

# THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

## FALL 2023

Volume 50, Issue 4



**5<sup>th</sup> Convocation in New England | “Hurriquake” Greets California**  
**Remembering Dr. Ronald P. McArthur (1924 – 2013)**





## “A Step in the Direction of Truth”

Excerpts from Dr. O'Reilly's Convocation Remarks to the Class of 2027

Welcome to Thomas Aquinas College, a place that is unique in many ways. There are so many things about the education here that set it apart, that make it unlike other colleges, that make it outstanding. There are the Great Books you will read, there is the authentically Catholic community, there is a real and inspiring dedication to higher things: to goodness, to beauty, and to truth. And there is the Discussion Method employed in the classroom.

It is not by lectures, by being told what to think, that we primarily learn at Thomas Aquinas College, but by delving into the minds of great thinkers, by reading, and by coming to understand what is true and profound in what we have read through discussing it. As one of the founders put it, “The Discussion Method is not essential to the life of learning. But it is essential to that life as it is carried out at this college.”

The method of discussion that we employ in the classroom gives life to the program. It inspires wonder, which is the beginning of wisdom. It makes the students more likely to make their own what they have learned, more open to recognizing the truth.

In the classroom, there may be digressions, helpful stories to illustrate a point, and so on. But what defines the classroom discussion is the rigor of order: There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. And that end is always a step in the direction of truth. Eventually, class by class, you will notice that you are, in fact, learning.

You might ask yourself: Whom are you learning from? In the Discussion Method, it is not the tutor who tells you what to think. It is not the other students. It is the author of the book you have read who speaks and leads students in the direction of truth.

Of course, there are obvious difficulties with the claim that it is the authors of the Great Books who teach us. Many of them disagree and disagree in fundamental ways; some claim things that are false, and even pernicious; the poets and historians do not seem to be teachers at all. As Mr. Mark Berquist said about the Great Books: “By what standard are they judged great? Is it that they contain a true doctrine about the highest matters? Perhaps some of them do, but taken as a group they disagree radically among themselves about these very matters, not only in regard to the truth about them but also in regard to the right method of pursuing the truth.” He continues: “The Great Books cannot be regarded as teachers nor their students disciples.”

No doubt Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas (to name a few authors) teach us directly, and that is why we devote so much time to their works. Other authors show us what follows if we make fundamental mistakes about first principles. These authors can help us make intellectual progress by seeing the consequences of their thinking, and in this sense might teach us something, even indirectly. Other texts we read might incline us to a position by moving our emotions, or, as the historian does, show us what follows from choices and actions.

Liberal education prepares you to receive, recognize, and understand truth. Truth makes you free because you are no longer bound to accept opinions, either your own or others'. Instead, you know what is true. You have made it your own. The texts we read at Thomas Aquinas College, the authors who teach, the tutors who guide, and the unique method by which we discuss all contribute, ultimately, to that freedom.

May God bless you.



*“The method of discussion that we employ in the classroom gives life to the program. It inspires wonder, which is the beginning of wisdom. It makes the students more capable of learning, more likely to make their own what they have learned.”*

## DEPARTMENTS

### One Program, Two Coasts .....16

Recent events and happenings

### Faith in Action .....34

News from TAC's alumni blog

### In Memoriam .....38

*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord*

### Upcoming Events .....41

Forthcoming lectures on both coasts

### Student Life .....42

Photos from California & New England



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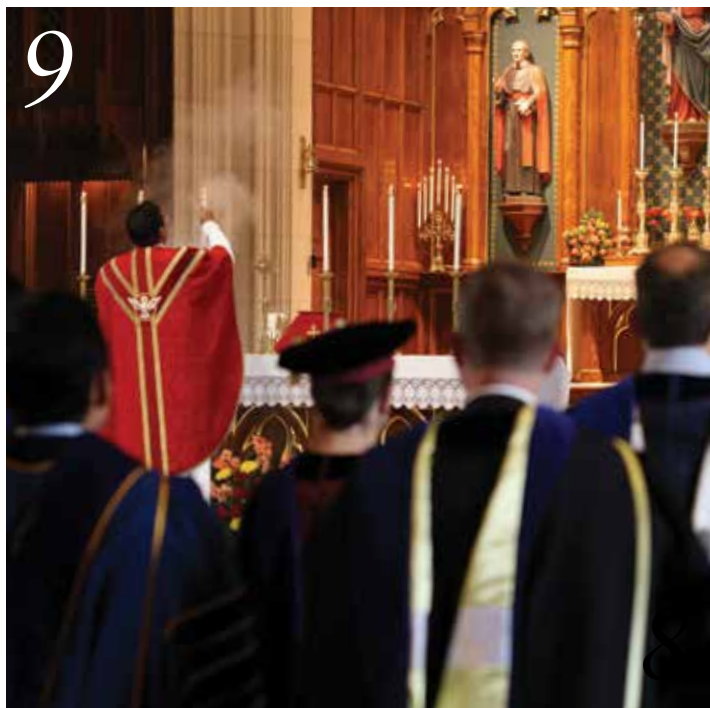


23



34





## FEATURES

### “Hurriquake” Heralds 53<sup>rd</sup> Convocation on California Campus ..... 6

Tandem of Natural Disasters Cause Costly Damages  
While Emboldening Students’ Faith

### Fifth Convocation in New England ..... 8

Full Freshman Class Shows Strength of New Campus

### “The Treasures We Possess” ..... 9

Homily from the 2023 New England  
Convocation Mass of the Holy Spirit



### Advice for Incoming Freshmen ..... 11

Matriculation Remarks from the  
2023 California Convocation

### Meet the Freshmen ..... 13

Members of the TAC Class of 2027

### New Faces ..... 23

College Welcomes New Faculty Members  
to its Teaching Faculty

### “What I Did Over Summer Vacation” .... 27

Students Share the Gift of their Education  
and Plan for their Futures

### Transitions ..... 32

A New Dean and First Associate Dean in California ...  
and Assistant Dean in New England

### New Books ..... 37

Latest works from alumni authors

### “A Man Born to Lead” ..... 39

Remembering Dr. Ronald P. McArthur



# “Hurriquake” Heralds 53<sup>rd</sup> Convocation on California Campus

**Tandem of Natural Disasters Cause Costly Damages —  
while Emboldening Students’ Faith**



Sunday, August 20, was supposed to be a quiet day on the campus of Thomas Aquinas College, California. The freshmen had arrived earlier in the week and completed their orientation. Most sophomores, juniors, and seniors had already returned or were on their way. All were preparing for Monday’s planned Convocation, the official start of the new academic year.

Then nature intervened.

As forecast, Sunday marked the day that the erstwhile Hurricane Hilary (since downgraded to a tropical storm) made land-fall in Southern California, bringing heavy winds and three inches of rain. Students were staying dry inside their residence halls and setting up their rooms for the year, when — suddenly — newly hung photos began to fall from the walls, plaster chipped

from the ceilings, and the buildings shook violently.

At 2:40 p.m., a 5.1-magnitude earthquake struck just four miles southeast of the nearby town of Ojai.

By God’s grace, no one was harmed, but the damage — while by no means catastrophic — was widespread and costly. Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel saw damages to its belltower, dome, and façade, as well as to the statue of its beloved patroness. Not a single building on campus was left

spared. And due to earthquake insurance’s notoriously high deductibles, the College will be left with an estimated \$4 million in out-of-pocket repair costs.

For their part, students seemed to weather the “hurriquake,” as the natural-disaster tandem soon became known, with characteristic grace. “After an initial twinge of fear, it quickly became an exciting event when we all realized that nothing was seriously damaged and nobody was hurt,” said freshman George Powell. Added senior Claire Thomas, “It became a great bonding experience for the campus as we worked through it together. It reminded me what a tight-knit community we have.”

TAC-California is no stranger to natural disasters, having survived major flooding in 2005 and the ravages of numerous

wildfires over the years, including the 2017 Thomas Fire. Longstanding relationships with first responders and insurance adjusters allowed for the next day’s Convocation exercises to occur with minimal disturbance. The Mass of the Holy Spirit was delayed until late that afternoon, pending a county inspection of the Chapel, but the Matriculation Ceremony took place, as originally scheduled, in St. Cecilia Hall’s Fritz B. Burns Auditorium.

There, the College welcomed the 104 students of the California Class of 2027, as well as the newest members of the teaching faculty, Dr. John Finley (’99) and Dr. Sarah Kaiser (’02). The two scholars publicly made the Oath of Fidelity and Profession of Faith, as do all new Catholic tutors. Dr. Paul J. O’Reilly, president of Thomas Aquinas College, then took to the podium to address the freshmen on what distinguishes the College’s academic program: its commitment to order, both in its curriculum and its pedagogy.

“Truth makes you free because you are no longer bound to accept opinions, either your own or others’. Instead, you know what is true. You have made it your own,” he said. “The texts we read at Thomas Aquinas College, the authors who teach, the tutors who guide, and the unique method by which we discuss, all contribute, ultimately, to that freedom.”





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Director of Admissions Jonathan Daly next invited the freshmen to sign their name into the registry, thereby formally enrolling as students of Thomas Aquinas College. When all had signed, alumnus priest Rev. John Winkowitsch, O.P. ('04), offered some guidance to the new freshmen. “Love to learn, ignore your grades, and learn to love, and then, I promise, Thomas Aquinas College will radically change your life,” the priest said before offering a final blessing.

Meanwhile, county inspectors assessed Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel and concluded that worship could resume inside. Thus, at 4:30 p.m., with sunshine brightening the campus after two days of heavy rainfall, students and faculty gathered for a delayed Mass of the Holy Spirit, with Fr. Winkowitsch serving as the principal celebrant and homilist. The prevailing atmosphere at the liturgy was one of relief after the dramatic events of the weekend — as well as enthusiasm for the new academic year.

“Everyone seemed even more fired up about the school year,” reflected senior Sophia Colarelli. “This somewhat-traumatic natural disaster brought us all together, and that is the whole point of Convocation.” ❖





# Fifth Convocation Reflects Continued Growth in New England

With no natural disasters to greet them, the 54 freshmen in New England experienced a much simpler welcome to Thomas Aquinas College than did their California counterparts. An overcast morning sky was the worst the weather had to offer, and even that gave way to sunshine by afternoon.

The August 19 Convocation exercises marked the fifth since the College acquired the Northfield, Massachusetts, campus in 2019, reflecting the continued success of its eastward expansion. “It’s remarkable to think that it has already been four years since we came to New England, that we have already run through a complete cycle of our academic program, and that we are ahead of schedule on our growth plan,” said President Paul J. O’Reilly. “The sight of a new, full freshman class is a sign of our continued growth and vitality and a reminder of God’s goodness to us.”

The day began outside Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel, where members of the faculty, clad in academic regalia, led

*“The sight of a new, full freshman class is a sign of our continued growth and vitality and a reminder of God’s goodness to us.”*



the procession inside for the morning’s Mass. Serving as the principal celebrant and homilist was an alumnus priest — Rev. Miguel (Gaspar ’08) Batres, O.Praem., of St. Michael’s Abbey in Silverado, California — a familiar figure on campus who regularly serves as chaplain for the High School Summer Program. Joining Fr. Miguel at the altar were the campus’s two chaplains, Rev. Greg Markey and Rev. Carlos Viego, all vested in red for this Mass of the Holy Spirit.

In his homily, Fr. Miguel implored members of the Class of 2027 to rely upon the grace of God so that they make the most of their next four years. “Christ, the light of the world, He who is the way, the truth and the life, the Word made flesh, God, has called you today to give you a mission: to know, love, and serve Him in a very particular way by all that is offered to you here at Thomas Aquinas College,” he said. “Not only does He give you all the graces that you need to accomplish this task, but He gives you the freedom to do it out of love, the very love He has shown you.”

After Mass, the incoming freshmen, members of the faculty, and other students reconvened in Moody Auditorium. To begin the Matriculation Ceremony, the College welcomed three new members of the New England teaching faculty: tutors Meghan Duke (’08), Joshua Lo (’12), and Rodrigo Ribeiro. With Fr. Markey leading them, all three educators made the Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity.

Then came the Matriculation itself, as — one by one — the members of the Class of 2027 signed their names to the College’s registry. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Dr. O’Reilly proclaimed the start of the College’s 53<sup>rd</sup> academic year, to which students responded with loud applause. Members of the faculty and Board of Governors then processed out of the auditorium as all sang “Immaculate Mary” — in gratitude for a new year of faith seeking understanding. ♦





# “The Treasures We Possess”

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## Homily from the 2023 New England Convocation Mass of the Holy Spirit

by Rev. Miguel (Gaspar '08) Batres, O.Praem  
St. Michael's Abbey, Silverado, California

**“May the eyes of your hearts  
be enlightened, that you may know  
what is the hope that belongs to  
His call, what are the riches of glory  
in His inheritance among the holy ones,  
and what is the surpassing greatness  
of His power for us who believe.”**

— Ephesians 1:15-19

These are the words of the Apostle St. Paul that we heard in the second reading to the Ephesians (Eph. 1:3a, 4a, 13-19a), and they apply very well to all of us, but especially to all of you, the incoming and current students for this academic year. We find ourselves in God's house, worshipping Him and beseeching His graces as we begin this academic year. Here at this Convocation Mass, we have been called together, not only by Thomas Aquinas College, but first and foremost by God's Divine Providence. Before we ask for something, we should recall that God never allows us to embark upon a mission without being

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***“God has called you today to give you a mission: to know, love, and serve Him in a very particular way by all that is offered to you here at Thomas Aquinas College.”***

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given the grace we need to do it. What is your mission? What is it you have been called to?

All too often the novelty of our responsibilities distracts us from the wonderful treasures we possess. On behalf of the students, for many of you at least, this is a new beginning, both exciting and daunting. There is much to learn and explore, friendships to make and, of course, through prayer and study, to see what exactly God was really calling you to today.

For parents, well, you are either used to this and grateful to



let your children grow up in a fine Catholic institution such as Thomas Aquinas College, or you are nervous and crying and do not want to let your son or daughter be away from home because you are afraid of not having them under your care where you can love them and protect them. Well, the truth of the matter is they have to grow up, so encouraging your children to make the best of their experience here at the College is the best thing you can do as a parent. All these feelings and sentiments — and I do not mean to be unsympathetic, dear parents and students — but they are a distraction from the treasures we possess.

Of what am I speaking? I am speaking of the hope, the riches, and the surpassing greatness of which St. Paul is speaking to the Ephesians.

What is the hope that belongs to His call? It is not a question whether our Lord is victorious or not. He is conqueror over sin and death. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the Son of God, the Word made flesh. We not only have hope, we have certitude; we know exactly where the life of virtue and holiness, following Christ, leads — eternal life with the Holy Trinity. This is the hope that is promised to us.

What are the riches of glory in His inheritance among the holy ones? Is it not the life of grace shared among the blessed in heaven, with all the angels, praising God forever and ever? Not only the Communion of Saints, as we experience it now, but one day perfectly realized with our resurrected bodies gazing upon God Himself.

What is the surpassing greatness of His power for us who believe? Is it not something we can experience now through the grace we have received in our souls? Grace is a participation in the divine life of God. As St. Paul helps us understand elsewhere, it is grace which makes us adopted sons of God, co-heirs destined to reap the fruits of Christ's victory as if they were our own. God's grace within us, it is more than just a nominal description that makes us feel good; it is the power of God Himself.

Let us go back to the beginning, and let us recall all that was given to us at our baptism. It was there, at that moment, when the life of grace began to flow in our lives. We were born anew, washed clean from every sin, and made pure, in the very image and likeness of God. It was there that we were forever given the privilege and obligation to be conformed to Christ and to share in His dignity. Grace forever changed our souls, not only strengthening us, but forever allowing us a participation in the divine life of God.

Here and now, God desires to live with us, so that one day we may live with Him for all eternity. Not only does God give us His divine life within us, but He also gives us the theological virtues — faith, hope, and charity — and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The theological virtues are of a divine origin, but they must be cultivated by us so that the foundation of faith and hope will never waiver, and the bond of charity, divine love, will never be broken between God and us, His beloved children. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us by God, but they are channels by which God has direct access into our lives. He acts through us and in us according to His divine plan, but it is our job to stay out of the way. In other words, show God you love

Him by staying in a state of grace, and let Him show you His glory and His greatness in all that you do.

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***“Never forget why you are here. Pursue the truth, and let this knowledge move you to love, and let this love move you to action, so that one day you may bring light into this dark world by revealing to the world: the hope that belongs to His call.”***

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It is amazing to consider all that God has given us as a foundation. All of these divine graces, virtues, and gifts are already ours, so the real question is, what are we doing with them? Of course, we are weak human beings, and the effects of original sin have darkened our minds and our hearts, but that does not mean there is no hope. On the contrary: Christ, the light of the world, He who is the way, the truth and the life, the Word made flesh, Not only does He give you all the graces that you need to accomplish this task, but He gives you the freedom to do it out of love, the very love He has shown you.

The truth that you will pursue, is not just reading the Great Books and trying to understand the minds of such great authors, but it adds to all that God has revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition. It all points back to the Author of Life, Who is the source of truth, Who is Truth Himself. Throughout your time at the College, you will notice the ready availability of grace offered through the sacraments. Take advantage of it, for it is a gift freely given from your Heavenly Father, through the priests that serve you here as chaplains. Grace heals what sin corrupted, and it allows you to form your intellect and your will so that you can truly know and love as God intended you to. It would be foolish to seek the truth without the assistance of God's grace.

What is your mission? What is it God is calling you to do? What I have shared with you in this homily is the obvious part, and it is available to all of you here at the College. Whatever it is God wants of you will only be made more clear as you pursue truth and wisdom. Begin this praiseworthy endeavor, and never forget why you are here. Pursue the truth, and let this knowledge move you to love, and let this love move you to action, so that one day you may bring light into this dark world by revealing to the world: the hope that belongs to His call, the riches of glory in His inheritance among the holy ones, and the surpassing greatness of His power for us who believe. ❖





# Advice for Incoming Freshmen

## Matriculation Remarks from the 2023 California Convocation

by Rev. John Winkowitsch, O.P. ('04)

Director of Vocations, Dominican Friars, Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

**B**efore I arrived here on campus for the first time 23 years ago, my high school classmates had voted me the quietest kid in my class and the most likely to become a millionaire; I also wasn't even Catholic. Now, I am in the Order of Preachers, I have made a vow of poverty, and I am a Catholic priest. So, trust me when I say, Thomas Aquinas College can radically change your life!

To get the most out of your time here, I have some advice: Love to learn. Ignore your grades. Learn to love.

### Love to Learn

The first time I checked my mailbox as a new freshman, I found a "Letter of St. Thomas Aquinas to Brother John." Thought I was special, right? And one line of that letter lodged itself in my heart: "Never mind who says what, but commit to memory what is said that is true."

In everything you read during your time here, seek the truth! Seek the truth with your mind! Seek the truth with your heart! Seek the truth with every single sentence you read, no matter who wrote it. You are reading the Great Books, so seek what makes them great. Don't nitpick and find mistakes and complain about how crazy and wrong someone might be. Stop focusing on the errors, and get back to seeking the true, the good, and the beautiful. "Never mind who says what, but commit to memory what is said that is true." Love to learn!

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Here's a little nugget I found while a student here: "There are three proofs for true divinity: prophecy that reliably pre-

dicts the future, miracles that are naturally inexplicable, and extraordinary happiness."

Isn't that something, right? Listing "extraordinary happiness" alongside miracles and prophecy as proof of the divine? Wow! Who do you think wrote that? St. Augustine? St. Thomas Aquinas? Nope. This little nugget of truth — that extraordinary happiness is proof of true divinity — came from the same pen that just a couple pages later argues that we are all created equal ... because everyone can kill anyone! Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

"Never mind who says what, but commit to memory what is said that is true." And extraordinary happiness is proof of the divine. Love to learn! Your years here are your chance to find little nuggets of truth and share them with the world.

### Ignore Your Grades

Now, this may be strange advice at the beginning of an academic year, but if there is one college in the country where grades really are irrelevant, it's here. I'm a prime



example of this fact.

My first semester here, I earned a D- in philosophy. Dr. Kelly nearly kicked me out of the school! I still remember being called into his office when I was scrubbing pots in the kitchen — that was my job. He's holding my disastrous final exam in his hands. He says, "I'll ask you one question. If you get it right, you get a D- and can continue. If you get it wrong, you get an F and you start packing your bags."

I don't even remember what he asked, but I got it right. I earned my D-. And he agreed to be my godfather, so I could be baptized that Easter, and then — see this silly hood and this silly hat I'm wearing? — I earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from The Catholic University of America on a full-ride scholarship and stipend.

Ignore your grades. They're meaningless. Let go of the stress, let go of the anxiety, let go of the pursuit of an imaginary ideal of perfection. Instead, love to learn. Love to read. Love to seek the little hidden nuggets of truth, like Easter egg hunts, and take

those Easter eggs of truth back out into the world to resurrect the true, the good, and the beautiful in a world that's desperately yearning for them.

## Learn to Love

Yes, you're here to educate your mind, read all the Great Books, stuff your head with knowledge and arguments and proofs. But trust me when I say, if you also don't learn to love during your years here, you will have failed.

One of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me, and one of the most painful things anyone has ever said to me, were in a single sentence. Sitting under the tree by the library right over here, a friend from my freshman section said to me, "John, you're like my guardian angel. Whenever I'm sad, you suddenly appear and cheer me up, but this time you can't help because I don't think you've ever really loved anybody." Ouch, right? Talk about a wake-up call. But she was right.

All the philosophy you will learn here, all the proofs for the existence of God, all the theology, all the history, the science, the props, they are all meaningless if you don't learn to love!

And nowhere was this clearer to me than

when I went home to my non-Catholic mother, who had Alzheimer's. Every part of me yearned to share everything I had learned about my newfound Catholic faith with my mother, but she would forget everything I said because of the disease. And I wrestled with God in that moment. If the Catholic faith is as true, good, and beautiful as my studies have led me to believe, how is someone like my mom supposed to see it? She wasn't raised Catholic; she can't learn anymore, either. Then it came to me: by meeting a saint. That's how someone with Alzheimer's can see the Faith.

That's the ultimate goal, right? Becoming a saint? The most succinct definition of holiness that I have ever heard came from St. Teresa of Calcutta, who has stood on this campus: "Holiness is only a very high degree of love." Learn to love! Learn to love to an extraordinary degree! The end of all your time here at Thomas Aquinas College, the final cause of all your studies, is learning to love like Christ on the Cross. "*Non nisi Te, Domine,*" as St. Thomas Aquinas uttered at the end of his life of learning, "Nothing but You, Lord."

So, learn to love your classmates and the arguments in class, learn to love your tutors and sharing meals at their homes,

learn to love the readings — even the crazy ones like Hobbes, because there are golden nuggets everywhere — learn to love your enemies to such an extraordinary degree that they become your friends that you're willing to lay down your life for on a cross. Love God, love neighbor, and leave here with the capacity to love to such an extraordinary degree that even our world and

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*"All the philosophy you will learn here, all the proofs for the existence of God, all the theology, all the history, the science, the props, they are all meaningless if you don't learn to love!"*

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culture — suffering from Alzheimer's, as it is, in cancel culture — can see the beauty of sanctity and the happiness of holiness lived out in your lives.

So: Love to learn, ignore your grades, and learn to love — and then I promise that Thomas Aquinas College will radically change your life. ♦





# MEET THE FRESHMEN

## Members of the Class of 2027 Come from All Corners, Seeking Truth

In its more than 50 years, Thomas Aquinas College has acquired a reputation for providing a rigorous and multifaceted Catholic liberal education. It is this reputation that continues to attract students of high intellectual and moral caliber from all walks of life — and, increasingly, from the farthest reaches of the globe — to the College's two campuses. The members of the Class of 2027 are no exception.

### Abigail De Kroon (CA'27)

For Abigail De Kroon (CA'27) of Alpharetta, Georgia, coming to Thomas Aquinas College from the wilderness of contemporary education was like entering a spiritual and intellectual oasis.

"When I was younger, I was a huge bookworm," she recalls. "But as I got older, reading became more of a chore, and I got sucked into the world of instant gratification and mindless screens." Her school years accelerated this regrettable trajectory; eventually, both Abigail and her parents knew something had to change.

"I wasn't fulfilled by the experience in my public school — not only academically, but socially," she says. Fortunately, between her sophomore and junior years, the opportunity arose to attend a small Catholic private school, St. John Bosco Academy in Cumming, Georgia. With its thoroughly classical curriculum and strong Catholic identity, Abigail jokes, "it was like 'TAC Lite.'"

*"I was taken by this classical education and Socratic method, intertwined with the Catholic faith, by how it studies everything in the presence of the Creator."*

Late though her transfer was, it was almost immediately transformative. "I figured out what I had been missing during my secular education," she reflects. "In my old school, there was a common theme of mediocrity. It was not typical to be engaged in what we were learning; we would just slave away to make the grades on the report card at the end of the semes-

ter." Her new experience could not have been more different. "When I transferred, I fell in love with reading again — and most importantly, I fell in love with my faith."

Newfound loves notwithstanding, Abigail did not expect, or desire, to attend a Catholic college. "At that point, I had been at a Catholic school for a few years, and I felt strong enough in my faith to go back out into the secular world," she says. "I felt confident, so I could stick with my safest bet, which was attending a state school."

But when she tagged along to bring her older sister, Alessandra (NE'26) — then an incoming freshman — to the New England campus last year, her resolution wavered. "I had just planned to drop my sister off, but this beautiful opportunity was revealed to me," she laughs. "I had some of the most fruitful prayer of my life in the New England chapel, with a lot of peace."

That peace followed her wherever Abigail went during her four days on campus. "I saw how devout everyone was, and how uplifting the environment was," she says. Talking with her sister's future teachers and classmates only deepened that impression. "I was taken by this classical education and Socratic method, intertwined with the Catholic faith, by how it studies everything in the presence of the Creator."

After the visit, Abigail knew she wanted what the College offered, and decided to follow in her sister's footsteps — only 3,000 miles away. "I realized that you can only grow outside your comfort zone," she says. "Coming here across the country, I knew I would be outside my comfort zone!"

It was not long after Abigail arrived at Thomas Aquinas College, California, that a familiar feeling settled in her heart. "In the first week, I felt such overwhelming peace," she says. Now



well into her freshman year, and accustomed fully to classroom discussions, Euclid demonstrations, and campus life, that peace remains: “I belong here.”

### Alex Maynard (CA’27)

Growing up in central Oregon, Alex Maynard (CA’27) was fascinated by the deepest questions posed by the human spirit, but struggles with anxiety made it hard to seek answers through higher education. Yet this past August, at the age of 26, he enrolled as a freshman at Thomas Aquinas College, California. His journey to the College is a testament to the patience of providence and the promise that God responds generously to a generous heart.

After finishing high school and dabbling in community college, Alex settled into a joyful Catholic life in Portland, where he joined a team of missionaries ministering to the homeless at a downtown parish. “I lived in community with three other men and four women in two houses, respectively,” he says.

As he poured his heart into ministering to the marginalized, Alex opened his soul more deeply to God’s ministration. “Living



a common life of prayer and service to the poor, I experienced profound interior healing,” he reflects. But with that healing came a challenge. “I was discerning where to go next year,” says Alex. Taking Eli’s advice to Samuel, he simply asked God

## New England’s International Freshman Class

Of the 54 students who matriculated at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, on August 19, eight are newcomers, not only to the United States, but to North America. They hail from Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina; from Ireland, France, and Austria. Yet however widespread their points of origin, they were all driven to the College by the same desire: to seek the truth — sometimes at the cost of great personal sacrifice.

“Nobody really understands how important it is to have this type of education for yourself, and for the people that surround you,” says Fermín Coelho of Beccar, Argentina, describing the mystified response he received from friends about his decision to attend TAC. He heard about the College from two alumni, Rev. Anthony Myers, S.S.J. (’94) and Roberto Helguera (’91), who established a classical high school near Buenos Aires, at which Fermín worked for the last two years. “In the summer holiday last year, they recommended that I come study here,” he says. Others had similar encounters with alumni.

Some, though, followed more roundabout paths. Maria Eloisa Csáky-Pallavicini of Vienna, Austria, learned about Thomas Aquinas College from her older brother, who attended the 2017 High School Summer Program in California. “When he came back, he told so many stories about it,” she laughs. Intrigued, Maria Eloisa also gave the Summer Program a try — and loved it.

“I faced a difficulty,” she recalls. “I had applied to law school in Austria and been accepted, but I also wanted to come to the

College.” At first, immigration circumstances seemed to resolve her difficulty, but after six months’ studying law in Vienna, she found herself aching for the community of friends united in the study of the Great Books. “We don’t have many communities of young Catholic people in Austria,” she explains. When circumstances shifted more favorably, she reapplied.

As Maria Eloisa’s experience suggests, geography is not a negligible factor for interested students overseas: Even having trekked several thousand miles, they face both linguistic and sometimes cultural barriers, as well. “The first month was a challenge, because I had to make a big effort to follow each of the classes,” laughs Fermín. “But everybody’s so welcoming, friendly, and accommodating,” adds Ethan Connolly of Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, “that within a couple of weeks, it started to feel very much like home.”

Indeed, the open arms of their fellow students have been an especially pleasant surprise. “Everyone is kind, and you can

*“One of the best things about the Discussion Method is that you really need to know what you are saying, because you have to defend your position in every class.”*



to speak; His servant was listening. And as with Samuel, God's voice was remarkably clear. "He seemed to say, 'Alex, you tend to run away from school.'"

Not only did God surround Alex with invitations to come back to school, He seemed to have one specific school in mind: Thomas Aquinas College.

Some of Alex's fellow missionaries had paid a recruiting visit to the California campus and returned glowing with enthusiasm, and Alex's spiritual director in Portland was none other than Rev. Paul Raftery, O.P., a beloved former TAC chaplain. Thanks to these converging influences, Alex applied to the College and was accepted. "I've had a good sense of peace being here," he says with a smile.

While enrolling certainly marks a return to academics, the College's program and pedagogy are like nothing Alex has ever experienced before. The Discussion Method has been a particularly pleasant discovery. "It's funky to think out loud collectively," he remarks. "Sometimes we get a bit stuck, but that's OK. It's a journey that we're on together; the point isn't to be perfect, but to pursue the truth in common."

*"This is where I can learn more deeply about God, the world, and the human heart"*

Though Alex is close to eight years older than most of his classmates, the age difference is neither a social nor an academic hindrance. "I don't feel like I'm around a bunch of kids," he laughs. "It's like having younger siblings. They are genuinely virtuous; it's edifying to be around them."

Free at last to ponder the great questions with peace of soul, Alex looks back with gratitude on his years of service to the poor. "When I told the missionaries I was going to the College, they asked me, 'Why there in particular? What do you hope to get out of it?'" he recalls. "I told them, 'This is where I can learn more deeply about God, the world, and the human heart.'"

He began this learning on the streets of Portland, and now looks forward to enriching his experience by immersing himself in the Great Books. "This is where I feel called to be." ♦



*International New England freshmen: Tiago Angioletti (Brazil), Ethan Connolly (Ireland), Fermín Coelho (Argentina), and Marya Zorzi (Brazil)*

really tell that it comes from their heart," remarks Maria Eloisa. "With some people during the first weeks, I felt like, 'Do they want something from me? Why are they being so nice?' But then I realized that they are genuine."

But as the international students have found in the first few months of the academic year, leaping these and other hurdles with the help of their new and welcoming friends is a small price to pay to study at the College. "I didn't expect to say this, but as much as I love my free time, classes are the most enjoyable part of the day," says Ethan. "It's very satisfying to discuss assignments with your friends and then see the fruits of those discussions."

Indeed, though the language barrier is at its most pronounced in classroom discussions, many find learning with the Discussion Method an especially rewarding experience. "One of the best things about it is that you really need to know what you are saying, because you have to defend your position in every class," reflects Fermín. "Every week that passes, I feel more ordered, having better ideas."


"You don't find a school like TAC, that has this spiritual, intellectual, and social environment, in the whole of South America," observes Jaqueline Bonfante of Parana, Brazil. "Even though our studies can be exhausting, they are worth it." ♦



# One Program Two Coasts

## RECENT EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

### Catholic Author & Podcaster Matt Fradd Addresses TAC Students

 While passing through Southern California, Matt Fradd — Catholic author and host of the popular Pints with Aquinas podcast — seized the opportunity to visit Thomas Aquinas College. “When I came on campus,” he joked, “I was hit with an overwhelming temptation to abandon my wife and children and register as a student here!”



In addition to touring campus and praying in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, Mr. Fradd generously took time to address students in St. Cecilia Hall’s Fritz B. Burns Auditorium about the Christian duty to reject worldliness. “We should recover leisure time from the totalitarian ‘work’ state of

*“We have a God Who would rather die than risk spending eternity without you.”*


mind,” he said. “Leisure leads to wonder, and wonder to the recovery of innocence, which is that childlikeness without which no man will enter heaven.”

Although he dwelt at length on the world’s corrosive influences, Mr. Fradd ultimately exhorted students to “remember the great

merciful love of God,” adding, “We have a God Who would rather die than risk spending eternity without you.” In all, he spoke and answered questions for over an hour, much to the delight of his audience.

“It’s absolutely glorious here,” Mr. Fradd said afterward while mingling with students. “I wish I had had this sort of education myself. When you create a beautiful environment, we’re more likely to act like humans at our best — and not like rats in a cage!” ♦

### Bicoastal Faculty Gathering

 After the success of last year’s curriculum meeting, which brought the bicoastal faculty of Thomas Aquinas College together on the California campus, College Governor Mark Montgomery made a generous offer: He would cover the expenses for any interested California tutors and their spouses to venture to New England for a weekend of fellowship this June.

“We got to see old friends again, people who had been longtime tutors with us whom we miss,” said Brian Dragoo, a member of the California teaching faculty. Of course, they made some new friends, too. “Most of us had never met a half dozen or so of the tutors out there,” said Dr. Christopher Decaen, also of California. Added Mr. Dragoo, “We’ve heard their names, but we don’t know who they are, where they are from, what they like to talk about.” The tutors remedied that deficiency, both in classroom discussions and over cocktails, sharing life with their colleagues across the country.



*Members of the New England faculty and their families host their California counterparts in June*



The visit to Northfield, Massachusetts, was a first for many of the California tutors, who returned west with “increased excitement over the progress and potential of the New England campus,” said Dr. Decaen. “Despite rumors of long winters, I imagine that many of us wondered whether we might enjoy teaching out there — for a year.”

As an attempt to foster friendship between the faculty of the two campuses, the trip was a tremendous success. “It was great,” concluded Mr. Dragoo. “We were able to solidify connections that we already had, but make them stronger, and make our friendships a little tighter.” ❖

## Welcome, Bishop Szkredka!

With joy, members of the Thomas Aquinas College community welcome the installation of Rev. Slawomir Szkredka as the new auxiliary bishop for the Santa Barbara Pastoral Region of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

In July, His Holiness Pope Francis named His Excellency as one of four new auxiliary bishops for the Archdiocese. The next month,

*“We congratulate Bishop Szkredka on his appointment, as well his fellow bishops.”*

the Most Rev. José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, announced that, upon his episcopal ordination on September 26, Bishop-elect Szkredka would serve as Episcopal Vicar for the pastoral region that includes Thomas Aquinas College, California. The region had been without an auxiliary bishop since the 2022 departure of the Most Rev. Robert E. Barron for the Diocese of Winona-Rochester in Minnesota.

“We congratulate Bishop Szkredka on his appointment, as well his fellow bishops, and we give thanks to God and to Pope Francis for blessing us with a new shepherd,” says Dr. Paul J. O’Reilly, president of Thomas Aquinas College. “We look forward to welcoming him to our California campus, and we are eager to aid him in his ministry to the faithful in Los Angeles.”

## NBC, Princeton Review Take Note of TAC



Rob Franek, editor-in-chief of the Princeton Review, appeared on NBC News’ *Today* show on August 18 to promote the Review’s newly released *The Best 389 Colleges*, in which Thomas Aquinas College is prominently featured.

During the interview, Mr. Franek and hosts Hoda Kotb and Jenna Bush Hager discussed the subject of financial aid. “When we think about college costs, this is a major concern for students and parents,” said Mr. Franek. “We tell students: Never look at the sticker costs; it’s about how much you’re going to pay at the end” — after factoring in financial assistance, which varies widely from school to school. On the screen behind them appeared the names of the Princeton Review’s top three colleges in the United States for financial aid, which Ms. Kotb supplied verbally, naming the No. 2 school on the list: “Thomas Aquinas College.”

In the 2024 edition of its annual college guide, the Princeton Review also notes that TAC students are among the “happiest,” “friendliest,” and “most religious” in the United States.

“We salute Thomas Aquinas College for its outstanding academics and its many other impressive offerings,” said Mr. Franek in a press release. “We’re delighted to recommend it as an ideal choice for students searching for their ‘best-fit’ college.”

*The Best 389 Colleges* integrates data from more than 2,000 institutions with surveys of more than 165,000 students nationwide, featuring only the top 14 percent of America’s four-year institutions. “We recommend each one as academically outstanding,” it notes. “Our ranking lists reflect the opinions of the school’s students — their customers — and their reports to us about their campus experiences.”

In addition to achieving ratings of 91 (out of a possible 99) for academics, 93 for quality of life, and 98 in faculty accessibility, Thomas Aquinas College earned the No. 2 spot nationwide on the Princeton Review’s ranking of the “Top 25 Colleges with Great Financial Aid.” Among the other high scores that the College received is No. 9 for “Most Beautiful Campus.”

“We are grateful that the Princeton Review has, once again, highlighted the quality of our academic program and the warmth of our campus community,” says Chris Weinkopf, Thomas Aquinas College’s executive director of college relations. “Yet especially noteworthy are the high marks it has given for the affordability of this education. Our founders pledged never to turn students away for reasons of financial need. More than 50 years later, our generous benefactors and dedicated Financial Aid officers continue to work hard to honor that pledge.” ❖



## ONE PROGRAM TWO COASTS

A native of Poland with advanced degrees from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, Bishop Szkredka previously served as a professor of biblical studies and the coordinator of human formation at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo. Among the many seminarians he has taught over the years was one of the College's newest alumni priests, Rev. Michael Masteller ('13), associate pastor of St. Helen Catholic Church in South Gate, California.

"He's a brilliant mind, all these studies from Rome, and yet has that piety, that kind of faith you would find in a regular parish," Fr.



*A group of College officials, headed by Chairman of the Board of Governors R. Scott Turicchi and President Paul J. O'Reilly, attend the September 26 episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Slawomir Szkredka.*

Masteller told the archdiocese's weekly magazine, *Angelus*. "I know they look for bishops who can teach the Faith, and that's definitely something he'll be able to do, with respect, with patience, with a listening heart but also with clarity of thought."

*Deo gratias!* ❖

## Second Thomistic Summer Conference



Building on the achievements of last year's inaugural Thomistic Summer Conference, Thomas Aquinas College hosted scholars from across the U.S. once more this summer. Old friends and new came to the California campus from June 15-17 to contemplate the nature of the soul, under the guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Organizing the event was Dr. John Goyette ('90), a tutor and the outgoing dean of Thomas Aquinas College, California, who traced the inspiration for the gathering to the late Dr. Ralph McInerny's summer conferences at the University of Notre Dame. "Ralph aimed to bring together a mix of scholars, both young and old, to help revive the study of St. Thomas by encouraging Thomists to share their ideas, to encourage one another in their academic work, and to develop friendships with fellow Thomists," says Dr. Goyette.

Representing such institutions as Ave Maria University, Hillsdale College, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Ralston College, The Catholic University of America, Thomas More College, the United States Air Force Academy, and the University of Notre Dame, the visiting scholars spent the mornings and afternoons listening to and discussing each other's papers. Titles included "St. Thomas on the Intentionality of Thought," "Science From The Vantage Point of the Human Soul," and "Arrow and Archer: St. Thomas Aquinas's Teleological Soul in Dante's *Commedia* and Melville's *Moby-Dick*."

## College Reviews: Kudos from U.S. News, American Spectator & New York Times



Of the more than 4,000 institutions of higher learning in the United States, Thomas Aquinas College has once again placed among

the top 100 national liberal arts colleges in *U.S. News & World Report's* annual college rankings. It is one of only seven Catholic schools to crack the top 100 (No. 67).

The College has also landed atop the magazine's rankings for "social mobility." Of the 211 schools that appear in the *U.S. News* 2024 Best College Guide, it is the only Catholic school to make the top 25 based on its number of low-income students.



In discussing the rationale for its annual rankings, *U.S. News* explains that they are based on "17 key measures of academic quality," ranging from graduation and retention rates to faculty resources and the average federal loan debt of graduates.

In its summer education issue, *The American Spectator* recommends 26 colleges where conservative-minded students can "play hooky" from the higher-education mainstream, and Thomas Aquinas College is among the most highly recommended on the list.







*“As a reunion of Thomists, it was a glimpse of the heavenly banquet.”*

The ideas shared this year centered around St. Thomas’s teaching on the soul, about which the Angelic Doctor wrote extensively, both integrating the thought of his predecessors and opening whole new vistas of inquiry. For Thomists, then, this particular subject yields rich theological, philosophical, and even scientific fruit, which the 26 presenters — and especially the featured speakers — harvested in abundance.

This year’s featured speakers included three TAC alumni, two of them tutors. On Thursday, Dr. Marie George (’79) of St. John’s University delivered an address entitled, “The Soul and the Natural Division of Living Things at the Most Universal Level.” Friday featured lectures by Dr. Goyette, who spoke on “The Soul as *Imago Dei*: The Image of the Trinity according to Nature and Grace,” and Dr. Steven Jensen of the University of St. Thomas in Houston, who delivered a paper entitled, “Why G.E. Moore Could Have Used A Few Lessons in Thomistic Psychology.”

The *Spectator’s* editors cite the College’s academics, which, they observe, have garnered praise from across the ideological spectrum: “All students participate in its classical Great Books curriculum, which many consider to be a more challenging curriculum than that offered by the nation’s top universities.” In an accompanying article, Dr. Ann Hendershott describes TAC as “vibrantly Catholic,” while the magazine’s profile of the College highlights its fidelity to the Church’s magisterium. “Faculty members and students alike share deep faith and an intellectual commitment to understanding the world through a Catholic lens.”

The latest education issue of the *New York Times Magazine* features an updated version of its College-Access Index, “a list of the country’s most selective universities ranked in order of economic diversity.” Thomas Aquinas College placed well in the upper half of the *Times’* list.

Then on Saturday, Dr. Michael Augros (’92) of Thomas Aquinas College, New England, concluded the gathering with “Aquinas’s Proof for the Human Soul’s Subsistence.”

But as Dr. Goyette envisioned, the conference was more than an academic exercise. Between sessions and at shared meals, the visitors nurtured friendships over conversation and, at least on Friday night, cocktails beneath the summer stars. This friendly atmosphere, together with the beauty of the campus and surrounding hills, made the conference an unforgettable experience for all in attendance. Said Dr. Christopher Blum of the Augustine Institute, “As a reunion of Thomists, it was a glimpse of the heavenly banquet.” ♦

## Friends Double Down for Week of Giving!

Thanks to the generosity of many, Thomas Aquinas College’s 2023 Friends Week of Giving generated more than \$2 million for student financial aid — a \$1 million increase from last year and more than double the initial goal.

The Week, which coincides with the end of the College’s fiscal year in June, is the last and most extensive of TAC’s three major annual fundraising efforts, preceded by the Alumni Day of Giving in March and the Parent Day of Giving in May. Whereas for those two

*“We thank God for blessing Thomas Aquinas College with so many loyal friends who are deeply committed to the College’s mission of Catholic liberal education.”*

initiatives the College relies on the help of those who know it “from within,” the Friends Week of Giving depends entirely on benefactors who know and respect the College through its reputation and influence in the wider culture.

This year, those friends’ commitment was tremendous.

This edition of the College-Access Index, explains the *Times*, measures economic diversity by analyzing the number of students receiving Pell Grants, which are typically awarded to applicants from the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder. Of the College’s 2020-21 cohort, 22 percent received Pell subsidies.

To anyone familiar with Thomas Aquinas College’s mission and history, its rank should come as no surprise. “Although they didn’t think in terms such as ‘economic diversity,’ the College’s founders considered it an obligation of our faith to make this education available to all who are willing and able to pursue it,” says Chris Weinkopf, executive director of college relations. “By God’s grace, and through the assistance of many benefactors, TAC continues to meet that obligation to this day.” ♦

**The  
New York  
Times**



**College Governor Berni Neal and her husband, Rob**

Much of the credit belongs to College Governor Berni Neal and her husband, Rob, who got the ball rolling with a pledge to match the first \$500,000 in gifts. The Neals' bold example inspired many others to give sacrificially, and the Week eclipsed its initial, \$1 million goal within 72 hours.

"Emboldened by this outpouring of support, we decided to push our luck and double the goal from \$1

million to \$2 million," says President Paul J. O'Reilly. "Five of Mrs. Neal's fellow members of the Board of Governors led the way with a second \$500,000 matching gift, and our friends rose to the challenge yet again, aided by a group of alumni and parents who stepped in at the last minute to nudge us over the finish line."

In total, benefactors contributed \$2,031,333 to this year's Friends Week of Giving — up from \$1,021,392 last year and a tenfold increase from the first Week of Giving in 2018, which yielded \$184,399.

"We thank God for blessing Thomas Aquinas College with so many loyal friends who are deeply committed to the College's mission of Catholic liberal education," says Dr. O'Reilly. "And we thank each of you who contributed and whose generosity allows this mission to flourish, now on two coasts." ❖

## The TAC Experience: Summer and Fall Seminars

Over two weekends this year, some 42 friends of Thomas Aquinas College — many of them members of the President's Council — got a taste of life at the school they so generously support. They lived in residence halls, participated in classroom discussions, and enjoyed the warm, collegial atmosphere that makes student life on either campus such an unforgettable experience.

"The Seminar Weekends are a great way for friends of the College to learn more about the curriculum," explains James Link, vice president for advancement. "Participants benefit from the kinds of texts our students read and from the kinds of conversations that happen every day in our classrooms."

While guests availed themselves of the spiritual riches of the College's chapels and enjoyed each other's company, the heart

*"In the brief time they are here, seminar participants benefit in the same ways that our students benefit from the four-year program."*

of both weekends lay in the classroom. Using the Discussion Method, under the leadership of Dr. Paul J. O'Reilly, president of the College, guests at both weekends pondered the four Gospels over the course of three seminars.

In the first seminar of each weekend, Dr. O'Reilly led participants from considering the tonal differences between John's

## ST. VINCENT DE PAUL Lecture and Concert Series Highlights from Last Semester\*



### CALIFORNIA



**Opening Lecture**  
**Dr. Christopher Oleson**  
Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College  
"Attending College in Plato's Cave"



**September Lecture**  
**Dr. Sean Kelsey ('92)**  
Rev. John A. O'Brien College  
Professor of Philosophy  
University of Notre Dame  
"Mind and World in Aristotle's *De Anima*"

### Fall Concert

Ilya Yakushev, classical pianist  
Selections from Haydn, Mozart,  
Rachmaninoff, and Beethoven



**Fall All-College Seminar**  
"The Bridge of San Luis Rey" by Thornton Wilder

**October Lecture**  
**Dr. Joshua Katz**  
American Enterprise Institute  
"Homer through a Microscope and a Wide-Angle Lens"





*“Mary is our advocate and an instrument of divine power, and that view of her is prominent in the Gospel of John.”*

Gospel and those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the so-called “Synoptic” Gospels) to an appreciation of the deep theological unity running through all four narratives. The following two seminars focused on the Gospel of John, examining Our Lord’s miracles and His passion, respectively, and noting the inconspicuous presence of the Blessed Mother throughout.

But just as the College offers one program on two coasts, the Seminar Weekends provided guests with the same intellectual opportunities embedded in their campuses’ distinct regions. At July’s Summer Seminar in California, guests mingled over cocktails in the shade of mountains and Mission-style buildings, the wind scented with live oak and orange blossoms. At September’s Fall Seminar in New England, meanwhile, guests saw Western Massachusetts in its autumnal finery, savoring the crisp breeze and burgeoning foliage.

Both weekends culminated in formal dinners, which featured musical performances by students. To conclude these evenings,

Dr. O’Reilly addressed the guests, tying together the themes of their three seminars. He was especially attentive to the Blessed Mother’s role as the new Eve in St. John’s Gospel. “It is said to be written last because of Our Lady and gives us a glimpse at Christ’s divinity,” he said. “Mary is our advocate and an instrument of divine power, and that view of her is prominent in the Gospel of John.”

Whether at the height of Southern California summer or in the Northeastern fall, participants at this year’s Seminar Weekends enjoyed fellowship, fine meals, and even finer conversations — in short, a brief immersion in the pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty that characterizes Thomas Aquinas College. “In the brief time they are here, seminar participants benefit in the same ways that our students benefit from the four-year program,” reflects Mr. Link. “It strengthens the bond they already have with the College, as well as their respect and appreciation for what we are doing.” ❖



Endowed by Barbara and Paul Henkels



## NEW ENGLAND

### Opening Lecture

**Dr. Steven Cain**

Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College,  
“Fides Quaerens Intellectum”



### September Lecture

**Dr. Kathryn Duda** (’03)

Assistant Professor,  
Russian Studies  
Mercyhurst University  
“War and Peace: In Search  
of an Ending”

### Fall All-College Seminar

“Barn Burning” by William Faulkner

### October Lecture

**Rev. Matthew Dougherty, O.Praem.**

College Chaplain, St. Norbert College  
“Against the God of the Gaps: Creation,  
Evolution, and the Catholic Faith”




### Fall Concert

**Madison String Quartet**

Mozart, Eine Kleine Nachtmusik; Schubert  
“Death and the Maiden Quartet”

## Dr. Sean Collins ('79) Teaches Every Course in Curriculum

 At the close of the last academic year, Dr. Sean Collins ('79) became just the sixth member of the Thomas Aquinas College faculty to teach all 23 courses in the College's curriculum.

Because TAC offers a fully integrated academic program, it is unique among American colleges and universities, requiring faculty members to teach all subjects in the curriculum — language, logic, mathematics, music, natural



*“The requirement demands much from our faculty, but they rise to the occasion, and our students are the ultimate beneficiaries.”*

science, literature, economics, history, philosophy, and theology. “Our founders recognized that tutors who teach across the disciplines are better equipped to answer students’ questions and help them see how the disciplines build upon one another,” says Dr. John J. Goyette, the 2022-23 dean on the California campus. “The requirement demands much from our faculty, but they rise to the occasion, and our students are the ultimate beneficiaries.”

The mutual coherence of the curriculum made an early and lasting impression on Dr. Collins when he was a TAC student in the 1970s, but “there were some moments when it advanced substantially,” he says, since joining the faculty in 1994. One such moment was his first go at teaching the Music Tutorial in 2010. “Music is a liberal art, and teaching it was an opportunity to see how the liberal arts, philosophy, and theology mesh,” he says. “Music is a microcosm of the whole program in some ways, so it was a lot of fun.”

In recognition of his accomplishment, Dr. Collins has become the latest custodian of the statuette which the faculty has dubbed Lady Philosophy, “given to tutors who finish teaching the entire program,” Dr. Goyette explains. “Sean will get to keep Lady Philosophy safe until the next tutor finishes.” ♦

## Media Highlight TAC’s Authentic Catholic Healthcare



**H**ow can Catholic colleges in California follow state laws regulating health insurance while conforming to Church moral teaching at the same time? An August article from the Catholic News Agency by Kevin J. Jones considers some of the available options — and points to Thomas Aquinas College as one successful example.

As CNA's article explains in detail, California's laws regulating health insurance have moved in a problematic direction for decades, requiring coverage for abortion and other treatments that violate Church teaching. To survive in this hostile environment, the College does not provide student health coverage —

most students remain on their parents' plans — and offers employee coverage by self-insuring through the federally regulated Reta Trust.

“Since we self-insure,” says Chris Weinkopf, executive director of college relations, “the College is exempt from regulations that require coverage at odds with Catholic moral teaching.”

In a separate investigation, The College Fix determined that “at least three Catholic universities in California cover abortion

*“Abortion is not health care, and TAC is committed to defending the sanctity of human life in all stages.”*

in their student health plans,” often citing government regulations as their justification for contributing to the destruction of unborn human life.

TAC is decidedly not among them.

“Thomas Aquinas College collects its own premiums and administers its own health plan,” author Brendan McDonald explained, “which makes it exempt from state mandates regarding health insurance.”

“We consider providing medical coverage an essential part of our character as a Catholic institution,” adds Mr. Weinkopf. “The College provides full health care — which includes dental and vision care, as well as zero monthly premiums — to all its full-time employees and their families. But abortion is not health care, and TAC is committed to defending the sanctity of human life at all stages.” ♦



**CNA** | Catholic News Agency





## New Faces

### College Welcomes New Members to its Teaching Faculty



*The newest members of the New England teaching faculty, Rodrigo Ribeiro, Meghan Duke ('08), and Joshua Lo ('12), make the Oath of Fidelity and Profession of Faith at Matriculation.*

#### Meghan Duke ('08)

When she graduated from Thomas Aquinas College, California, in 2008, Meghan Duke never imagined that she would one day join its teaching faculty, let alone at a new campus in New England. She never even expected to attend graduate school.

Miss Duke's journey to Northfield, Massachusetts, was providentially roundabout, beginning with her primary education in Wilmington, Delaware. "My parents were really good with all of their kids," she says. "They tried to make sure that each child had the education that was right for them." As a result, she tasted many flavors of study, from parochial Catholic schools and homeschooling to Waldorf education. Her parents kept their ears open for any new developments in higher — and especially Catholic — education.

"My dad heard about TAC when I was in high school, and he thought it would be a good fit for me," says Miss Duke.

Her father's hunch proved prescient. "I was always fine in school, but it was always because you're supposed to do fine in school," she recalls. "TAC was the first place where I was really invested in the questions we were asking."



*"An intentional part of the College's program is instilling confidence that reality is understandable."*

Upon graduating in 2008, Miss Duke set about pursuing a career as a writer and editor. "I worked for a small publishing house associated with the Intercollegiate Studies Institute," she says. "I then worked for *First Things* for three years as an editor." It was a fateful time. "I was interacting with the different disciplines, which are the primary sources for authors at *First Things*," she recalls. Revisiting

the Great Books as an editor sparked an interest in graduate school.

Following that interest led Miss Duke to the University of Notre Dame, where she earned a master's degree in theology. Believing her scholarly itch sufficiently scratched, she took a new position as a writer and research assistant for the president of The Catholic University of America — but the itch returned. "The president taught a class on the virtues for honor students at CUA. Helping him research, I realized I wanted to be doing the other part of his job — the teaching part," she laughs. "That's what finally pushed me back."

Now finishing her doctoral studies at CUA with a dissertation on St. Albert the Great's theology of the Beatific Vision, Miss Duke is thrilled to return to the College as a tutor — and in her native Northeast, no less. Having acquired some teaching experience during graduate school, she is especially excited to


employ the Discussion Method in the College's classrooms and with its students.

"Many students elsewhere have no confidence in their ability to discern meaning in a text, and sometimes even in reality," she says. "Reading the Blue Book when I was applying, I realized that an intentional part of the College's program is instilling confidence that reality is understandable, and giving students

the tools that make them deserve to be confident.”

This year, Miss Duke is working with the College’s ever-curious freshmen to discern meaning in Latin grammar, as well as with the sophomores to unpack poetry and history in seminar and the nature of the soul in the philosophy tutorial. ❖

## John Finley ('99)

 Returning to teach at Thomas Aquinas College, California, is a homecoming of sorts for Dr. John Finley ('99) — in more ways than one. Not only is he an alumnus of the College, he is also an alumnus of the faculty.

Dr. Finley is the oldest son of one of the College’s early tutors, Dr. Norman DeSilva ('75), who tragically died of a brain tumor in 1985. He was raised by his mother, Maureen (Barlow '76), and stepfather, Jim Finley ('76), in nearby Ojai. Upon graduating from high school in 1995, he enrolled at the College his parents had loved. And, after exploring other career paths in the years following



*“The students here come because they want to engage in the intellectual life.”*

his graduation, he came to realize that his abiding love for the intellectual life was too strong to play second fiddle to another profession.

Accordingly, Dr. Finley earned a master’s degree in philosophy from the University of Dallas in 2003 and completed his doctorate in 2006, shortly before his first return to the College as a tutor. He taught for six happy years on the California campus, during which time he also married his wife, Hilary, and welcomed the first of the couple’s three children. In 2012, however, he moved to St. Louis, looking to serve the Church by educating future priests at Kenrick-Glen-

non Seminary.


“St. Louis is one of the few major cities in the U.S. that’s Catholic in its history and heritage,” Dr. Finley observes. “The seminary was great. It was orthodox; they have a focus on Aquinas and a whole class devoted to natural philosophy — which was wonderful to teach, coming from here!” For 10 years, he led seminarians through the mysteries of philosophy, but as their young family grew, Dr. and Mrs. Finley found themselves growing homesick for the West Coast.

“We missed our families, especially in a place like St. Louis, where it’s so multi-generational if you’re a native,” Dr. Finley explains. So, in 2022, the family returned to Southern California, where Dr. Finley had been hired to provide continued education for the staff and faculty at the Valor Institute. Although delighted to be back in his home state, he quickly became aware of another longing. “I realized,” he says, “how much I missed being in the classroom.”

Now only three hours south of the College, rather than 2,000 miles east, Dr. Finley contacted his alma mater earlier this year and was grateful to receive an invitation to rejoin the teaching faculty. “From an outsider’s perspective, the seminary and TAC seem very similar: They are both Catholic and they are both small,” reflects Dr. Finley. “But it really is the case that the students here come because they want to engage in the intellectual life. In the seminary, your students are well intentioned, and they know that philosophy is important, but you still have got to get them interested in it.”

Teaching the Sophomore Mathematics and Junior Philosophy tutorials, as well as Sophomore Seminar, Dr. Finley has found abundant intellectual enthusiasm among his sections. “I had the opportunity to teach many of these texts during my time away from TAC,” he says with a smile. “To be able to come back and do those in a Socratic setting is a real joy.” ❖

## Sarah Kaiser ('02)

 Dr. Sarah Kaiser ('02) is among the first of Thomas Aquinas College’s second-generation tutors, joining her father, veteran tutor Dr. Thomas J. Kaiser ('75), on the College’s California faculty.

Indeed, the College runs in Dr. Kaiser’s family: Her parents graduated in the first class, and many aunts and uncles followed. Her father was hired as a tutor when she was two years old. When the occasion arose, it only made sense for her to attend herself.

But if Dr. Kaiser’s journey to TAC as a student was open and shut, her journey to the faculty was anything but. “When I was a student, one of my tutors, Dr. Glen Coughlin, said I should go on to graduate school and then come back and teach,” she laughs. “I thought, ‘That’s not going to happen!’ I didn’t like writing, and graduate school just means lots of papers.”

While discerning her next step after graduating in 2002, she worked as the College’s resident assistant. Eventually, however, her discernment led her to enter the Discalced Carmelites of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in Valparaiso, Nebraska, in 2004. She was there for three years, but health problems forced her back to Southern California in 2007.

“I was in contact with the nuns,” she says. “A full year after I left, the prioress said, ‘Why don’t you go back to school?’” Dr. Kaiser thus enrolled in Ave Maria University’s newly founded master’s in theology program and completed her degree in 2010. Although accepted into AMU’s doctoral program, she still heard God’s voice in her heart, and so she





*“A full year after I left, the prioress said, ‘Why don’t you go back to school?’”*

entered the Discalced Carmelites of Our Mother of Mercy in Alexandria, South Dakota. After four years, though, it was clear that the health problems that had plagued her during her first sojourn in the convent were far from resolved.

Leaving religious life for the last time in 2014, Dr. Kaiser was uncertain where to go next. She first came home to California to care for her elderly grandparents and eventually worked as the secretary to Dr. Michael F. McLean, then president of the College. Her former tutors were pleased to see her again — and immediately resumed their old refrain.

“Dr. Brian Kelly said, ‘I think you should go and get your Ph.D.,’” recalls Dr. Kaiser with a chuckle. “I told him, ‘No program is going to take me, I’ve been out of academia for years; you don’t just go and get your Ph.D.’” When he insisted, though,

she looked into returning to Ave Maria — and was in for a shock. “I got accepted right away with Dr. Kelly’s recommendation. I don’t know what he said!”

Finishing her coursework in 2021, Dr. Kaiser continued writing her dissertation while working on the California campus once more, plying her old job as a resident assistant. Upon successfully defending her dissertation earlier this year, she finally became a TAC tutor.

At the far end of her circuitous journey to the faculty of Thomas Aquinas College, Dr. Kaiser brings a considerable dose of circumspection to her Freshman Natural Science and Sophomore Theology tutorials. “I like that we are tutors and not professors, because that’s always been kind of intimidating to me,” she says. “I never feel like I know anything, but I don’t need to ‘profess’ to be a teacher.” ♦

## Joshua Lo (’12)



Growing up in Dallas and Houston, Texas, Joshua Lo (’12) nurtured dreams of becoming a concert cellist. Yet he reconsidered those dreams when he enrolled at Thomas Aquinas College in 2008. “I loved it,” he says. “I wanted to continue thinking about these matters for the rest of my life.”

The first matters that Mr. Lo thought about after graduating were the two subjects that gave him the most difficulty as a student. “Some of my weak points were languages and logic,” he says. “I worked hard to rectify those after TAC, which paved my graduate and postgraduate studies.”

After earning a master’s degree in philosophy at Boston College, he brushed up on his languages by serving as a teacher’s assistant at the Accademia Vivarium Novum, a Latin and Ancient Greek immersion program in Rome. And he is now in the process of completing his doctorate from Boston University as he finalizes his dissertation, “On Aristotle’s Inductive Syllogism in Prior Analytics II.23.”

Having thus rectified any lingering deficiencies in language and logic, Mr. Lo continued his New England academic journey by accepting a position as an instructor at the Thomas More College of the Liberal Arts (TMC) in 2019, the same year that Thomas Aquinas College opened the doors of its Northfield, Massachusetts, campus. With multiple friends on the College’s faculty, and with TMC only 90 minutes away, he paid several visits to TAC-New England over the years. When the opportunity arose to teach at his alma mater, he could not let it pass.

“I very much enjoyed working at Thomas More,” Mr. Lo explains, but he missed the College’s integrated curriculum, in which tutors teach across the disciplines, so as to help students better make the connections between them. “One of the things that drew me back to TAC was the opportunity to teach math



*New tutors John Finley (’99) and Sarah Kaiser (’02) make the Oath of Fidelity and Profession of Faith at California’s Matriculation ceremony.*



*“There’s a fresh zeal here, which I imagine was at the very founding of Thomas Aquinas College.”*

and the sciences again,” he adds. For his first year at the College, however, he is teaching Freshman Philosophy and Sophomore Language, delving into the two disciplines on which he focused as a graduate student. Relying on even further past expertise as a cellist, he is also teaching music to the juniors.

Taking a position at the College’s New England campus was both a relief — being able to continue his academic career without leaving a region that he has come to call home — as well as an opportunity, allowing him to contribute to a pioneering moment in the College’s history. “There’s a fresh zeal here, which I imagine was at the very founding of Thomas Aquinas College,” he says. “I am happy to be part of the new adventure here.”

In addition to this academic adventure, Mr. Lo has been living another adventure since the summer of 2022, when he married his wife, Jackie. With the newlyweds welcoming their first child earlier this year, they are overjoyed to join so many friends on the TAC faculty, many of whom are parents to young children of their own. ♦

## Rodrigo Ribeiro



“I first came across Thomas Aquinas College through its website many years ago,” says Rodrigo Ribeiro, a new member of the New England teaching faculty. “I thought about applying then to come as a student, but at that point I was halfway through law school — and in Brazil — so I ended up putting it aside.”

A few years later, Mr. Ribeiro’s life would change course. The young student had found a new fascination along-

side law: philosophy.

After earning a master’s degree at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Mr. Ribeiro emigrated to Houston, Texas, to pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of St. Thomas’s Center for Thomistic Studies in 2018. Searching for a roommate, he found a TAC alumnus who was also beginning his studies at the Center. The two hit it off. “The first night I had in Houston was marked by a pleasant dinner and hours of intelligent conversations with several other TAC graduates,” he recalls.

Over his years in Texas, Mr. Ribeiro befriended many more alumni from around the area. “I could not fail to be impressed



*“I would ask what had inspired them to pursue and live such a life, and they would constantly refer to their alma mater.”*

with their seriousness about the life of wisdom and the Catholic faith, different as their personalities were,” he says. “I would ask what had inspired them to pursue and live such a life, and they would constantly refer to their alma mater.”

Fascinated, Mr. Ribeiro picked up *A Proposal for the Fulfillment of Catholic Liberal Education*, the College’s founding and governing document, to better understand his friends’ background. “I became convinced of the wisdom and prudence put into the work done at the College,” he says. “I concluded that I would do well to model my studies after it.” Inspired, the graduate student

crafted and worked through a personal reading list alongside his formal studies — and, upon submitting his dissertation this past year, applied to teach at the College.

“I wish to pursue the active-contemplative life that St. Thomas calls the most perfect life, the life Our Lord lived — the life built on abundance of contemplation, and on the sharing of that contemplation with others through teaching,” Mr. Ribeiro reflects. “From the experience I have had, I cannot think of a better place to live such a life than at TAC.”

Having served for several years as an adjunct professor at the University of St. Thomas, Mr. Ribeiro will begin this new active-contemplative life by teaching some familiar texts in the Junior Philosophy tutorial, which is dedicated exclusively to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and the Junior Seminar. In keeping with the College’s expectation that tutors teach across all disciplines,

Mr. Ribeiro will also teach the Freshman Natural Science tutorial.

For the erstwhile law student-turned-philosopher, of course, a change of intellectual pace is no shock. “That all students at the College read and discuss the same works, and that all tutors are supposed to have a certain familiarity with the different parts of the curriculum, helps the College to have that unity of minds and hearts which seems so important to the fulfillment of its purpose,” he says. “I am looking forward to working in a place with such unity.” ♦



# “What I Did Over Summer Vacation”

## Students Share the Gift of their Education and Plan for their Futures

While students at Thomas Aquinas College finished exams and closed their books in May, they did not close their minds and hearts. Over the summer months, they found numerous ways to invest their God-given talents, stay intellectually sharp, and prepare for their futures after graduation.

### Cami Tuffile (NE'24)

“After a few summers of working in foodservice and childcare, I was looking for a more management-focused, professional job,” says Cami



Tuffile (NE'24). She found exactly that through BJ's Wholesale Club Management and Development Program. “It was a 12-week intern program, with positions in the

main office and in various clubs and distribution centers around the East Coast,” she says. “My days consisted in learning management skills from my supervisor, the club manager, attending lectures to learn about the different aspects of the company, and working with the other department managers in my club to help propose new ideas.”

Some of those new ideas included suggestions for increasing company efficiency, which Cami pitched to company executives near the end of the summer. “The presentation was well received, and I had multiple high executives approach me afterward with further questions.” While warehouse management seems a far cry from liberal education, the two demand overlapping skillsets. “I came back to TAC with a new appreciation for looking at all the angles of any problem I encounter, whether in natural science or class-event preparation!” ♦

### Trinity Chester (CA'25)

Trinity Chester (CA'25) participated in Stand Together, a program run by the Charles Koch Foundation which offers professional development and placement in partner organizations. Through Stand Together, she interned at Atlas Network, a Washington-based organization “that provides training and grants for classically liberal think tanks around the world,” she says. “I helped them create online courses and prepped for training they were conducting in South Africa and Malaysia.”



Though a solitary liberal arts student in a swarm of political science majors, Trinity was a credit to her classical formation: “Communication with my team was a lot

## Pilgrimage to Lisbon and Rome



“Last summer, I asked Our Lady for a special grace, but I wasn't very specific,” recalls Monica Weinkopf. “One day, I got out of Mass, and my dad handed me a flyer for World Youth Day in Lisbon. As soon as he put it in my hands, I thought, ‘This is what I'm supposed to do!’”

She shared the idea with her friends, who were thrilled at the prospect. In all, eight fellow rising juniors from the California campus would make the weeklong trip to Lisbon, followed by four days in Rome: Madryne Alario, Carrie Armstrong, Eli

Hunt, Patrick Murphy, Julia Nicely, Patrick Salinas, Josiah Savannah, and Katelyn Woods. “As a recent convert, I've had a hard time realizing just how large the Catholic Church is,” reflects Eli. “I wanted to find out.” And find out they did.

“We went to Mass in something like 10 languages over the course of the trip,” says Monica. “It was beautiful to walk down the street and hear Polish people singing in the streets and French people singing in restaurants — we even walked into a Panamanian music festival one day!” ♦

easier because of what I have learned here,” she reports. The rising junior found herself growing evermore excited to return to school during her months at Atlas Network. “Atlas Network presents philosophy on the assumption that modern audiences have no background in it, so a lot is presented without argument,” Trinity explains. “Coming back to my classes, I appreciate their nuance a lot more.” ❖

## Pedro da Silva (NE’25)

Over the course of two weeks in Rome, Pedro da Silva (NE’25) attended a conference sponsored by In Altum, an organization based in Washington, D.C., which, says Pedro, “connects and prepares leaders within the Church.” Visiting Rome was a reward in and of itself. “My top three beautiful moments were going to the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major during the Feast of the Dedi-



*“Intellectually, it gave me a lot of energy before classes started. It made me desire to go back to school!”*

cation, going to Mass at Santa Maria Sopra Minerva on the Feast of Saint Dominic, and finding the original Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help,” he says.

The conference was more, however, than a chance to visit the Eternal City: Attendees also explored the writings of the philosophers and statesmen who shaped the course of Christendom over the centuries. “Intellectually, it gave me a lot of energy before classes started. It made me desire to go back to school,” Pedro remarks. “They teach via lectures, so I definitely missed the talking part!” ❖

## David Ivory (CA’24)

At the College’s Career Day last February, David Ivory (CA’24) applied, on a lark, for an internship at Virtual Service Organization (VSO), which provides cloud-based technological assistance to institutions of all sizes. “I thought, what could it hurt?” he laughs. But to his pleasant surprise, he got the job, which filled his summer. “I worked on the product-development team,” David explains. “We ingested, normalized, transformed, and exported customer data, and produced a report that could save one company upward of millions of dollars.”



Despite having no background in coding, David relied on his years of discussing the Great Books to exceed his supervisors’ expectations. “Within two weeks, they said I had learned more than they thought I would in the entire two months — and within four weeks of working there, they offered to extend my position year-round,” he recalls. David hopes to continue with VSO after graduating next May. ❖

## Agustina O’Reilly (CA’26)

Agustina O’Reilly (CA’26) interned at the Institute for Women’s Health (IWH), a non-denominational Christian organization dedicated to pro-life advocacy across the globe. Among other activities, the IWH “reaches out to different countries’ embassies in D.C. to help their governments enhance their way of helping women,” says Agustina. Her duties as an intern were sundry, ranging from data entry to graphic design for promotional materials — and beyond. “It was fun to be a kind of wild card,” she laughs. “Because I know Spanish, they even asked me to interpret meetings between ministries in Guatemala and am-



*“The brotherhood and the spiritual and physical formation made it the best summer I’ve ever had.”*

bassadors from Washington D.C.”

Whether her tasks were dramatic or mundane, Agustina undertook them with distinctive panache. “My superiors were impressed by my way of participating and my clear communication, and I always said it was TAC that was teaching me to do that,” she says. “It was gratifying to see that what I’m doing here truly works!” ❖

## Jonathan Steineke (CA’24)

Jonathan Steineke (CA’24) spent three weeks at Schloss Wissen Castle in Germany, participating in the Catholic Worldview Fellowship. “Half the time we were in old cathedrals and historical sites, and the other half we were in the classroom studying theology, Church history, and a bit of ethics,” he says.



Fellows studied theology, experienced central Germany’s tangible Christian cul-





## New Mexico Shrine Builders

Following in the footsteps of many fellow students over the last few years, Isaias Boucher (CA'26), Patrick Daly (CA'26), Alex-ie Forrester (NE'26), Peter Kuebler (CA'26), and Jack Milligan (NE'26) volunteered their labor at the St. Kateri Rosary Walk and Shrine in Gallup, New Mexico. "They finished most of the *nichos* along the Rosary Walk last summer," says Isaias. "This summer we got a good start on the central plaza, where each of the mysteries generate from, but it still needs to be finished."

Building the shrine, however, was only one side of their summer. Between a common life of prayer and weekend trips that included hiking in Durango and busking in Santa Fe, the laborers developed a fraternal connection stronger than the bond formed by toiling together under the sun. "The brotherhood and the spiritual and physical formation made it the best summer I've ever had," says Peter. Adds Patrick, "It was amazing to have a really busy schedule, but still find time to think about God and to pray." ♦

ture, and shared a common life of prayer, which opened Jonathan's eyes not only to the broad history of the Church, but to the breadth of Catholic spiritual, cultural, and intellectual life available even today. "The Catholic Worldview Fellowship helped me see the whole human being as one," he says. "This life is not a purely intellectual life. The intellect can't flourish if the other parts of you aren't flourishing." ♦

### Thomas Rust (NE'24)

Jonathan was not the only student theologizing between the Danube and the Rhine this summer. Already in Vienna for a



wedding, Thomas Rust (NE'24) visited the International Theological Institute (ITI) in Trumau, Austria, where he plans to pursue a master's degree next fall. "The culture of TAC has helped me grow in my faith over the past few years, which has led me to

want to learn more and more about God," he says. "I love the theology classes here at TAC, and I want more."

An added attraction of the ITI was, of course, its idyllic location at the edge of the Alpine foothills. "It was incredible to be

*"The culture of TAC has helped me grow in my faith over the past few years, which has led me to want to learn more and more about God."*

in Europe for the first time," Thomas says. "Most striking was the amount of architectural beauty and history that surrounds you almost all the time." His trip to Austria did more than reassure him about his future: It charged him with a desire to make the most of his final year of studies at the College: "The trip was an incredible experience that gave me a deeper appreciation of beauty." ♦

### Elizabeth Langley (NE'24)

Along with recent graduate Maggie Huckins (NE'23), Elizabeth Langley (NE'24) walked the Camino de Santiago — though it happened almost by accident. "We wanted to visit some convents in Spain, but that trip fell through," says Elizabeth. "So Maggie said, 'Why don't we just do the Camino?'"

The idea caught their fancy. "You read about pilgrimages, but you never do them, so we thought we might as well!" Over 10 days and across nearly 80 miles of the Spanish countryside, the pair became genuine *peregrinos*: They slept in hostels, shared pasta and spiritual insights with strangers,



and got used to blisters on their feet. The spiritual lessons were not lost on Elizabeth.

“When you’re on pilgrimage, if something happens that’s out of the ordinary, you think, ‘Of course that would happen,’” she laughs. “But our whole life is a pilgrimage. The Camino taught me to place more trust in God taking me through each step.” ❖

### Daniel Fiallo (CA’27)

In his last summer before becoming a college student, Daniel Fiallo (CA’27) volunteered at Schott Communities, a care center for the mentally handicapped run by the Archdiocese of Miami. “It was always

about spending time with the people there,” says Daniel. “I would play catch or basketball with them, or I would help them with arts and crafts projects.” In addition to being a daily companion, he also helped mentally handicapped adults master skills that would enable them to work simple, dignified jobs.

Now a freshman, Daniel can detect unexpected echoes from this experience in his classroom discussions. “When I was



working at Schott Communities, I had to put myself in the shoes of the people we were helping and figure out what they were trying, and able, to communicate,” he says. “That’s similar to what happens in the Discussion Method, though obviously on a different level: You have to figure out what the other person is saying — and not just stick with your own thoughts.” ❖

### Jacquelyn Ogden (CA’25)

Working as a kitchen manager at Camp Pendola, a Catholic summer camp in the picturesque Sierra Nevada Foot-hills of northern



California, was a homecoming of sorts for Jacquelyn Ogden (CA’25). “I grew up going to Camp Pendola as a kid,” she says. She returned to work as a counselor in the summer of 2022, during which her work-study experience came in handy. “There was a kitchen-managing need, and because I had experience working in an industrial kitchen at the College, the camp thought I knew enough to do the job.”

*“I saw my education paying off, because I was in charge of people below me and I had to communicate with them, manage my time, and take responsibility.”*

Though apprehensive, Jacquelyn proved more than up to the task, such that camp officials invited her to return this summer to serve full-time as the kitchen manager. Much to her surprise, she found her liberal arts background popping up in strange places. “I saw my education paying off,” she says, “because I was in charge of people below me and I had to communicate with them, manage my time, and take responsibility for things even without getting directions on how to do those things.” ❖


## Alpine Pilgrimage



Four friends from the California campus — Andrea DiTrollo (CA’25), Patricia Doyle (CA’25), Evelyn Murray (CA’24), and Peter Vigil (CA’25) — joined tutors Dr. Marco Emerson and Dr. Scott Strader on a 10-day pilgrimage that took them first to France, then to Switzerland and over the Swiss Alps into Italy. “The Alps were amazing,” recalls Patricia. “As we were hiking, my internal monologue stopped. The only thing going through my head was prayer. You’re not able to think about anything else.”

Echoing the experiences of Christian pilgrims for 2,000 years, the hikers gleaned spiritual lessons from their very tangible journey. “I got sick on our 10-day hike into the mountains, but I got to see the Alps and jump in a freezing-cold lake,” laughs Andrea. “There will always be things that make you want to lie in bed and not do anything, but at the end of the day, putting in the effort is worth it.” ❖





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## A New Dean and First Associate Dean in California ... and Assistant Dean in New England

College Welcomes Tutors Letteney, Baer, and Shivone

Over the summer, Dr. Michael J. Letteney succeeded Dr. John J. Goyette as dean of Thomas Aquinas College, California, granting Dr. Goyette a well-deserved reprieve after six highly eventful years of service.

Although Dr. Goyette was forced to spend much of his term steering the

the tools they need, from Matriculation to Commencement,” he says.

Given the breadth of those responsibilities, the College has instituted a new position, the associate dean for academic affairs, now held by J. John Baer. “The dean’s position had grown over the years,” Mr. Baer explains. “It was re-

Board of Governors and report to Dr. Paul J. O’Reilly, president of the College, on academic matters. He will also consult with Dr. Travis Cooper, the assistant dean for student affairs, on matters related to campus life. As associate dean, meanwhile, Mr. Baer will tackle more concrete administrative matters, including oversight of the bookstore and library, as well as the career and counseling office.

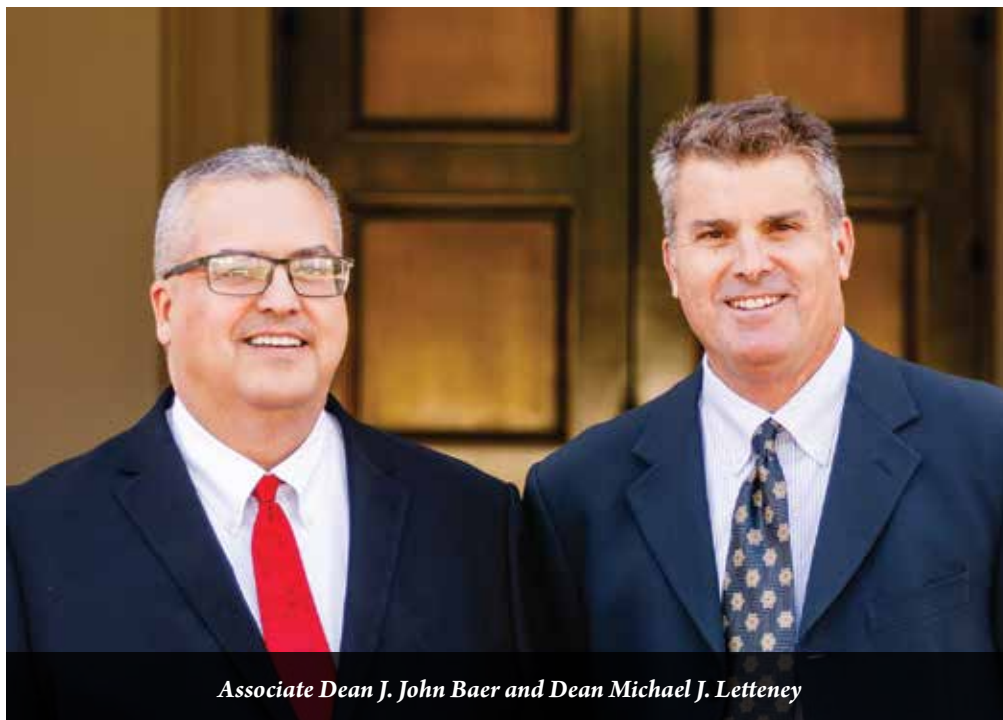
The distinction between their roles, however, will not preclude the dean and associate dean from working in tandem on numerous issues. Says Mr. Baer, “It’s a cooperative venture.”

### New England

Having completed his four-year term as the first assistant dean of Thomas Aquinas College, New England — an enormous task during the establishment of the new campus — Dr. Patrick Gardner gratefully returns this year to fulltime teaching. Assuming his responsibilities as assistant dean is Dr. Stephen F. Shivone, who joined the California teaching faculty in 2017 before heading east in 2019.

Both the dean and assistant dean look after the welfare of the College, but the latter does so “by focusing on the direction of student life and formation of student culture,” explains Dr. Shivone. Because the assistant dean discusses the College’s rules of residence every year at freshman orientation, students sometimes identify this “formation” with mere rule enforcement. The reality, of course, is far more nuanced.

“My role is to ensure that the students are doing well here and living



Associate Dean J. John Baer and Dean Michael J. Letteney

*“The dean’s position had grown over the years. It was really more than we wanted to put on the shoulders of one person.”*

College through natural disaster, the acquisition of the New England campus, and a global pandemic, Dr. Letteney points out the dean’s principal function is and remains academic. “It’s my job to ensure that the program is being executed well, that students are recruited to fill the classrooms, and that they are given

ally more than we wanted to put on the shoulders of one person, considering that we want the dean to still be a tutor in the classroom and have a family life.”

Thanks to this “divide and conquer” strategy, both men can carry out their new responsibilities while continuing to teach. As dean, Dr. Letteney will join the



*“My role is to ensure that the students are doing well here and living lives that are conducive to the pursuit of wisdom.”*

lives that are conducive to the pursuit of wisdom,” says Dr. Shivone. To that end, he works closely with the chaplains to ensure that students’ spiritual needs are met and regularly consults with the residential directors and student prefects to gauge campus morale. In these and countless other ways, he acts as the custodian of a Catholic and intellectual campus culture.

Dr. Shivone sees his disciplinary role only within this wider, custodial context. “The rules are like guardian angels: They ‘light and guard and rule and guide,’” he says. “I don’t think that, left to themselves, most people would be able to live this sort of life without the



direction and guidance of rules.” Even so, he adds, enforcing such rules requires prudence: “You have to be wary of legalism and of treating students as if they are younger than they are, not capable of making their own good judgments.”

This new administrative role is not a first for Dr. Shivone, who previously served as the assistant dean for academic affairs at Belmont Abbey College

in North Carolina. Experience notwithstanding, his new position will nonetheless have its challenges. Fortunately for this father of five, there are resonances aplenty between his duties as assistant dean and those he fulfills every day at home. From enforcing rules to the humbler task of approving campus movie nights, says Dr. Shivone, “it’s like the assistant dean becomes the dad of the campus.” ♦

## New Director of Alumni and Parent Relations

To help deepen relationships within the broader TAC community, the College has hired Nathanael Cassidy ('22) as its new director of alumni and parent relations.

“Nathanael is a bright, affable, and enthusiastic champion of his alma mater,” says Vice President for Advancement James C. Link. “We are confident that he will do a great job of keeping both alumni and parents of students, past and present, engaged in the life of the College.”

A native of the United Kingdom, Mr. Cassidy came to the California campus as a freshman in 2018, then headed east to help settle the Massachusetts campus when it opened its doors in 2019. In 2022 he was among the 32 first graduates of Thomas Aquinas College, New England.

*“I am thrilled to get to give back to the school that has given me so much.”*

Following his graduation, Mr. Cassidy worked for AmPhil, a consulting firm that assists nonprofit organizations across the U.S. As an analyst, he handled client communications, project management, and a variety of writing and research projects

that have prepared him well to become the College’s liaison to its parents and alumni.

During that time, he also kept busy in his personal life. In the summer of 2022, Mr. Cassidy returned to California to marry classmate Simone (Kelly '22) in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. The newlyweds then spent the next few months lovingly caring for Dr.

Nancy Anne Faller, the New England campus nurse, who died of cancer last fall. This summer they welcomed the arrival of their first child, daughter Primrose Anne Mary Helena.

“I am deeply grateful to Thomas Aquinas College for giving me not only a fabulous education, but also many of my dearest friends, including my lovely wife and, now, our family,” says Mr. Cassidy. “I am thrilled to get to give back to the school that has given me so much, and I look forward to working closely with TAC parents and my fellow alumni.”

The Cassidys live on the New England campus, where they are actively involved in the life of the community. “No matter the coast,” says Mr. Cassidy, “TAC is home to us.” ♦



*Nathanael Cassidy ('22)*

## Faith in Action

### News from TAC's Alumni Blog

#### Dr. Kyle Washut ('07) Named WCC President

After 16 years of service to Wyoming Catholic College, Dr. Kyle Washut ('07) has been appointed the school's fourth president, assuming leadership of an institution which shares a deep spiritual kinship with his alma mater.

This kinship began, Dr. Washut observes, as a friendship between Dr. Ronald McArthur, founding president of Thomas Aquinas College, and Dr. John Senior, co-founder of the late Integrated Humanities Program (IHP) at the University of Kansas. "One day, early during my time as a student at Thomas Aquinas College, I was dining at [tutor] Dr. John Nieto's house," recalls Dr. Washut. "Naturally, my car — with its distinctive Wyoming license plates — was parked out front. At one point during the evening, Dr. McArthur burst into the room, calling out in his booming voice, 'Who's the guy from Wyoming?' He proceeded to buttonhole me, regaling me with stories of his time in Wyoming and of his friendship with Dr. Senior."

As the Most Rev. James D. Conley, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, noted in his 2023 Commencement Address on the College's California campus, Dr. McArthur and Dr. Senior were "fellow co-conspirators ... engaged in a bold project that would have a lasting impact on the renewal of the liberal arts in the West." The College and the IHP were among the first generation of institutions to realize that project — and Wyoming Catholic, established in 2005, is foremost among the next.

Dr. Washut has watched this project unfold from many vantages at Wyoming Catholic, where, excepting a break to earn a doctoral degree, he has served in numerous capacities since 2007. Through it all, he has remained faithful to the essential wisdom at the heart of the two friends' "conspiracy."

"As the new president of Wyoming Catholic, I have been formed both by the thought of Dr. Senior (as communicated by my teacher and mentor, Dr. Robert Carlson, who studied under Senior himself at the IHP) and that of Dr. McArthur (passed on

*"This twofold formation has profoundly shaped me as an educator and as a man, and has prepared me, I believe, to guide this unique college into the future."*



to me during my time as a student at Thomas Aquinas College)," says Dr. Washut. "This twofold formation has profoundly shaped me as an educator and as a man, and has prepared me, I believe, to guide this unique college into the future — a future informed by the intellectual richness and spiritual boldness each of these great men had to offer."

Having been appointed to his new position on August 7, Dr. Washut formally took the helm as Wyoming Catholic College's president at its matriculation ceremony on August 20, with a formal inauguration to be held later in the year.

"I am pleased to extend my warm congratulations to Dr. Washut, his family, and the whole Wyoming Catholic College community," says Dr. Paul O'Reilly, president of Thomas Aquinas College. "Just as Dr. McArthur and Dr. Senior's friendship deepened through their years spent in the common project of revitalizing Catholic liberal education, I hope and pray that our two schools may grow closer as we continue the project they started." ❖

#### Alumnae Nuns Recall Sr. Wilhelmina

Long before the world knew Sr. Wilhelmina Lancaster, O.S.B., for the extraordinary preservation of her body in the grave, two alumnae of Thomas Aquinas College were among those who knew the nun for her decades of devotion to religious life.

Sr. Mary Josefa (Kathleen '07) Holcomb, O.S.B., overlapped with Sr. Wilhelmina at the Abbey of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles, for nine years, and Sr. Sophia of the Holy Eucharist (Gina Marie '08) Eid, O.S.B., for seven-and-a-half. Both helped to care for the elderly nun over the years. "As time went by, she had withdrawn a little from the normal flow of community life," says Sr. Sophia. "But that allowed some private time for the novice helpers. There was this one-on-one with her that was very edifying. It was beautiful to hear her talk about the things always on her mind — Our Lord and Our Lady, the things that we needed to pray for in the world."

As young nuns, Sr. Sophia and Sr. Mary Josefa were espe-



cially impressed by Sr. Wilhelmina's nearly 80 years of exemplary Benedictine life. "It was an important part of our formation to see religious life lived so long and so fully," says Sr. Mary Josefa. "To see that example of fidelity to the very end was a huge grace."

Sr. Wilhelmina's fidelity through the years was especially remarkable since much of that time coincided with a period of turmoil in the Church. As numerous religious congregations relaxed the traditional demands of their vows, such as wearing a habit, Sr. Wilhelmina remained steadfast — a trait that ultimately led her to found the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles. When she died in 2019, she was laid to rest in her habit — which, as the sisters discovered earlier this year, seemed to have a mysterious steadfastness of its own.

"When Mother Abbess decided to complete the St. Joseph's altar and to have Sister's relics placed in the altar — as it's customary for a Benedictine monastery to have their founder's relics in the abbey church — she had a rotating crew of sisters



*Sr. Wilhelmina  
Lancaster, O.S.B.*

*"It was an important part of our formation to see religious life lived so long and so fully."*

digging up the grave," said Sr. Mary Josefa. "When they found the coffin and got the lid off, they saw that not only her whole body was in a remarkable state of preservation, but even her religious habit. We didn't know what to expect, but we certainly weren't expecting that!"

The state of Sr. Wilhelmina's body made headlines in May, which brought numerous pilgrims to the congregation's mother-



*Sr. Mary Josefa (Kathleen '07) Holcomb, O.S.B.,  
and Sr. Sophia of the Holy Eucharist  
(Gina Marie '08) Eid, O.S.B.*

house in Gower, Missouri. "There were a lot of people going on pilgrimage — hundreds, maybe even thousands," says Sr. Sophia. While the sisters themselves await a proper investigation by Church authorities, they cannot help but see God's hand in the discovery. "It was an assurance for us that Sister's humble life was precious in God's eyes, and that He preserved her in some way for us to see," says Sr. Mary Josefa. "It was significant that He preserved her habit, because

she suffered so much to keep it. To see the habit intact really spoke to us — a sign of God's fidelity in reward for Sister's fidelity." ❖

## Alumnus Finishes Tenth 100-Mile Endurance Race

In early June, Joseph Seeley ('94) completed the San Diego 100, an endurance trail run in Lake Cuyamaca, clocking in at just under 31 hours — marking his tenth 100-miler in 10 years. The achievement is all the more impressive since he is a relative latecomer to following the footsteps of Pheidippides.

"I got into the software industry back when the dotcom era was just taking off," recalls Mr. Seeley, the owner of Seeley Solutions, LLC, who previously worked for eight years as an enterprise solutions architect at Amazon Web Services. Between the stresses of his job and raising a young family, his health gradually declined. "I got up to about 230 pounds," he remembers grimly.

Things changed when his boss began inviting him on a lunch-hour run. "I finally took him up on it, and we did a two-mile run on the beach — and after a mile he dusted me," Mr. Seeley remembers. "It was humiliating!" But it was also the motivation he needed. "When something like that happens, we either tend to give up and say, 'No, this isn't for me,' or 'OK, I've got to figure this out.' I decided to double down and figure it out."

Through aggressive practice over six months, Mr. Seeley gradually moved from lagging behind fellow runners to keeping up with them. "I realized that I may not have been the fastest person, but I could hang with them for whatever distance," he says. But redeeming his earlier humiliation was far from his only motive. "Running had a lot of positive effects. I didn't do it for weight loss, but I noticed it helped!"

What began as a hobby grew into a habit. Mr. Seeley eventually competed in half and full marathons across Southern California. For the ambitious runner, however, even that was not enough. "Another buddy at work said, 'We always get out of shape in the summer, because spring and winter are the running seasons,'" he remembers. The two friends decided to challenge themselves by signing up for a nearby 50k trail run.

And a challenge it was. "It was in August, and it was hot," laughs Mr. Seeley. "We didn't have the right shoes or the right equipment and totally got thrashed. For that run, you wanted to pull in at four or five hours, but we barely got in at eight!" As before, the humiliation forced him to challenge himself still further. "I doubled down and started trail running from there on."

As it happens, trail running became a favorite outlet, for numerous reasons. "Instead of being with a lot of people, on the trail, you spend a lot of time by yourself in God's creation," he says. "It's reflective and meditative." For an endurance runner like Mr. Seeley, the longer distances also made him more competitive. "Not as many people can hang," he explains. "If I do a 50k, I'm all right; but if I do a 100-miler, all of a sudden



I'm in the front of the middle pack!"

Even more importantly, the vast distances allowed Mr. Seeley more fully to involve his wife, Monica (Heithaus '96), and six children in his hobby. "They

allow you to have a pacer to run with you in the second half of a race like a 100-miler, when you get tired and fuzzy-headed. The pacer can't help you, but can go in front and lead you, so you can go on autopilot for 10 to 20 miles," he says. "I've had all my kids come out and pace me through certain segments. It's really a beautiful thing."

Mr. Seeley's tenth 100-miler adds to his record of nearly 30 marathons, not to mention other races: no mean feat for a man who took up running at the age of 30. "Aristotle says virtue is in the mean, and that's true," he laughs. "But some of us don't understand what the middle is!" He plans to keep looking — and running— until he finds it. ♦

## Naval Physician: Dr. Dave Langley ('15)

**D**ave Langley ('15) is on the last leg of the long journey to become a physician. Three years after graduating from Thomas Aquinas College in 2015, he entered medical school on a Naval commission at Rocky Vista University in Denver, Colorado. He graduated in 2022 and is now working through his residency requirements at Florida State University in Sarasota.

His TAC grounding in philosophy, he says, provides an essential check against temptations to overconfidence. "I've realized more and more that there's a hierarchy in the sciences," he notes. "We need to have a good understanding of where medicine falls in the arts and sciences; there's a lot of uncertainty in



*"We need to have a good understanding of where medicine falls in the arts and sciences."*

it. In short, humans are fearfully and wonderfully made. There's an order in nature, and looking for that order, while understanding your limitations, is not only good for the patient, but helpful for a doctor on a psychological level."

But the College's influence has been practical as well as

speculative. Dr. Langley's experience with the Discussion Method "is helpful when I'm speaking to other doctors," he observes. He and professional peers must often collaborate to analyze a patient's particular situation, a process which can sometimes echo classroom discussions about this or that point in a difficult text. "I may call the intensivist — the critical care doctor — and make an argument to him for why a patient should be in the ICU, as opposed to just going to a medical floor," he explains. Thanks to his background, Dr. Langley feels more at ease in such scenarios. "In fact, I look forward to them!" ♦

## Solemn Profession

**O**n June 24, after nearly seven years of formation, Frater Moses Pavel Luke Blain, O.Praem. ('14), made his solemn profession as a member of the Norbertine Order, vowing to persevere forever in the pursuit of poverty, chastity, and obedience at St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California.

In that perseverance, Frater Moses will rely on God's grace, particularly through the companionship of his new Norbertine family, many of whom share his roots at Thomas Aquinas College. He will also have the constant prayers and support of his natural family, who joyfully witnessed his profession.

As the culminating moment in religious discernment, Frater Moses's ceremony was not unlike a wedding, "because it has a sense of finality that even becoming a priest or deacon doesn't have," remarked his sister Pauline Blain ('23). But, she noted, the parallels to marriage did not stop there. "Watching his face, I could tell that he was so in love, so happy to be giving his life to God."

*"Watching his face, I could tell that he was so in love, so happy to be giving his life to God."*



The canon's profession made a comparable impression on his many friends, among them Carter Farrier ('14), who said, "It was an inestimable joy to watch our friend and classmate enter a monastic community which has remained steadfast in its adherence to the modern magisterium."

But solemn profession was only one of the milestones which Frater Moses passed in June. Less than a week later, he was ordained to the transitional diaconate at the hands of the Most Rev. Timothy E. Freyer, Auxiliary Bishop of Orange, California bringing him one step closer to the priesthood. ♦



## Latest Works from Alumni Authors

### Scholars Pen Works on Mathematics, Philosophy

#### Dr. Jean Rioux ('82)

Students at Thomas Aquinas College study the basics of metaphysics and a great deal of mathematics — and some continue pondering both long after they graduate. One such graduate is Dr. Jean Rioux ('82), whose research at the intersection of the two disciplines has led to his new book, *Thomas Aquinas's Mathematical Realism*, which examines math in light of Thomistic metaphysics.



"I became interested in the philosophy of mathematics my senior year at TAC," recalls Dr. Rioux, chair of the Philosophy Department at Benedictine College. "We were reading some of the modern mathematicians whose ways of conceiving quantity, as well as what mathematics really was, intrigued me." Those conceptions diverged considerably from those of the founders of Western mathematics, and he began to wonder what had caused the divergence.

Dr. Rioux's wonder persisted into his graduate studies at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, where his dissertation director was well versed in the 'analytic' tradition of philosophy, which led the modern departure from ancient mathematics. At his advisor's suggestion, the budding scholar unearthed the roots of this departure and its gradual descent into skepticism. "You had people encountering unsolvable problems, trying to explain whether mathematics has a solid foundation and talking about a 'crisis in foundations,'" says Dr. Rioux. "Once I started looking into it, I thought, 'The moderns aren't doing too good a job of this, even by their own admission!'"

The debate has far more than academic implications. "Pope St. John Paul II was concerned about the place of reason in modern thought because we have lost confidence in the capacity of reason to find any kind of certitude," he says. Fired by the Holy Father's concerns, Dr. Rioux realized that a fresh assessment of mathematics was in order.

"I have colleagues in the math department who are heartbroken over students who see math as merely a tool," laments Dr. Rioux. "They have a sense that mathematics is good to know for its own sake, but their training has been so focused on the practical that they don't make the distinction anymore. They don't ask those deeper questions: Are we constructing something that follows rules which we have also given it, or are these things abstracted from the physical world?"

Dr. Rioux concurs with Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas that mathematics offers a road to a wider and deeper wisdom which penetrates the nature of things and leads first to philosophical, and ultimately to theological, contemplation. Those interested in following that road — or in debating whether that road leads to that destination at all — should pick up *Thomas Aquinas's Mathematical Realism*. ♦

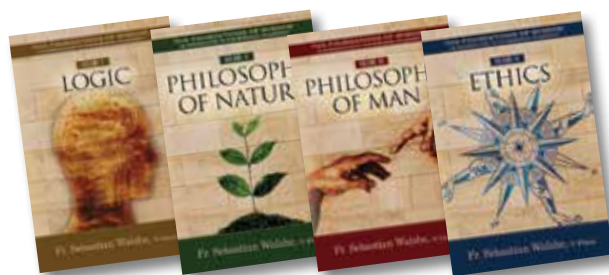
#### Rev. Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem. ('94)

The extensive oeuvre of Rev. Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem. ('94), continues to expand. While the Norbertine priest and professor of philosophy's most recent books have been devotional, his new series from TAN Books, *The Foundations of Wisdom*, is a comprehensive introduction to philosophy. Over three volumes, with at least one more forthcoming, the series introduces adolescent readers to the perennial philosophy propounded by Plato and Aristotle and brought to rare perfection by St. Thomas Aquinas.

In *Logic*, Fr. Sebastian examines "the foundational principles of rational thinking so as to give [readers] the formation to discover the truth and defend against error." The next volume, *Philosophy of Nature*, helps the reader "understand how to view the material universe that surrounds him and to see the order that God has instilled in it." Then in *Philosophy of Man*, Fr. Sebastian integrates the preceding lessons to discuss the human soul, because "knowing the truth of what the soul is and what that means for us will enable us to live as ones truly free."

And how does the truly free man spend his life? Fr. Sebastian considers that question in the last volume of the series, *Ethics*.

As a systematic whole, *The Foundations of Wisdom* is a lucid exposition of Catholic philosophy. It will be indispensable both for students and teachers, as well as for general readers who seek to understand themselves and their place in the world by natural reason according to the mind of the Church. ♦



## IN MEMORIAM

**Eva Clark**

June 23

*Legacy Society member*

**Mary Agnes Moriarty**

June 24

*Mother of Rev. Mark Moriarty ('95)*

**Shirley Dillon**

July 12

*Mother of late president Dr. Thomas E. Dillon; grandmother of Tom ('91), Maria ('97), and Christine (Ellis '99); great-grandmother of Cecilia (Shrader '15), Maggie (Goyette '21), Andrew Ellis ('22), Sean ('23), and Frances ('26)*

**Anna Quinan**

July 20

*Grandmother of Daniel ('10) and Abby (Morath '14)*

**The Hon. James L. Buckley**

August 18

*Benefactor*

**Rebecca Marti**

August 28

*Mother of Joe ('98)*

**Alan Franklin Tucker**

August 29

*Uncle of Megan ('02) and Andrew Baird ('04)*

**Joel Laubacher**

September 5

*Husband of Agnes (Zepeda '82); father of Charles ('17)*

**Terese Ann Dufresne**

September 10

*Grandmother of Sarah ('14), Michael ('19), and Aaron ('22)*

**Dr. John J. Damiani**

September 18

*Father of John ('84)*

**Rick Peters**

October 1

*Father of Jonathan ('00)*

**Rev. Joseph Vincent Fitzpatrick**

October 3

*Friend*

**Charles Norman**

October 3

*Benefactor*



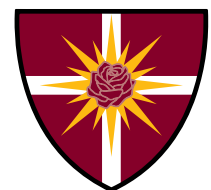
*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.*

## Because the future needs the wisdom of the past ...



Please contact Paul Blewett, Director of Gift Planning  
[pblewett@thomasaquinas.edu](mailto:pblewett@thomasaquinas.edu) | 805-421-5924

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the future  
with a  
legacy gift  
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The St. Thérèse of Lisieux  
Legacy Society

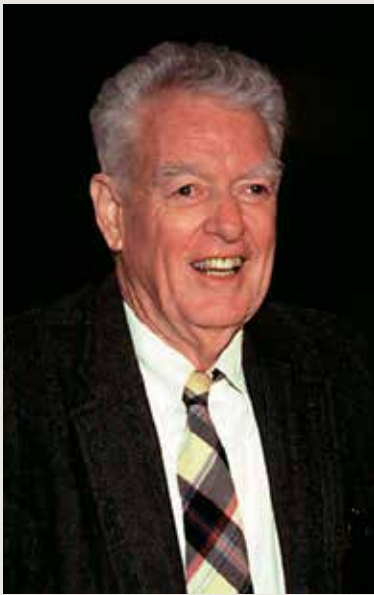


# “A Man Born to Lead”

Remembering Dr. Ronald P. McArthur, 1924 – 2013

By Anne S. Forsyth ('81)

*His unrivaled charm, as that of every really eloquent man, lies in his singleness of purpose, his fixed grasp of his aim, his noble earnestness.*



Thus does Cardinal Newman speak of St. John Chrysostom, the “Golden-mouthed” Father of the Church. But his words are also an apt description of Thomas Aquinas College’s founding president, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of whose death the College marked on October 17, 2023. A towering figure of a man, Dr. Ronald P. McArthur did indeed possess the kind of charm of which St. John Cardinal Newman spoke.

Larger than life, with a booming voice and a tremendous sense of humor, Ron McArthur was completely engaging. He was a man born to lead — and lead he did. By the sheer force of his intellect and personality, and an unrivaled ability to articulate the nature and mission of Thomas Aquinas College, he gathered together a small band of tutors, students, governors, and benefactors to do the impossible. In the words accompanying the Salvatori Award, which he received from the Heritage Foundation in 1991, he accomplished “the herculean task of founding a new private college in 1971, dedicated to the highest standards of teaching and leadership.”

Yet he would be the first to say that there were others who were indispensable to the effort: Mark Berquist, with the scope of his mind and his wisdom in ordering the College’s curriculum; Jack Neumayr, with his knowledge and love of St. Thomas and the conviction that a fruitful study of his works required a good grasp of Aristotle’s philosophic works; and Peter DeLuca, the only founder with practical business experience. With their help, Dr. McArthur brought Thomas Aquinas College to life and then sustained the young community for 20 years, guiding it with prudence and an unflinching conviction in the excellence of our academic program and the goodness of the moral and spiritual life it cultivated in our students.

## Rallying the Troops

Those early years were not easy, as the College faced nearly overwhelming financial challenges. During an especially fraught 1983 meeting of the Board of Governors, Dr. McArthur departed from his prepared report to rally the troops as only he could, putting into high relief the nobility and urgency of their purpose:

I think it is important, given our problems and difficulties, that I spend my time not so much in reporting on the College as in reflecting upon the reasons which brought us together and upon the importance of the education we undertake with our students. ...

Our attempt to educate is a quite successful undertaking which has had, as its effect, to show our students that reason can understand some very important aspects of reality, and that it can guide from high ground the moral life. It has been successful because we study the greatest minds, because we help our students work from *within* a great tradition of learning, and because we help them use their *own* minds to consider the questions. ...

There is *not*, in the United States, any other school which does what we do. We are devoted to the intellectual life, to understanding God, and to Catholic teaching as our guide and our end. Our view of education is unique, its implementation somewhat different; its results, however, are reassuring, for we see every day the intellectual and moral growth of our students who, though the path is difficult, yet desire to keep their lives focused on Wisdom, the wisdom of Christ.

We have borne fruit, significant fruit, in our graduates, and from them will come some of the leaders, some of the saints, some of the intelligent citizens, upon which our country and the world will, in its increasing disorientation, depend for the sanity to hold it together.

Our task, then, is to make sure that we keep Thomas Aquinas College in existence — for, if we do not, there will be no collegiate education in this land which is *Catholic*, *intellectual*, and able to develop the minds of our young.

In a similar way, Dr. McArthur often rallied the students at the College, particularly during the gloomy days of winter, when the rigors of the academic program weighed heavy on us. He never failed to revive us and set us out afresh on our academic path.

## Humility: The Mark of Greatness

Dr. McArthur loved the truth more than his own opinions; he submitted himself to it and followed it wherever it led him. His students saw this daily in the classroom. Instead of lecturing, he humbly listened to us give our thoughts on the work at hand, guiding the discussions when needed, confident that we would be better for having come to the truth by the workings of our own minds. (Though, truth be told, he would often, in the end, summarize our attempts to get at the truth, elaborating and improving upon them!)

In a talk to a gathering of alumni after stepping down as president, he revealed the depth of his humility as he recounted what he had learned from the school's earliest students:

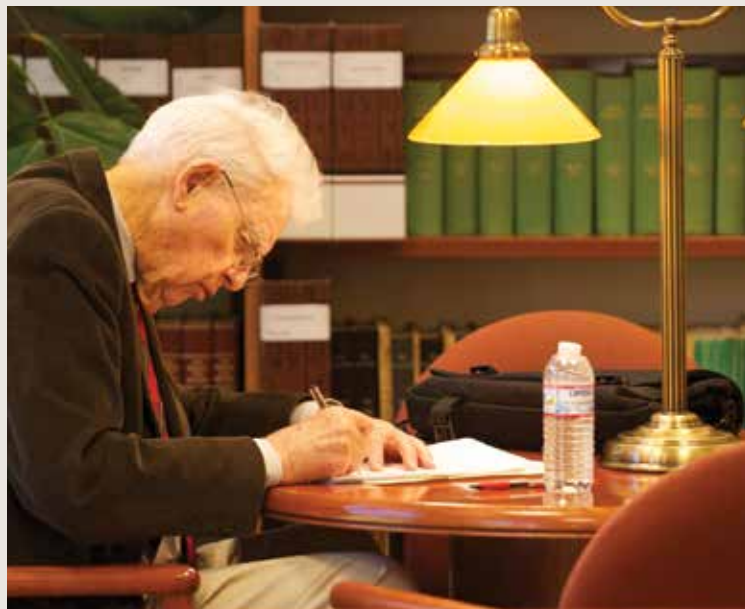
When we started the College, I wanted, along with the other founders, a time set apart for Mass and priests on the faculty. But I was determined that we would be a college. There were some who thought we should, in some way, be like a monastery if we were to fulfill our purpose. Not I! We were to be seekers of the truth, philosophers and theologians, and of course subject to the Magisterium. But we were to be somewhat detached from the ordinary life of the Church and from any undue concern for liturgical worship.

I was badly mistaken, and I began to know it as soon as we opened in 1971. The first students wanted something wholly Catholic: a Catholic community, and not a Catholic version of American education. They began immediately the nightly Rosary; they began to adorn the chapels with the spiritual works of the saints; they formed a choir to sing at Mass in the great Catholic tradition. In other words, they spontaneously tended to form a community akin in some ways to the monastery — and not just a college. They were thirsting for the wholeness of life, and I was intending to give them bread alone.

I was taken aback, having never seen a group of students like this, and I knew I could never direct such aspirations, always recognizing from afar how good and true they were.

What I see now is that Thomas Aquinas College will continue to succeed — given the curriculum, good tutors, good students, and a dedicated administration — in the measure in which the liturgy and the sacramental life are alive on campus, in the measure in which the Holy Sacrifice is the center of the day, and where it not only sanctifies but teaches daily the splendor of the New Law, Who is Christ Himself in His passion, death, and resurrection, and in His sacramental presence on the altar. Liturgical worship is not an adjunct to the life of learning; it is rather the other way around: We study and learn so that we might be more fully members of the Church and live Her life more deeply.

This is, of course, the teaching of St. Paul, and I had read it many times without much profit. Only now do I see how much better than I were those early students, and how much we all owe them.



## A Personal Note

Ron's wife Marilyn was the love of his life, and like him, she gave her life to the College. In His wisdom, God did not grant them biological children, but their spiritual progeny number in the thousands. Moreover, their companion of 40 years, Cathy Walsh ('80) loved and cared for them like a daughter, especially in their last days on earth.



## Looking to the Future

Some years before his death, Ron was asked what he thought about the state of the College and how it had developed over the years. In response, he said:

The school remains essentially the same and is in many ways better now than ever before. We should then love and support the common effort. While individuals are important,



and play their role for a time, they pass on, as they must. But hopefully the idea remains, and we must hope that there will always be others who will give their lives to the effort.

Yes, I believe the College can look forward in this vale of tears to a hopeful future, with an important role to play in the Church and in the history of salvation.

Speaking on behalf of the alumni and friends of the College, with all our hearts, we thank you, Dr. McArthur, for having given your life to found, establish, and guide Thomas Aquinas College.

*Requiescat in pace.* ❖



## UPCOMING EVENTS



Advent Lessons and Carols .....December 1



Lecture:

Dr. David Appleby..... January 12

Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College, California



Lecture:

Dr. John Francis Nieto ('89) ..... January 19

Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College, New England



Lecture:

Dr. Therese Cory.....January 26

Professor of Thomistic Studies

University of Notre Dame



Concert: Peter Blanchette.....January 26

Classical Guitarist



Presidents' Day Lecture:

J. Walter Thompson .....February 16

Fellow, Dean

Thomas More College of Liberal Arts



Spring Concert:

Madison String Quartet .....February 23



St. Thomas Day Lecture:

Dr. Josh Hochschild..... March 7

Professor / Director of Philosophy, Politics,  
& Economics Program

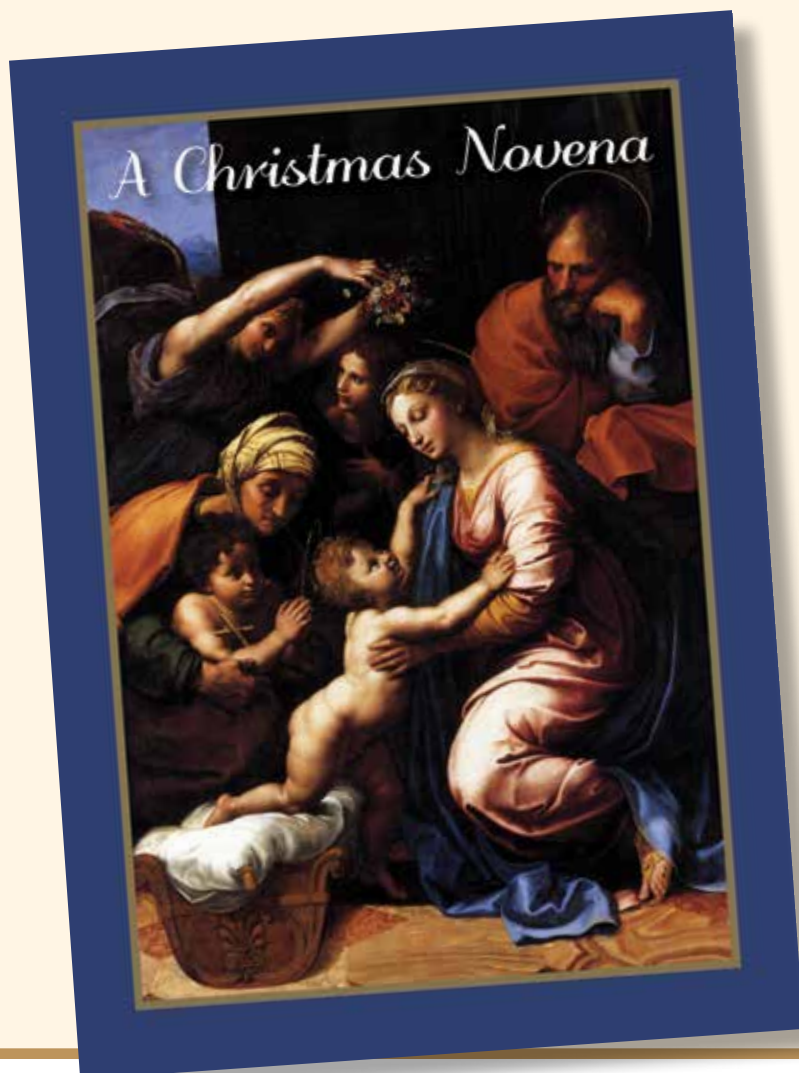
Mount St. Mary's University

## MORE EVENTS

[thomasaquinas.edu/events](http://thomasaquinas.edu/events)

**Campus Mass schedules:**

[thomasaquinas.edu/masstimes](http://thomasaquinas.edu/masstimes)



## The Perfect Gift ... A CHRISTMAS NOVENA OF MASSES

Beginning on December 16, the chaplains of Thomas Aquinas College will offer a novena of Masses in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. Each person enrolled in the Novena will receive a beautiful, personalized card from the College.

(Cost: \$5 per card, includes shipping and handling.  
All names must be received by December 15.)

**[thomasaquinas.edu/novena](http://thomasaquinas.edu/novena)**



## STUDENT LIFE



**1.** Students play ice-breakers at the Freshman Soiree. **2.** Seniors welcome members of the Class of 2027, first with a party on the beach ... **3.** ... and later with a dance on the St. Gladys Patio. **4.** The Admissions Office hosts a dinner to thank students who have volunteered to host visitors this year. **5.** A slip-n-slide offers relief from the heat before the fall's All-College Barbeque. **6.** Prefects surprise freshmen with an unexpected shower at an Orientation social. **7.** Students enjoy a brief victory, en route to defeat, in their annual battle against the tutors in a game of Trivial Pursuit.







**1.** Freshmen collect specimens for the annual “Bug Project.” **2.** Students reunite at an impromptu dance to kick off the academic year. **3.** Classes battle in a tug-of-war at the All-College-Barbeque. **4.** Members of all four classes discuss William Faulkner’s “Barn Burning” at the All-College Seminar. **5.** Seniors host an outdoor, America-themed dance for the Class of 2027. **6.** Following the completion of the first week of classes, prefects greet their fellow students with root-beer floats. **7.** Students applaud September’s lecture, “War and Peace: In Search of an Ending,” by Dr. Kathryn Duda (’03).







THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

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