The AMU & APU Newman Center
Quarterly Newsletter
ISSUE 5 Spring 2018

Mission

The AMU & APU Newman Center is an American Public University System (APUS) student organization founded as a Catholic ministry for the students, alumni, faculty and staff of APUS.

About Newman Centers

Newman Centers are Catholic ministry centers at non-Catholic universities throughout the world. They provide pastoral services and ministries to their Catholic communities, in particular to the Roman Catholic student population within the university. The centers are named in honor of Cardinal John Henry Newman and were inspired by Newman’s writings. The first Newman Center was established in 1893 at the University of Pennsylvania.

“Fire of Easter”
Mark Bowles, PhD

As we move through the cyclical liturgical year of six seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Triduum, Easter, and Ordinary Time), we now find ourselves in Lent and fast approaching the Triduum. I always find the barrenness of Lent to be a wonderful opportunity for contemplation. Catalysts for contemplation are many, but I would like to share some thoughts from Pope Francis and Thomas Merton, and also add in a dash of popular culture (a shameless plug for my History and Popular Culture course here at APUS!).

If you have not already, I encourage you to read Pope Francis’s Lenten Message for 2018. In it he focuses on Jesus’s words from the Gospel of Matthew where He says, “Because of the increase of iniquity, the love of many will grow cold” (24:12). Jesus spoke His words in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives, where He warned about false prophets drowning out His message of love and rendering hearts cold.

It is easy to see examples of iniquity in our world today. Pope Francis identified them as equating wealth with happiness, the panacea of drugs, the desire for a “virtual” existence, and the loss of dignity and freedom for many. These, ultimately, lead towards a colder and loveless heart.

Coldness is often a theme that appears in literature. Pope Francis recalled Dante’s
Exploring *The Presentation*—The Fourth Decade of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. . . . in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce—so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Meditation

From Pope Saint John Paul II: In *Redemptoris Mater*:
A just and God-fearing man, called Simeon, appears at this beginning of Mary’s “journey” of faith. His words, suggested by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 2:25-27), confirm the truth of the Annunciation. For we read that he took up in his arms the child to whom—in accordance with the angel’s command the name Jesus was given (cf. Lk. 2:21). Simeon’s words match the meaning of this name, which is Savior: “God is salvation.” Turning to the Lord, he says: “For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Lk. 2:30-32). At the same time, however, Simeon addresses Mary with the following words: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed;” and he adds with direct reference to her: “and a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (cf. Lk. 2:34-35). Simeon's words cast new light on the announcement, which Mary had heard from the angel: Jesus is the Savior, he is “a light for revelation” to mankind. Is not this what was manifested in a way on Christmas night, when the shepherds come to the stable (cf. Lk. 2:8-20)? Is not this what was to be manifested even more clearly in the coming of the Magi from the East (cf. Mt. 2:1-12)? But at the same time, at the very beginning of his life, the Son of Mary, and his Mother with him, will experience in themselves the truth of those other words of Simeon: “a sign that is spoken against” (Lk. 2:34). Simeon’s words seem like a second Annunciation to Mary, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow. While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful.

See the complete text of *Redemptoris Mater*.

“The Fire of Easter,” continued

imagination of Hell in the *Inferno*. Dante envisioned not a fiery devil, but one who ruled upon a throne of ice and remained frozen in his “loveless isolation.” And now for my dash of popular culture, where this image has contemporary resonance. In the movie *Frozen*, Elsa becomes the snow queen in her icy “kingdom of isolation” because she is afraid to touch others.

Pope Francis argued for the “fire of Easter” as an invitation and a way to return love to our hearts. This is symbolized by the lighting of the Easter candle on Holy Saturday of the Triduum. If you have attended an Easter Vigil mass, you will recall how that one light from the Paschal candle spreads throughout the church. Pope Francis wrote, that single warm flame will “slowly overcome the darkness and illuminate the liturgical assembly.” The light shows we are not alone; we live in a community.

Illustration of Dante’s Satan trapped in the frozen central zone in the Ninth Circle of Hell, by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
Let’s compare these thoughts to a mystical vision that Thomas Merton had in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, on March 18, 1958. This was a rare day when he emerged from his cloistered (isolated) home of contemplation at Gethsemani Abbey (www.Monks.org). Merton was a Trappist monk and one of the most influential Catholic writers, theologians, and mystics of the twentieth century. His prodigious writings also encompassed social activism in the 1960s as well as comparative religion. Here is what happened to Merton:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world. . . . This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. . . . As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.¹

Consider for a moment the mountain theme because there is a profound message here. Merton entitled his autobiography The Seven Storey Mountain and had his moment of clarity when he left his isolation. Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives to begin His Passion. Even Elsa escaped her ice mountain to save and reunite with her sister. Using Merton’s words, the mountains can enable our dream of separateness and spurious self-isolation.

Isolating ourselves in racial, economic, social, ideological, national, political, and even religious mountains increases the chances of growing cold to the needs of all others. Pope Francis wrote, “Love can also grow cold in our own communities . . . the most evident signs of this lack of love: selfishness and spiritual sloth, sterile pessimism, the temptation to self-absorption, constant warring among ourselves, and the worldly mentality that makes us concerned only for appearances.” Our mountains of isolation breed the iniquity that Jesus warned about. The antidote is simply love.

Sometimes as Catholics, we too can isolate ourselves on a mountain. I remember a joke that a priest once told at an RCIA class that I was facilitating. He said that Peter was welcoming someone new to Heaven and introduced him to a group of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Protestants. Then Peter whispered and pointed to a group of Catholics. When asked why he lowered his voice, Peter said, “Oh, that is because Catholics think they are the only ones up here.”

Pope Francis concluded his Lenten message by saying, “I would also like my invitation to extend beyond the bounds of the Catholic Church, and to reach all of you, men and women of good will, who are open to hearing God’s voice. Perhaps, like ourselves, you are disturbed by the spread of iniquity in the world, you are concerned about the chill that paralyzes hearts and actions, and you see a weakening in our sense of being members of the one human family.”

So in my Lenten contemplation this year, I am meditating upon the ways that I can personally extend the fire of Easter to help unite the deepening divisions around us.

We should all be concerned, as Pope Francis warns, about the “chill that paralyzes human hearts.” In response, Elsa would offer, “Only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart.”

Peace to all on the coming fifty days of Eastertide.

Mark Bowles is a Professor of History at American Public University System. You can find him online at ProfessorMDB.com.

Lynn McAfee

I have been participating in Wreaths Across America since 2014. This year on December 16th, myself, several cousins, along with fellow students and alumni from AMU participated in the laying of wreaths. My cousins decided as a family project to see if we could fundraise enough money to sponsor 100 wreaths at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, MA. This particular cemetery has 57,000 graves eligible for wreaths, with only about 5-10% of these graves usually receiving a wreath. This year’s donations covered 20% of the cemetery. It was a cold, windy, wintry day in New England, but the company and respect shared among the participants was felt throughout the process. A special part of the day for my family is we visit my cousin’s husband who is buried in Section 30A of the cemetery, as well as bring back three wreaths to be laid on the graves of family members in North Attleboro, Norton, and Attleboro, MA. My cousins are already talking about helping to remove the wreaths in January as well as the date for next event. We plan on trying to sponsor 200 in 2018.

Anne Midgley

This is the third year that my husband and I have served as APUS site coordinators for local Wreaths Across America events. Each year, the event re-enforces for us the dedication and sacrifice of our nation’s veterans, and the need for us to honor those who have given so much for our freedom. During the ceremony at Forest Lawn East Cemetery in Matthews, NC, Congressman Robert Pittenger introduced James Crump, a 93-year-old WWII veteran who had participated in the Omaha Beach landing on D-Day and received two Bronze Stars and three Purple Hearts. Mr. Crump looked out over the crowd and said, “You were worth fighting for.” That simple statement struck the hearts of many gathered to honor the service men and women buried there. We certainly owe to them the honor and respect that we paid to them that day.

Kay O’Pry-Reynolds

On December 16th, there was a large turnout for Wreaths Across America at Washington Crossing National Cemetery, near Philadelphia. Washington Crossing is a fairly new national cemetery, and the number of volunteers and wreaths has increased every year. This year due to a glitch there was a shortage of wreaths but many people stepped up and bought wreaths from nurseries and florists to help make up for the shortage. Almost all of the graves of the veterans had a wreath placed on them. The Guardians of the Cemetery, mostly older men and women, are no longer doing this event next year but a group that has stepped forward and will be taking over moving forward.

There were a large number of families gathered to decorate the graves for the holidays. Many of the people who came brought a wreath with them to help make up for the deficit in the number of wreaths. It was a good thing to see such a large turnout of younger people who are ready to step up and take up the mantle from the older generations. It is important that the reverence for the people who have fought for our freedom is being taught and passed on to our future leaders and service members. My family turned out to honor my father-in-law, James Reynolds, who passed away in January of this year. We purchased 20 wreaths and placed them to help make up for the shortage.
Member Updates

Let’s congratulate our members on their recent accomplishments!

- Gregory Comiskey made the Dean’s List for Q4 2017 and was accepted into Pi Gammu Mu.
- Jona Lunde recently received a job promotion.
- Frank Hoeflinger welcomed a grandchild to the family and started his own business, “Artistry by Frank.”
- Kay O’Pry-Reynolds will be receiving her second masters degree with a dual focus on Humanities and English soon. She will resume her doctorate work in August.

Featured Member: Jessica Lathrop

Jessica Lathrop attended AMU to earn her master’s degree in Ancient and Classical History after completing her Bachelor’s degree in Humanities from the University of Maryland University College in 2013. In 2014, she launched an e-commerce business to help supplement the family income, but her heart was in learning about the world’s many cultures and historical pasts. Despite having three daughters at home and a husband in the US Navy, Jessica started at AMU full time in hopes of finishing her degree faster than the ten years spent completing her bachelor’s degree only part time.

Jessica is involved in several various parish volunteer activities, including facilitating for the nine-week marriage ministry program called “The Choice Wine,” serving as head chairperson for the primary school’s landscaping club, assisting the church with graphic designing for their promotional materials, and helping with other social media and digital services.

In her family life, Jessica experienced a very unique event in 2015, which helped strengthen the Catholic foundations for her ever-growing family. After spending over two years struggling with infertility and suffering three miscarriages, Jessica and her husband visited the Shrine of Our Lady De La Leche, in Saint Augustine, to pray and give a small offering. The shrine is famous world-wide for fertility miracles on behalf of Mother Mary. Almost four weeks after their visit, Jessica discovered she was very-newly pregnant during a specialist appointment, giving birth to a happy, healthy girl. The baby was later baptized at the Shrine, with special permission from the bishop. In 2016, Jessica then gave birth to a baby boy, after experiencing a pregnancy-related heart attack, during her (naturally stressful) thesis capstone. So much for being infertile! After a slight delay in finishing her thesis, Jessica healed well, the baby grew healthily along, and she finished her degree in spring of 2017.

The culmination of these experiences gave Jessica a deep desire to travel the world and see first-hand the many cultures she had studied during her education. With her husband in full support, they planned a long-term excursion to Europe and are now based in Valencia, Spain. During their initial trip over from Florida to Spain, they stopped in various cities and had the pleasure of seeing beautiful churches in Virginia, New York City, Lisbon, Portugal and Seville, Spain. The family’s exploration of churches will no-doubt continue as they travel along, also exploring the other historical treasures as they go!
It’s a Baby Shower!

You are cordially invited to a virtual baby shower to benefit your choice of:

**Abundant Hope Pregnancy Resource Center**

or

**Seneca Choices for Life**

During our recent chapter meeting, we decided to focus our spring service event on once again supporting pro-life women’s centers. Two of our members, Gregory Comiskey and Lynn McAfee, are closely involved in this ministry. Gregory’s center is Seneca Choices for Life, while Lynn’s is Abundant Hope Pregnancy Resource Center.

**How you can help:**

Visit one or both of the centers (details below) to learn about their mission and services. Consider making a financial contribution. Pray for the staff at the centers and for the families that they serve.

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**Abundant Hope Pregnancy Resource Center:** Abundant Hope is a Christian pro-life ministry serving the Greater Attleboro, South-Eastern Massachusetts, and Cape Cod communities. We strive to promote sexual integrity, empower individuals to make life-affirming choices, and to live the truth that all lives matter. Sharing Christ in word and deed is a key component in this ministry. We share the truth about fetal development, adoption opportunities, and the physical, emotional and spiritual risks associated with terminating a pregnancy.

You can learn more about Abundant Hope and donate at their website: [https://ahprc.org/](https://ahprc.org/)

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**Seneca Choices for Life** states this about the women it serves: God loves these women more than we could ever know how. He has been walking with them longer than we have. We have the gift of stepping in on a project that He has begun and is intimately invested in. Seneca is a door He has opened for them, and it is the Holy Spirit that works through our hands, feet and heart. Our role is not to save lives, the Holy Spirit does that. Our role is to be present, with open hearts, ready to love and serve each woman and family who walk through our doors. It is an honor to do this each day.

To learn more about Seneca Choices for Life or to make a donation, visit their website at [https://senecacfl.life/navigation](https://senecacfl.life/navigation).

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## Events, Resources, and Advisor’s Corner

### Commencement

Commencement 2018 will be celebrated June 1-2.

APUS has a number of exciting events planned for Commencement, including **Rise Against Hunger**. This service event brings students, alumni, staff, and faculty together to package nutritious meals used primarily to support development programs and to save lives in developing countries around the world.

Visit us at the Alumni Welcome Rally, where The Newman Center will have a host table.

### Sins of Omission

**Advisor Cynthia Nolan, PhD**

Recently, we heard this passage at Mass from Luke 16:19-23: “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.”

It got me thinking about what the rich man had done wrong. I mean, the rich man didn’t hurt Lazarus, the beggar, or cause Lazarus to lose his job or steal from him. But the rich man did go to hell.

**Why?**

Is it wrong to have fine linen clothing? No. Is it wrong to live in a lovely house? No. Is it wrong to have a sumptuous table? No. But this parable reminds us that we have to **DO** something with our lives. This rich man did not help the beggar. He was probably given the opportunity to help him almost every day. But he did not.

We often think of sins of commission; they make sense, and they are easy to remember. When we go through the Ten Commandments before going to Confession, we think about what we did wrong, but we don’t often think about the things “we failed to do.” Indeed, we say the penitential act at every Mass, and it includes sins of omission.

The corporal works of mercy are concerned with the physical well-being of our neighbors, friends, and even strangers: To clothe, shelter, and feed the needy, to give water and visit the sick or imprisoned, and to bury the dead. If the rich man had acted on the seven corporal works, he might have saved himself from hell, and we all need a reminder of that.

### Resources

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Write to us at apus.newmancenter@gmail.com
The American Military University (AMU) was founded in 1991 to provide distance education to military learners. In 2002, AMU was reorganized into the American Public University System (APUS) and American Public University (APU) was founded to provide the same quality, affordable, and flexible education to a broader audience of motivated working adults. Today the university system is one of the largest providers of online higher education offering more than 200 academic programs to students enrolled worldwide.