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Campus ministry links faith and volunteerism

By Pete Sheehan



Scott Salvato, Molloy College's director of campus ministries, helps Molloy freshmen Kelly Quackenbush, left, and Laura Angyal keep an eye on one-month-old Jaylin while Pat Shea, director of Mommas House, holds 10-month-old Jayden during a visit by Mr. Salvato, Ms. Quackenbush and Ms. Angyal to the Brookville home for young mothers and their babies. (TLIC photo by Gregory A. Shemitz)

Rockville Centre — Scott Salvato lost no time in his new job as director of campus ministries at Molloy College here. The fall term has barely started, but already he's organized a student retreat and began introducing students to a range of volunteer service projects. On Saturday he brought a couple of freshmen to assist staff and residents of Mommas House in Brookville.

"It's great that Molloy encourages students to help out," said Patricia Shea, founder of Mommas House. With its residences in Brookville and Glen Cove, Mommas House provides a home and support for young women who, facing pregnancy but lacking family or other support, choose to raise their babies.

"These students are the same age as the mothers so they can relate to them," Ms. Shea said. "It's good to get (volunteers) in college because the experience can shape their outlook for the rest of their lives. In addition to the help they can give, they gain greater awareness of the needs that are out there and of the Church's

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mission of service.”

“This gives us an opportunity to give back to the community,” said Laura Angyal, a Molloy freshman. “I like kids. I teach religious education. Helping here is a natural step.”

“It makes us feel good, like we are accomplishing something,” said Kelly Quackenbush, also a freshman at Molloy.

Volunteerism

Promoting service projects has been close to Mr. Salvato’s heart. For seven years he worked as a campus minister at St. John’s University, Queens. Though his work encompassed the full range of campus ministries — retreats, prayer, planning Masses — “each member of the staff had a particular focus. Mine was service and volunteerism.

“When I got there, there were probably a dozen students doing different kinds of volunteer work,” Mr. Salvato said. “It grew gradually. Soon we had a few dozen students in different services,” including helping out at soup kitchens, tutoring children at inner-city schools, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. “In a few years, we had hundreds taking part. People have a natural desire to live out their faith and volunteering is a very practical way to do that.

“Many of the students never meet a homeless person, except to walk by him,” he remarked. “They find out that homeless people are a lot like the rest of us. Some students, for example, were surprised to find that some homeless people are St. John’s basketball fans, and manage to keep up on how the team is doing.”

Mr. Salvato, a Massapequa native who now lives in Valley Stream, is a graduate of St. Rose of Lima School, Massapequa, and St. Anthony High School, South Huntington. He went to St. Bonaventure University to study theology.

After graduating in 1993, Mr. Salvato started teaching religion at Holy Trinity Diocesan High School, Hicksville. “I enjoyed teaching and it was there I met my wife, Kate Andrews, a Spanish teacher,” he noted. They now have a four-month-old daughter, Brigid.

Drawn to campus ministry

After four years, however, “I wanted to try something new. One day Kate was looking at The Long Island Catholic and she saw an ad that St. John’s was looking for a campus minister. I liked working with kids but this offered something different — outside the classroom but still teaching,” Mr. Salvato said. “I really enjoyed being at St. John’s,” where he also continued his studies, earning a master’s degree in theology and beginning doctoral studies in history.

Though he was happy at St. John’s, Mr. Salvato said, earlier this year “my wife was looking through The Long Island Catholic again and saw that Molloy was looking for a director of campus ministries.”

At Molloy, Mr. Salvato said, he is “getting to know the college, the faculty, the administration, and the students. I’m also trying to better understand the college’s mission and its Dominican charism. One thing that I want to do is cultivate student leaders. After all, I can accomplish more with eight student leaders than I can by myself.

“Students who become leaders in campus ministry can use that experience beyond the college,” Mr. Salvato said. “I find that students who were involved in campus

ministry come back to tell you that it helped them in their careers because they learned to lead, not just manage. There has to be training and formation. They have to understand why they are doing what they are doing, that the service is an expression of their faith. A lot of that comes from prayer. All the Christian life springs from prayer.”

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