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
At that moment, I was overcome by pride: Our special university in Pittsburgh was in the Pope’s sacred house.

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
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. ♦
WHEN IN ROME...

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

By Ken Walters
Taylor 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.

“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.

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 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.

To learn more, visit duq.edu/rome to watch a video produced by recent Duquesne graduate Sydney Bauer, A’18.
HONORING THE BRAVE

SPECIAL PROGRAM AT DU’S ITALIAN CAMPUS LINKS STUDENTS TO WORLD WAR II SOLDIERS KILLED IN ITALY

By Megan Tressler
Studying a war that occurred 70 years ago in a country thousands of miles away is educational, to be sure. But, researching the life of one soldier in the place where he died in battle offers an intimacy far beyond the history lesson.

At Duquesne University’s campus in Rome, the young men and women of today are connecting with the young soldiers of World War II through a special program that gives students deep insight into the heroes of yesterday.

“Duquesne students see young people nearly their same age that came to Italy, not to study abroad, but they came to liberate and lost their lives as they served their nation. This is humbling and grounding for young Duquesne students. They come away from the project with a better understanding of the privilege that we have to live and study in Rome and I think it affects their overall approach to their semester in the Eternal City,” says Michael Wright, director of Duquesne’s European programs.

The “Be the Difference - Never Again” project was started by Elizabeth Bettina Nicolosi in New York in 2014 as a way to remember those who gave their lives during World War II. It was adopted by the Italian campus in 2016 and continues to be a transformative experience for 120 students each semester.

Through the program, students research the lives of some of the 7,860 soldiers buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Nettuno, Italy. After finishing their research, students travel to the cemetery for a memorial service. They read poetry in English and Italian and place wreaths in the cemetery chapel. Students spend the rest of the day “meeting” their soldier by visiting the tomb. There, they pay homage to the soldier with poems or songs or by leaving memorabilia or flowers.

As part of the program, Duquesne students conduct the research in partnership with students from the Istituto Vittorio Bachelet High School in Rome.

“Students are touched by this experience as we are visiting and honoring those so far away from home that lay at rest on the beautiful Italian shores,” says Wright. “It is our way to give back to those that gave their lives, educate our young people about brutal realities of the past, and help create bonds of friendship between young American and Italian students.”

Last year, Pope Francis visited the cemetery to pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. The Duquesne students and Italian high school students were in the cemetery with the pope and attended his special Mass there.

Rebecca Lord discovered that her soldier, George J. Bacher Jr. from Pennsylvania, died at age 28 in Corsica in 1944.

“World War II is rife with tragic, beautiful and haunting stories of men and women from all nations performing heroic actions throughout the war. To learn and research solely on one person, George Bacher, allows us to truly know and respect him, as well as honor his sacrifice,” she says. “Many of these soldiers have never had visitors, so to be able to ‘speak’ to them and remember them not only for their part in the war, but also for being a person just like us, is truly an honor.”

The students’ projects will ultimately be compiled into volumes that will be given to the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery. And, Italian campus students will continue researching soldiers.

“A Spiritan education is about opening young people to service, global vision and justice which makes students more open to understanding global concerns and ultimately more open to the Holy Spirit. This project gives students the opportunity to serve the community in which they are living and studying, build friendships and cultural understanding while confronting historical events that left nations destroyed and families heartbroken,” says Wright. “The ultimate goal of the Italian campus is to help put students on the path to global citizenship where they will be able to put into practice the things they learned during their semester in Italy to better the United States and to work towards a more peaceful world.”
GLOBAL IMPACT

SPIRITAN GENERALATE, DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY WORK TOGETHER TO SERVE THE UNDERSERVED

By Ken Walters
The headquarters for the Spiritan Generalate occupies a serene plot of land overlooking St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican. This restored former schoolhouse surrounded by well-tended gardens is an appropriate setting for the work of the worldwide Spiritan Congregation, whose leadership gazes out the windows at night and draws inspiration from the glittering dome that for centuries has marked the physical center of Catholicism.

Like almost every religious order and congregation in the Church, the Spiritans maintain their central office in Rome as “a way to maintain connection with the Vatican, and a way to connect with one another,” explains the Reverend James P. McCloskey, C.S.Sp., Ph.D.

Founded in 1703, the Spiritan mission works to help oppressed and disadvantaged people overcome the struggles of everyday life. Today, nearly 3,000 Spiritans serve in more than 66 countries—particularly in Africa—but also in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia. If not serving in parishes or refugee camps, they work in social services that have a direct impact on the poorest and most marginalized, McCloskey says.

A key component of the Spiritan mission is education—which is where Duquesne University comes in.

“We serve as the academic hub for the Spiritan Congregation,” says Duquesne University President Ken Gormley, who visited the Spiritan Generalate headquarters earlier this year with McCloskey. “Many Spiritans have been taught here at Duquesne, and Spiritans have come to our Pittsburgh campus to teach as well.”

Founded by Spiritans in 1878, the University works in tandem with the Spiritan Generalate’s governing body in both operating Duquesne and developing its future vision.

During his visit, Gormley met with the Superior General of the Congregation, Father John Fogarty, and members of the General Council, which currently includes Spiritan priests from Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania, Mozambique, France, Switzerland and Ireland. Fogarty previously served at Duquesne as director of the Center for Spiritan Studies.

Gormley presented the University’s new strategic plan to the General Council and discussed the plan’s ongoing direction and implementation.

“The plan really captured the council members,” McCloskey says. “Their pride and enthusiasm for the University and its future animated our conversations throughout the day.”

While the Spiritans may not be as well-known as some other Catholic congregations, their work has not gone unnoticed by the Church. In just the past year, two Spiritan priests were named cardinals by Pope Francis. It marked the first time in the congregation’s 300-year history that a Spiritan was named a cardinal, the highest role in the Church.

“That kind of recognition shows the significance of their work,” Gormley says. “It’s rare and dramatic for that number of priests to reach the level of cardinal.”

The Spiritans continue to expand their mission throughout the world, including opening a new Spiritan University in Nigeria earlier this year. In June, McCloskey visited the university while attending a convocation at the Spiritan International School of Theology in Enugu, Nigeria. The opening comes as the Spiritans also have begun university projects in Tanzania and Ghana.

“The Spiritans view education as essential to their mission,” McCloskey says. “Through these schools, they can contribute to the advancement of the poor as a means of evangelization.”

With that in mind, the United States Spiritans held their provincial chapter meeting at Duquesne in June. The weeklong meeting is convened every six years, with the purpose of prayerful reflection on the work and future direction of the Congregation for the United States province.

“It’s a very exciting time for higher education and the Spiritan mission,” McCloskey says. “While there is always a focus on preaching the Gospel, the Spiritans are including education as an integral part of that calling. It’s a source of pride to know that Duquesne plays a key role in delivering on that mission.”

The Spiritans continue to expand their mission throughout the world, including opening a new Spiritan University in Nigeria earlier this year. The Rev. James McCloskey, C.S.Sp, senior advisor to the president for strategic initiatives (bottom center), visited the university while attending a convocation at the Spiritan International School of Theology in Enugu, Nigeria. Top right: Recently, Duquesne University President Ken Gormley and McCloskey visited the Spiritan Generalate headquarters to discuss the University’s new strategic plan.