

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE WINTER 2025

Volume 53, Issue 1



Floriani

**Alumni Chant Ensemble Comes
to New England**

Chapel Named a Jubilee Pilgrimage Site • TAC Defies Enrollment Trends



Against All Odds

Floriani Finds a Fitting Venue in Northfield

It has been four years since Floriani — a quartet of Thomas Aquinas College graduates who travel the country performing chant and other traditional forms of music — set out to restore sacred music in the Church and the world. At the time, most would have called their quest a fool’s errand.

Although talented and handsome, these young men conform to none of the standards of contemporary musicians. They dress in cassocks, eschew applause, and oftentimes sing in Latin. Even among Catholics, they frequently must explain that their centuries-old hymns are truly “Catholic music” — indeed, “*the* Catholic music.”

Yet beauty, truth, and goodness have a power to endure, regardless of circumstance. Four years after its members walked away from promising careers to answer a higher calling, Floriani is thriving. These musicians are not only making a living by performing ancient hymns and chant — an accomplishment few would have thought feasible — they are succeeding in their mission to awaken audiences to the Church’s rich heritage of sacred music.

More than that, through their singing, their workshops, and their humble demeanor, they are bringing their audiences closer to Christ. This reality was on vivid display at last summer’s National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, where Floriani set the solemn tone for a meeting between Our Lord and some 50,000 pilgrims at Lucas Oil Stadium.

So, it was with great joy that we brought Floriani “back” to Thomas Aquinas College last fall. (See story, page 6.) On a cold Friday night in November, Thomas Quackenbush (’14), Giorgio Navarini (’17), Joseph Daly (’19), and Graham Crawley (’20) sang before a full house, not on the California campus from which they all graduated, but on its New England counterpart, which opened its doors in 2019, just before they launched their apostolate.

It was a fitting choice of venue. Thomas Aquinas College, New England, also continues to thrive when conventional wisdom says it shouldn’t exist. Since 2020, at least 64 private liberal arts colleges have shut down in the U.S., the result of declining enrollment. Meanwhile, the College — having long ago reached maximum capacity on the California campus — expanded its Freshman Class in New England by one-third this year alone. (See story, page 15.)

Like Thomas Aquinas College’s founders more than 50 years ago, I marvel at these works of Providence and how this institution, with limited resources and against all odds, continues to further its mission. And nowhere are the fruits of that mission more evident than in the thousands of alumni who, like Floriani, marshal the gift of this extraordinary education, in ways large and small, to bring the world closer to Christ.



“Like Thomas Aquinas College’s founders more than 50 years ago, I marvel at these works of Providence and how this institution, with limited resources and against all odds, continues to further its mission.”

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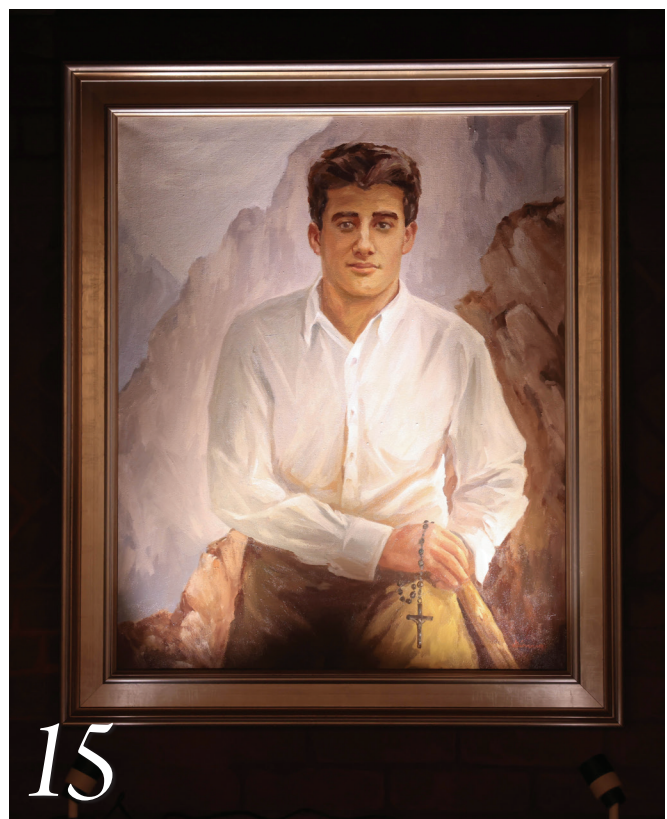
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A Floriani

HOMECOMING

After Performing Before 50,000 at the National Eucharistic Congress, Alumni Chant Group Comes to TAC-New England

It was a homecoming of sorts on November 22 as Floriani made its first trip to Thomas Aquinas College, New England. In a candlelit Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel, the group's four singers — all alumni of the California campus — performed a selection of traditional Gregorian chant pieces, American folk hymns, and original compositions.

The Chapel's pews were filled not only with students and faculty, but also with neighbors, alumni, and other friends of the

“It’s part of our heritage, part of our patrimony, something we can own and hand to the following generations.”

College who came to see the nationally acclaimed ensemble, which in July sang before 50,000 faithful at the National Eucharistic Congress. The hourlong concert, “O Death, Where is Thy Sting?” dwelt on the themes of the *quattuor novissima*, or Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell.

“We’re delighted to have the chance to sing for the New England campus,” said Thomas Quackenbush (’14), joined in the Chapel’s sanctuary by his fellow members: Giorgio Navarini (’17), Joseph Daly (’19), and Graham Crawley (’20). A nonprofit organization, Floriani aims to revitalize sacred music in the Church and in the world.

“I think it’s important for Catholics to recognize that there is a treasury of Catholic sacred music that goes back to the time of Christ,” Mr. Navarini told a reporter from the Diocese of Springfield. “It’s part of our heritage, part of our patrimony, something we can own and hand to the following generations.”

Floriani’s origins trace back to the members’ student days on the California campus, when they staged viral Christmas flash mobs at local malls and sang the National Anthem at opening day for the city’s Little League. “We started as a barbershop group and shifted toward Gregorian chant later on,” said Mr. Crawley. “We sang at liturgies around the Ventura County area and saw the power that sacred music had on people.”

The group’s members belonged to different classes, united by Mr. Navarini, who was a freshman when Mr. Quackenbush was a senior and then a senior by the time Mr. Crawley arrived as a freshman. “We went our separate ways

until after the Covid lockdowns turned everything upside down. We got back in touch and still felt called to do this as a mission,” said Mr. Crawley. “It was some-

“There is a treasury of Catholic sacred music that goes back to the time of Christ.”

thing that we talked about at school, but never thought it was possible. Yet here we are, four years later.”

To preserve reverence in the Chapel, Floriani requested at the concert’s outset that attendees withhold their applause. At its conclusion, the group’s members led the audience in a spirited singing of the *Salve Regina*, directed toward the Chapel’s icon of its patroness, Our Mother of Perpetual Help. □





Giorgio Navarini ('17)



Thomas Quackenbush ('14)



See video of the concert:



thaq.co/floriani



Beyond the Classroom

Tutors Represent TAC at Scholarly Conferences



Unlike professors at most colleges, Thomas Aquinas College’s tutors are not required to fulfill research requirements, as their primary duty is to their students. Some, however, independently pursue additional scholarly studies alongside their tutorials, contributing to seminars, conferences, and publications the world over.

This past fall, three members of the California teaching faculty — Dr. Drew Rosato, Dr. David Appleby, and Dr. John Finley — helped organize and participated in academic conferences in the United States and Europe. Working with fellow scholars from institutions around the world, they contributed to research on a wide array of topics, ranging from gender ideology, to Jewry in the Middle Ages, to the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, occasioned by the 800th anniversary of his birth.



“When we speak of male and female, we’re talking about fundamental capacities we possess as human beings composed of body and soul.”

Dr. John Finley

Dr. John Finley spoke on the timely and contentious topic of the nature of man and woman at two conferences in October — one at Franciscan University in Steu-

benville, Ohio, and the other at the American Catholic Philosophical Association’s (ACPA) 2024 Annual Meeting, which he helped to organize.

When Dr. Mary Catherine Sommers, philosophy professor for the University of St. Thomas and head of the ACPA, read a 2015 article by Dr. Finley on the metaphysical view of the human being as male or female, she knew she wanted him to assist her with the ACPA’s 2024 meeting. Themed “Male and Female He Created Them,” the conference tackled the philosophical conversation on gender and brought together scholars from around the country.

After looking over the papers submitted for the conference, Dr. Finley put together a panel of speakers to take a more focused look at what it means to be man or woman from the standpoints of science, medicine, and philosophy. He worked alongside

and Revelation (Emmaus Road Press, 2022).

“When we speak of male and female, we’re talking about fundamental capacities we possess as human beings composed of body and soul, as well as the role of the species to propagate itself and express love,” says Dr. Finley, who wrote on Aquinas’s view of the soul, body, and generative powers. “Aquinas doesn’t delve deeply into the reproductive, biological side of the issue, which is where the other two papers on my panel were of great assistance.”

Dr. Finley also appeared at the “Man and Woman in the Order of Creation” conference at Franciscan University. Similar to the ACPA’s theme, Franciscan’s gathering took up the issue of the nature of man and woman as ordained by God, inviting speakers from a variety of disciplines, including biology, psychology, metaphysics, and theology. “I think it’s very important to address these hot-button issues from a multidisciplinary perspective,” Dr. Finley says. “It’s valuable to be able to see the truth from the angle of each discipline in order to form a wise and well-rounded stance on the matter.”

To offer a preliminary foundation to some of the more scientific and metaphysical talks to follow, Dr. Finley presented a paper titled “The Human Being as the Microcosm of Creation,” which examined Aquinas’s view of the human being as bringing together the spiritual and physical in one being. “Theologically, we distantly imitate Christ in His union of the divine and human natures,” he says. “As male and female, we remotely im-



“It’s wonderful to share the scholarly work I have done, as well as to promote the College and its mission, with a greater collection of scholars from the U.S., Europe, and Israel.”

itate God in His creative act; there’s also an imitation of Christ in His relationship to the Church, as bride and bridegroom. Thinking of the human being as a microcosm references both our imitation of the cosmos and these theological principles as well.”

Dr. David Appleby

While in Rome early last fall, Dr. David Appleby collaborated with a fellow scholar to arrange a conference titled “Jews in the Frankish Orbit.”

For Dr. Appleby, the gathering was the outgrowth of a casual conversation among friends, sparking an interest in the topic. “While at a different conference two years ago, a friend raised the idea of doing a conference where we gather a group of scholars to say something up to date about Jews in Western Europe, specifically in the Frankish realms in the early Middle Ages, and things soon got out of control,” he laughs.

After spending two years finding speakers and arranging accommodations, with the help of Dr. Lynda Coon, dean of the Honors College at the University of Arkansas, Dr. Appleby assembled fellow medieval experts and enthusiasts in the Eternal City. In his paper, he considered the label “Judaic superstition,” which appeared in two *Adversus Judaeos* pamphlets written by bishops of Lyon in the ninth century. In particular, Dr. Appleby argued that the label of superstition helped the bishops develop a powerful and useful image of present time in relation to the course of salvation history. His and other presentations enabled the attendees to gain a better view of how the Jews of the Middle Ages lived and were perceived by others.

“I’m delighted to report that the conference went very well,” Dr. Appleby says. “It’s wonderful to share the scholarly

work I have done, as well as to promote the College and its mission, with a greater collection of scholars from the U.S., Europe, and Israel. For me, it was a very good and enriching experience in addition to my main work as a tutor.”

Dr. Drew Rosato

In August, Dr. Drew Rosato facilitated a conference on medieval Franciscan thought at Oxford, working with Dr. Lydia Schumacher, professor of historical and philosophical theology at King’s College in London. The conference centered around a book the two scholars are editing, *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Franciscan Thought*.



“I tried to develop some arguments compatible with Aquinas’s account, as well as show some reasons why his account of prophetic cognition is still reasonable to uphold.”

“The book, which will have 40 chapters, covers how medieval Franciscans understood a variety of philosophical and theological topics,” Dr. Rosato says. “It also contains a section about the historical and institutional context of medieval Franciscan thought, as well as a section on the legacy of Franciscan thought after the Middle Ages.”

Set at the idyllic Queen’s College, the conference gathered many of the book’s contributing authors, 14 of whom presented drafts of their chapters to their colleagues. For his paper, Dr. Rosato examined how medieval Franciscans understood the redemptive work of Christ, drawing on texts by Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaven-

ture, and Duns Scotus. “The conference was a great opportunity to meet some of the contributors in person for the first time and to have a chance to share our work with each other,” Dr. Rosato remarks.

A few months later, Dr. Rosato found himself in South Bend, Indiana, where he presented a paper on St. Thomas’s understanding of prophecy. Dr. Rosato’s paper, one of over 150 presented at the University of Notre Dame’s “Aquinas at 800” conference, was an excerpt from a book to which he is contributing, along with fellow Notre Dame alumni. “The book is a *festschrift* for Dr. Joseph Wawrykow, a Thomist who recently retired from Notre Dame,” he says. “He directed my dissertation and those of many others, so his former students are offering him this book as a way of honoring all that he has done for us.”

The paper, he adds, is an attempt to respond to various objections leveled against St. Thomas. “Some critics of Aquinas’s account of prophetic cognition, for instance, think that he multiplies miracles beyond

necessity when he posits that the prophetic light is given and taken away periodically over the course of the life of the prophet,” says Dr. Rosato. “In my paper, I tried to develop some arguments compatible with Aquinas’s account, as well as show some reasons why his account of prophetic cognition is still reasonable to uphold.”

While attending the conference, Dr. Rosato was able to visit with colleagues and former students, including Claire Murphy (CA’20) and Andreas Waldstein (CA’19). “We had many pleasant discussions about different aspects of St. Thomas’s theology,” he says. “Overall, I think the conference was a great success.” □



Ring in the Jubilee

**Bishop Byrne Designates
Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel
as a 2025 Pilgrimage Site**



In observance of the 2025 Jubilee Year, the Most Rev. William D. Byrne, Bishop of Springfield, Massachusetts, has decreed that Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, will be an official pilgrimage site for the people of his diocese.

“As the Universal Church now looks toward the 2025th anniversary of the Word becoming flesh among us, our local Church looks toward unique opportunities for the faithful to obtain Jubilee grace and blessing,” His Excellency proclaimed. “I hereby declare and decree Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel at Thomas Aquinas College a sacred place and pilgrimage site in the Diocese of Springfield.”

Held at least once every 25 years, a Jubilee Year is a time for forgiveness of sins, thanksgiving, joyful celebration, and pilgrimage. His Holiness Pope Francis formally began the Jubilee Year in Rome on Christmas Eve with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica. It will conclude on next year’s Feast of the Holy Family, December 28, 2025.

“I designated Our Mother of Perpetual



“I designated Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel as a Jubilee Pilgrimage Site because I want people to see one of the newest gems of the diocese.”

Help Chapel as a Jubilee Pilgrimage Site because I want people to see one of the newest gems of the diocese,” explained His Excellency, who dedicated the Chapel in 2022. “Since TAC is relatively new to the Diocese of Springfield, I think it is important for people to know about its presence here, not just as a sightseeing stop but as a place of learning and prayer, where we can give God glory, honor, and praise.”

During this time, pilgrims to the Chapel who fulfill the usual conditions — detachment from sin, sacramental confession, Holy Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father — will be able to obtain the Jubilee plenary indulgence by engaging in Eucharistic Adoration and meditation, concluding with the Lord’s Prayer, the Profession of Faith, and invocations to Our Lady. “In this Holy Year,” explains Bishop Byrne, quoting Pope Francis, “we pray that everyone ‘will come to know the closeness of Mary, the most affectionate of mothers, who never abandons her children.’”

Constructed in 1909 on what was then the campus of the Northfield Seminary for

“Since TAC is relatively new to the Diocese of Springfield, I think it is important for people to know about its presence here.”

Young Ladies, Thomas Aquinas College’s New England chapel is built from Rockport granite in a variant of the Gothic revival style fittingly known as Collegiate Gothic. A gift of Margaret Olivia Sage, it was originally named for her late husband, Russell Sage, an American financier, railroad executive, and member of Congress. In 2019, just weeks before the College launched its inaugural year of classes on the New England campus, it renamed the building in honor of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

While preserving the Chapel’s elegance and heritage, the College incorporated numerous renovations to make it a fitting place for Catholic worship, including the addition of a tabernacle, kneelers, a central aisle for liturgical processions, confessionals, a permanent altar and altar rail, Stations of the Cross, statuary, and a high altar and reredos. The building also now features an icon of



its patroness, modeled after a centuries-old image associated with countless miracles. In 2022, alumnus architect Anthony Grumbine ('00) and his colleagues at Harrison Design received a prestigious Bulfinch Award for their work on the Chapel’s renovation.

“We are honored that His Excellency would designate Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel as a pilgrimage site, and we look forward to welcoming faithful pilgrims throughout the year,” said President Paul J. O’Reilly. “The Chapel is already a fount of grace for our campus. In this year of Jubilee, may it become one for the entire diocese.” □



Alumna Proclaims Word at Vatican’s Jubilee Mass



On Christmas Eve, His Holiness Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica to mark the start of the Jubilee Year, then offered Mass for the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. Among those present was Caroline Guinee ('20), who had the honor of reading one of the preparatory prayers for the Jubilee as well as proclaiming the second reading during the Christmas Eve Mass.

“Everyone keeps asking me how I got this privilege,” says Miss Guinee, a program assistant with the Thomistic Institute at the Angelicum. “I honestly have no idea how it landed to me, other than God is so sweet.”

Recommended for the honor by her superiors at the Angelicum, she reports that she was “totally blown away” when asked to do the readings. “I just felt very honored to be a part of the opening of the Jubilee and the Mass,” she says. “Honestly, I still feel like God was way too good to me in giving me this privilege.” □



Northeastern Pilgrimages

Students Make Autumnal Trips to Boston, New York & Providence

Making the most of the rich cultural environs of the Northeast, students at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, made pilgrimages this fall to Boston, New York City, and Providence. They visited beautiful churches and other historic landmarks, sampled the fine arts, and venerated the remains of the College's beloved patron.

Art in Boston

The first of these pilgrimages was a Columbus Day Weekend excursion to Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The sightseeing adventure began with a two-hour drive along foliage-rimmed highways.

Before arriving at the museum, the group visited St. Paul's Parish in Cambridge. The parish serves as the Roman Catholic chaplaincy for Harvard University students and is known for its stunning architecture and reverent music. The building, completed in 1923 and once the tallest structure in the area, is Romanesque in style, with round arches and marble columns. The group took a guided tour, followed by Mass on the church's main altar, offered by TAC Chaplain Rev. Carlos Viego.

Fed by the sacred liturgy and architecture, the students next made their way to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum,



named for its American art collector and philanthropist foundress. All took their time savoring a variety of paintings, sculptures, tapestries, and stained-glass windows. "It was so good for us to visit the museum," said sophomore Teresa Cole ('27). "We get to read so many beautiful texts at the College, including plays and poetry, but appreciating art in its other forms also better rounds you as a person."

After leaving the museum, the pilgrims split up to find dinner in various parts of Boston, many enjoying the local Italian cuisine. All were full of joy as they headed back to campus with exciting stories to tell about a day well spent.

Theater in New York

Three weeks later, on All Saints' Day, a collection of students, staff, and faculty excitedly set out for New York City to tour Manhattan and catch Kenneth Branagh's new production of *King Lear*.

Upon arrival on Manhattan's Upper East Side, the group stopped by St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church for Mass. Dedicated in 1918, the church has been in the care of the Dominican Friars for more than a century.

Its architectural beauty did not escape the attention of the students, who, after Mass, took some time to admire the many side altars and stained-glass windows, two of which featured prominent authors in the TAC curriculum: St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle.

After Mass, the students explored different parts of the city on foot. One group made a small pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Cathedral, which was displaying saintly relics in honor of the solemnity. "It was such a pleasant surprise," said Isabella Caughron ('26), "but also very fitting."

The groups later reconvened on the Upper East Side to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Various parts of the Museum captured the students' awe and wonder, from medieval frescoes and High Renaissance paintings to English Victorian furniture and Van Gogh's oils on canvas. "It would probably take at least three or four days to adequately examine this museum," remarked Ethan Connolly ('26).

As the sun was setting over the city skyline, the group next gathered at a local Italian restaurant in Midtown. Dinner was hearty, and the conversations were cheerful. After a round of desserts, all departed for

"Experiencing these plays live really helps you to understand that Shakespeare is not only meant to be read, but also to be seen and heard."

the main event: *King Lear*.

Considered one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, *King Lear* is a part of the Junior Seminar curriculum. Sir Kenneth Branagh, the award-winning British actor and filmmaker, served as director of this new production and also played the title character. The top-tier acting and technical production helped bring together the dramatic and highly emotional climax.

"Experiencing these plays live really helps you to understand that Shakespeare is not only meant to be read," said Student Support Coordinator Emily (Barry '11) Sullivan, "but also to be seen and heard."

Back to Boston — Opera!

Making the most of their Thanksgiving break, some 20 students made a second trip to Boston for the premiere of Telemann's opera *Don Quichotte* at the New England Conservatory of Music.

The day began with a return trip to St. Paul's Parish in Cambridge, followed by brunch and sightseeing in Harvard Yard, with students eventually meeting up at the Harvard Art Museum, where multiple original works of Van Gogh, Monet, and Botticelli were on display. "I really loved the Italian Renaissance section," said Isabella Caughron ('26). Then came dinner at local restaurants, followed by dessert at Mike's Pastry, famed for its delicious cannoli.

At last came the day's main event, the concert! Woven throughout the opera were movements from Telemann's delightful orchestral suite "Burlesque de Don Quichotte," a work that uses strikingly evocative music and ballet-like choreography to depict

various humorous episodes from Cervantes' classic novel — the opening work in the College's Junior Seminar.

Many of the students in the group had never experienced the opera prior to this trip, and it made a lasting impression. "I have now fallen madly in love with opera," exclaimed Grace Flanagan ('28). "It was like a musical, only with much better dancing and music!"

Saint Thomas in Providence

Finally, on a cold Wednesday evening



Clockwise from left: Students admire the stained glass at St. Paul's Parish in Cambridge, explore New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, venerate the major relics of St. Thomas Aquinas in Providence, and take in a performance of Don Quichotte at the at the New England Conservatory of Music.

in December, a hearty group of students grabbed their coats and braved a forecasted Nor'easter to make the two-hour journey to Providence, Rhode Island. As part of a two-year jubilee celebrating the Angelic Doctor's birth, death, and canonization, St. Thomas Aquinas's major relics were on a 10-city, three-week tour of the East Coast, bringing an abundance of blessings for

those who came to see them.

"Even though it's a weeknight and short notice, we still had so many people sign up," said Mrs. Sullivan. "Every single seat in the vehicles was taken!"


Students arrived at St. Pius V Parish in Providence just

as the snowstorm began to let up. They carried Rosaries, scapulars, medals, and other sacramentals to touch to the saint's skull, making their possessions third-class relics. "I brought my *Summa*," said Sam Livingston ('26), holding up his copy of the saint's most famous work. "I'm hoping that St. Thomas will give me extra graces for finals week!" The line to kneel before the relics was long, but the wait proved well worth it, as each student had a chance to venerate the remains of the College's patron. A Mass in honor of the Universal Doctor followed, offered by Dominican priest Rev. Simon Teller, O.P.

After the Mass, many students remained to pray for St. Thomas's intercession and further venerate his relics. "I'm so grateful I got to have this once-in-a-lifetime experience," said Cecilia Macik ('27). "I will never forget it." □



Unital "Don Quichotte"



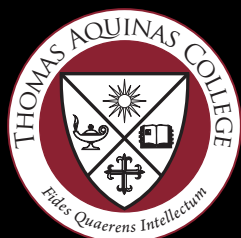
High School Great Books Programs

AT THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

California Two-Week Program: July 6 – 19, 2025

New England Two-Week Program: July 13 – 26, 2025

California One-Week Program: July 27 – August 3,



THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE


thomasaquinas.edu/summerprograms



One Program Two Coasts

RECENT EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

Dr. Christopher Decaen ('93) Teaches Every Class in College's Curriculum

 Dr. Christopher Decaen ('93), a tutor on the California campus, has joined a select group of Thomas Aquinas College faculty: those who have taught all 23 courses in the College's classical curriculum.

"Chris had already completed the program once as a student, but completing it again as a tutor requires a level of mastery that is a remarkable achievement," says Dr. John Goyette, the College's vice president for advancement. Only six other members of the teaching faculty have achieved this milestone: Dr. Thomas Kaiser, Dr. Glen Coughlin, Dr. John Nieto, Mr. David Quackenbush, Dr. Andrew Seeley, and Dr. Sean Collins.



relative youth of the College, the number of tutors who have taught the entire curriculum will surely grow in the years to come. For now, however, Dr. Decaen remains in rare company. "Chris's achievement illustrates the commitment of our entire faculty to our integrated program of studies, which we pursue together with the students in a close-knit community of friends," says Dr. Goyette.


"Seeing the integration of TAC's program firsthand gives one a perspective on reality itself that is, paradoxically, at once illuminating and mystifying," Dr. Decaen adds. "The former because you make genuine progress when you peer up toward the heights, the latter because you only make out the summit

Thomas Aquinas College is unique among American colleges and universities in requiring its faculty members to teach not only in their areas of expertise, but in all the disciplines — language, logic, mathematics, music, natural science, literature, economics, history, philosophy, and theology — that make up its fully integrated curriculum.

"In a way, the tutor needs to teach the whole program for the same reason that the student must complete it," Dr. Decaen remarks. "The 'walls' between the sciences are porous; indeed, their ceilings and roofs are hierarchical, some building on others, and all of them reflecting the same One Truth. Thus, there cannot help but be a unity to all truths, though one can miss it when not watching for it. And the curriculum at TAC has that unity as an explicit part of both what

in a vague way. I imagine that any tutor who 'finishes' the program is ready to dive back in and start over. You're never really finished — not this side of Paradise, anyway." □

TAC Defies Higher Ed Enrollment Trends

 "A Catholic college," the *Ventura County Reporter* recently observed, "has bucked two national trends when it comes to enrollment levels and the ratio of male to female students." The religious media have taken note, as well, with the Catholic News Agency recently including the College among a list of faithfully Catholic schools that have seen significant increases in enrollment over the past few years.

Overall, college enrollment in the United States has dropped by 7.4 percent — or some 1.5 million students — in the last decade. Four-year, private institutions have reported a staggering 54 percent loss in enrollment, and some 14 were forced to close their doors in 2023. Thomas Aquinas College, on the other hand, has seen its enrollment numbers rise, especially since opening its New England campus in 2019.

At its 2024 Convocation ceremonies, the College welcomed its largest freshman class to date, achieving a record combined enrollment of 565 students — a 50 percent increase from 10 years ago. While the California campus hovers around its 400-student

"The tutor needs to teach the whole program for the same reason that the student must complete it."

it teaches and how it teaches, especially in the order of the courses. Both the students and the tutors see this and benefit from it."

After graduating from the College in 1993 and pursuing advanced degrees in philosophy at the Catholic University of America, Dr. Decaen joined the College's teaching faculty in 1999. Given the

ONE PROGRAM TWO COASTS

maximum capacity, the New England campus has seen a 13 percent increase in its student body since last year. At 193 students, it's keeping pace with its growth plan and is nearly halfway to capacity.

"These numbers are very much in keeping with the overall trend: California has been at maximum capacity for years, and the number of students on our New England campus has nearly quadrupled since launching in 2019," says Chris Weinkopf, executive director of college relations.

College enrollment in the United States has dropped by 7.4 percent over the last 10 years. At TAC, it has increased by 50 percent.

Also contradicting national trends, the Thomas Aquinas College Class of 2028 is split evenly between men (49.4 percent) and women (50.6 percent), whereas men make up just 40.5 percent of undergraduate students nationwide. "It's testament to our founders' vision that the rigorous liberal arts curriculum they designed, which includes four years of mathematics and natural sciences, continues to attract wide numbers of students, male and female alike," adds Mr. Weinkopf. "It speaks to the timelessness of our Great Books program."

The 168 students who make up this year's freshman class hail from 29 U.S. states and 9 countries, reflecting the widespread appeal of the College's program of Catholic liberal education. "There's a great demand for the authentically Catholic, academically excellent education that the College offers," says Mr. Weinkopf. "We are pleased to be able to extend this opportunity to a greater number of students and their families every year." □



Campus Honors Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati

Just months before His Holiness Pope Francis canonizes Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Thomas Aquinas College unveiled a new painting of the "Man of the Beatitudes" — now hanging in the student center named in his honor on the College's New England campus.

The painting, unveiled for the first time at November's campus-wide Thanksgiving dinner, is the work of Courtney Giovinazzi, a classically trained artist and the mother of two TAC students, Enzo (NE'26) and Dominic (NE'27). "It was really a labor of love," says Mrs. Giovinazzi. "I wanted to represent him as best I could."

Formerly known as the Tracy Student Center, Bl. Frassati is the century-old, red-brick building that serves as a central hub for campus life, where students study, socialize, and host dances. Thanks to the generous gift of an anonymous couple, the College renovated the building in 2022 and renamed it in honor of Bl. Pier Giorgio, who is widely recognized as a patron of young people.

Wishing to commemorate the building's namesake, the College began searching for an artist to render a painting of Bl. Pier Giorgio in 2023. "We wanted to have an image of him somewhere in the student center," says Director of East Coast Development Patrick Ford. "But the kind of composition we wanted was rather specific." Because the image was to be hung above the building's fireplace, a somewhat dark area, the color palette needed to be light and bright to stand out.

Mr. Ford didn't have to look far: Mrs. Giovinazzi was delighted for the opportunity to create such a piece for the College. The completed work shows Bl. Pier Giorgio crouched on a rocky hillside, a nod to his love of hiking and outdoorsmanship. The young Blessed smiles at the observer with a warm, inviting grin that hints at his sense of humor and mischievous spirit. (He was known as "the Holy Terror" because of his love of practical jokes, which he would play on friends and family.)

The unveiling and dedication of the painting were especially opportune as, only a few days prior, the Holy See announced that Bl. Pier Giorgio will be canonized in the summer of 2025. "We'll have to change the signs on the building and maps to say 'Saint' and not 'Blessed' next summer," laughs Dean Steven Cain. "But what a joyous change to make!" □

New Book from TAC Governor Tom Krause



“Everyone recognizes the importance of culture and acts as if they understand it, while in reality, very few understand the consequences of culture at all,” says Dr. Thomas R. Krause, CEO of Krause Bell Group and a member of the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors. “I wanted to help leaders understand and effect organizational change.”

If Your Culture Could Talk: A Story about Culture Change follows CEO John, a technical man who prefers data to people, as his company is thrust into a corporate catastrophe caused by its culture. John, along with his mentor, Jane, and incompetent HR head Marvin, is encountered by Culture personified — a blunt and brutally honest creature that helps John and his peers view in a whole new light the problems brought on by their company’s organizational ethos.

“I was working with a particular client who was having a lot of difficulty achieving the culture change they wanted, and I started thinking about how I could help them understand it better,” explains Dr. Krause. “As I was thinking about what culture is and how it comes to be, it occurred to me: What if you could talk directly to culture itself? That idea led to a story that I thought would be more fun, helpful, and approachable to an organizational leader than an academic description of the thing.”

“I wanted to help leaders understand and effect organizational change.”



Dr. Krause is founding partner of the Krause Bell Group, an international consulting firm specializing in organizational culture and safety management. He is a prolific author and speaker on the topics of leadership, organizational safety improvement, and culture change. In 2010, he joined the College’s Board of Governors after falling in love with the curriculum through his daughter, Christel Kelsey (’91). Since then, he has regularly employed graduates of the College at his various companies, as he believes their moral and intellectual formation sets them a step above the rest.

“A TAC graduate has a certain level of integrity you can always count on,” says Dr. Krause. “He or she also has a sense of curiosity about underlying philosophical issues and will not take something for granted just because it’s the regular way to think about it. They notice things — such as flaws in their company’s culture, for example — that someone with a more typical or secular background may not question at all.” □



“Get with the Program” Workshops

To help students, both returning and new, make the most of their Thomas Aquinas College experience, New England Student Support Coordinator Emily (Barry ’11) Sullivan hosted a “Get with the Program” series of on-campus workshops this past fall. “These workshops are designed to help students level up their academic abilities and enjoy college more,” said Mrs. Sullivan. “We are trying to think of freshman orientation as more of an ‘ongoing formation,’ providing the students with some practical tools and skills to help with the transition into college-level work and adult responsibilities.”

Father/son (and psychologist/tutor) duo Dr. Richard Cross and Dr. Peter Cross presented the first workshop, “Prepping Your Props and Readings Like a Pro,” which offered strategies for students to maximize their time and prepare well for class. A graduate of the College, the younger Dr. Cross tackled the practical side of the discussion, while his father explained the neuropsychology behind why such strategies work.

At the second workshop, “How to Write an Excellent Paper,” tutor Dr. Margaret Hughes, director of Dolben Library’s Writing Center, spoke about the structure and order of a well-written paper. “Every excellent paper has a clear, concise thesis statement,” she said. “No thesis statement means no paper.”

The third session “What College Students Should Know About Mental Health,” featured Counselor Kate Schell, LMHC, who discussed managing mental health from a Catholic perspective. Attendees learned how they could harness the mechanisms that cause

“These workshops are designed to help students level up their academic abilities and enjoy college more.”

anxiety to manage their mental health more effectively. Once everyone understood the basics of the topic, Mrs. Schell walked students through several coping strategies for mitigating stress.

The series concluded in November with the final workshop, “Time Management, Building Good Habits, and Other Skills for a Life Well Lived,” presented by Mrs. Sullivan and Assistant Dean

Mozart, Bach, Vivaldi & More!

See Video of the TAC Choirs' Fall Concerts

Mozart's *Requiem in D Minor*



The powerful strains of Mozart's *Requiem in D Minor* could be heard in the Fritz B. Burns Auditorium on November 22, as Thomas Aquinas College's California Choir and Orchestra performed for an audience of students, tutors, and friends of the College.

The concert, part of the St. Vincent de Paul Lecture and Concert Series, took place, fittingly, on the evening of the Feast of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music and musicians. The chorus and orchestra, composed of students, tutors, and visiting musicians, gave a stirring performance, lifting the hearts of their listeners to God through the sacred music.

The passion that the musicians brought to the performance was not lost on the audience. "It was powerful," said Estevan Henderson ('26). "It moved me; I could hardly help but be moved by it."



Video: thaq.co/requiem24



Video: thaq.co/lessons24

Advent Lessons and Carols



The California campus hosted its first-ever Advent Lessons and Carols service on December 8. Students, faculty, alumni, and benefactors gathered in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel for the program, in anticipation of Christmas.

In keeping with a 150-year tradition, the service featured readings from Sacred Scripture — or "lessons" — which recounted stories of humanity's fall from grace, the centuries of yearning and anticipation in the Old Testament, and finally, the Incarnation, which brings to fruition all that was foretold by the prophets. After each lesson, the Thomas Aquinas College California Choir, directed by Daniel Grimm ('76), filled the Chapel with sacred hymns and chant.

"Lessons and Carols seemed like a great way to prepare for Christmas, inspire our students, and give something back to our benefactors," said Vice President John J. Goyette. "We wanted to try something that would resonate with what we do here on campus: pursuing the truth with friends and ordered ultimately to the truth that is Christ himself."

Christmas Concert



Throughout the academic year, the Thomas Aquinas College New England Choir sings weekly at Masses in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel. At Christmastime, however, it joins forces with the College Orchestra to delight the community with longer classical pieces at the annual Christmas Concert. For this year's concert, the student musicians performed Bach's *Magnificat in D* and Vivaldi's *Gloria in D*.

Luminarias lined the pathway up to the Moody Auditorium on the evening of December 6, the lights flickering in the wind. Inside, the audience waited expectantly for the concert to begin.

Each piece featured multiple gifted soloists, while the whole choir and orchestra were thrilled to lift their voices and make a joyful noise to the King of Kings. "The Magnificat is a beautiful prayer," said Matthew Santos ('26), a choir member. "It's only fitting that we included it."



Video: thaq.co/christmas24

ONE PROGRAM TWO COASTS

Stephen Shivone. The first part featured a presentation introducing students to the idea of “a plan of life” — a routine one imposes to nurture spiritual growth; and during the second, students made their plans by creating a bullet journal, or hybrid journal/calendar.

“These workshops have been a huge success,” said Mrs. Sullivan. “With our newly expanded freshman class, I’m glad we’re able to help students thrive at TAC.” □

Students Network at Fall Career Fair

Employers who place a high value on critical thinking and effective communication visited the California campus in October to meet, interview, and advise students at the Fall Career Fair. Students stopped by employers’ booths in St. Cecilia Hall, chatting with professionals about law, insurance, tech, education, healthcare, sales, and manufacturing — as well as internship and post-graduation employment opportunities.



The group of employers included several alumni, such as Justin Alvarez, Esq. ('97), founder of The Alvarez Firm, and Peter LaFave ('13), a strategic sourcing consultant for Elevance Health, as well as other admirers of the College. “It’s impossible for a company to teach a new hire how to think, even when they come in with many technical skills,” observed John Johnson, founder and CEO of Pat-

“With AI on the rise, the world needs those with an authentically liberal education to enter tech now more than ever.”

mos, a cloud solutions and AI services provider. “That’s why Patmos has always viewed TAC as the best-kept hiring secret in tech. With AI on the rise, the world needs those with an authentically liberal education to enter tech now more than ever.”

Some recruiters also saw the culture of faith among the students as an asset in hiring. “It’s very important to find faithful Catholic students who bring that mission with them when they go into the workforce,” said Gabriela Thurau, a representative of the Classical Learning Test.

Students discerning their career paths appreciated discussing dif-

ferent fields of work with the professionals who made time to speak with them, and many signed up for future interviews. “There was a lot of variety,” said Marcus Boucher ('28). “I really enjoyed talking to all the different people who set up booths and learning more about job opportunities.” □

Dr. McArthur Inspires New Generation

On a Wednesday night nearly three decades ago — March 6, 1996 — students packed into St. Joseph Commons to listen to Dr. Ronald P. McArthur, the retired founding president of Thomas Aquinas College, speak about Catholic liberal education. On October 30, 2024, a new generation of students on the California campus came to St. Cecilia Hall’s Fritz B. Burns Auditorium to watch a video of that same talk.

It is a yearly custom at the College, around the October 17 anniversary of Dr. McArthur’s 2013 death, to show a video of one of the many informal, extemporaneous addresses he frequently gave to the student body during his lifetime. Dr. Tom Kaiser ('75), tutor and a member of the College’s first graduating class, introduced the video by sharing some of his own memories of Dr. McArthur’s many impromptu presentations.

“Every once in a while, when the students needed a pep talk, he would get up and give us a talk,” recalled Dr. Kaiser. “He would get up at lunch and go, ‘Look,’ and just explain to us why we’re here and why what we’re doing is important. I don’t think we have ever had a better spokesman who can get the students reinvigorated and excited about their studies.”

Though most of today’s students never had the opportunity to meet Dr. McArthur, they saw his love for the College and its students, as well as his passion for truth, vividly on display as they watched and listened to him on video. “All education ought to contribute finally to our seeing God. That’s really what education is about, what education ought to be about,” Dr. McArthur reminded his audience.

He stressed the importance of the kind of community that the College offers: one brought together by a common love for truth, seeking God through a classical, Catholic education in the liberal arts. “Through the providence of God, you’re here, and through the providence of God, you’re able to participate in this community.”

Those who came to watch the video were touched and encouraged by Dr. McArthur’s words. “I was really struck by an analogy he made about cultivating soil,” reflected student John Paul Sommer ('27), “and how TAC is the best place to till the soil of our minds.” □



Einstein as Leisure

By Patrick Murphy (CA'25)

Mission Viejo, California

When I was considering colleges to attend, I had the advantage of knowing the TAC curriculum well from my older sister, Claire ('20), who is an alumna. I was excited about the prospect of studying St. Thomas, but I perceived the lack of majors here as a weakness. I was very interested in economics, and I wanted to make a career out of it. I took for granted the popular view that, if I was serious about my career, I would need to major in economics as an undergraduate. I thought I would have to go to college somewhere else.

The turning point in my thinking came when I watched a fascinating YouTube video on Einstein's theory of relativity. Of course, I didn't understand any of it, but I really wanted to study it and hopefully come to understand as much as I could!

"I came to see TAC's lack of specialization as a great strength. I could study not only the Einstein I was so interested in, but also some economics in Senior Seminar as well as St. Thomas."

I realized, though, that I probably wouldn't be able to study Einstein in college unless I became a physics major and worked my way up to the higher-level courses. I didn't want to commit to all those credit hours to the exclusion of other fields of study that interested me. But then I remembered that my sister got to study Einstein at TAC in Senior Mathematics, and that she loved that class and took so much away from it. (In fact,

she taught Einstein to undergraduates at Notre Dame last semester!)

All of a sudden, I came to see TAC's lack of specialization as a great strength. I could study not only the Einstein I was so interested in, but also some economics in Senior Seminar as well as St. Thomas.

Since becoming a student here, I have come to love this community, especially the way we treat the intellectual life as a form of leisure. I'll mention a particular experience that's happened to me many times, which I think illustrates well what's really a fundamental attitude of the College. The experience is that of getting caught standing in a seemingly accidental spot, talking with someone for perhaps an hour or more about something interesting that we have been studying.

The crossroads by St. Joseph Commons, where all the paths to the residence halls meet, is a frequent place for this, but it also happened to me just the other night after the lecture outside St. Serra Hall, all because I happened to run into a friend who was leaving as I was arriving. Forty-five minutes later, my feet were hurting because I was still standing in my lecture shoes, since I never actually made it into the dorm to change. (But I wouldn't have it any other way!)

Oftentimes I will get to my homework much later than expected after dinner because I got caught in a conversation in the Commons that was much too interesting. Of course, it's important to get your homework done on time, but the way I see it, doing your homework diligently is for the sake of being able to have those in-depth conversations with friends in pursuit of the truth.



That's what I mean by treating the intellectual life as leisure: leisure as an end to which you order other things in your life, and not just something trivial that you do when you're tired or bored.

My education at TAC has prepared me for life after graduation in ways I never could have imagined. I am currently discerning between two different careers: I am applying to graduate school for philosophy of science and considering a job offer in finance that arose out of a summer internship I found through the College's Career Center.

In both cases, my TAC education has proved invaluable. My very interest in philosophy of science began with our study of the chemical revolution in Sophomore Natural Science and our study of astronomy and physics in Sophomore Mathematics and Junior Natural Science. In the case of finance, on the other hand, I think my success in the internship (and the job offer that came out of it) was, in large part, a fruit of my preparation through the Discussion Method. My mentors were pleased with my ability to pick up new concepts rapidly by asking good questions, then explain those concepts to others.

I want to express my gratitude to you, the Board of Governors, for all the work you do. I cherish the opportunity being here today has given me to recognize more of the blessings in my life, and I am grateful for them. □

The Love of Wisdom, Sparked by a Sweatshirt

By Trinity Chester (CA'25)
Morgan Hill, California

The story of how I found myself at Thomas Aquinas College is a bit unusual. My parents didn't attend this school. Neither did any of my family members or close friends. In fact, until I was about 12 years old, I had never even heard of TAC, and a small liberal arts school certainly wasn't on my radar.

And then, one day, a girl in my homeschool group wore a TAC hoodie to the park. Curious, I asked her about this school that I had never heard of, and she told me it was a Catholic liberal arts school where they read a lot of books and talk about philosophy and theology.

I went home and googled "Thomas Aquinas College," then spent hours poring over the College's website. I was hooked, and I think I decided right then that TAC was where I wanted to attend college. I am so grateful for that chance encounter — or, more probably, that providential event — which led me here. That one conversation, sparked by a sweatshirt of all things, changed the course of my life forever.

Looking back on my childhood, it's clear I was meant for TAC. I loved reading, loved learning as much as I possibly could about any given subject, and loved to argue.

I was blessed to receive an education that instilled a strong sense of wonder, teaching me to ask questions and seek answers. Although I was a cradle Catholic, this questioning led me to a stint with relativism in middle school, during which I considered leaving the Church. I vividly remember going on a parish youth ministry trip and spending the bus ride trying to convince my peers that every religion was equally true because

everyone believed their own religion to be true.

Yet it was through researching my theological questions that I came to realize that the Church has answers — and good ones. I fell in love with the beauty of theology, the Queen of the Sciences, and that love brought me to TAC.

When I got here, I think I still desired truth for the wrong reasons: I wanted to feel smart and to be able to win arguments. My time here has taught me that a true philosopher is one who is madly in love with the truth.

Through conversations in class with my section-mates, in the Commons or the dorm with friends, and in the Chapel with Jesus, I have learned that truth isn't something that's valuable because it makes you feel smart or helps you win arguments, but something that has value in itself.

"When I got here, I think I still desired truth for the wrong reasons: I wanted to feel smart and to be able to win arguments. My time here has taught me that a true philosopher is one who is madly in love with the truth."

One of the greatest surprises of my time here has been the realization that the perennial truths we encounter in our curriculum are very relevant in our modern world. People are hungry for the truth, and my education has sparked many fruitful conversations in the outside world. It gives me the context to



have nuanced conversations about the Faith and the state of society.

Over Christmas break last year, right after reading Pascal's Wager and St. Thomas's Five Ways in class, my brother asked me, "How can we really be sure there is a God?" We talked a bit about Pascal's Wager and the importance of faith, and then I explained that St. Thomas Aquinas gave five proofs for the existence of God from natural reason alone.

"No way," he said. "That can't work. There's no way." But after I took him through St. Thomas's first argument, I think he changed his mind. The world needs what TAC students have been given, and I have realized that my education is not only a gift to me, but a gift to my whole community.

With this in mind, I plan to work in the non-profit sector or in an education-related field for the first few years after graduation, putting my education to good work by contributing to the common good. Then, who knows? Maybe this love for truth will draw me to a graduate program in theology or to missionary work abroad.

Wherever I go, I know that love for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful will animate the rest of my life, and I am beyond grateful for this gift. □

Note: The above essays are adapted from remarks made to the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors at their fall meeting.

Faith in Action

News from TAC's Alumni Blog

Attorney Justin Alvarez ('97) Aids Women & Babies in the Fight for Life

As a boy, alumnus attorney Justin Alvarez ('97) was curious — and precocious.

At the age of 13, he developed an interest in the fields of business and law. "I was that strange child who would read law books at the library just to figure out what I could and could not do," he recalls. "And I ran my fair share of small businesses, starting in middle school." That interest became a lifelong passion, culminating in his work as the owner of the Alvarez Firm in Camarillo, California, a legal practice specializing in real estate.

Around the same time, with no prompting from friends or family, he reasoned his way to the pro-life position. "I didn't have any religious-based reasoning for thinking abortion was wrong, but I saw the science and the ethical implications," he explains. "In the very early-stage zygote, you see a scientifically



clear, unique human individual. I was not focused on personhood, or its meaning, only that scientific analysis, and I didn't find any arguments that would refute that."

From there sprang another lifelong passion: his work on behalf of unborn babies and their mothers. For more than 20 years, Mr. Alvarez has served on the Board of Directors of Obria Med-

ical Clinics, a swiftly growing pro-life organization dedicated to bringing health care and pregnancy support to expectant moms around the country. In 2023, the Board elected him as its chairman.

Conversion, College & Career

While still a teenager, Mr. Alvarez also began the discernment that would ultimately lead him to Thomas Aquinas College and the Catholic Church.

Raised in a largely secular home, he became curious about the question of God, inspiring him to explore various faiths. "I was something of a deist to begin with," he says. "Around age 15, I attended Mormon missionary sessions, studied world religions, and would sometimes attend up to four Christian churches on a Sunday."

As he neared high school graduation, he sought to study philosophy and theology, and he wanted an undergraduate education that would prepare him well for law school. "The College's program was perfectly suited to what lawyers do — read and analyze texts, interpret them, then discuss and argue about them," he says. "I also learned that, even in those early days, TAC had many alumni who had attended very strong law schools, and so, even though the College was then small and young, it could help me get into a significant law school." In 1993, he enrolled as a freshman on the California campus.

"Since the time I was 15, I had already been investigating various Christian churches," he says. "This was my chance to see what the Catholics had to say!"

By all indications, he found it persuasive. Not long after arriving on campus, Mr. Alvarez began to attend Mass, at the encouragement of a friend. By the goodness of God's grace, through the theological formation he received in class, and drawn by the intellectual clarity of Catholic doctrine, he entered the Church on the Easter Vigil of his sophomore year. "I received the 'Grand Slam' of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion that night!"

"One of the things I have always firmly believed in is loving the woman where she is, unconditionally, because she deserves to be loved for who she is."

When it came time to graduate, he could not decide between his childhood interests in law and business, so he opted for both. He enrolled at the University of Notre Dame, where he earned a *juris doctor* and a master's in business administration. Today, his law firm provides legal advice and strategic guidance to business and property owners. "Many of my





clients are businesspersons,” he says. “So, they appreciate that I understand what they have to face as business owners.”

But before heading to law school, he took some time to consider if he had a priestly vocation and joined a young adult study group at a parish in Huntington Beach, California. After discerning that his calling lay elsewhere, he began dating his soon-to-be wife, Kelly, who ran the study group with

her sister. Today, the couple has 10 children, including two current students on the California campus — Maximilian ('26) and Therese ('27) — and one alumna, Cecilia ('24), who graduated from the New England campus last spring.

“As I see my children attend and graduate from the College, I can see that the formation they received at home only continues to grow and deepen,” says Mr. Alvarez. “TAC remains an incredible opportunity for forming the knowledge that will lead one to a happy and productive life.”

Saving Lives with Obria

Soon after graduating from Notre Dame, Mr. Alvarez took a job with a law firm in Orange County, California, across the street from a large abortion clinic. “On my lunch breaks, I would often go down and say a Rosary in front of the clinic,” he says. “Eventually, I noticed a space for lease next door, and knew I wanted to get a pro-life clinic in that space.”

Determined to see his idea through, he reached out to Obria — then called Birth Choice Medical Clinics — and met with its founder, Kathleen Eaton-Bravo. Though the space he had in mind did not end up working out, the organization’s second counseling clinic opened months later, just a few blocks away. Soon after, Mrs. Eaton-Bravo invited him to join Obria’s Board of Directors.

“I feel especially called to serve the crisis-pregnancy center movement, where you’re meeting women in crisis on the front

lines,” says Mr. Alvarez. “One of the things I have always firmly believed in is loving the woman where she is, unconditionally, because she deserves to be loved for who she is, not just because she is carrying a baby. And when she feels that unconditional, non-judgmental love, she can feel empowered to make the choice she didn’t think she had, and choose life for her child, choose to love her baby unconditionally as she was loved.”

For the last two decades, Mr. Alvarez has aided Obria in its quest to provide high-quality pro-life medical care and support to mothers and their unborn children. What started as one counseling center in Orange County has grown to include 21 medical clinics across 6 states, saving well over 1,700 lives in the past year alone.

“We recognized the need for a unified, national brand in order to effectively counteract internationally recognized organizations like Planned Parenthood,” Mr. Alvarez explains. “Though each one has local differences, all Obria clinics are united in our branding, standards, and, most importantly, our mission: to provide comprehensive, compassionate medical health services consistent with the inherent value and dignity of every person.”

As Obria’s network grows larger, Mr. Alvarez is prepared to continue the fight for life, especially in the face of both external adversaries and unseen evils. “You can tell how effective you are by how much the enemy attacks you in spiritual combat,” he says. “In times of our greatest successes, the spiritual attacks on our board and employees grow in strength.”

While it can be daunting, this spiritual warfare inspires him to continue his good work: “When I see these attacks, I know we must be doing good things, because if Satan comes after us that much, he must really hate us and everything we achieve. Though the work is difficult and exhausting at times, I think about all the lives we have saved and will save, and know I have to keep going.” □



Mr. Alvarez (right) and fellow members of the Board of Directors visit Obria’s Georgia clinic.

Cardinal Burke Names Rev. Hildebrand Garceau, O.Praem. ('78), as Shrine Rector

On the Feast of Christ the King, His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke appointed an alumnus priest, Rev. Hildebrand Garceau, O.Praem. ('78), as the new rector of the Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

“In the joy of today’s feast, I have the profound joy of installing Father Hildebrand Garceau, Canon Regular of Prémontré of Saint Michael’s Abbey in Orange, California, as the Fourth Rector of the Church of the Shrine of Our



Lady of Guadalupe,” His Eminence announced. The Cardinal founded the Shrine in 2004 when he was the Bishop of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Its architect, Duncan Stroik of the University of Notre Dame, also designed Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel on Thomas Aquinas College’s California campus.

A native of Connecticut, Fr. Hildebrand first came to the College as a student in 1974. After graduating in 1978, he attended Mt. Angel Seminary in Oregon and was ordained to the priesthood in 1984. He served as a chaplain on the California campus from 2011 to 2015.

For the past year and a half, Fr. Hildebrand has served the Shrine alongside three fellow Norbertine brothers. Now, he will aid its community and pilgrims as the Shrine’s administrator and guide. “As Rector of the Shrine Church, Fr. Hildebrand has the responsibility of assuring that all priests who serve here are faithful to the Shrine’s high mission: the care of the souls of pilgrims,” said Cardinal Burke in his Christ the King homily. “The pilgrims to the Shrine are profoundly blessed by his faithful and generous priestly life and ministry.” □

Peter Bockrath (CA'24) Commissions into “Team Saint Paul”

One of the College’s newest graduates, Peter Bockrath (CA'24) has accepted a bold new challenge: to minister to the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces as a member of Team Saint Paul, an evangelization group established by the Most Rev. Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D., Archbishop for the Military Services, U.S.A.

Last September 13, His Excellency commissioned Mr. Bockrath and two fellow missionaries to the Team, which is tasked with helping servicemen and women grow in their faith amidst the challenges that can come with military life. “We currently have five missionaries, and Mr. Bockrath is one of our first two men,” says Archbishop Broglio, who in August presided over this fall’s Convocation at TAC-California. “I’m very excited he’s joining this initiative.”

For his first tour of duty, Mr. Bockrath will be stationed at Fort Campbell in Kentucky, where he and three other members of Team Saint Paul will live and engage with members of the U.S. Army. “This role of missionary for the active-duty service members is really important because it allows us to provide a firsthand witness to the full, happy, and beautiful life that one

can have through loving the heart of Jesus,” he says.

“Team Saint Paul is the most exciting initiative for the Archdiocese of Military Services because it allows people who are about the same age as our men and women in uniform to interact with them about the Faith,” says Archbishop Broglio. “This is an attempt to invite young people to practice their faith and bring the Gospel to others, which is consistent with the mandate Jesus Christ gave us to go out, preach the Gospel, and baptize all nations.” □



Peter Bockrath (CA'24), left, at his commissioning with fellow Team St. Paul missionaries

Uniting Catholics in Business: Karen Walker ('76)

“I would say I am more of an entrepreneur than anything else,” says Karen Walker ('76), seasoned journalist, PR professional, and founder of the *Catholic Business Journal* and “The Mentors Radio” show. Since graduating from the College in 1976, Ms. Walker has built a career around bringing together Catholics in the business world.

Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, she first heard about Thomas Aquinas College while in high school through a fellow parishioner. “He eagerly approached me after Mass one Sunday to ask where I was going to college, and painted a vivid picture of the Great Books, their authors, and their depth of wisdom,” she recalls. Intrigued, she visited the College, and, struck by how different it was from any other school she had visited, made the decision to apply. “Upon attending, I felt truly free to ask and wonder about any question, confident that there would be an answer and that I could learn it, whether or not I knew the answer yet.”

In the summer after her junior year, Ms. Walker took a job with an architectural firm. When she attended daily Mass during her lunch break, she assumed she would be the only businessperson present. “To my shock, I noticed a lot of ‘suits’ in attendance: well-dressed, clearly high-level executives,” she says. “Other than my father, I had never experienced working with an ethical, Catholic business professional, so seeing all these people at Mass really made an impression on me. I wanted to know where these Catholics worked, and work for them.”

After her graduation, she earned a master’s degree in philosophy at Laval University in Quebec. From there, she soon found her niche in the world of communications, public relations, and marketing. “I love and am curious about God and the richness of our Catholic faith, people, ideas, and innovative solutions to problems,” she says. “This field was a natural fit. It was, for me, a way to connect individuals with something greater than themselves, and thereby fuel a little more hope, charity, and love in the world.”

Over the years, she worked with a variety of businesses, including a California state legislator’s office, the C.S. Lewis Foundation, the Catholic Textbook Project, LaserMonks, Inc., the Catholic Marketing Network, and her alma mater. She has also written for the Associated Press, the *Los Angeles Times*, trade journals, the *National Catholic Register*, and other publications, and ghost-authored four books.

On the Feast of the Assumption — August 15, 2007 — Ms. Walker founded the Catholic Business Journal, LLC, which for 17 years has served Catholic business professionals with

premiere, curated Catholic and business content. “I saw opportunities for faith growth at the parish level and opportunities for business growth in different industries, but I yearned for a more concrete connection between business and faith,” she explains.

As a way to market the *Catholic Business Journal* as it started to grow in popularity, Ms. Walker launched “The Catholic Business Hour” radio show on EWTN. She found her host in Dick Lyles, a Catholic businessman, who interviewed guests and answered live listener questions twice weekly for eight years.

After “The Catholic Business Hour” ended its run in 2016, Ms. Walker created a new but similar program, catered to a wider audience. “The Mentors Radio,” hosted by two highly acclaimed CEOs, both Catholic, Tom Loarie and Dan Hesse, airs on San Francisco’s Salem Radio Network affiliate, iHeart Radio, and Spotify, featuring guests from all walks of life who mentor listeners by sharing their experiences, motivations,



“Other than my father, I had never experienced working with an ethical, Catholic business professional, so seeing all these people at Mass really made an impression on me.”

and purpose. “Listeners learn by their example: how they overcame phenomenal obstacles, built a thriving business or led a winning team, handled growth challenges, let-downs, and catastrophe, and what drives them to keep going.”

Despite not having a conventional background in entrepreneurship or communications, Ms. Walker has flourished in both fields and attributes her success to the foundation she received at Thomas Aquinas College. “My TAC education has been my rock and guide throughout my life in multiple ways,” she says. “At the College, I learned how to think and accurately evaluate ideas, that wonder is the beginning of knowledge, how to entrust to God the myriad of things I do not understand. Nothing is easy. But I try to do all for the glory of God!” □

Paul Habsburg (NE'24) Represents Order of Malta at U.N.

“After four years of participating in the Discussion Method at Thomas Aquinas College, speaking on difficult topics in front of others, I have gained so much confidence and humility,” says alumnus Paul Habsburg (NE'24), who is currently interning with the Sovereign Order of Malta at the United Nations in New York City. “For me, I think TAC was the ideal preparation for this kind of job.”

Upon graduating from the New England campus this past spring, Mr. Habsburg began a one-year internship for the Sovereign Order of Malta, a humanitarian Catholic lay order dedicated to serving the poor, the sick, and victims of war and catastrophes. The Order has a permanent mission at the United Nations, where it is recognized by 114 countries and works to maintain international diplomatic relations, providing aid to communities worldwide.

In the past few months of his internship, Mr. Habsburg has



sat in on many U.N. committee meetings and reported on them for the Order. He also writes statements for these committees and has even presented a few himself.

“In October, I gave three statements for the Order for the first time,” he says. “Even though it was daunting to be the one representing the Order in front of representatives from all over the world, it was a very exciting high point of my experience so far.” □

Two Alumni Ordained to Transitional Diaconate in LA!

At a Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles on November 23, a bishop asked seven men — including two Thomas Aquinas College alumni — to make the Promises of the Elect. All seven replied, “I do.”

Minutes later, the candidates knelt, one by one, before the Most Rev. Brian Nunes, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, who laid his hands upon them, thus ordaining the young men to the transitional diaconate. By God’s grace, these newly ordained deacons will become priests of the Catholic Church next spring.

The College’s two new alumni deacons, Rev. Mr. Paul Collins ('14) and Rev. Mr. Jorge Moncada Hernandez ('18), will now spend six months working in L.A. parishes, a final preparation for their priestly duties. Both will then go on to serve in the

“What I see in the missionary life is going to people where they’re at, especially bringing the peace of Christ to people in difficult circumstances.”

Archdiocese of Los Angeles, but Deacon Collins’s tenure will be short-lived: After a few years of parish life, he will go on to serve members of the U.S. Navy as a military chaplain. His future bishop, the Most Rev. Timothy Broglio — Archbishop for the Military Services, U.S.A., president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the 2024 Convocation Speaker at Thomas Aquinas College, California — was on hand for the solemn occasion.

“What I see in the missionary life is going to people where they’re at, especially bringing the peace of Christ to people in difficult circumstances,” Deacon Collins told *Angelus News*.

“I want to tell people that God loves them,” says Deacon Moncada. “I think that’s a problem we face nowadays; we don’t understand the Father’s love. We try to find it somewhere else — friendships, addictions, you name it. I want to bring the Father’s love to the people who desperately need it.” □



Reese Cuevas/Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Barbara Blewett

1930 – 2024

Barbara Arlene Blewett, wife of the College's late Vice President John W. Blewett, died peacefully in her sleep on October 16, 2024, at her home Santa Paula, California. Her daughter Katie Masteller ('82) had just finished praying a Rosary with her at her bedside. "It was a fitting way to go," observes her son Paul ('85), the College's director of gift planning. "She was devoted to the Rosary, to the Blessed Mother, and to the Sacred Heart."

Born on May 23, 1930, in Los Angeles, Mrs. Blewett grew up on a dairy farm in Fife, Washington, and met her husband while they were students at Seattle University. Mr. Blewett would go on to pursue a far-ranging career that included work as a longshoreman, a sportswriter, an executive for the Kaiser family of companies, and ultimately as the College's vice president for finance and operations — a late-life career change for which Mrs. Blewett was largely responsible.

"In the years following the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, the Kaiser company became increasingly involved in immoral medical practices, including abortion, and that made my parents deeply uneasy," says Paul. Around the same time, two of the Blewetts' daughters enrolled at the newly founded College, and Mr. Blewett made the acquaintance of its founding president, Dr. Ronald P. McArthur.

"I remember traveling to campus with my dad for a meeting he arranged with Dr. McArthur. I was just a kid, but it's my understanding that Ron saw that my dad could be of great help and asked him then to come work for the College," Paul adds. "Ordinarily, I don't think he would have been inclined to leave a very

"She did a lot of good, most of it unseen by the world. She was steadfast in the Faith and strove for sanctity always. I never saw her waver on that."

successful career to work for a fledgling startup, but because of his trust in Mom's judgment and strong moral sense, he agreed to the change of careers."

Whether in supporting her husband, raising their family, or in various private initiatives, Mrs. Blewett worked tirelessly for the Church and the Faith. "She did a lot of good, most of it unseen by the world," Paul adds. "She was steadfast in the Faith and strove for sanctity always. I never saw her waver on that."

Her pro-life activities ranged from cradle to grave. "She was a tireless activist on behalf of the unborn and was always generous to those in need," says Paul. "She also played an instrumental role



in bringing hospice care to the United States in the 1970s," arranging many speaking tours for Dr. Richard Lamerton, an acolyte of Dame Cicely Saunders and a pioneer of modern hospice in the United Kingdom.

The Blewetts moved to Santa Paula when Mr. Blewett first began working for the College in 1980, and for the next 44 years, Mrs. Blewett would become a fixture in the community. She often manned tables at community events to distribute pro-life literature and would graciously engage anyone who approached her. She likewise kept the vestibule at the local parish stocked with tracts on a wide range of topics — from morality, to apologetics, to contemporary issues facing the Church and the world — and regularly made trips up to the TAC campus to bring books to students, faculty, and staff.

Mrs. Blewett continued these many good works well into her later years, when the occurrence of a brain condition, which was put in remission, compelled her to embrace a more contemplative life. In this time, she turned, as ever, to the Blessed Virgin Mary for consolation.

Over their 62 years of marriage, the Blewetts were blessed with seven children, three of whom are TAC alumni: Katharine (Masteller '82), Margaret (Wall '82), and Paul ('85). To date, 10 of their 28 grandchildren have also gone on to attend the College: Mary Colette (Bolanos '11), Rev. Michael ('13), and Annamaria Masteller ('16); Joe ('20), Jack ('20), Nicholas ('23), and James Blewett ('24); and Jake ('11), Therese (Dufresne '18), and Alexander ('23) deTar. The Blewetts' descendants further include 60 great-grandchildren.

On the morning of October 24, 2024, hundreds of friends and family gathered in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel on the California campus for a Requiem Mass for the repose of Mrs. Blewett's soul. One of her grandsons, Rev. John Blewett, SJS, offered the Mass in the extraordinary form, to which Mrs. Blewett maintained a lifelong devotion.

"Barbara Blewett was beloved by all in the Thomas Aquinas College community," observed President Paul J. O'Reilly ('84). "She always had a kind word for everyone." □

IN MEMORIAM

Leonard John Netzel

April 17, 2022

Father of Joanne (Ambuul '93); member of
the St. Thérèse of Lisieux Legacy Society

Marion Brown

May 24, 2024

Mother of Lynn (Baunach '91)
and Ann Brown ('94)

Bridget M. Huntington

July 2, 2024

President's Council member

Barbara Blewett

October 16, 2024

Mother of Katharine (Masteller '82),
Margaret (Wall '82), and Paul ('85);
grandmother of Mary Colette (Bolanos '11),
Rev. Michael ('13), and Annamaria Masteller
('16); Joe ('20), Jack ('20), Nicholas ('23),
and James Blewett ('24); and Jake ('11),
Therese (Dufresne '18), and
Alexander deTar ('23)

Rita Zoumaya

October 21, 2024

Sister of Tutor Daniel



*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.*

Hilda Krestyn

November 5, 2024

Mother of George ('76); grandmother
of George ('03), Anna Heschmeyer ('04),
Maria (Foster '09), Francesca (Huntley '13),
and Liz (Coffey '17)

Miraleah "Mimi" Price

November 13, 2024

Former assistant to the dean

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



... help shape
the future
with a
legacy gift
today.



The St. Thérèse of Lisieux
Legacy Society

Please contact Paul Blewett, Director of Gift Planning
pblewett@thomasaquinas.edu | 805-421-5924

UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p> President's Day Lecture: Paul Clement
43rd U.S. Solicitor General.....February 21</p> <p> President's Day Lecture: Dr. Daniel Mahoney
Professor of Political Science,
Assumption University.....February 21</p> <p> Spring Open House Weekend for
High School Juniors and Seniors February 27</p> <p> Lecture: Dr. Zena Hitz
Tutor, St. John's College, Annapolis.....March 14</p> <p> Spring Play
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>.....March 22</p> | <p> Lecture: Dr. Stephen Barr
Professor Emeritus,
University of Delaware.....March 28</p> <p> Spring Play
<i>The Winter's Tale</i> April 4-5</p> <p> Spring Concert: Gilbert & Sullivan's <i>Mikado</i>
The Thomas Aquinas College Choir April 11</p> <p> Spring Concert
The Thomas Aquinas College Choir April 11</p> <p> 51st Annual Commencement May 17</p> <p> 4th Annual Commencement.....May 24</p> |
|---|---|

More events: thomasaquinas.edu/events

Campus Mass schedules: thomasaquinas.edu/masstimes

THIS SPRING

Honor Thy Father & Mother

WITH A NOVENA OF MASSES

Beginning on Mother's Day (May 11) and Father's Day (June 15), the chaplains of Thomas Aquinas College will offer a novena of Masses for mothers and fathers, respectively. Each parent included in the novena will receive a beautiful, personalized card from the College.

Cost: \$5 per card for shipping and handling. Mother's Day names must be received by May 8; Father's Day by June 12.

thomasaquinas.edu/novenas



STUDENT LIFE



1. An ensemble calling itself “TAC Unplugged” plays acoustic cover songs and original works at a mid-semester performance in St. Cecilia Hall. **2.** Student volunteers come together during Advent to assemble more than 1,200 sandwiches for a local food bank. **3.** Players clash at the net during the fall’s Volleyball Championship. **4.** Trying their hardest to look mean, the underclassmen take the field at the annual Turkey Bowl. **5.** Students feast and offer gratitude at the Thanksgiving Dinner. **6.** On a peaceful Sunday afternoon, student musicians take part in the Fall Schubertiade. **7.** Athletes battle during the dramatic men’s soccer finale.





1. Acolytes lead a candlelit procession for the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. **2.** In preparation for Halloween, students carve pumpkins in the Bl. Frassati Student Center. **3.** The winners celebrate their victory in the men's basketball championship. **4.** Contestants vie in the log-splitting contest at Oktoberfest. **5.** Sophomore ladies dazzle as the Greek pantheon at the Halloween dance. **6.** Musicians perform at Open-Mic Night. **7.** The quarterback surveys the field at the Turkey Bowl.





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