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UVic Newman House up and running

Written by Bronwyn Lawrie, Youth Speak News

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VICTORIA, B.C. – Students at the University of Victoria (UVic) marked the blessing of its first Newman House, a residence and spiritual home for Catholic students on campus, Oct. 9.

Victoria Bishop Richard Gagnon presided over the blessing on the anniversary of the day that Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman was received into the Catholic Church. About 30 students and community members were in attendance. The Newman House, which is all male this year, opened for students at the end of August.

"God is blessing me and all the residents with this opportunity to grow in our faith, evangelize the campus and strengthen our resolve to live a faith-filled and holy life," said Jeremy Côté, 22, the house leader. "I feel that this house has really become a home to me already, both for the people here and the atmosphere of community."



Fr. Dean Henderson, Karl Trautman, Nathan Michaluk, Jeremy Côté, Carl Rethmeier and Bishop Richard Gagnon stand outside the recently opened Newman House at the University of Victoria.

Photo by Bronwyn Lawrie

Named for Blessed Newman, the mission of the UVic Newman House is "to provide a spiritual and social environment rooted in Catholic values where students could grow in their Christian faith, living out the teachings of Jesus while attending the University of Victoria or Camosun College while experiencing the richness of a community in Christ."

Bringing a Newman House to UVic is the idea of UVic chaplain Fr. Dean Henderson. The seeds for the house were planted almost 15 years ago when he went on sabbatical at the University of Oxford, Newman's former home.

"The university age range is crucial, as such significant vocations are cultivated, and social leadership shaped at universities in Canada," said Henderson. "(The Newman House) solidifies the presence of our Catholic community on the campus. It communicates to both the Catholic community and the wider academic community that we have a place in the world of higher education. We are here to serve and we belong."

House residents are Côté, Nathan Michaluk, 20, Carl Rethmeier, 20, and Karl Trautman, 20. In return for reduced accommodation costs, residents serve the Catholic ministry on campus in a variety of ways, such as liturgical assistance at Mass and involvement with the activities and evangelization of the Catholic Students' Association.

They also follow a house rule.

"We pray together at least once every day and ensure that we spend time in community every week," said Côté.

"There are other aspects of the house rule as well, but they all revolve around the principle of service to each other, the Catholic Students' Association at UVic and the Lord."

This is the first Newman House west of Ontario, as well as the first Canadian Newman House opened in the last 30-odd years. There are three other Newman Houses in Canada, located at McGill University, Queen's University and the University of Toronto. (There is a Newman Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, but it doesn't have a residence and functions as a Catholic campus club.)

"I've heard that over 50 per cent of the faithful lose their faith during their four years of attending a secular university," said Côté. "The Newman House exists as a stronghold, a place where values of service, honesty, humility and love are built up in us. I believe that this Newman House can be a ray of hope in the midst of a culture lacking true men of faith, courage and love."

Blessed Newman was beatified in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI in Birmingham, England. Originally an Anglican clergyman, Newman converted and was received into the Catholic Church on Oct. 9, 1845. He went on to become a well-known intellectual, writer, educator, poet and cardinal.

Looking forward, Henderson hopes to establish a second house for female students and eventually to

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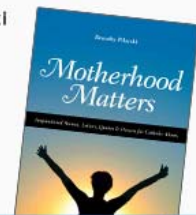
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obtain a permanent residence, as the current house is rented.

"I hope that great friendships in faith are cemented through the Newman House, vocations are fertilized there and the joy of Christ is celebrated within the whole diocesan community," Henderson said. "I also hope to see a permanent house centre in the near future which can serve more permanently our mission purposes."

(Lawrie, 20, is a creative writing major at the University of Victoria. [Read more about her at youthspeaknews.org.](#))

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