

# Catholic Center Begins Construction

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After seven years of fund-raising efforts, the Joseph P. Mack Catholic Center will begin construction efforts this month.

On Oct. 9, Father Brian C. Cool of the Newman Catholic Community led a virtual Town Hall meeting to provide updates on the project following the final approval to begin construction from September's Board of Trustees meeting.

The new building will be named after alumnus and former Board of Trustees member, Joseph P. Mack '55, who pledged over \$2.5 million to build the center. With site preparation and clearing underway, construction is set to be completed by September 2025 for the new academic year.

The center will be constructed at the intersection of Wilson Boulevard and Faculty Road, offering closer proximity to residential buildings and parking lots. The center hopes this will encourage anybody off-campus to be part of the site.

The center will include a pastoral care center, kitchen, sanctuary, and a multi-purpose room, which can be reserved by any University-affiliated student group. Updated building plans show that the building space will be 7,900 square feet, an

increase from the originally proposed 7,300 square feet.

The project is set to cost a total of \$8.8 million. Between the center's previously-existing endowment and contributions from over 440 donors, the Newman Center has currently raised \$7.8 million in funds. The remaining \$1 million is meant to be allocated toward additional features and details for the chapel.

The newly dedicated space is a response to the growing number of religious-affiliated student groups on campus that utilize the Interfaith Chapel. There are currently 13 religious-affiliated groups, with limited reservation capabilities for all groups.

According to Catholic Newman Community's promotional material, the center currently hosts about 75 student leaders and offers over 100 programs on campus. The new center is meant to provide a dedicated Catholic chapel on campus and stronger pastoral care for students.

This recent announcement comes after concerns were raised by students at the beginning of last year at a Town Hall hosted by the Student Association Government concerning promoted updates on funding for two dedicated non-interfaith religious centers on campus — the Joseph P. Mack Catholic Center and the Greenbaum Center for Jewish Life. In the

Spring 2023 semester, students held demonstrations on campus and issued a statement through Instagram account @stop\_the\_build that spoke out against the construction of both buildings.

"While we recognize that advocates claim institutional funds will not be used for construction, any time, effort, and land that the University spends on these projects should be focused on meeting students' actual needs such as housing, dining, and academic support," the statement, which was issued on Feb. 28, 2023, said. "The buildings are clearly not examples of openness to the diversity of both religious and non-religious ideas and expression on campus or to collaboration, encounter, and exchange across religious distinctions."

Despite these concerns, the new center aims to serve their community and the greater campus at large. "We want them to come to literally what's called the sanctuary," Father Cool said. "And whether they be Catholic or not Catholic, you know, the students need and deserve a space that is going to be dedicated for prayer and a prayer for any faith tradition that wants to come and use our facility."

*Texcucano is a member of  
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