

New Website from the Mary Foundation Helps Catholic Young Adults Find Friends in Local Groups. (CatholicYoungAdultGroups.org)

For Immediate Publication:

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CatholicYoungAdultGroups.org, the latest tool for evangelization from the Mary Foundation, went live during Holy Week 2022. The website is the first fully-interactive national directory of over eight hundred young adult groups in the United States and Canada. Using a zip code or address search, young Catholics in the working world can instantly find nearby groups or attend scheduled events. They can also search groups by categories such as social gatherings, service projects, Eucharistic adoration, retreats, sports, and special Masses. Local chapters of national groups such as Young Catholic Professionals, Theology on Tap, and Catholic Beer Club are also represented.

According to the Mary Foundation's Director of Outreach, Anthony Mencini, who heads up the project, "Having friends in a community of believers is a basic human need. Many Catholics, even those who practice their faith, feel disconnected and are searching for meaning when they go out into the working world, even more so after the pandemic. We're longing for real human connection and social media just leaves us feeling empty. Our new website addresses this need."

"In my free time, I run a group for Catholic young adults with my best friend at a local parish. Our experience convinced us that authentic Christian friendship is the ultimate tool for evangelization. Real friendship in the real world changes lives. Socializing and praying together deepens our faith. That's why we created CatholicYoungAdultGroups.org for the entire country. It works. In most larger cities, there is something to do and there are people to meet every night of the week."

"I was far away from my faith when I graduated from college. The acceptance I felt immediately at Catching Fire, a local group here in Cleveland, brought me back and set me on a completely new path."

"I moved halfway across the country to work here," attests Patrick Cole, Special Projects coordinator at the Mary Foundation, who was raised in the Methodist tradition. "I didn't know any other people until I came upon a community of Catholic friends who took me in for who I was. These people changed my life and I want others to have the opportunity to easily find communities like mine."

The new website is also a powerful resource for connecting young adult leaders. The Mary Foundation, whose benefactors have distributed over twenty million books, booklets, recordings, and prayer medals as tools for evangelization since 1991, began by investing in a pilot program to support young adult groups in the northeast Ohio area in early 2020. Mencini and his team were

surprised to discover that local Catholic leaders (almost all volunteers) were typically unaware of the other groups or did not know the other leaders.

“As it turned out, the Cleveland area has over twenty-five groups, and now our leaders meet regularly,” according to Mencini. “Metro Washington DC has over sixty groups. Our website makes it easy for leaders to find each other, cosponsor events, help each other face challenges, and get the word out about individual activities and gatherings. From now on, no matter where they live in America, founders of new groups, who tend to have full-time secular careers, don’t have to go it alone.”

Because of the variety of platforms and social media used by these groups, search engines are typically useless for finding them. It took Mencini’s team of researchers several months to locate, evaluate, categorize, and upload the groups, events, and contact information into the map-based, relational database that powers CatholicYoungAdultsGroups.org.

Mencini emphasizes the important role relatives play in this initiative, “Parents and grandparents, you can be the most influential people in your children’s lives. Let them know about this website. Remember that the social events are a big draw, even if your children don’t practice their faith. They can find friends for life and become open to the sacraments. That’s what happened to me. Many people find out about these groups from a parent, uncle, aunt, or grandparent. In Patrick’s case, it was his mom. And although most groups don’t emphasize dating, there isn’t a more natural way to find a good Catholic spouse.”

The founder and president of the Mary Foundation, Bud Macfarlane, a bestselling Catholic novelist, emphasizes the potential of the new website. “This is what evangelical innovation is all about. As a father of four sons myself, every day I witness the immense challenges facing this generation of young Catholics. With CatholicYoungAdultGroups.org, in a matter of seconds, no matter where your child or grandchild lives in America, when they head out into a world that actively draws them away from the sacramental life, they can find like-minded Catholics and live their faith in a community that complements the parish system Our Lord designed.”

“We’re also thinking ahead. We care about the Catholic children in grammar school today. Tragically, many are leaving the faith before the end of high school. Who will be there for them in ten or twenty years? Bishops and pastors are desperate for realistic and deeply sacramental ways to bring the fallen-away back into the fold. As happened with Anthony Mencini, one major way is through the welcoming friendships these hundreds of groups provide.”

“Our experience building this tool revealed that more young adult groups are forming. The number can double quickly if we connect the leaders, who then work with parishes and the diocese. This new generation of devout Catholics may seem small as a percentage, but they have grown up in a culture that has tested their faith and have come out on the other side with a strong commitment to serve the Church. They are actively evangelical, too, and want to try new approaches within these grassroots groups. They have a ‘culture of invitation,’ a fearlessness, and a great love for the Eucharist. They’re doing the work in the trenches. We need to support them.”

“Their social and spiritual events are a natural means for inviting their fallen-away peers to come back into the warmth of the faith,” Macfarlane continued. “My team could not miss how these young adults have been burned by social media, pornography, and financial uncertainty since childhood. They are rightly wary of anything that is designed to use them for profit or does not respect their individuality. Everyone craves human connection. This website is for our nieces, nephews, children, and grandchildren. There are ten times as many good Catholics compared to when I was their age and I admire their zeal. We need to help them find spouses and be there for them as they start their own families.”

CatholicYoungAdultGroups.org was built and runs on a shoestring budget and needs financial support. Please visit their website. To learn more about the Mary Foundation, and to browse their other tools for evangelization, many of which are available free-of-charge or for nominal donations, visit CatholiCity.com.