



God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond

Ahern, Kevin; Malano, Christopher Derige
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Book Review

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This edited volume of fifteen chapters and six appendices provides a thought-provoking study of Roman Catholic small group ministries on college campuses and in parish settings. The authors represent a diverse sample of laity and clergy who are serving in a variety of settings in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. The two editors, Ahern and Malano, share a background in the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS – Pax Romana). Ahern currently serves as an assistant professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, and Malano is the pastoral administrator of the Newman Center at the University of Hawai'i – Manoa. They believe that the answer to the question, “where is God on the quad?” is “in small faith groups and student communities” (xvii).

God's Quad includes an Introduction, three sections, and appendices. In the Introduction, Ahern and Malano explain their three goals for this text. They write, “first, we want to draw more attention to the needs and realities of the ‘student church’.... the second aspect of this project is to highlight some of the ‘good news’ stories and best practices of small student groups... [and] the third and perhaps most important aspect... is to provide concrete and practical tools for student leaders and chaplains to build and strengthen small student communities” (xx, xxi, xxii).

Part I, Revitalizing the Student Church, offers two chapters that examine the potential of small group ministries in light of Pope Francis’s writings on renewal. Ahern explores four key foundations – empowering, ecclesial, encompassing, and engaging – that he argues are necessary for effective student organizing and evangelizing. Listening is another important concept. Healey argues, “be a listening church first and a teaching church second... what if we

really listened to youth and young adults – their concerns, needs, doubts, questions, criticisms, burning issues, hopes and dreams?” (17).

The five chapters in Part II present global perspectives on Catholic student small group communities in Italy, Peru, India, Mali, and Eastern Africa. Part III complements Part II’s global views with North American perspectives from Boston College, Duke, the University of Hawai’i, Manhattan College, Purdue, as well as models of small group ministry at Catholic Relief Services and the Newman Catholic Center of Sacramento. These multiple case studies examine a variety of settings and models that illustrate the appeal and flexibility of these approaches.

In addition, Karoue and Manola’s epilogue compares and contrasts many of the concepts in the book and brings it to a very successful conclusion. The editors also include five appendices with resources for small student groups including models for theological reflection.

Ahern and Malano are to be commended for producing an engaging volume that is consistently of high quality across the various chapters, a rarity in edited volumes, as well as for providing geographical and background diversity. This is a well written, insightful volume that deserves to be included in theological libraries and in the collections of anyone who works in campus ministry, small group ministry, or who teaches these subjects.

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