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Accepting the Call

01.11.2011 | Catholic, Faculty The Rev. Christopher Wittmann, S.M., who's served as director of campus ministry at the University of Dayton for nine years, has accepted a three-year term as novice director in the Marianist Province of the United States.

Wittmann will step down in June from one of the largest campus ministries in the country.

"Father Chris hired a corps of talented campus ministers, expanded the popular student retreat program and advanced social justice initiatives -- among a number of other accomplishments -- during his tenure," said Daniel J. Curran, president. "His pastoral approach and steady leadership will be missed on campus."

(Watch an interview with Fr. Chris Wittmann about his ministry at the University of Dayton). (url: <http://www-ig.udayton.edu/Stories/Story/?contentId=17504>)

Campus ministry's accomplishments during Wittmann's tenure include:

- A quarterly "Perspectives on Faith and Life" dinner discussion series with faculty, staff and students. The program received an exemplary award from the Catholic Campus Ministry Association.
- New school break service and other immersion programs, including the REAL Dayton plunge.
- Enhanced communication through social networking and new brochures, such as the mission-based document *Commitment to Community: Catholic and Marianist Learning and Living*.
- Addition of the University's first full-time campus minister for interdenominational Christian ministry and a formal process for recognizing student-led religious organizations on campus.
- Three new or renovated chapels in Marianist, Marycrest and Stuart residence halls.
- A comprehensive campuswide planning process for a proposed \$12 million renovation and expansion of the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception.

"I have enjoyed my time at UD immensely. It is a great place to work and minister; it is a place imbued with a powerful Marianist spirit; and I have had the privilege to work with wonderful students and inspiring colleagues," Wittmann said. "At the same time, I accept this call from the province willingly and even eagerly, with a sense that it holds new challenges and will allow me to develop new dimensions of my life as a Marianist brother. It is humbling to be asked to take on formation work."

Wittmann will be assisted in his new role at the novitiate community at Mount Saint John by Bro. Charles Johnson, S.M., who was the province's national vocations director for eight years before entering the Institute of Religious Formation at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Both will spend the next year preparing for this ministry while being assisted by the Rev. Mike Lisbeth, S.M., novice director, his assistant, Bro. Michael O'Grady, S.M., and others within the province.

At the novitiate, aspiring Marianist brothers prepare for future vowed life and ministry by participating in classes in history, theology, and spirituality of religious life; learning community-building skills; and discerning whether religious life is their calling.

Before joining the University of Dayton, Wittmann directed the Dayton Marianist LIFE retreat, a summer program for high school students from the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico, and directed the campus ministry program at Chaminade-Julienne High School in Dayton. He taught religion classes for nine years at Hackett Catholic Central High School in Kalamazoo, Mich., and Chaminade-Julienne.

A Dayton native, he earned a master of divinity degree from St. Michael's Faculty of Theology in Toronto in 1993. He also holds two degrees from the University of Dayton: a Master of Arts in theological studies in 1987 and a Bachelor of Arts in psychology in 1983. Wittmann made his first vows in 1987 and final vows in 1990. He was ordained a priest in 1994.

For media interviews, contact Father Chris Wittmann, S.M., at 937-229-3369.