SUMMER EDITION 2026

the Coelian

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE PONTIFICAL IRISH COLLEGE ROME



UT CHRISTIANI ITA ET ROMANI SITIS

Editorial Greeting

Eoin McCormack
Director of Lay Formation



Greetings to all our Coelian readers,

This year, as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Irish College on the Coelian Hill, has been another exciting and memorable chapter in the life of the College. Over the past few months, we bid farewell to our students as they departed before the summer, while also extending a warm welcome to many guests who joined us in marking this centenary year in a variety of ways.

Significantly, we marked an important milestone as the first group of Irish students successfully completed the College's inaugural full-year programme of lay formation. This achievement represents not only the fulfilment of a long-held vision, but also the beginning of a new chapter as we enter the next century of formation and discipleship on the Coelian Hill.

The summer also brought a magnificent concert to the front gardens of the College, featuring *The Priests* alongside 30 choir members from across Ireland. It was a wonderful occasion that combined music and faith over a week long centenary pilgrimage.

On a personal note, I am pleased to share that I have completed my STL thesis on the topic of *Co-Formation for Co-Responsibility.* I hope this work will contribute to a firm theological foundation for the continued mission of co-formation at the College, bringing together clergy, seminarians, and laity in communion for co-responsibility in a synodal Church.

As we look ahead, we eagerly anticipate welcoming a new group of students in September and beginning another enriching year of study, formation, and community life. Thank you for your continued interest in and support of the Irish College. I hope you enjoy reading this summer edition of The Coelian 2026.

With every good wish,

Eoin McCormack
Editor



Presenting An Taoiseach Micheál Martin with a copy of the Spring edition of The Coelian during his visit to the College in May



A Message from the Rector

Fr. Paul Finnerty
Diocese of Limerick

Greetings from the Rector,

In the last edition of The Coelian, we marked the first anniversary of the election of Pope Leo XVI. As I write these words, we have just celebrated the memorial of St Augustine. As a son of his, we continue to hold the Holy Father in prayer and affection from a hill he knows well.

This has been a year of gratitude. I wish to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues and staff here at the College. In particular, I offer words of appreciation to Fr Marius Cojan, who has completed his first formation year as Vice Rector. When he assumed the role, he used the image of an iceberg to describe his transition from student to staff: as a student he saw only a small part of what happens here; this year he has encountered more and more of what lies beneath the surface. I am grateful to him for embracing this responsibility during a Jubilee year — and a Jubilee for the College itself — as we continue to mark our Centenary with various celebrations.

My gratitude also extends to Eoin McCormack, who has led our first full Lay Formation Programme. Launching such an ambitious initiative during the Jubilee Year of Hope was fitting, for it is itself a sign of hope for the future. We have gained immense experience, and Eoin has had the opportunity to complete his STL — as he notes in his editorial, the programme has provided a kind of laboratory for his work and study in formation. We have seen clearly the value of a co-formative space for the ongoing formation of priests and the initial formation of seminarians and lay students across the four dimensions: human, spiritual, pastoral/community, and intellectual.

I am equally grateful to Fr Eugene Duffy for joining us this year and helping us navigate uncharted waters. He has remarked that what we are doing reminds him of efforts made decades ago, and this has renewed his enthusiasm. His academic expertise and deep understanding of the human condition have greatly enriched the students, especially through pastoral reflection and spiritual and personal accompaniment.

All of this has unfolded during our Centenary Year on the Coelian Hill. We have marked this milestone in different ways throughout the year. One of the highlights — featured in this edition — is our Musical Pilgrimage and Centenary of Song. I express my gratitude to all who prepared and participated, especially our alumni: Frs Eugene, Martin, and David. As I write, we are preparing to welcome more alumni for the Annual General Meeting of the Oliver Plunkett Union and their week of Centenary celebrations.

Ireland has been well represented by Embassy staff and by the many ambassadors who have served here since diplomatic relations were established in 1929. In these words, I wish to single out Ambassador Frances Collins and Ms Erin Swan, Deputy Head of Mission, for special mention as they conclude their mandate. It has been an honour to work alongside them and their team at the Embassy on many significant events during their posting — in particular, our close collaboration with them and the Jubilee Committee for the Jubilee of Hope in 2025.



A Message from the Rector

Fr. Paul Finnerty
Diocese of Limerick

I am grateful to Ambassador Collins for sitting down with Eoin McCormack for the interview included in this edition. Her reflections — and the collage of photographs — offer a vivid insight into her work. She highlights several moments, and I would like to recall a few of the significant events we worked on together here at the College.

Among them were the inter-Church gathering of Church leaders to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement — a historic moment for the College. We were honoured to welcome President Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina for the launch of the exhibition Ireland and the Birth of Europe, and again to welcome the President following the Funeral of Pope Francis. We hosted the memorial event marking the first anniversary of the death of Archbishop Noel Treanor, and the one-day symposium celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Daniel O'Connell. Most recently, we welcomed An Taoiseach Micheál Martin following his visit to the Vatican, where he greeted the College community and members of the Irish religious community in Rome. During that visit, he viewed the College Archives and announced support for the cataloguing, digitisation, and preservation of the archive as part of the College's conservation, accessibility, and public outreach project.

Finally, I wish to thank all who participated in the Formation Programme during the 2025–2026 year. The College exists for formation, and I hope that what you have experienced here will continue to support you as you grow in holiness and become the person God intends you to be. One student wrote to me before departing: "Living in Rome has truly been a great blessing, and I hope to use my formation here for good back home." May this be true for all — priests, seminarians, and lay students alike — who have shared this year with us, and for those who will be part of future communities.

With best wishes,
God bless.
Paul



Fr Paul welcoming An Taoiseach to the college together with Bishop Martin Hayes

Events
May - July 2026

May

1 May - Hosting the community of Sant'Egidio

6 May - Irish College Annual Barbeque

9 May - Welcoming Minister James Lawless T.D.

13 May - Visit of the Apostolic Nuncio

13 May - Ongoing Formation: Apologetics

19-20 May - End of the Year Retreat for the Irish Lay Students

22 May - Welcoming An Taoiseach

27 May - Graduation of Irish Lay Students

31 May - Farewell to Irish Lay Students, Thomistic Institute Students and SJV seminarians

June

1 Jun - Welcoming the first Summer Pilgrim Programme (SPP) helpers

15 Jun - Doctoral Defence of Fr. John McKeever (Archdiocese of Armagh)

29 Jun - Welcoming *The Priests* and the Centenary Musical Pilgrimage participants

July

3 Jul - The Centenary in Song Musical Pilgrimage Concert

13 Jul - Refectory Ceiling Restoration Works Started

25 July - SPP Visit to Nemi



Welcoming Minister James Lawless T.D.

On 9 May, we were delighted to welcome Mr. James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, to the Irish College. During his visit, the Minister had the opportunity to meet with the College's Irish staff and students, as well as explore the rich historical archives and learn more about the College's distinguished history in shaping Ireland’s legacy in Europe.



Our lay formation students presented an overview of the programme, sharing their experiences of living and studying at the College and reflecting on the many opportunities for academic, spiritual, and personal growth that it provides. They also guided the Minister and his team on a historical tour of the campus, introducing them to the College's unique heritage and its important place in the life of the Irish and Universal Church.



The Minister was presented with a copy of the previous edition of The Coelian and kindly signed the College Visitors' Book, marking the occasion of his visit. The visit concluded with lunch in the College, where the Minister enjoyed the hospitality of the community and continued conversations with staff and students.











Welcoming An Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D.

On 22 May, the Irish College was honoured to welcome An Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD to the Coelian Hill during this special centenary year. The visit provided an opportunity for the Taoiseach to meet members of the College's three formation communities of clergy, laity, and seminarians, gaining firsthand insight into the diverse life and mission of the College as it enters its second century on the Coelian Hill.

During his visit, An Taoiseach viewed a specially curated display from the College archives, showcasing the rich heritage and longstanding contribution to Irish religious, cultural, and public life. He took particular interest in a number of significant archival items, including letters from Éamon de Valera and other notable figures who have shaped the course of Irish history.

Addressing the College community, An Taoiseach spoke of the important role the Irish College has played in preserving Irish history and shaping Irish identity in Europe over more than four hundred years. He acknowledged the College's enduring contribution to Irish society, the Church, and the wider Irish diaspora, and announced government financial support for the continued preservation and development of the College archives.





Representing the Irish Episcopal Conference, Bishop Martin Hayes of the Diocese of Kilmore expressed the gratitude of the Irish Church for the Government's commitment to supporting the College's archival heritage. He noted that this investment would help safeguard an invaluable historical resource and ensure that future generations can continue to access and learn from the rich story of the Irish College and its place in Ireland's national and ecclesial history.

The visit concluded with lunch attended by An Taioseach and his wife Mary alongside the College community, providing an opportunity for further conversation and engagement while celebrating the shared commitment of Church and State to preserving this important part of Ireland's heritage.


IRELAND
IN RO





Address to An Taoiseach by Rector Fr. Paul Finnerty

Cara - for the benefit of our international community - is the Irish word for "friend." And this College is, above all, a place where friendships are formed. *A chara* - was the form of address Éamon de Valera used when writing to the man whose portrait hangs here in our dining room — Monsignor John Hagan.

Monsignor Hagan oversaw the construction of this building, and this year marks the **100th anniversary** of its opening to students on the Coelian Hill. It is a significant milestone for the College, coming just two years before we celebrate the **400th anniversary** of the first Irish College in Rome.

The Ireland of 1628 — and indeed the Ireland of 1926 — is very different from the Ireland of today, just as the College of today is different from the College of those earlier eras. Today, the College resembles a shamrock with **three interwoven communities**:

• a community of priests pursuing postgraduate studies, drawn from sixteen nations — many of them countries to which Irish missionaries once travelled to announce the Gospel;
• a community of men preparing for priestly ordination;
• and a community of young men and women being formed as missionary disciples for participation in a synodal Church.

Each group receives formation tailored to its needs, but all share a common focus on the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions of growth — forming the whole person in a holistic way. In many ways, the international character of this College mirrors the Ireland of today — a country enriched by many cultures, languages, and traditions, and one that recognises diversity as a strength. The global nature of our community reflects the global nature of modern Ireland.

Taoiseach, as we celebrate one hundred years here on the Coelian Hill, the party you lead also marks its own centenary. Monsignor Hagan was a trusted adviser to Éamon de Valera. It has been said that, in effect, by finally accepting Hagan's advice to exchange armed protest for constitutional initiative, de Valera founded the Fianna Fáil party at the College. That momentous decision followed a secret visit by de Valera to Rome early in 1926. Only last Saturday, Fianna Fáil celebrated its hundredth anniversary. It is, therefore, a year of anniversaries for both of us. And just as the founder of your party addressed Monsignor Hagan as a chara, it seems fitting that I use the same expression as I address you today.

A chara is appropriate, for you have shown genuine friendship towards this College since we first met following the funeral of our late Holy Father, Pope Francis, just over a year ago. How fitting that our next encounter should be today, following your meeting with our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV — himself a friend of this College, having visited many times before his election. The visitors' book he signed as a newly created cardinal is the same one I will invite you to sign shortly.

Your friendship has been evident in the interest you have shown in the College, in its archive and library, and in the place it holds in Irish history and in Ireland's future. One of the letters I showed you over lunch — from de Valera to Monsignor Hagan — ends with these words: "I hope you will be spared to work for Ireland's cause at your present post. In Rome, of all places, Ireland must continue to be represented."

Address to An Taoiseach by Rector Fr. Paul Finnerty

Ireland has indeed been well represented — by the Embassy staff and by the many ambassadors who have served here since diplomatic relations were established in 1929. Today, in your presence, I wish to single out Ambassador Frances Collins and Erin Swan for special mention. This is their last formal occasion with the full student body before their mandate concludes. I thank them for their friendship and their service. They are exemplary public servants. The pin I wear today bears two flags — the flag of Ireland and the flag of the Vatican.

Ambassador Collins, the friendship we have shared during your mandate augurs well for the future relationship between Church and State. The old adage is true: **the quality of our lives depends on the quality of our relationships.** Those who work on behalf of the State
and those who work on behalf of the Church share a common calling: the call to serve, the call to be servant-leaders. And so, Taoiseach, as a servant-leader of the Irish people, I now invite you to address us.

Taoiseach, Go raibh míle maith agat for your announcement and for the support you have shown to this College. The digitisation of the entire Hagan Collection began through the expertise of Georgetown University, and completed thanks to the support of the Irish Government completed the portrait of Monsignor Hagan — not only as Rector, but as a priest, a thinker, and a man whose insight helped shape Irish-Vatican understanding during the most turbulent years of Ireland's journey to independence.

And now, with the support you have announced today, the continuing digitisation of the College's wider archival holdings will allow a fuller portrait of the College's place in Irish history to be completed — in time for our 400th anniversary. Taoiseach, on behalf of all of us here, thank you for your friendship, your leadership, and your commitment to preserving Ireland's story. Go raibh maith agat, a Thaoisigh.

I now invite Jousha our youngest resident to present you with a sketch of the College and Eoin McCormack to present you with a copy of the College's newsletters and Alison to present Mrs Martin with some flowers.

I want to acknowledge with gratitude all who are gathered here this afternoon — Mrs Martin , members of your delegation, Ambassador Collins and McCullough, Bishop Martin Hayes representing the Irish Bishops, our invited guests, and especially our College community of students and staff.





IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN

Address to An Taoiseach by Bishop Martin Hayes

Digitalisation of Irish College archive in Rome serves the common good

- "To understand our own era, we need to study what has happened before, engage in research that enables us to come to terms with our past" – Bishop Martin Hayes

An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, and your wife Mary,
Your Excellency, Ambassador Frances Collins (Ambassador of Ireland to the Holy See),
Your Excellency, Ambassador Elizabeth McCullough (Ambassador of Ireland to Italy),
Father Paul Finnerty, Rector of the Pontifical Irish College, Rome, and Father Marius Cojan, Vice Rector.

Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and, in particular, on behalf of the Trustees of this Pontifical Irish College, Rome, I thank you and your Government for your very generous donation to the archives of this College. This gesture recognises that the College has not only served as a centre for the training of clerical students, but that it is an important part of the story of the Irish involvement in Europe and the development of Irish national and political identity.

It is vital for future generations to have access to the story of our past, therefore it is important that we use the latest available tools of digitalisation of records with which to study the past. The support of your Government to the digitisation and preservation of the archives of this College is highly significant.

Archival material of this nature is not only the heritage of individual dioceses and congregations but of the nation as a whole. The preservation of the archival material of the College is as important to the State as it is to the Church in Ireland. The archive here consists of approximately 16,000 volumes, including: the largest collection of books on Irish history and culture in continental Europe; rare theological, philosophical, literary works and includes the College's oldest manuscripts from the 12-14th centuries.

Its preservation for future generations is of paramount importance. Evidence of this - if evidence were needed - has come to us in recent weeks with the welcome release online of Ireland's 1926 Census. We now have growing numbers of people engaged in family research seeking to understand the contexts in which viewpoints developed, decisions were made and practices adopted. Public support for and appreciation of the initiative has been remarkable. Families and individuals have found information on their background which would never have been known were it not for the publication of this material. Church records are an important information source, not only for family history researchers but, also, in the case of the records of the Irish Pontifical College, Rome, founded in 1628, because they offer an insight into the history of Ireland over the past four hundred years.

Archives have value to nations and regions, organisations, communities, and individual people. They provide evidence of activities, they tell stories, document people and serve as valuable sources of information for research. The digitalisation of the College's archive is an effective and efficient use of resources for the common good. We must reflect on the past with the full facts so as not to stray into a reinterpretation of the past.

IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN

Address to An Taoiseach by Bishop Martin Hayes

This grant aid will enable the completion of the digitalisation and online presentation of the archival material, the provision of appropriate storage and conservation facilities as well as the adaptation and equipping of designated accommodation so as to create accessible events which will include conferences like that of the international conference here in Rome, in September 2028, to celebrate the 400th anniversary of foundation of the Irish College. This preservation and digitalisation project and the 400th anniversary initiatives will also support the marking of the centenary of diplomatic relations between Ireland and the Holy See in 2029.

In curating the records of our past, as well as giving due recognition to the record-keepers of the past, in preserving the fruits of their labour in digital form, we will have accessible material with which to guide us into the future. To understand our own era, we need to study what has happened before, engage in research that enables us to come to terms with our past. The key, therefore, to learning something about the past might be an older preserved building, or an archive, but the means whereby we may understand it is - and always will be - ourselves. The preservation of these archives for study and research will ensure that how we deal with the past contributes to the well-being and quality of life of everyone in our society now and in the future. If future generations are to understand themselves, they will need our efforts to preserve our archives.

Our diocesan and religious authorities are aware of their duty to preserve the material which has been created by their past, including making it publicly accessible. Unfortunately, due mainly to financial constraints, they are not always in a position to do so. Also, at a time in Ireland when, with the decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, parish and diocesan structures are being reconfigured, that there is a great danger that the vast amount of archival material present in all the Catholic dioceses, parishes and in the houses of the Religious Congregations may be lost.

The interest of your Government in the archives of this College is, therefore, all the more welcome. Hopefully, it is but the beginning of a process for which future generations will be eternally grateful. Thank you.

- Bishop Martin Hayes is Bishop of Kilmore and he was representing the Trustees of the Pontifical Irish College, Rome, and the Bishops of Ireland, at this gathering in the College.





Welcoming Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Montemayor

Archbishop Montemayor celebrating Wednesday Community Night Mass with the Students and Staff



On 15 May, the Irish College was pleased to welcome Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor, Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, on his first official visit to the College. Bringing the cordial greetings and good wishes of the Holy Father, the Archbishop joined the community for its weekly Community Night Mass, which he celebrated with clergy, seminarians, lay students, and staff.

Following Mass, Archbishop Montemayor remained for supper and the ongoing formation session led by Eoin McCormack. During the evening, he took the opportunity to meet and speak with students and staff, showing a keen support in the the life and mission of the College.

The Archbishop was particularly complimentary of the College's distinctive spirit of co-formation and synodal living, praising the atmosphere of collaboration, shared learning, and mutual support that characterises community life. His visit was a source of great encouragement to all and a welcome affirmation of the College's mission as it continues its centenary celebrations.



Archbishop Montemayor with some of the Irish College students



Doctoral Defence of Rev. Dr. John McKeever

Congratulations to Rev. Dr. John McKeever for defending his doctoral thesis on the 25th of June of this year. Fr John has been a member of the College community for the last three years while studying at the Alphonsianum.

His doctoral thesis “Authenticating the development of Doctrine in Moral Theology”, used the thought of St John Henry Newman and Alasdair MacIntyre on the topic of the death penalty in Church teaching.

Fr John has been a valued member of the college community for the last number of years and we wish him all the best as he returns home to take up the position of secretary of the Irish Episcopal Conference.



Fr. John McKeever on the successful defence of his thesis with his defence examiners and Cardinal Seán Brady

Graduation of the Lay Formation Students 2025-2026



Catholic Lay Formation Programme 2026

- Cal Heaney
- Conor Maguire
- Daniel O'Rourke
- Eamonn Russell
- Edward McKendry
- Jack Dooner
- Jamie McDaid
- Joshua Colclough
- Kelan Feeney
- Liam Wilker
- Maria Rose O'Hare
- Sadhbh Kiely
- Stephen Browne

Since launching programmes for young lay adults in 2023, this year marked a significant milestone as thirteen Irish students completed the College's first full-year programme of lay formation, encompassing the four dimensions of human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation.

Throughout the year, students participated in academic studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, regular prayer and liturgical life within the College, spiritual direction, human formation workshops, and a variety of pastoral experiences including with the Missionaries of Charity and participation in a local parish Alpha programme.

As the programme continues to develop and expand, it is our assured hope that future generations of young lay people will benefit not only from academic study but also from a formative experience that nurtures mature faith, leadership, and discipleship. Through the unique experience of synodal life at the Irish College, combined with the beauty and heritage of the universal Church encountered in Rome, students are equipped to return home enriched and inspired for service in their local parish communities.

We remain deeply grateful to the many bishops, priests, benefactors, and sponsors whose generosity has made this initiative possible and who have supported these students in their journey of discernment, growth, and formation. Your encouragement and commitment continue to play a vital role in shaping this new chapter in the life of the College.



Kelan Feeney



Maria Rose O'Hare

"In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission."

"The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ."

Vatican II
Apostolicam Actuositatem, 2

Thank you to all those who help make this programme possible through your prayers and financial support.
For more information contact eoin.mccormack@irishcollege.org



Sadhbh Kiely



The Four Keys: Sanctifying the Mundane

by Liam Wilker
A Reflection on the Lay Formation Experience 2026

Introduction



It's hard to comprehend day-to-day life in the twenty-first century. The workplace is very demanding; cars and advertisements bombard our attention while phones and technology consume our time. Despite these challenges, the Second Vatican Council issues a universal call to holiness, the sanctification of the workplace and a deeper sharing of Christ's mission as priest, prophet and king. Based on my experience on the Irish College Lay Programme, I propose that if we are to live the values of the council in the world, we need to tailor the education and formation of Catholics to develop what I like to call **the four keys:** *Adoration, The Divine Office, Fraternity and Spiritual Reading*.

The Sovereign Silence (Adoration)

What is Eucharistic Adoration? Pope Pius XII explains it best "Now, the Church in the course of centuries has introduced various forms of this worship … for example, visits of devotion to the tabernacles … benediction of the Blessed Sacrament … and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament publicly exposed." Since we have a deep love for Jesus and we believe that Jesus is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic Adoration follows on as a logical consequence of this.

In Adoration, I have had moments where my worries and cares have disappeared as well as the space to make important decisions. Praying in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament not only enables me to escape from the noise and distractions of the secular world, to give me time to think, but also invites me into an even deeper communion with Our Lord.

The Sanctification of Time (Liturgy of the Hours)

The Liturgy of the Hours is often described as the prayer of the Church. Catholics from all over the world are encouraged to pray a combination of psalms, antiphons, hymns, scriptural readings and intercessions during different parts of the day.

There have been times when I have experienced great strength and solidarity from praying the Liturgy of the Hours. For me the best part is being able to pray with my Catholic brethren and being able to sanctify the day by choosing to carve out specific moments of the day to give time to God.

The Wisdom of the Masters (Spiritual Reading)



Spiritual reading is good practice, especially in the times which we now find ourselves. Prayer with the Lord is one thing, but being able to pray well is another. Reading good spiritual books from the saints and other acclaimed spiritual writers of the Church are a great way to form our minds and hearts for God.

I have had the pleasure of reading great books recently that have really formed my prayer life. *The Story of a Soul* by St. Therese of Lisieux and *Practicing the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence have both taught me the value of **transforming ordinary moments** of daily life and turning them into something prayerful.

The Fellowship of Fraternity (Men's Fraternity)

In a world that tries to isolate us, having brothers and sisters in Christ that we can reach out to for support, can be a real blessing. We were never meant to live out our faith on our own. Communal fellowship has always been encouraged.

Having been in many men's groups, I have had the chance to be kept accountable, learn from my brothers in Christ and make friendships that will continue to last throughout my life. I appreciate that while it may be difficult to find Catholic friends to keep you accountable, the results will surprise you.

Conclusion



Based on my experience of living out these 'keys' through the Irish College's Lay Programme last year, I believe that if all four are lived and lived well, each of us can unlock a personal relationship with Christ that will help us to become the 'secular leaven' that the Second Vatican Council calls for. We will be better equipped to deal with the challenges of the modern world.

It certainly won't be easy to cultivate these practices since our societal and cultural values are often antagonistic to silence, prayer and meaningful relationships. However, we often forget that the Church has given us plenty of material and supernatural aids to guide us along the way. The Sacraments, churches and our local community are all here to help us. Let's endeavour to unlock the doors of our hearts and let Jesus in.



Liam Wilker is from the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore and took part in the Lay Formation Programme at the Irish College in 2026

The value of Pastoral Reflection

by Jamie McDaid



During my time at the Irish College, I had the chance to participate in a Pastoral Reflection module, coordinated by Fr Eugene Duffy. The weekly sessions offered a chance for each student on the course to share an experience or significant event that had happened to them, and then opened the forum up to discussion.

Through the various pastoral placements, and in the quieter, unresolved moments, we came to see that often real growth is not found in dramatic moments of insight, but instead, in the steady, quiet work of **honesty** and **humility**.

One of the most persistent themes was **boundaries**. The module helped us see that healthy boundaries are not about emotional distance or cold professionalism, but are instead manifest expressions of clarity and respect for all involved. Learning to step back without guilt felt uncomfortable at first, yet it brought a quieter, more sustainable way of being present. Faith feels lighter once we released the old assumption that we must hold everything together. God's work continues even when we are not at the centre.

Closely connected was the challenge of **respect**. Sitting with people whose lives and beliefs differed markedly from our own, often expose quick judgments. There is a discipline to **presence**, in listening to anger or doubt. This kind of respect subtly widens faith, being open to the possibility that God is at work in stories that look nothing like the ones we would have scripted ourselves.

Confidentiality was another significant theme. Holding someone's raw vulnerability responsibly more than just a rule; it is about protecting trust and honouring sacred space. The practice of careful stewardship of what we hear deepens our prayer life and I now bring unnamed burdens before God with greater reverence for what others carry alone.

Perhaps most unexpectedly, the module reshaped my view of the **ordinary**. Much of ministry and formation consists of small, unremarkable acts, such as making your bed in the morning, walking with someone to class, or simply remaining present amid routine college life. I had once seen these as background to more "transcendent" moments. I now recognize them as the very material of formation. **Faith is not lived primarily in set-apart highs but in the middle of daily realities.**

Group reflection sessions wove these themes together. Sharing my struggles with boundaries, the temptation to judge, and the discomfort of difference left me feeling exposed. Yet as my peers listened without rushing to advise, a gentle relief replaced the vulnerability.

I remain grateful for the slow, sometimes uncomfortable shaping this experience has brought to my faith and future practice. In the end, faithful presence may be less about having all the answers and more about learning to stay, with clarity and humility, in the **places where God is already at work**.



Jamie McDaid is from the Diocese of Derry and took part in the Lay Formation Programme at the Irish College in 2026



Centenary in Song Musical Pilgrimage 2026

The Centenary in Song Musical Pilgrimage saw more than 30 singers and musicians from across Ireland come together for a week of pilgrimage, prayer, and music in collaboration with former students of the College and the world-renowned classical vocal group, *The Priests.*

The initiative began with a dinner conversation last year with Fr Martin, who was visiting the College at the time. Together, we explored ideas for a special concert to mark the centenary year of the College on the Coelian Hill. As we continue to expand the range of formation programmes offered at the College, the seed of that idea gradually blossomed into a unique programme combining faith formation and catechesis, liturgical music, workshops, pilgrimage, and prayer.

Our aim was to bring people together from across Ireland to deepen their understanding of the faith in a new and engaging way, while also strengthening their commitment to sacred music and equipping them to bring those gifts back to their home parishes and dioceses. And so, the Musical Pilgrimage was born.

Unfortunately, as he was recovering from illness, Fr Eugene was unable to join us for the week. He was ably represented by mezzo-soprano Nuala Murray, alongside Fr David and Fr Martin.

It was a wonderful way to mark the College's centenary year and I was greatly honoured to direct the pilgrimage and to witness first-hand the faith, generosity, and musical talent of all who participated. Over the course of the week, new friendships were formed, faith was deepened, and a shared love of sacred music united people from every corner of Ireland. The experience was a powerful reminder of the important role that music plays in prayer, worship, and evangelisation, and it is my hope that the fruits of this pilgrimage will continue to enrich parishes, dioceses, and communities long into the future.

Eoin McCormack



Centenary in Song photographs credit to Mr. Silviu Pal

A Musical Pilgrimage Poem

by Earnan Gilleran
Pilgrimage Participant



On Monday late in June we gathered In the Irish College out in Rome.
To begin our MUSIC pilgrimage I wondered how I'd get along,
As we gathered in the college church The priest's and Nuala led the hymns
And as harmonies from this choir rose, Our music pilgrimage now begins.

On Tuesday in the college for all we would remain
As Eoin gave a guided tour all areas to be seen
We sat for some theology, a Pedagogy of Desire
Before we had our lunch break And for individual practice we'd retire
Then to the rehearsals we would go anxiety now begins
Would I and my experience allow me to fit in,
And for the mass and Seek Ye First, We'd be ready for the show,
As we were joined by a former President, I was ready to give it a go.









Now Wednesday bright and early from our beds we did arise,
As to the Vatican and St. Peter's, a sacred mass would be our prise
We were joined by the Ambassador who later all of us would greet,
But first a wonderful guided tour before some treats we'd have to eat

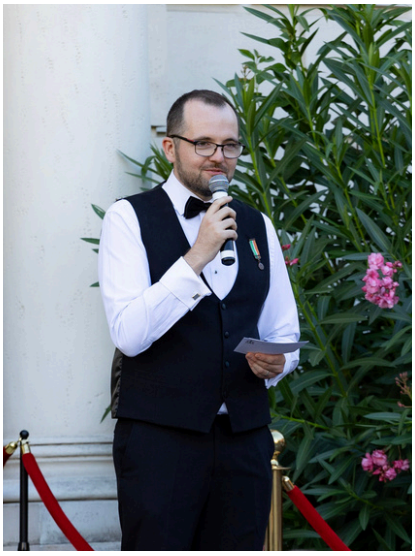
A little time for shopping but it just might be too warm,
So all back to the college where a film was put on.
Now the film it was special a certain story it did tell
About the "Three Priests" another "boy band" if they gelled.

We saw pictures from their childhood as many stories there were told,
About how they got started a lifelong tale it did unfold.
At the end was something special Fr. Eugene took the floor
Well, it was on a big screen and off on another shore.

So Thursday something special as we walked ore time long gone,
As the story in San Clemente brought us back to old time Rome.
Would we sing the Sicut Cervus? that decision had been made,
And boy was it just something no doubt it certainly made the grade.
So to workshop late that evening to help with breathing was the plan,
Take a good big breath and hold it, allow your tummy to expand.







On Friday had a special gig didn't sleep too well last night,
So off to Santa Croce to pray we'd get it right.
Some spoke about being anxious about letting others down,
Fr. David about the choir I said just to flip that round.
As back into the college all the work it was been done,
The stage was set the chairs in place just a sound check to be run.





So just a final practice to see we'd get it right
And just a reassurance that we wouldn't get stage fright.
The dress it would be formal dickie bow, white shirt for men,
The ladies looked resplendent in black dresses, white scarves the trend.
Fr. David, Fr. Martin and Nuala led the show,
The crowd they had gathered with the Ambassador in front row.



Now all we had to do was for our repertoire to perform,
As we gathered with the trio five songs we'd sing along.
From King of Kings to Danny Boy and end with Raise Me Up,
And glad we were to get at end a fabulous bualadh bos.





That night as we gathered a singsong did ensue
A mighty end to a wonderful day to sing along with you.



Saturday to St Mary Major to Our Lady sing a song
What a wonderful way to end a week as the church it was not thronged.

So as I sit and think of all, I know this poem must end,
But before I go I have some greetings I must send.
To Fr. Paul and all the College staff we send most grateful thanks.
For looking after everything making sure there were no blanks.
To Nuala for directing and leading us in song
And a thank you to non-singers who also came along.
To Fr. Martin and Fr. David I don't know the words to say
For allowing us to join you in a very special way.
To the music pilgrim choir a thousand thank you's now I send
For making such a memorable week which sadly had to end
But maybe it's a beginning the final curtain might not fall
As "The Priests" may want us all again and we'll all answer to the call.



REELING IN THE YEARS

A Look inside the Coelian from 1968

THE BIG DRIP

Travellers in June swore it was a mirage. Choking with the dust of SS. Quattro they would step forward hesitantly, expecting the lagoon of blueness and swaying palms, air-beds and sun-shades to fade before their eyes. But it persisted and soon they were leaping and laughing, showering themselves with coolness like Malayan elephants.

Water! Our sociologists had noted its centrality in primitive society and assured us that the modern world despite great technological advancements had only in a superficial manner displaced it to the peripherals of community life. It had broken down social barriers in the past and would continue to do so bringing together kings and peasants in gay interchange of pleasantries. Students of science claimed that it was a necessary constituent of all animal and vegetative life (which just about took in everything from John A. to the bristles on Shaugh's chin). The theologians among us pointed out its tremendous symbolic value; while our philosophers with more than a hint of sophistry saw in it a return to authenticity: man is largely composed of the stuff; therefore in welcoming it he accepts himself! In short no respectable establishment could possibly enter the post-Vat. II era without... a swimming pool!

The first thing to be done was to dig a large hole. That is where the old air-raid shelter and adjoining cavity came in so useful. Within a few days a rectangular crater 36 x 19½ x 9½ feet was being lined with bricks, concrete and plaster. Meantime a filter and two tanks (for hot and cold) arrived and were duly installed in the shelter. A difficult operation and executed with somewhat less than



perfect efficiency by our Italian workmen. Supporting walls buckled and someone was nearly squashed — all I fear a bit of a disappointment after the way they managed to give us the Colosseum in the days of Caesar. However the tanks were eventually lowered into place and connected with filter and furnace.

And that was all that was done in November. A winter passed before we returned to the job. The unadorned walls, the dirty bottom strewn with soggy leaves as well as with twigs and stones, were not inspiring. A special Pool Committee was appointed: Gerry Gillespie, Frank O'Shaughnessy, Donal Donnelly-Wood and Seamus Kelly. With the tireless assistance of Father Doyle they set about the task with haste: for the summer heat was but a few weeks off.

By the time the pool had been scoured out and allowed to dry the special plastic paint had arrived and all who fancied their artistic touch volunteered to wield a brush. With remarkable co-ordination the first shift began at crack of dawn on May 1 working through until breakfast, at which point the second shift took over. This early start was necessary in two respects:

a) in order to protect the fresh paint from strong sunlight;

b) so as to complete the job in one « sitting ».

By 9 a.m. most of the College had gathered to cheer the obliteration of the last square inch by Gerry Powell. Amid loud applause and clicking cameras he was hoisted aloft like a lost pot-holer.

The tempo speeded up then for a bit. A second coat of paint was added on the 3rd followed one day later by the installation of the pool ladder and various lines of demarcation. Filling operations were ready to commence on the 7th. We manned every available



BEH!

tap in the College and at a given signal the precious liquid was released. All eyes turned towards the pipe-opening: the water was on its way. We braced ourselves for the growing rumble, the fury of unleashed power, the huge mountain of spray. But what a miserable dribble!

The full irony of the situation was driven home by the news that the supply was available only for two hours a day. Mathematicians confirmed that at the current rate of twenty buckets per hour no one would be having a dip before 1973.

The situation was intolerable. Water-diviners were called in and an ancient well in the grounds was opened up. For a moment we even toyed with the idea of turning off the fountain in the front garden: the possibility of an extra five buckets a day was not to be spurned. Someone even suggested that we pinch a supply from the Holy Sea. Then on the

15th the army next door came to the rescue. For a day and a night a huge hose writhed and bucked like a thing possessed and the water-level leapt to nine feet.

The opening ceremony followed immediately. After Father Doyle's blessing the icy, mountain water awaited its first customer. A sporting Rector took upon himself the honour. With a fine plunge he parted the unchartered expanse and waved on the rest of us. Like the swine of the Gospel the cavalcade plunged in and for half-an-hour the sheer joy of youth displayed itself. But something was missing. Then he arrived, ripped off his soutane and with a fierce scream leapt into space. It was on his way down that he remembered he was unacquainted with the fundamentals of swimming. And so it came about that the Lifeguard Service (headed by Seamus Kelly) had an unexpected early initiation.

As the summer drew on the surrounds of the pool gradually became the scene of increasing gaiety: the lawns were littered with air-beds, the hedgerows with multi-coloured togs. Eugene Boland was in process of winning the tan-competition; Eamonn Cassidy had tried to walk on the waters; and Donal O'Connell had taken his first dive, returning most of the water to the barracks.

For the Pool Committee it was slightly less glamorous. The sparkling blue lagoon effect could be achieved only by a regular treatment of chlorine and sulphate, plus the sweeping of the pool floor with a specially designed vacuum cleaner. However it was obvious that the efforts of the student-body had not been in vain. And this became even clearer when the Lateran exams, traditional source of June ulcers, were tamed and put into perspective. Father Hanly must take much of the credit for this of course — but the pool also played its part. After a steaming session with Profs. Boublik or Zedda it was sheer ecstasy to slip beneath the waters and resurface — a new man!

When we returned after the summer recess the pool continued to provide much relaxation until the fine weather of October gradually cooled. Some enthusiasts planned a Christmas morning dip, but the prospects of an extra nippy winter soon dissuaded them. Moreover by that time the Committee had put an end to all speculation by draining the pool. After all it too needed a rest!

The Common Man



Farewell to H.E. Ambassador Frances Collins & Deputy Erin Swan

This summer marks a sad farewell to two wonderful friends of the College, Ambassador Frances Collins and her Deputy, Erin Swan. Both have been outstanding representatives of Ireland to the Holy See and have provided exceptional leadership to the Irish community in Rome throughout their time in office.

Over the past four years, they have worked tirelessly to foster and strengthen relationships among the many Irish religious houses and institutions in the city, regularly bringing together representatives for celebrations, commemorations, and community events. Their commitment, generosity, and diplomatic leadership have been deeply appreciated by all who have benefitted from their friendship and support.

Their departure was formally marked on 24 June at St Isidore's Franciscan College, where they were presented with a newly commissioned painting on behalf of the rectors of the Irish houses in Rome as a token of gratitude for their dedicated service and enduring contribution to the Irish community.

In anticipation of her departure, Ambassador Collins kindly agreed to sit down with The Coelian for an interview, reflecting on some of the highlights of her time in Rome, the relationships she has forged, and the experiences that have made her tenure at the Holy See so memorable.





An Interview with Her Excellency Francis Collins

Looking back on your tenure in Rome, what moments stand out as particularly significant during your time as Ambassador of Ireland to the Holy See?

One of those moments was at the beginning of my term, when I presented my credential's to Pope Francis. It was one of the moments in my life I will always never forget and treasure especially in light of his sad passing. I'll of course also never forget his funeral, which President Higgins, Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Tanaiste Simon Harris attended. I don't know of any Irish Embassy who would host our three highest representatives at the same time and I think it very much reflected the esteem to which Pope Francis was held in Ireland. It was also amazing to be here for a conclave and the election and inauguration of Pope Leo XIV. These were really historic moments that will always stay with me. I also feel very privileged to have served two Popes and to experience that transition in the Church.



Ambassador Collins presenting her credentials to Pope Francis.
Photo Credit:: © Vatican Media

Working at the Holy See is quite a unique position, what were your initial thoughts in taking on the role of Ambassador?

Well, within our diplomatic service we often describe our Embassy to the Holy See as the 'Window onto the World', given the extent of the Holy See's diplomatic relations and of course the Church's presence throughout the world. Having worked previously in Uganda, South Sudan and on the Irish Aid programme where I engaged with Catholic NGOs and Irish Missionaries, I very much had a sense of the global reach of the Church. I also worked in multi-lateral diplomacy where the Holy See is an observer at the UN, so I also had a sense and understanding of the importance of the moral voice of the Holy See in international diplomacy.

I often explain to people that the role of Ambassador to the Holy See is quite similar to that of Ambassador to the UN in that as Ambassador to the Holy See you are following a very broad range of foreign policy issues. For example, from Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the situation in the Middle-East, or in conflict affected countries like Myanmar and South Sudan to following issues like nuclear disarmament, Climate Change or more recently A.I. and what the Pope and the Holy See is saying about these situations and challenges.

But, what I have come to better understand and appreciate from my time here is that the Holy See's diplomatic efforts are particularly rooted in upholding human dignity and advocating for lasting peace. The Holy See encourages us to actively confront the urgent issues of our time. It does this itself by championing the social doctrine of the Church and the principles that underpin it such as the common good, solidarity among nations, social justice and subsidiarity. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work alongside some of the best diplomats in the world at the Holy See and to benefit from their knowledge and understanding and to learn from their approach.



An Interview with Her Excellency Francis Collins

Ireland has a long history with Rome and the Holy See, how did this shape your time as Ambassador?

Well in 2029 we will mark 100 years of diplomatic relations and the Holy See was one for the first states we exchanged diplomatic representatives with and also our first diplomat to have the title of 'Ambassador' was to the Holy See in 1946 so it's a really historic and important relationship within our diplomatic service. But of course, the relationship with the Holy See goes back much further than the foundation of the state and during my time, we've had the wonderful opportunity to mark some significant anniversaries including the 400 anniversary of the foundation of St. Isidore's by Luke Wadding and the 250 anniversary of the birth of Daniel O'Connell marked with a conference here at the Irish College.

During the jubilee year we took inspiration from these important links to highlight the important legacy of the Irish in Rome through our 'Ireland in Rome Map' which was subsequently feature on RTE's Nationwide. The Map brings to the fore historical sites that have linked Ireland and Rome for centuries. Some of the work, I'm most proud of is the work highlighting the legacy of Ireland and the Irish in Rome and working with the Irish Religious Community in Rome in bringing that heritage to the fore for younger generations. We have had events marking the legacy of Msgr Hugh O'Flaherty and his Escape Line during WWII, for Fr Leonard Boyle who was Prefect of the Vatican Library and more recently looking at the important contributions to the Church and Ireland's global reputation by our Irish women religious. Sr. Pat Murray, Sr. Collette Kane, Sr. Mary Barron and Sr. Julie Buckley have lived extraordinary lives rooted in their mission to the Church and it was wonderful to feature that in our Lives of Hope, Lives of Mission documentary.

The Pontifical Irish College has also played an historic role in cultural and diplomatic exchange for centuries, how would you describe it's contribution?

The contribution of the Irish College has been immense over its almost 400 year history, not only here in Rome but also as an important foothold in Europe for centuries. Before the foundation of the state, together with the other Irish houses in Rome and elsewhere in Europe it played an important role in preserving our cultural identity, language and history. But, what I have learned during my time here is that our religious diaspora not only preserved our heritage but also shaped what it meant to be Irish. And by this, I mean that global sense of Irishness, us wanting to be present on the international stage and actively contributing where we can to address the most pressing global challenges.

...contd.



Ambassador Collins and Fr. Paul signing a memorandum of understanding oversaw by Minister Sean Fleming TD regarding the digitization project of Irish College Archives.



An Interview with Her Excellency Francis Collins

...contd. This is something, which is very much to the fore in our foreign policy today. That sense of Ireland taking its place amongst the Nations of the world and actively contributing whether that be through our Irish Aid programme, at the UN, or our peacekeepers. And it is wonderful to see, that College very much continues in that vein today. I have really enjoyed meeting and getting to know the community that resided at the College over the last number of years from so many countries including Ireland. It is also wonderful to see the Community made up of lay, clergy and seminarians living together as one and forming lifelong friendships. It is a real example of Pope Leo's motto "In the One we are One". Some of my best memories is seeing this Community come together for the annual Advent Vespers and of course Christmas Carols. They have been such joyous occasions.





Ambassador Collins meeting Pope Leo XIV
Photo Credit: © Vatican Media

As you conclude your term as Ambassador, what hopes to have both personally and for the continued relationship between Ireland and the Holy See?

Personally, I have been very proud to serve as Ireland's Ambassador to the Holy See and the community that we have here in Rome and I'm just so inspired by the people I have met here and wonderful work that they do. I hope that I will have the opportunity to meet people again and continue to promote the legacy of the Irish Religious here in Rome so that younger generations have an appreciation of the legacy that Ireland has here in the eternal city through centuries of engagement.

Diplomatic relations between Ireland and the Holy See have been going from strength to strength and I think that the Holy See has a lot of respect for Ireland and vice a versa. In terms of foreign policy engagement, I know that the Holy See sees Ireland as a consistent and values based foreign policy partner and that is important in today's world. We work very well together on some very important issues including on promoting peace, development and humanitarian assistance, an area of foreign policy we call nuclear disarmament which means ridding the world of nuclear weapons and climate change and we will continue to do so.

As a parting gift, Ambassador Collins presented the College with three Papal medals celebrating the First Anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV, the official medal for the Jubilee year 2025 and the 10th Anniversary medal of the Pontificate of Pope Francis.















Pontificio Collegio Irlandese
Est. 1628

OLIVER PLUNKETT UNION

"Remember your leaders,
those who spoke the word of God to you;
consider the outcome of their way of life,
and imitate their faith."
- Hebrews 13:7

The Oliver Plunkett Union is celebrating the Centenary of the Pontifical Irish College on the Cælian Hill by with a pilgrimage to Rome from the 20th to 26th September 2026.

Highlights Include:

- Residence at the Irish College
- Pope Leo XIV - General Audience
- AGM of Oliver Plunkett Union
- Banquet at the Irish College
- Daily Mass in Roman Churches
- Gità to Montecassino & Gaeta
- Dinner at Old Irish College Villa
- Time to explore the Eternal City

fbradley@derrydiocese.org

Cockhill Parochial House,
Buncrana, Co Donegal, F93 F9VE

www.irishcollege.org/about/oliver-plunkett-union/



Summer Pilgrim Programme (SPP) 2026

After the departure of the lay students and seminarians at the end of May, the College has been delighted to welcome some new and familiar faces to the College during the summer period, as part of the Summer Pilgrim Programme.

We have been joined by **Mark McDonnell**, **Paudie Hurley**, **Shíofra Deegan**, **Clodagh de Courcy MacDonnell**, **Eoin Gormley**, **Ruairí O'Connell**, **Joseph Killeen** and **Brendan Maher**.

They have been of great assistance with the many groups visiting the Irish College this summer, as well as during the Centenary in Song pilgrimage. Many will remain through August so that, even as Rome closes, the College will be kept ticking over!

We also welcomed back **Katiebeth Gaynor**, who worked with our librarian, Cezara, in the archives, cataloging correspondence of former Rector of the College, Michael J Curran. We are also delighted to have Katiebeth coming back in September for the Lay Formation Programme!

We thank all who have joined us this summer for their work and contribution to the College!











A Tapestry of Service
My experience as an SPP

by Shíofra Deegan

The dust of Rome's Tor Vergata still clings to my shoes, a tangible reminder of a week that transformed my spirit. I had returned from the Youth Jubilee with a group of young people from my diocese, carrying memories of a journey I had initially faced with trepidation. I had set out alone, uncertain of the path, yet I am eternally grateful for the courage to take that first step. The journey did not end there. Asked to share my pilgrimage with my peers in college, I was once again seized by fear.

Yet, I took the leap of faith. For an hour, and with the desire to continue, I poured out my heart, sharing the raw texture of faith as a young person. The response was a gift; my peers expressed how insightful it was to encounter a vision of faith they had scarcely known. In speaking of my time at the Pontifical Irish College, my college chaplain saw a spark I had not yet named. She encouraged me to apply for the Summer Pilgrim Programme (SPP). Though the title was new to me, the call was clear. I jumped at the chance, driven by a singular desire: to return to the Eternal City, the place that had first filled me with such profound joy, faith, and hope.

Originally, I intended to stay in Rome for just the month of June, but I soon realised the city had called me to linger; my stay stretched into nearly six weeks. My days began in the quiet mornings, dedicated to the rhythm of preparation: organising keys and testing every room to ensure the college was ready. As the academic year drew to a close, the silence gave way to a vibrant influx of guests and pilgrims, and my role expanded into a tapestry of service. I learned so much from the incredible team I worked under, embracing duties that ranged from the practical to the spiritual, all fite fuaite lena chéile (woven together).

I assisted in preparing for weekly and community Masses, served as a waitress at mealtimes, and managed the front-of-house reception after Sunday Mass, welcoming both weary travellers and those who now call Rome their home. My week also included managing office tasks and assisting with the hosting of the aperitivo on Wednesdays and special events. Perhaps most rewarding was the opportunity to pick up basic Italian phrases, allowing me to connect with people on a personal level. From the smallest key to the largest event, every task became a lesson in hospitality and faith.

The true wealth of my time in Rome, however, lay not in the duties I performed, but in the incredible people I met—souls with inspirational stories I otherwise would never have encountered. My days were filled with a remarkable diversity of faith: from Cardinals and Bishops to Seminarians and Priests from every corner of the globe.



I walked alongside Past SPP participants who had served during the 2000 Jubilee, who shared their stories and reminisced over their journeys with old friends, as well as Interfaith leaders, Nuns, my fellow SPP participants and ordinary Parishioners. This vibrant company transformed what could have been lonely, fleeting moments into cherished memories.

These connections unlocked opportunities like reading at Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's, touring the ancient layers of San Clemente, and visiting all the Papal Basilicas. I attended Vespers in Santi Quattro, explored the catacombs of the Capuchins, and witnessed the joy of weddings celebrated within the College walls. I was present for a group of priest's 40th anniversary of ordination, attended a Papal Audience with a Cardinal and his family, and stepped inside the Vatican. There, I visited the Campo Santo Teutonico, hearing heroic stories of the late Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, and toured St. Peter's Basilica several times.

Beyond the sightseeing, I was part of the life of the community: helping on pilgrimages, attending concerts, and celebrating a book launch at St. Isidore's and the Embassy's farewell reception at the Residence on the Via della Conciliazione. A highlight was witnessing the Centenary in Song Concert, rounding off the Musical Pilgrimage, a celebration of the College's rich history and musical tradition. I even witnessed a doctoral defence, a testament to the intellectual rigour of this house. And when the schedule allowed, I found time to travel to Assisi where I saw the tombs of St. Francis, St. Clare and St. Carlo Acutis. Each of these experiences was not done in isolation, but in the company of others who made the sacred feel personal and real.



Of course, no time in Rome is complete without the majesty of the city itself. I walked through the ancient stones of the Colosseum, made a wish at the Trevi Fountain, and stood in awe beneath the Pantheon. I visited the Vatican and countless other churches and museums, savouring the food and the rhythm of the streets from sunrise to sunset. Yet, amidst these grand sights, the most profound moments were often the simplest. It was in the quiet spaces of the College that I found my true centre. I cherished the evening prayer led by my peers, the laughter and fellowship of community Cena in the Rectory, and the grace of daily Mass. I found peace in Vespers at Santi Quattro, the joy of collecting Vatican stamps, and the gentle rhythm of evening strolls after dinner.

But the place that held my heart most was the roof. There, under the Roman sky, I found time to reflect. It was in those moments of solitude that I realised how much I had grown. I often found myself barely reaching for my phone, content to simply be in the presence of God and the beauty of the Eternal City. In the silence, I learned that the greatest miracles are not always in the crowds, but in the quiet spaces where faith takes root.

Though I found it hard to leave, a profound peace now settles in my heart. I know, with absolute certainty, that I will return to this place that has given me so much. Rome is no longer just a city of ancient stones and grand basilicas; it is a home away from home, a place where I learned to listen, to serve, and to trust. The memories of the roof, the laughter of the Rectory, and the silence of the chapel are not endings, but promises. I leave with a full heart, ready to carry the light of Rome back to my diocese, knowing that the journey is far from over. As the old Irish saying goes, 'Tá an t-ádh ar an té a thagann ar ais' (Great luck is the one who returns). Slán go fóill to the Irish College, untill the day I walk those halls again.



Shíofra Deegan is from the Diocese of Meath and is studying to be a primary school teacher in Marino College, Dublin.

Appeals from the Rector



Pontifical Irish College Charitable Trust

Many thanks to all who have donated to the Irish College.

The College can benefit from the Irish Charitable Donation Scheme. If an individual donates €250 or more in a year to the '*The Pontifical Irish College Charitable Trust*' the Trust can claim a refund of tax paid on that donation if a CHY annual or enduring certificate accompanies the donation.

It is important that the donations are labelled correctly – to the *'The Pontifical Irish College Charitable Trust'* so that we can avail of them.

The following are the Bank details for The Pontifical Irish College Charitable Trust:

Name: **Irish College Rome RE: Charitable Trust Current Account**
Type: **Current A/C**
Location: **2 COLLEGE GREEN DUBLIN 2**
Account number: **60 2335 78**
IBAN: **IE07 BOFI 9000 1760 2335 78**
BIC: **BOFIIE2D**

Parish Placements

Last year, several Postgraduate Priests assisted in parishes over the summer.

There are always requests from students here at the College who would love **the opportunity to assist in an Irish Parish**, particularly during the summer.

If anyone is interested in hosting a priest and availing of some assistance, please contact the Rector directly:

paul.finnerty@irishcollege.org

Sabaticals at the Irish College

The Pontifical Irish College welcomes applications from **priests who wish to undertake a sabbatical in Rome**, with the approval of their bishop.

We offer **semester-long** and **full academic-year** sabbatical experiences, providing time for prayer, study, renewal and engagement with the life of the Church in the heart of Rome, while living within a community of **priests, seminarians** and **lay students** shaped by a synodal model of formation. The college is happy to assist with applications for appropriate study programmes at Roman Universities.

Applications for the sabbatical programme at the Irish College are **reviewed by the Rector**, and acceptance is **subject to availability each year**.

For further information, please contact our office at
reception@irishcollege.org





The Pontifical Irish College Rome

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