

New director of Tulane Catholic fosters spiritual growth and community engagement

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Rev. Ian Bordenave, O.P., was delighted to accept the position of chaplain and director of [Tulane Catholic](#) last summer. Born at Keesler Air Force Base on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, he considers New Orleans his ancestral home and loves everything about it, from the people and culture to the architecture and cuisine.

That connection made it easy to say yes when asked to consider the Tulane Catholic position by his Dominican Province. He admits, however, that he was a bit intimidated.

“I’m older than some of [the students’] parents,” said Bordenave, 57, during a recent interview at Tulane Catholic’s headquarters on Audubon Street. “I wondered, ‘Can I keep up with these students?’” He quickly found out that he could.

Students welcomed Bordenave with open arms, which has made his transition into college clergy that much smoother. He said their energy and enthusiasm is infectious.

“I look at this position as a chance to help shape the lives of these young adults,” he said, helping them strengthen their faith but also “become responsible and productive citizens in our country and the world and to make meaningful contributions in whatever fields they are pursuing.”

Tulane Catholic does this through a variety of spiritual, social and service-oriented offerings. Mass and confession are celebrated daily, twice on Sundays, in the [St. Martin de Porres Chapel](#). There are also opportunities for students to participate in Bible Studies, choir, lectures and retreats.

“We focus on prayer and the Lord,” Bordenave said, “but you can’t be serious all the time.”

That’s where the Student Leadership Team comes in, planning trivia nights, game nights, welcome parties at the beginning of each semester, and a weekly free Sunday Supper following the evening Mass. “It’s nice when the whole first floor is full of students,” he said.

Programming such as mission trips and national conventions are also offered through FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, a national outreach program on college campuses throughout the United States.

Born in Biloxi, Mississippi, and raised in Valparaiso, Florida, Bordenave visited New Orleans often in his youth and worked in several capacities for the Archdiocese of New Orleans from 2000-2009 before moving to Texas. He began pondering the priesthood as a child at his Catholic elementary school, but mostly as an attention-grabbing measure.

He recalled a story where a visiting priest asked his class what they wanted to be when they grew up, and one boy said a priest. The priest praised the boy’s answer so heartily that during another visit, Bordenave also said he wanted to be a priest,

even though he didn't necessarily want to be one at the time.

But the more he thought about it, the more he pictured himself in the priesthood. He enrolled and graduated from the University of Dayton, a Catholic college in Dayton, Ohio, where he took a prayer course and learned more about religious life. It wasn't until he was serving as a Patriot Missile Officer in Saudi Arabia after Desert Storm that he committed.

"I decided to go for a run in the desert," said Bordenave, an avid runner who has participated in 12 marathons. "I ran far enough that all signs of civilization were swallowed up. I'm out there and I'm running, and I heard God speak to me. He said, 'OK, Ian, I've been chasing after you for years. I want you to follow me into the priesthood.' I said, 'OK, God, you got me.' And at that point I just felt a profound sense of peace."