**It’s a match made in heaven — literally and digitally! Newman Connection has united with the Serra Club’s College Connection for Catholics (CCC) to unite even more young people on college campuses throughout the country in community and communion with each other and our faith.**

“It is critical to keep our young adults connected to the faith,” said Matthew Zerrusen, co-founder of Newman Connection. “So many of them lose their faith in college because they lose their way, their path and their direction. We can help resolve that by getting them connected to the right people, places and locations. The Serra Club’s program College Connection for Catholics and Newman Connection have united forces to take on the challenge of *Keeping Our Youth Connected to the Catholic Faith!”*

The evidence is compelling. A 2010 report by the Georgetown University Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) of the changes in religious practices behavior of Catholic students on all college campuses — Catholic, public, private non-Catholic religious and private non-sectarian indicated that 32%, 42%, 51% and 49% respectively are less active in Mass attendance than they were when they were at home with their families. In addition, participation by Catholic students in prayer, reading sacred texts, religion and spirituality also significantly dropped.

Judith H. Cozzens is the Chair of the Board of College Connection for Catholics and has been instrumental in its implementation for the past three years. Officially inaugurated by the U.S. Council of Serra International in the spring of 2007, local Serra Clubs gathered an initial 2500 names of high school students and provided them to college campus ministries. There are now more than 13,000 students connected to more than 1550 colleges all across the country.

 “I got connected with Newman Connection in January,” Cozzens said. “We’re both working for the same mission of helping our young people and campus ministries. Campus ministers are so grateful that we’ve listened to them and are working to make it easy to invite students before they even arrive on campus.”

Clearly, the bridge must be made with their Catholic community on or near campus before students even leave home. Both the Newman Connection and College Connection for Catholics are attempting to do exactly that.

**“I think this partnership is fantastic,” said Bishop James D. Conley of the Archdiocese of Denver. “The more Newman Connection and College Connection for Catholics can get out there, the more students they’ll reach who will then become part of the conversation. By making these connections especially through social media, young people are going to be looking at platforms like this to get information. It puts the information out there in an attractive and compelling way and the digital world is where young people are looking and searching.”**

Both Serra Club members and Newman Connection volunteers gather names of Catholic high school students all across the country, organize them and send them on to campus ministers — in essence keeping them connected to the faith. A recent comprehensive email blast by CCC to diocesan directors of youth ministry, diocesan superintendants of education and 1110 Catholic high schools offered graduation packets to Catholic students and their families.  Graduation packets provide information regarding Masses on campus and/or at the local parish, Bible studies, service opportunities, mission trips, small group faith sharing — information specific to the college the student will be attending. The Campus Minister is also informed of the student’s arrival so they can make contact and invite the student to participate as soon as they arrive on campus.

“This partnership between us couldn’t come at a better time,” Zerrusen said, “some might use the word providential. It made a lot of sense for us to partner because they already had their boots on the ground reaching the students and we had the United in Prayer Outreach through social networking. We have the tools they needed and provide a better ability to engage students.  Now that we are combining our efforts I expect this program to grow significantly in the coming years.”

There are 26 religious orders, 196 colleges and universities and more than 35,000 individuals who are United in Prayer at the Newman Connection. Last year, the web-site had more than 50,000 visitors — 72 percent were new. The Institute, the educational resource offers streaming videos online 24/7 to form and inform visitors in the faith. Currently the featured course is “Exploring YOUCAT,” the new youth catechism of the Catholic Church.

**“We have worked so hard to raise our children in the faith and we want them to become part of the faithful in the pews in the future,” Cozzens continued. “Making this connection or bridge for them will help make that happen.”**

Zerrusen cited still another most significant reason for this partnership and emphasis — campus ministry generates more vocations than any other ministry of the church. The mission of Serra International is “to foster and affirm vocations to the priesthood and vowed religious life.” And indeed, Bishop Conley discerned his own vocation while at college.

“Campus Ministry needs to be at the heart of the New Evangelization of the Catholic Church and we intend to get it there,” Zerrusen concluded. “Newman Connection is very excited about the opportunity to work with the many different Serra Clubs in keeping our youth connected to the Catholic faith and doing everything we can to help campus ministry and young adults. We have UNITED for our future and our faith.”

**Newman Connection *Newsroom* 8/9/12**