Scholarships for a New Generation of Lay Leaders
“Why is CTU important to me? Because it’s essential. We need an institution bold enough to envision what the Catholic world is going to look like, or else we risk losing our tradition. CTU is that institution.”

Barry Sullivan, Life Trustee, Cooney and Conway Chair in Advocacy and professor of law, Loyola University Chicago
The Initiative

Catholic Theological Union, the largest Roman Catholic graduate school of theology in the United States, is embarking on an initiative to raise substantial scholarship support for a new generation of lay leaders to serve the mission of the Church. As one of the first schools of theology to open its doors to lay men and women, who now comprise nearly half of our student population, CTU educates lay students and religious for ministry alongside seminarians preparing for ordination. These lay men and women, highly motivated and generous in spirit, are essential to serve the many needs of today’s Church and world.

The Church is Alive

At the liturgy celebrating his installation as Pope, Benedict XVI lifted his eyes from the text of his sermon and declared with force: “The Church is alive! The Church is alive!” The Catholic Church is indeed alive. It is alive for the one in four Americans—68 million strong—who identify themselves as Catholics. It is alive for those who draw spiritual strength from its rich liturgy and sacred tradition. It is alive for those who mark the birth of a child or grandchild in the waters of baptism, who celebrate the beginning of married life at its altars, or find solace after the loss of a loved one in the Church’s unyielding faith in a God of everlasting love.

The Church in this country is also alive in its extraordinary works of mercy on behalf of those in need.

- Last year the American Catholic school system provided quality elementary, secondary, and college education for over three million students and religious education for over four million more in public schools.
- Eighty-five million patients were cared for in the nation’s 556 Catholic hospitals, and seven million more in its specialized health care centers.
- More than 180,000 children were protected and nourished in Catholic orphanages and day care centers.
- An incredible 28 million people in desperate need were assisted in Catholic social service centers.
- Reaching beyond our shores, Catholic Relief Services provided more than half a billion dollars in aid to countries experiencing disasters around the world—aid provided by the generosity of Catholics and other donors.

A Time of Extraordinary Change

The motivation for these vibrant expressions of the Catholic faith is both simple and profound: we strive to follow the example of Christ who brought comfort to those who mourn, hope to those in distress, and compassion and nourishment to the least among us. At the same time, the Church is a human community—a vital and complex network of people and parishes and institutions that support the life and mission of the Church in all its dimensions. Until now, much of the leadership and guidance of this vast network was in the hands of priests and religious brothers and sisters. Working in tandem with devoted lay people, this work force has sustained the institutional life of the Church and ensured its values and mission, all done with a minimum of expense. The contribution of priests and religious sisters and brothers to the life of the Church in the United States has been truly extraordinary.

But the Catholic community is now aware of a profound change taking place in the Church.

- Since 1968, the number of American Catholics has risen from 46.6 million to 68 million, an increase of over 40%.
- During this same period, the number of yearly priestly ordinations has decreased by nearly 50%.
- Today, 16% of all Catholic parishes in the United States are without a resident pastor.
- The priestly population is aging, with religious order priests averaging 64 years of age and diocesan priests 58 years.
- The decline in vocations to women’s religious communities has been even more dramatic: in 1965 there were nearly 180,000 Sisters in the United States; today there are 59,208.
Signs of Hope

There are, however, extraordinary signs of hope. Inspired by a renewed appreciation of the lay vocation in the Church and motivated by a call to service, a new generation of lay men and women are stepping forward ready to sustain the vital mission of the Church, working in harmony with priests, deacons, and religious. There are currently 29,145 lay ministers employed in the U.S.—an increase of 35% since 1992. For the first time in American Church history, this number actually exceeds that of ordained priests in parish ministry.

These statistics demonstrate the need for qualified, professional lay ministers, particularly in parishes and other settings where priests are increasingly in demand for sacramental duties, making it very difficult for them to fulfill their non-sacramental pastoral and ministerial roles. The bulk of these duties are already being delegated to lay men and women serving as pastoral ministers, lay ecclesial healthcare ministers, marriage preparation instructors, youth ministers, parish administrators, business managers, etc. In addition, more and more lay men and women are taking over important institutional leadership roles on a diocesan level in Catholic education, health care, and social services. There is a compelling need for these leaders to receive sound theological training and pastoral formation in order to be effective and true to the spirit of the Church’s mission. It is equally essential that the spiritual formation component of theological education be provided for these lay men and women with the same quality and resources with which we have educated our seminarians.

The Response of Catholic Theological Union

Catholic Theological Union is uniquely positioned to prepare this new generation of lay leaders for the life of the Church. As the largest Roman Catholic graduate school of Theology, CTU is blessed with an outstanding and internationally recognized faculty and a reputation for academic excellence and sound pastoral training. Located in Hyde Park near the University of Chicago and founded in 1968 as a union of three religious order seminaries, CTU is now comprised of 25 sponsoring religious communities, with its student body of more than 500 consisting of both religious order seminarians and lay men and women preparing for Church service. International students from over 40 countries comprise more than 30% of our student body, bringing the spirit and realities of the global Catholic Church to our educational setting. One in six of every religious order priest ordained in the United States is a CTU graduate.

Through its Augustus Tolton and Oscar Romero programs, CTU prepares African American and Hispanic lay leaders for service in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Working in close collaboration with the University of Chicago Divinity School and several Protestant seminaries in the Hyde Park community, CTU also offers our students a firsthand experience of ecumenical collaboration.

Our nearly 3,200 graduates minister worldwide as pastors and pastoral associates, teachers, social workers, government officials, hospital chaplains, administrators, and more. Through its Cardinal Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry, CTU has also become a leader in interreligious dialogue, particularly with the Jewish and Muslim communities. CTU students have the opportunity to be fully informed about and engaged with the complex religious map of our 21st century world.

“I truly believe in the mission of CTU, the education of the laity and the commitment to interreligious study and dialogue. I love the spirit of the place; there is joy in the institution, and there is an insistence on quality and scholarship.”

Carolyn Parmer, Trustee, lawyer, philanthropist
“Today, it would be difficult to imagine a diocese effectively carrying on its mission without the assistance of capable, generous, and faith-filled laity. As lay persons become responsible for the care of others in the Church, their theological education and spiritual formation for ministry is of ever greater importance. I welcome any effort that helps the Church authentically transmit the faith of the Apostles to dedicated lay ministers and deepens their love for Christ.”

Francis Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago
“My experience is that lay students at CTU are challenged to encounter the Church in its fullness: women and men of all ages celebrating our common baptismal call to ministry and service yet ever respecting the distinctive responses of ordained, lay, and religious to that call. CTU lives the Vatican II vision of church in the modern world.”

Robert Wheeler, MAPS 1998
attorney, businessman, and Codirector of the Emmaus Lay Formation Program
“All the baptized are called to work toward the transformation of the world.”

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, A Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005

“A Call to Serve

The students who come to CTU—both seminarians and lay men and women—come with a deep sense of vocation, believing that God is calling them to a life of dedication and service to others. The quality of today’s students is outstanding and their idealism is a great inspiration. They are truly a witness of hope for the future of the Church. The education they receive at CTU, under the guidance of an expert faculty and staff, gives them a sure knowledge of the richness of the Scriptures and the Catholic tradition. It hones their pastoral skills with training and supervised pastoral experience to prepare them to serve God’s people with sensitivity, respect, and sound judgment. A required program of spiritual formation ensures that these future Church leaders are people of character and integrity, and that they are steeped in the practices of prayer and reflection that will sustain them in their ministry.

The Need

As noble as their motivation may be, the financial realities of lay persons pursuing their ministerial vocation can be overwhelming. Depending on the course of study, a full year’s tuition for a Masters degree that prepares a lay student for ministry costs approximately $15,000. With even frugal living, the total yearly amount a student needs can reach $25,000. For the lay men and women who represent nearly half of our student population, this can be a severe financial challenge. To assume a cumulative and substantial debt can also be dangerous for the future well-being of our graduates, given that church-related positions do not provide higher level salaries, making debt repayment difficult. Many lay students extend their graduate education over a long period of time, while working a significant number of hours to earn the financial support they need, in addition to taking out student loans or borrowing from family and friends.

Financial support for the priesthood candidates at CTU is generously provided by the religious communities to which they belong. Through their service to the wider Church and through their own appeals to the friends of their respective communities, the 25 religious orders who sponsor CTU continue to have confidence in the preparation for priesthood the school provides for their members. In the case of lay men and women, however, providing them full or partial scholarship support is an urgent priority for CTU on behalf of the Church. Despite several scholarship funds and an annual disbursement of more than half a million dollars in scholarship monies for the 2008-2009 academic year, CTU does not have nearly enough scholarship opportunities available to assist exemplary students in financial need. Each year CTU has to turn away exceptional applicants because of a lack of sufficient scholarship support. In 2009, for example, there were 80 inquiries for the full-tuition Bernardin Scholarship and only seven scholarships could be awarded. Similarly, each year students who have already been admitted to CTU have to withdraw because the scholarship support they need cannot be provided. In fact, for the 2009-2010 academic year, nearly 50% of those offered 20-45% tuition reduction declined matriculation because of the still prohibitive cost of tuition. Increasing scholarship support will enable CTU to attract quality lay student candidates, making it possible for them to fully engage in the academic and spiritual rigor of a graduate degree in theology regardless of their ability to pay.
Partners in Hope

Drawing on our recent admission patterns and projecting our recruitment efforts to meet the growing need for professionally trained lay ministers, we are seeking to substantially increase our available scholarship funds. This will be achieved through the support of generous individuals who care deeply about the future of the Church and through partnerships with other foundations and funding sources.

Catholic Theological Union is a place where candidates for ordination study with lay men and women for roles in ministerial leadership and for lives of service. We believe this collaborative approach to graduate theological education is an asset to ministerial preparation, especially for the Church of the future where dedicated priests and religious will need to work side by side with qualified lay ecclesial ministers in order to sustain the Church’s mission.

By financially supporting a person’s response to God’s call to pursue theological education, you are investing in the Church of today and a vision of a Church for tomorrow, a Church which celebrates thousands of years of history and tradition, and a Church which recognizes the integral vocations of lay and ordained to carry out its mission in the world. Pope Benedict XVI stated this new awareness in an address to the Church of Rome in September 2009: “…it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective roles of those consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as “collaborators” of the clergy but truly recognized as “co-responsible” for the Church’s being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.”

We at CTU believe that God’s Spirit is inspiring a new generation of extraordinary women and men to bring the beauty and strength of the gospel to our world. We ask you to join us in this historic effort to build the Church of the future.

“Our call to lay ministry is greater than who we are as individuals, it reaches out to the generations of students who will come after us who will continue the work the first lay graduates of CTU have started. We must guarantee that opportunities and scholarships exist for future lay students who come to CTU to prepare for ministry. The religious orders at CTU are doing their part to provide opportunity and support for lay students, now it’s time for us to do ours.”

Judy Chiarelli, MDiv 1999, political scientist- Argonne National Library

Please Join Us

For more information about how you can get involved in supporting a new generation of lay leaders call Anne Marie Tirpak, Director of Development, at 773.371.5417 or email at atirpak@ctu.edu.