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Catholic college students selected for year of leadership training

by Casey McCorry

St. Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale University and the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management have created a joint program that aims at teaching talented young Catholics how to offer their skills in leadership roles within the church.

This August, students from Yale University in New Haven, Conn.; Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn.; Ohio State University in Columbus; Michigan State University in East Lansing; Stanford University in California; and the University of California in Los Angeles will attend three-day community retreats that will commence a regular series of meetings and a yearlong training in Catholic ecclesiology and theology.

Roughly a dozen students at each school -- most in business, prelaw, premed or theology studies -- were chosen by priests, campus ministers and lay ministers within their campus chapels for the year of training.

Founders explain that an anonymous donation funded the program and after a review of this year's six pilot sites, they hope to expand the program and develop a nationwide model.

"Young Catholic graduates have an abundance of skills to offer the church, but often they do not know how to apply them. Through this program, they will learn not only that their service is needed, but how best to utilize their gifts," said Christopher Solga, the program manager and a 2008 Yale graduate.

The Leadership Roundtable, a lay-led group based in Washington, D.C., and formed in the wake of the Catholic clergy's sex abuse scandal, is dedicated to bringing better administrative practices to dioceses and parishes nationwide. The Roundtable developed Engaging Students to Enliven the Ecclesial Mission, or ESTEEM, with the hope that students would incorporate their fields of study and their involvement in

the parishes and dioceses they find themselves in after they graduate.

“We want to find out how these students can bring leadership positions into the church and diocesan agencies. They have so much to contribute,” explained Fr. Robert Beloin, a Yale chaplain. He described how students can aid their parishes by integrating their profession into groups where it would be most helpful.

“If they’re working full-time in business, they can participate in a parish financial board. Whatever their expertise we want to show them how to get involved in diocesan-level social justice programs.”

“This generation of Catholics is the best educated in our nation’s history, and the resources, competencies and skills these young adults can bring to the church could truly transform parishes, bringing vitality, fresh perspectives and contemporary proficiencies to the life of our church,” said Kerry Robinson, executive director of the Leadership Roundtable.

ESTEEM, she said, develops “concrete ways to prepare young Catholics to exercise genuine leadership in parishes, dioceses and other Catholic institutions. ... The consequence of engaging talented young Catholics in authentic leadership is evangelization.”

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