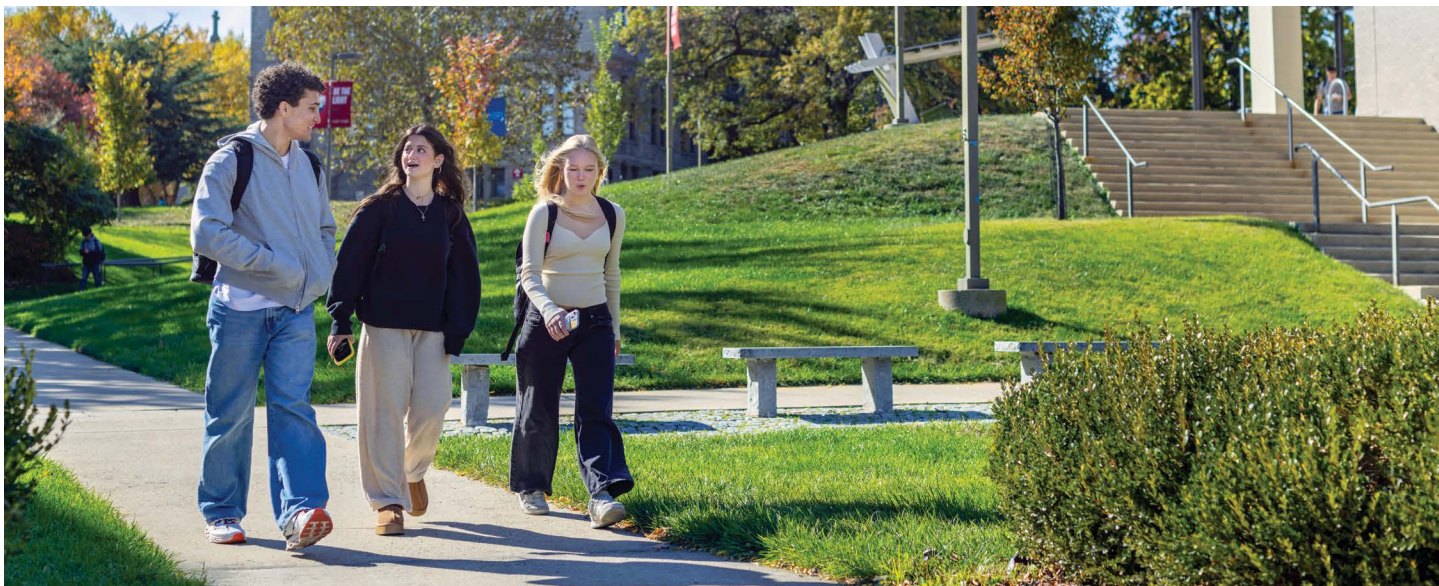
5. HAVE A DEEP DEVOTION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Say the prayer "Come, Holy Spirit!" many times each day. Ask for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. Dedicate your education, your future career, and most importantly your vocation to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Grow in hope. Develop a burning desire for heaven and eternal life. Realize that the people who are most productive in life are those who take the long view, those who have a burning desire for heaven. Make it your goal to leave this world with Saint Paul's words on your lips: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).



6. SERVE GENEROUSLY

Jesus tells us: "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me" (Mt 25:40). Perform regularly the Works of Mercy. The Christian tradition lists seven Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead. There are also seven Spiritual Works of Mercy: counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, pray for the living and the dead. When you perform these works, you enact the love of Christ. You show Christ to others, and those whom you serve reveal Christ to you. Time is precious, of course. But in love make sacrifices to help those in need. A practical first step would be to call your parents and grandparents consistently. You will never know what a lift this gives them every time you call. Be generous with your time and attention to the poor. Volunteer with Campus Ministry. Remember the truth that Saint Francis of Assisi teaches: "It is in giving that we receive."



7. SANCTIFY YOUR ACADEMIC WORK

Transform study into prayer and a practice of the presence of God. Before every study block say a short prayer that offers God your concentration, determination, and tenacity. Be a Renaissance man or woman who, by God's grace, can integrate music, art, cinema, literature, history, philosophy, and theology with engineering, nursing, business, communications, education, economics, and politics. A Renaissance person grounded in the truth, mission, and prayer of the Catholic Faith can cast a wide net of engagement—and evangelization—because of their capacity to converse with a wide range of people. Engagement and evangelization begin in study, and they are lived out in the wide range of activities that the University offers—from classes to internships, research to athletics.

8. BUILD AUTHENTIC FRIENDSHIPS

No one lives life alone, and no one succeeds at life alone. We all need friends. Scripture tells us: "A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure" (Sir 6:14). Seek the treasure of friendship. Aim to be a strong, sincere, virtuous, and loyal friend to others. With your friends, discover and explore the mysteries of life; the mysteries of the earth; the mysteries of space; and the mysteries of the heart. With your friends, discover and explore the mysteries of faith, too. Around the country, university students are becoming Christian and entering the Church because a Catholic friend took interest in them and gave powerful witness to the Faith. Make the sincere, compelling, and inviting way that you live your Catholic Faith—especially with your friends—a light of Christian hope to every student, faculty, and staff member you meet.

9. LEARN TO ARTICULATE THE CATHOLIC FAITH

Cultivate the art of apologetics, the skill of explaining in an orderly and heart-felt manner what we Christians believe. To develop this skill, study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Read the works of Catholic apologists: ancient ones like Saint Justin Martyr and Saint Irenaeus, and contemporary ones like G.K. Chesterton and Bishop Robert Barron. Honing the craft of apologetics will help you express the reason for the faith-filled hope that is within you. Saint Peter tells us to be ready to do this always (1 Pt 3:15). Having this reason at hand will be a gift to yourself, your friends, and the wide variety of people that the Holy Spirit will place before you.

10. EXPLORE THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

Take advantage of Catholic University's distinguished faculty and academic resources. Whatever your discipline, seek out the scholarship, lectures, and conversations that demonstrate how the Catholic intellectual tradition enriches every field of study. For instance, our University is newly focused on the Church's ethical direction regarding artificial intelligence. Guided by Pope Leo XIV's prophetic teaching in his encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, we want to learn how best to use AI ethically for the common good and the spread of the Gospel. Beyond our campus, search for talks and articles by Catholic thinkers such as Helen Alvaré, Robert George, Mary Eberstadt, Fr. James Schall, Fr. Robert Spitzer, and our soon-to-be-beatified alumnus Archbishop Fulton Sheen. Look, too, for the videos of the Thomistic Institute, particularly its Aquinas 101 series. Be the Holy Spirit's instrument of casting fire on the earth! Learn to live and express your Catholic Faith charitably and compassionately in the public square.



11. CARRY THE CROSS FOR JUSTICE

During your years at Catholic University, become an instrument of social justice, racial harmony, and societal change grounded in the Gospel, Catholic Social Teaching, the sanctity of human life, non-violence, your commitment to daily conversion, and a creative Catholic missionary way of thinking. Remember the lessons of history: antagonism, violence, and a spirit of destruction set back authentic movements of social change by decades. The American-born Servants of God Dorothy Day and Sister Thea Bowman (a University alumna) are important examples to follow here. Carry the cross of Jesus Christ courageously on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, the ignored, the voiceless, and the forgotten.

12. GO TO MARY

Just before he died, Jesus gave his mother Mary to be our mother, too (Jn 19:27). Meditate on this mystery regularly. Visit the magnificent Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception adjacent to our campus. Discover there Mary's love for you. Learn about her many titles: Mother of Mercy, Gate of Heaven, Refuge of Sinners, Queen of Peace, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and so many others. Pray the Rosary. Ponder the mysteries of Jesus' life with Mary. In all things, take the advice that Mary gave to the servants at the Wedding of Cana: "Do whatever my Son, Jesus, tells you" (Jn 2:5).

As a student, a priest, and a bishop, these 12 points have guided my life as a disciple. They have made me a better friend to Jesus and to others. I offer them to you as a sure guide for beginning and living your college career well.

Before I conclude, I want to give you a little homework. Obtain copies of these four books: Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, and Josef Pieper's *Faith, Hope, and Love* and *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. Over your time at the University, make sure to read these books. Perhaps you can finish one a year. They will enlighten your mind, strengthen your heart, and insert you confidently into the living adventure of the Christian life, an adventure undertaken and completed by the generations of saints who have gone before us. God has made you to join their ranks.

My young brothers and sisters, again welcome to Catholic University! God has many gifts and graces in store for you. Be not afraid! Remember with Saint Paul that no eye has seen nor has any ear heard what God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9). Get involved with Campus Ministry. Take advantage of all it offers and allow it to guide you more deeply into a vibrant life with Christ. Thank you for witnessing Christ to each other and to all whom you meet throughout Washington, D.C.

Know that each one of you remains in my daily prayers and Masses. I remember, too, your families and every friend you make on campus.

God Bless you!

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre

