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Campus ministers help graduates transition into the 'real world'

Porsia Tunzi | May. 24, 2012

Dominican Sr. Jodi Cecilia Min

Graduating college students shouldn't feel like they're being jettisoned into the "real world," as if the life they have been living is some kind of "unreal world," say campus ministers counseling students during this perennial time of transition.

"Don't discount the past years as unreal," Jesuit Fr. Jack Treacy tells graduating students at Santa Clara University in California, where he is director of campus ministry.

College life is filled with its own difficulties, and students already have experienced family struggles, new relationships and money concerns, Treacy said in a recent interview. College isn't drastically different than life after it, he said. Recent graduates should take pride in what they have already accomplished and appreciate their own gifts and talents.

Graduates "really do have something to contribute to the world," and "a responsibility to use their gifts in society that reflects God's dream for humanity."

Dominican Sr. Jodi Cecilia Min, assistant director of Lasallian mission at St. Mary's College of California in Moraga, offers a similar sentiment. She said she hopes students' lives after St. Mary's are a continuation of what they began at the college; namely, learning to integrate faith with the way they live, whether that is in relationships or jobs.

"What do you think the Gospel is?" Min asked. "It's a life guide, it's essential and relevant -- the Gospel is meant to be lived."

Being a Catholic is not just about routinely attending Mass on Sunday, Min said. As an institution founded by the Christian Brothers, the college encourages students to adopt the "lived Gospel," which means being people who practice the Gospel in their daily lives and beyond graduation, she said.

Treacy echoed that sentiment. "Most students are here for four years at Santa Clara University, but I hope the spirit lasts with them for their entire lives."

Carrie Rehak, director of campus ministry at Holy Names University in Oakland, Calif., said she likes to think campus ministry begins with helping students prepare for life after college the day from they enter. Her emphasis is on the importance of finding one's vocation. Finding one's calling is a long process, one that can last a lifetime, she said.

Holy Names campus ministry motivates students to start asking difficult questions about vocations early in their academic careers so they may find their own unique purpose in the world once they graduate, Rehak said.

Pamela Thomas, assistant director of residential ministry at St. Mary's College of California, helps students "differentiate between 'skills and tools' and 'passions and loves.' "

A student may be skilled in accounting and have a passion for prison ministry. Although these two endeavors might not come together in the same environment, a person can still pursue both, said Thomas, who is professor in Liberal Education for Arts Professionals, or LEAP, a career transition program for professional dancers.

At times, skills and passions intersect; at other times, they run parallel to one another. Yet both are important and carry equal weight, Thomas said.

Despite their best efforts to prepare students for the transition out of college, campus ministers know the move can be stressful, so they encourage students to ask for help when they need it. Treacy reminds students to "reach out to professors and staff members on campus as well as the alumni to help with their transition."

Thomas said she hopes graduates take a love for learning with them.

"There is still so much more to learn and know," she said. "I hope the awe of learning continues."

However, she also hopes they will leave behind their need for perfection. Students are sometimes driven mad with their need for high performance during their undergraduate academic career, Thomas said. "Life isn't perfect, and students should enjoy the imperfections of life."

[Porsia Tunzi graduates from St. Mary's College of California in Moraga in May.]

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