

AN  
INSPIRATIONAL MORNING  
WITH  
**POPE  
FRANCIS**

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT KEN GORMLEY REFLECTS ON HIS TRIP TO ROME TO VISIT DUQUESNE'S ITALIAN CAMPUS AND A SPECIAL MOMENT WITH THE POPE

*By President Ken Gormley*



In my work as a writer, I've been privileged to meet several U.S. presidents and a dozen U.S. Supreme Court justices. But never a Pope. So, on the day I received a letter from Bishop David Zubik's office informing me that I'd been approved to attend a papal audience with Pope Francis in the Vatican, I nearly fell out of my chair.

My assistant, Peggy, said: "Maybe you'll get to say hello to the Pope or shake his hand."

That was dreaming too big.

"Not a chance," I replied.

Bishop Zubik, the pastoral leader of the Diocese of Pittsburgh and a proud Duquesne alum, arranged for Fr. James McCloskey, one of my senior advisors, and me to attend the papal audience on Feb. 7. Fr. Jim warned me that if the Pope was called to travel, or if there was rain, the audience could be cancelled at a moment's notice.

It was worth the risk. I'd been looking for an opportunity to visit Duquesne's Rome campus for years. As an undergrad, my daughter Becca had attended the program and loved it. So Fr. Jim and I left snowy Pittsburgh behind and headed to Rome.

The first night, we made our way to Ristorante Archimede, where Michael Wright, the director of the Rome campus, had arranged a dinner with 60 Duquesne students in the program. We dined on artichokes, fried calamari and pasta. I chatted with a wonderful group of students, taking group photos and toasting to a wonderful semester. The next day, Fr. Jim and I toured the campus—a beautiful gated property on the hillside overlooking the city—where we visited classrooms and ate homemade *paczki* (Polish donuts) with the Polish nuns who run the facility.

Hours later, Fr. Jim and I reported to the bronze door of the Apostolic College, just inside the gates of St. Peter's Basilica. Vatican guards escorted Fr. Jim inside. He returned with two tickets marked: "*Incontro con il Santo Padre Francesco.*" The guard nodded and said: "*I migliori*" ... ("The best!").

Then the rain began. Torrential downpours, more harsh than usual, engulfed the city by nightfall. We were stunned when we checked the Vatican website, which confirmed that the outdoor papal audience had been cancelled in favor of a smaller audience inside the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall. There was no telling where this left us.

At the Vatican the next morning, Fr. Jim and I stood at a barricade where thousands of people were lined up hoping to gain entrance. The armed guard inspected our tickets and, magically, waved us through to the VIP entry. Swiss Guards in their colorful uniforms clicked their heels and saluted when they saw Fr. Jim's collar.

Inside the magnificent hall, Fr. Jim and I were led to a small section of folding chairs just below the altar. We looked at each other.

"I think I may have just died and gone to heaven," Fr. Jim said.

The hall seated only 6,000—much smaller than the outdoor



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venue. In the rear, hundreds of grade school children sang religious songs and chanted "Papa, Papa!" Soon, the Duquesne Rome campus students arrived waving and carrying a homemade Duquesne banner. At that moment, I was overcome by pride: Our special university in Pittsburgh was in the Pope's sacred house.

This moment was the fulfillment of a life's dream. Since his election by the papal conclave in 2013, Pope Francis—the first pontiff from the Southern Hemisphere—was clearly someone special. He had captivated the world with his down-to-earth approach and his compassion—the same basic traits that animated the Spiritan priests who founded Duquesne University.

As I waved back to our students, Pope Francis suddenly appeared and began walking down the center aisle. The chanting erupted into cheers; the Pope clasped children's outstretched hands, kissed infants held aloft, signed autographs and blessed rosaries presented by senior citizens, clearly reveling in this part of his ministry.

We stood and knelt during an inspiring hour-long prayer service, during which Pope Francis spoke in Italian, Latin and Spanish, reflecting on the Liturgy of the Word, and eliciting laughs when he spoke of the virtues of a "brief, well-prepared homily at Mass."

After his homily, the Pope introduced a surprise for the assembled children: He had

arranged for a carnival performance! A colorful group of tumblers, jugglers and balancing acts captivated the audience. After leading the applause himself, Pope Francis concluded the day with the Latin singing of *Pater Noster*, followed by a moving papal blessing.

With that, the Holy Father climbed down the altar steps and made his way to a row of children in wheelchairs, placing his hands on each head and administering a special blessing. Next he prayed with a man who had recently turned 100—the man held the Pope's hands in his own, tears streaming down his face. The Pope also continued a tradition by greeting a row of new brides dressed in flowing wedding gowns alongside their grooms. He spoke with each couple and posed for selfies, eliciting laughs and hugs.

Abruptly, he headed in our direction.

Fr. Jim and I were in the second row of the special seats: There wasn't an inch of daylight in front. All we could do was wave in the direction of the pontiff. And pray.

Having spent time in my childhood positioning myself outside the locker room at Forbes Field, waiting for enough space to insert my feet and get autographs from my Pittsburgh Pirates heroes, I had some experience in this "art form." As I jostled and maneuvered in search of an opening, an Italian teenager saw the look of frustration on my face and tugged me into a space beside him.

I thanked the boy in Italian and whispered to Fr. Jim: "Never underestimate the ability of someone from Swissvale to get into the front row!"

The Holy Father spoke with several nuns and chatted with the Italian family that had made room for me. Then he got to me.

"Pope Francis," I said. "I'm the president of Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit in Pittsburgh. Being here today is the greatest honor of my life. Bishop David Zubik—a distinguished alumnus of our University—made this visit possible, and he sends his regards." The Holy Father beamed. "Please send



President Ken Gormley recently visited Duquesne University's Italian campus in Rome. Duquesne serves as the academic hub for the Spiritan Generalate, whose headquarters are located in Rome. During the visit, Gormley and the Rev. James McCloskey, C.S.Sp., senior advisor to the president for strategic initiatives, toured the headquarters and attended Mass.

my own regards to Bishop Zubik," Pope Francis replied in English with a gentle Spanish accent. "He is a great leader of the Church."

Next, I introduced Fr. Jim, who squeezed in beside me. A flush of joy and awe came over Fr. Jim's face as he bowed before the Holy Father and kissed his papal ring. This remains one of my most special memories: Seeing a humble and devoted Spiritan priest who had dedicated his life to the service of Christ and the Church standing before the Pope and expressing his prayerful appreciation.

I pointed to the audience behind us. "Pope Francis," I said, "60 of our Duquesne students are here to join us in this beautiful celebration. I'd like you to see them." As if on cue, our

students waved and held their banner aloft. I was filled with pride.

As Pope Francis held onto my hand, I added: "Pope Francis, we'd love for you to visit Pittsburgh one of these days."

He smiled broadly and gave me a "thumbs-up."

I'm taking that as a definite yes.

I will always cherish special memories of that day. My time with Pope Francis only amounted to several minutes, but it seemed like several hours. I'll treasure the green leather pouch bearing the seal of the papal house, which contains a beautiful pair of rosary beads blessed by Pope Francis. I'll treasure a red scrapbook with dozens of pictures taken by the Vatican photographer during our brief

but precious time with the Holy Father.

But the most valuable treasure is the one held, in a private place, in my heart. Fr. Jim and I had met Pope Francis of Argentina, the leader of over a billion Catholic faithful in the world and the head of the most enduring religious institution ever established on this earth. During that day in the Vatican, we were able to bring to the *Casa Pontificia* the 140-year heritage of Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit and celebrate our common mission of service to others, like the millions of pilgrims who have come before us over the past 2,000 years.

I've been given many successes and blessings in life. But this was one of God's greatest gifts of all. ♦



To read more about our work in Rome, the Spiritan Generalate and a special Italian campus program that pays tributes to veterans, please see the following pages.

# WHEN IN ROME...

DUQUESNE'S GROWING INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS OFFER LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS

*By Ken Walters*







Duquesne University students benefit from a variety of experiences on the Rome campus. “Students are in love with learning when they experience history and art where it was made and still stands today,” says Michael Wright, director of European programs at Duquesne.

**T**aylor Martin’s study-abroad experience in Rome was unforgettable on several levels. The Duquesne University student re-connected with distant relatives in Bobbio, took a boat ride around the beautiful island of Capri and learned to speak Italian with native speakers in local coffee shops.

But Martin, a junior majoring in occupational therapy, says there is one experience that sticks out most in her mind.

“One thing I will never forget was a service opportunity where we fed the homeless,” she says. “Working with students not only from Rome but around the world, we prepared and gave out meals to the

homeless in the streets near the Vatican. What really touched me was how the people we worked with knew the people they were serving; they talked with them, checked in on them and listened to their stories. It wasn’t something that was done occasionally; this was a daily practice to help those in need.”

Such experiences are at the heart of a study-abroad program, says Duquesne University President Ken Gormley. And there is no more natural place in the world for Duquesne to make its second home than in Rome.

“As a top Catholic institution with a Spiritan mission, our Rome campus has the history of Catholicism

right in front of it,” Gormley says. “The footprints of Spiritans are all over Rome.”

Gormley made his first visit to the Rome campus as Duquesne’s president earlier this year. The trip was part of a papal visit arranged by the Most Rev. David A. Zubik, bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Along with the Rev. James P. McCloskey, C.S.Sp., Gormley greeted Pope Francis at the papal audience during his Vatican visit at St. Peter’s Square.

Students and faculty from the Italian campus also were part of the papal audience and unfurled a Duquesne banner when the University was recognized in the large auditorium.

“It was an amazing experience to be in the

Vatican and greet the Pope, whose leadership and genuine compassion for people is a role model for all of us,” Gormley says. “It was a thrilling day and one of the most memorable experiences of my life.” (See story on pages 36-39.)

The visit comes at a time when Duquesne’s study-abroad programs are gaining momentum, especially since the introduction of programs in Dublin and various Maymester opportunities in Africa, China, Japan and Europe. Maymester programs are four-week excursions that are especially valuable for students who want to explore a different culture but can’t afford to take a full semester abroad due to financial or time constraints.

"It's increasingly essential for students to be exposed to other cultures as the world becomes more global," says Michael Wright, director of European Programs at Duquesne. "The exchange of ideas and exploring different perspectives is an important part of the educational experience."

Founded in 2001, the Rome program typically educates 140 to 150 students each year. During the past five years, more than 800 students at the Italian campus received a Duquesne education, with plenty of relevant "hands-on" experiences, community service opportunities and time for personal reflection. Gormley notes the Rome campus features the same academic rigor students would find on the Bluff.

The hallmark of the Italian campus is on-site courses, which meet in the historic center of Rome. For example, the Baroque painting and sculpture class is held in the Vatican Museums to help students study the Sistine Chapel, while an ancient history class is conducted in the Colosseum.

"Students are in love with learning when they experience history and art where it was made and still stands today," Wright says. "Students gain a global perspective and receive a more solid understanding of history, the arts and theology, all while confronting self-discovery."

Academic excursions are popular with students at the Rome campus. Business students travel to Italy's food capital, the Emilia-Romagna region, where they work with executives from food companies such as Barilla while also learning how other food products, like Parmesan cheese and balsamic vinegar, affect the region's economy. Another excursion to the Naples area introduces students to the ancient sites of Pompeii and Paestum, while also visiting an organic buffalo farm to learn how mozzarella cheese is made.

Like Martin, some students take a more personal approach to their study-abroad experience. Italian-American students often find the villages from where their families immigrated to the United States. Working with the Rome campus staff and classmates, Martin was part of a group that received a grant to travel to Bobbio, where she visited distant relatives whom she had not seen in five years.

"I'm pleased that we can offer students the opportunity to study in Rome," says McCloskey, senior advisor to the president for strategic initiatives. "They benefit so much from the richness of the environment, whether it's being part of the papal audience in St. Peter's Square or studying in the heart of ancient Rome. They truly become immersed in the culture and come away with experiences that last a lifetime."

And while the "Eternal City" may be more than 4,500 miles from Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh connection extends beyond Duquesne. The

University's Italian campus sits on the property of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, which also operates the Holy Family Institute in Pittsburgh.

"The Rome campus is a partnership," Gormley says. "This is a Duquesne University-run operation—and everything about it is Duquesne—from the staff and faculty right down to creating personalized experiences for students. The sisters are instrumental in making everything run smoothly."

During his visit, Gormley met with new students, faculty and staff and saw some of the Spiritan sites in the city. The campus is housed within the Acquafredda Nature Reserve west of downtown Rome, about seven miles from Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica.

"It was fabulous to hear from students

**"As a top Catholic institution with a Spiritan mission, our Rome campus has the history of Catholicism right in front of it."**

about their time studying in Rome," he says. "The campus is much bigger than I imagined and the facilities—classrooms, computer labs, dormitories—are first-rate. I'm in awe of the richness of the experience students have on campus."

Students also have the opportunity to visit a variety of historic sites both inside and outside of Italy, such as Florence, Paris, Greece and the Netherlands. Martin visited 17 cities in five countries during her time in Rome and notes that experiencing different cultures will help throughout her career.

"As an occupational therapist, I will treat patients with different backgrounds and from different cultures," she says. "It will be important for me to understand where people are coming from—their values and what's important to them—to help them heal and recover. Studying in Italy exposed to me a variety of cultures that will help me to better understand people and ultimately become better at my profession."

For more information about Duquesne's international programs, visit [www.duq.edu/study-abroad](http://www.duq.edu/study-abroad). ♦

➔ To learn more, visit [duq.edu/rome](http://duq.edu/rome) to watch a video produced by recent Duquesne graduate Sydney Bauer, A'18.