

**PRESS RELEASE:**

April 23, 2025



Promoting and Defending Faithful Catholic Education

## Newman Guide Colleges Lead the Way at Commencement 2025



Christendom College in Front Royal, Va.

You can tell a lot about a person by the friends they keep. You can also tell a lot about a college by who it chooses as its commencement speaker or honorary degree recipient.

To become Newman Guide Recommended, we review an institution's policy on [speakers and honors](#). A Newman Guide Recommended school or college invites speakers, hosts events, and honors individuals to advance its mission of forming young people in truth.

Unfortunately, that's not the case at every Catholic college, as we have reported on scandalous commencement speaker choices since 1993. This year, [Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind.](#), has chosen Dr. Mary McAleese, a self-professed Catholic and the former President of Ireland who [supported](#) the repeal of Ireland's pro-life amendment in 2018, as commencement speaker. Dr. McAleese has publicly [supported same-sex marriage](#) and is [quoted](#) as saying that a Church hierarchy that is "homophobic and anti-abortion is not the Church of the future."

It was just last year that the same Saint Mary's College, which is an all-women's college, [faced backlash](#) for planning to admit biological males who identified as female. In contrast, if you're looking for a college committed to the authentic mission of Catholic education, look to [The Newman Guide](#).

The distinctly faithful Catholic colleges recommended in The Newman Guide have chosen outstanding speakers for this year's commencement ceremonies. Many are witnesses to the Catholic faith and the sort of people graduates should emulate.

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## **Ave Maria University (Ave Maria, Fla.)**

[Michael Knowles](#) is the host of The Michael Knowles Show at the Daily Wire and The Book Club at PragerU. A devout Catholic, Knowles openly professes his faith and brings it to the public forum. Informed by his faith, he engages with contemporary society to further promote and defend the Christian values fundamental to our nation.

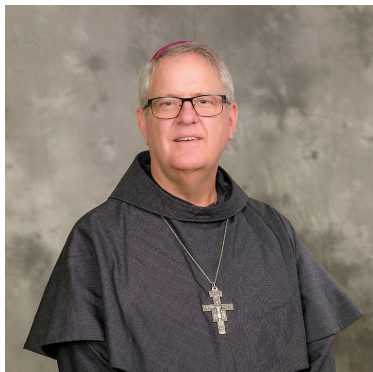
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## **Benedictine College (Atchison, Kan.)**

[Sister Deirdre "Dede" Byrne](#) is a missionary, surgeon and retired U.S. Army colonel. She has been a fearless advocate for the unborn and the chronically ill and disabled, and she has worked tirelessly to defend conscience protections for medical doctors.

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## **Belmont Abbey College (Belmont, NC)**

Rather than hosting an outside speaker, the "student of the year" serves as commencement speaker at the College. Three honorary degree recipients have been named, including Charlotte's Bishop Michael Martin, who is quoted as saying, "Our Catholic schools, first and foremost, are here to breed, to help form, and grow disciples of Jesus Christ in the Church—that's our primary, number one, unchanging, without-a-doubt mission."

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## **The Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.)**

"[Bishop Robert Barron](#) has spent his life illuminating Catholic teachings and making them accessible to millions of people around the world through his books, videos, and social media presence," said University President Peter Kilpatrick. "His ability to engage modern culture while faithfully presenting the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition embodies what we strive to instill in our students. His call to evangelize through beauty, goodness, and truth will provide powerful inspiration for our graduating class as they prepare to lead with light in their future endeavors."

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## **Christendom College (Front Royal, Va.)**

[Francis X. Maier](#) is a Senior Fellow in the Catholic Studies Program at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, where his work explores the intersection of Christian faith, culture, and public life, with a particular focus on lay formation and action. "With his extensive experience in lay leadership and Catholic engagement in public life, Maier is an ideal speaker to address our graduating class as they prepare to bring Christendom's mission—to restore all things in Christ—into the world in new and impactful ways."

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## **Franciscan University of Steubenville (Steubenville, Ohio)**

[Mary Rice Hasson](#) is a lawyer, author, and public speaker; she co-founded and directs the Person and Identity Project at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. Mary and her husband, Seamus, will receive honorary degrees for courageously serving God in the public square, uniting reason, faith, and charity, as they address vital issues of human dignity and religious liberty in the Catholic Church, the country, and the world.

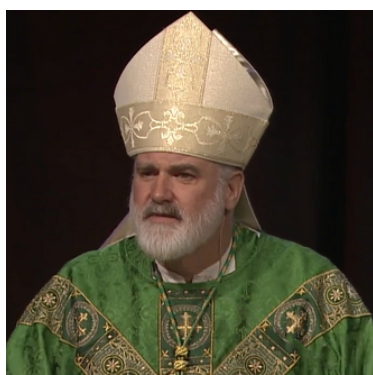
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## **Holy Apostles College and Seminary (Cromwell, Conn.)**

[James Wahlberg](#) is the Executive Director of the Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation, which partners with other youth organizations to improve the lives of inner-city youth. He is powerful witness of the Catholic faith, not only through his conversion and personal story of redemption, but also through his tireless work to bring Christ's hope into some of the darkest corners of human experience—addiction, poverty, and despair.

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## **Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College (Barry's Bay, Ontario)**

Bishop Scott McCaig, CC, is Bishop of the Military Ordinariate of Canada. Having converted to the Catholic faith as a young man, McCaig joined the Companions of the Cross and became a priest in his twenties. He has carried out missionary activity in Africa, Europe, and Asia and is noted for his apostolic zeal, his fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and his impassioned and effective preaching.

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### **Thomas Aquinas College (Northfield, Mass.)**

Before entering the world of public policy, [Dr. Kevin Roberts](#) was a Catholic scholar and educator, who, after years of teaching at the collegiate level, went on to found John Paul the Great Academy in Lafayette, Louisiana, then serve as president of Wyoming Catholic College. As the onetime CEO of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and now as president of the Heritage Foundation and Heritage Action for America, he has been a faithful champion of religious liberty, the defense of the family, and the pro-life cause.

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### **Thomas Aquinas College (Santa Paula, Calif.)**

[Dr. Michael McLean](#) has dedicated his career to Catholic liberal education, having joined the faculty of Thomas Aquinas College in 1978 and served for 12 years as its president (2010–22). When he stepped down as president, he returned to the classroom. He has a special connection to the Class of 2025, as he has taught two sections of theology for seniors this year.

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### **The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts (Merrimack, N.H.)**

Dr. Kevin Roberts is a leader in conservative politics whose life's work echoes many of the qualities of Thomas More College's patron, St. Thomas More. Roberts has dedicated his life to education as the founder of John Paul the Great Academy in Lafayette, Louisiana, and former president of Wyoming Catholic College. Now, as President of the Heritage Foundation, he is a leading voice in the world of politics. His example is a testimony to the need for faithful Catholic voices in our public life.

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### **University of Dallas (Irving, Texas)**

[Sister Josephine Garrett](#), a Texas native, entered the Catholic Church shortly after receiving a bachelor's degree in politics with a concentration in business from the University of Dallas. She worked in banking for ten years, eventually attaining leadership roles before beginning formation with the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. She professed her final vows in 2020.

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### University of Mary (Bismarck, N.D.)

As a priest of Opus Dei and the CEO and Chairman of the Board of Relevant Radio, [Father Rocky Hoffman](#) is an exemplar of an evangelization that springs from knowledge of God and the discovery of Him in daily life. In his pastoral ministry, his leadership, and his deep devotion to the Eucharist, he witnesses to the charity and abiding trust that the Lord asks of all Christians.



### Walsh University (North Canton, Ohio)

[Samantha Kelley](#) is an exemplary witness of the Catholic faith and embodies the values that Walsh University seeks to instill in its graduates. As the founder of FIERCE Athlete Inc., Samantha champions the integration of faith with athletic excellence. Her commitment to empowering female athletes to embrace their identity through faith and sport aligns with the university's mission to form students intellectually, spiritually, and morally for lives of purpose and service.



### Wyoming Catholic College (Lander, Wyo.)

"[Chris Stefanick](#) has been a clear and compelling voice on behalf of Catholic evangelization for many years," said Wyoming Catholic President Kyle Washut. "I look forward to the wisdom and advice he will offer to our graduates... the ability to discern, to speak the truth, and to evangelize on behalf of their faith will be a vital part of their lives after graduation. And who is better suited to send them on their way than Chris?"

If you're seeking a faithful Catholic college experience, take note of the college's choice of commencement speaker. This choice allows you to glimpse inside the soul of a Catholic college, evaluating if its "Catholic ideals, attitudes, and principles penetrate and inform its activities."

[2024 Catholic college commencement round-up.](#)

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