

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE SPRING 2024

Volume 52, Issue 1

Ingenuity & Independence

California Campus Goes “Off the Grid”
with Innovative Energy Plan



Expansion in New England · A Visit from Attorney General William Barr



FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Of Great Books and Microturbines

Energy Independence Plan Reflects,
Sustains College's Founding Mission

Ordinarily, the Thomas Aquinas College Newsletter reports the goings-on of TAC students and alumni, showcasing for the College's friends the good works that their prayers, sacrifices, and gifts make possible. This issue, however, features an additional article about one of the behind-the-scenes, practical matters that do not typically make it into these pages: our energy-management plan for the California campus.

We include this article, which you can find on p. 13, because the energy-management plan says a great deal about the extraordinary community that supports this college, as well as our unique program of Catholic liberal education.

Looking to break free from the state's costly and unreliable energy grid, two TAC alumni — one, a member of the teaching faculty; the other, our vice president for operations — devised an innovative plan to convert the natural gas from a nearby oil field into electricity. They solicited the expertise of an electrical engineer (who is also a TAC dad) and a member of our Board of Governors. From there, they drew upon a decades-long, friendly relationship with Carbon California, operators of the oil field, who agreed to provide the natural gas, plus invaluable technical support, free of charge.

The entire process was an analytical and collaborative effort, much like the Socratic discussions that characterize our classrooms. As with our classroom conversations, this effort began with a question. It proceeded by considering that question from all sides and contemplating the available possibilities, working from shared principles to reach a satisfactory answer. And like any good classroom conversation, it required the input of many to come to fruition — to achieve “independence,” we relied heavily on the generosity, goodwill, and wisdom of others.

The resulting plan is an innovative marvel and a model for other institutions. By embracing a revolutionary approach that makes optimal use of the latest technology and local resources, it saves the College \$600,000 per year. It also meets the state's highest clean-energy standards, reflecting our commitment to being good stewards of both our benefactors' generosity and God's creation.

More than 50 years ago, the College's founders were adamant that, at Thomas Aquinas College, the Catholic faith would not merely adorn an otherwise secular education. Rather, it would infuse all that we do, animating every academic inquiry, shaping the moral life of the campus, and governing even the mundane, workaday matters of running a college, from financial aid to employee compensation.

Back in the 1960s and '70s, our founders could not have foreseen a future of green microturbines and high-capacity Tesla batteries. Nonetheless, the new energy-management plan for our California campus is very much in keeping with — and a testament to — their vision for Catholic liberal education. ❖



“The College’s founders were adamant that, at Thomas Aquinas College, the Catholic faith would not merely adorn an otherwise secular education. Rather, it would infuse all that we do.”

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One Program Two Coasts

RECENT EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

College Announces 2024 Commencement Speakers

This spring, Thomas Aquinas College will celebrate its 50th Commencement exercises, and in honor of the occasion, it will welcome distinguished speakers and celebrants to fete some 110 new graduates — the members of the Class of 2024 — on both coasts.



Dr. O. Carter Snead

For the California Commencement, set for May 11 on the Santa Paula campus, Dr. O. Carter Snead of the University of Notre Dame has agreed to serve as the day's speaker. A professor in the University's law school, as well as a professor of political science and the director of the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture, Dr. Snead is an internationally recognized expert in law and bioethics. He testifies regularly before the U.S.

episcopacy last fall.

One week after the California Convocation, on May 18, the College will hold the third Commencement at its New England campus in Northfield, Massachusetts. Serving as the day's Commencement Speaker, as well as the principal celebrant and homilist for the Baccalaureate Mass, is a prince of the Church and an old friend of the College: His Eminence Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke, Prefect Emeritus of the Apostolic Signatura.



The Most Rev. Slawomir Szkredka

The onetime bishop of La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Saint Louis, Missouri, His Eminence served as the Commencement Speaker on the California campus in 2010, whereupon he received the College's highest honor, the Saint Thomas Aquinas Medallion. He visited the campus again in 2016 and hosted members of the College's Board of Governors that same year in Rome. Although Commencement will mark his first visit to Northfield, Cardinal Burke has had a deep connection with the New England campus. In 2022, he gifted the College with the sacred relic of St. John Henry Newman that is housed in the main altar, below the saint's statue (a gift of the late Rev. Paul Lamb) in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel.



Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke

"We are delighted that these faithful servants of the Church — one, a layman; two, bishops; and scholars, all three — have agreed to come share their wisdom and celebrate with our graduates," says Thomas Aquinas College President Paul J. O'Reilly. "We look forward to welcoming Dr. Snead, Bishop Szkredka, and Cardinal Burke, and we are grateful for their friendship." ❖

Congress, state legislatures, and courts across the country on a wide variety of matters relating to medicine, science, and biotechnology; and he has advised officials in all three branches of the federal government on similar issues.

Offering the morning's Baccalaureate Mass of the Holy Spirit will be the Most Rev. Slawomir Szkredka, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles for the Santa Barbara Pastoral Region. A native of Poland, His Excellency attended seminary in Kraków before transferring to Ss. Cyril & Methodius Seminary in Michigan, which has traditionally provided priests for Polish communities within the U.S. After his ordination in 2002, he served in various parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Los Angeles prior to becoming a professor of biblical studies and the coordinator of human formation at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo. Bishop Szkredka's visit for Commencement will be his first to the California campus since his elevation to the



Reflections of a Two-Time Attorney General

The Hon. William P. Barr Delivers Presidents' Day Lecture

One of only two Americans ever to hold the office of U.S. Attorney General twice, the Hon. William Pelham Barr came to Thomas Aquinas College, California, on February 23 to give the 2024 Presidents' Day lecture.

In his hourlong address, "Today's Challenges to Our Constitution," Mr. Barr spoke to some 500 students, faculty, staff, and members of the Board of Governors about "the steady grinding down of the executive branch's authority" in the post-Watergate era, a result of "the encroachments of the other branches." These incursions, he lamented, have occurred under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, undermining the founders' vision of a robust presidency to unite and lead the republic.

"The framers felt that they needed a strong executive that was able to act with energy, consistency, decisiveness, and they came to feel that had to be provided by an



Former Attorney General William P. Barr visits with students

As part of its St. Vincent de Paul Lecture and Concert Series, the College hosts a President's Day Lecture on both campuses each year to consider issues related to the American founding. Past speakers have included U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, *First Things* founding editor

Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, and one of Mr. Barr's predecessors as U.S. Attorney General, the Hon. Edwin A. Meese III. A graduate of Columbia University and George Washington University Law School, Mr. Barr held the office from 1991 to 1993 under President George H. W. Bush and again from 2019 to 2020 under President Donald Trump.

Upon arriving on campus, Mr. Barr visited with students and members of the Board of Governors, then toured Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel and St. Bernardine of Siena Library before attending a formal All-College Dinner, held

in his honor, in St. Joseph Commons. At his ensuing lecture in St. Cecilia Hall's Fritz B. Burns Auditorium, he discussed the differing conceptions of executive authority that shaped the American founders' conception of the separation of powers, dating back to 17th century England. Deviating from this conception, he argued, reflects a political ruthlessness that prioritizes expedience over the country's constitutional order.

"What accounts for the anything-goes, no-holds-barred mentality which you're seeing in our politics?" Mr. Barr asked. "Up until, I think, about 30 years ago or so, both political parties were concerned about preserving the overall integrity and function of our political system. ... They were hesitant to take action without asking the key question, which is, 'What happens when the shoe is on the other foot? If the other side were to do this, what would happen to the system? And how will this affect it over the long run?' We're seeing less and less of this kind of prudence; it's all about immediate political

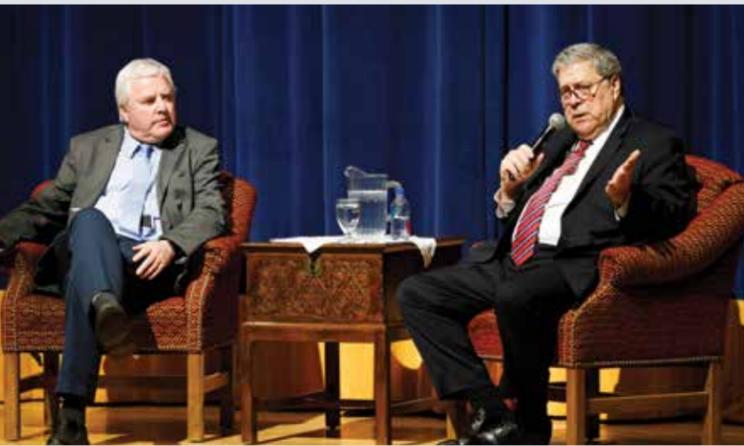
"I am delighted to be here, because this institution, to me, is on the front line of what we have to do to restore the foundation upon which our system rests, both in the City of God and in the City of Man."

individual, in solitary hands, who was free and separate from the divided counsels of the legislative branch," said Mr. Barr. "So, they vested all executive power in one official: the President of the United States."

ONE PROGRAM TWO COASTS

usefulness. We'll do anything to prevail today regardless of the cost tomorrow."

Students responded to Mr. Barr's address with a standing ovation, after which he spent some 45 minutes thoughtfully answering their questions, which ranged from Aristotelian notions of the common good to the principles of election law. "We are grateful and honored that Attorney General Barr would travel all this way to share his wisdom and experience with our students," said Thomas Aquinas College President Paul J. O'Reilly. "I think they found his analysis to be informative and enlightening, as did we all."



"This isn't about fights over law and using the law as a way of forcing people to live their lives the way we think or the way some other people think. It's about hearts and minds."

When concluding his address, Mr. Barr stressed the need to "restore and preserve in full vigor the founding principles," which can only occur among citizens committed to and practiced in the art of reasoned discourse.

"At the end of the day, this isn't about fights over law and using the law as a way of forcing people to live their lives the way we think or the way some other people think. It's about hearts and minds," Mr. Barr observed. "So, I am delighted to be here, because this institution, to me, is on the front line of what we have to do to restore the foundation upon which our system rests, both in the City of God and in the City of Man. In this partisan age, with all its passions and intensities, we have to take special care not to allow these passions of the moment to cause us to permanently disfigure the genius of our Constitutional structure." ❖

Fritz B. Burns Foundation Blesses College with \$3 Million Grant for Financial Aid

One morning in early December, Thomas Aquinas College President Paul J. O'Reilly received an unexpected but welcome phone call. Two longtime friends of the College, Maureen Rawlinson and Cheryl Robinson, trustees of the Fritz B. Burns Foundation, would be in the area. Would he be free for a visit?

Within a few hours and after lunch with several students, Mrs. Rawlinson and Mrs. Robinson presented Dr. O'Reilly with a \$3 million check for the Fritz B. Burns Endowed Scholarship Fund, which supports student financial aid at Thomas Aquinas College.

"We were delighted to welcome Maureen and Cheryl to campus and thrilled by their happy news," says Dr. O'Reilly. "The Fritz B. Burns Foundation has been steadfast in its support of the College for more than 50 years. This latest grant is but the most recent example in a long history of tremendous generosity."

Since the late Fritz B. Burns signed his first check to the College in 1971, its founding year, the foundation that carries on his legacy has consistently made ever-greater grants in support of TAC and its students. "Fritz Burns was involved in the founding of Thomas Aquinas College, so it is very special to us," says Mrs. Rawlinson. "He admired the College and the kind of education it stands for: classical, traditional, concerned for the whole person, mind, body, and spirit."

Over the years, the Fritz B. Burns Foundation has provided funding for St. Junipero Serra residence hall, Albertus Magnus Science Hall, St. Thomas Hall, and Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, as well as full funding for St. Gladys Hall, St. Cecilia Lecture and Concert Hall, and the Pope St. John Paul II Athletic Center on the California campus.

"We're always confident that when we make a gift to TAC, they're going to complete the project, going to do it at the best possible cost, and get it done in a reasonable time," says Mrs. Rawlinson's husband, Rex, the Foundation's president. "It's going to be beautiful, and it's going to contribute to the mission of the College. When you set foot on one of the campuses, you just feel like you're at a place where you should be studying and contemplating eternal things."

Two years ago, the Foundation established the Fritz B. Burns Endowed Scholarship Fund, which provides funding for the College's nationally recognized financial aid program. With the \$3 million grant that Mrs. Rawlinson and Mrs. Robinson hand delivered, the Endowed Scholarship now exceeds \$6.5 million. It is the College's



President Paul J. O'Reilly with Cheryl Robinson and Maureen Rawlinson, trustees of the Fritz B. Burns Foundation

single largest named endowment, generating sufficient interest to meet the financial aid needs of 10 to 20 students each year.

"Having contributed so extensively toward the building of the College, the Fritz B. Burns Foundation is now also going above

"When you set foot on one of the campuses, you just feel like you're at a place where you should be studying and contemplating eternal things."

and beyond to make attendance at the College possible for our students, thanks to its Endowed Scholarship Fund," says Dr. O'Reilly. "We are profoundly grateful for the friendship that Mr. Burns established all those years ago, and for the faithful, generous support of his foundation and its officers ever since." ❖

Thomistic Summer Conference 2024

Now entering its third consecutive year, the Thomistic Summer Conference is becoming a tradition at Thomas Aquinas College, California. This June 13-16, visiting scholars will reflect on "Virtue, Law, and the Common Good," with submissions now open for paper proposals.

St. Thomas's writings on morality form a complex doctrinal cathedral, but he founds this theological edifice on a few key, interrelated ideas: virtue and law (intrinsic and extrinsic principles of the moral life, respectively), both of which aim at the common good (the end of the moral life). Papers for this year's Thomistic Summer Conference will address questions about the relationships of virtue to happiness, of natural to human law, of law to justice, and of the political common good to the common good of the heavenly city.

This year's featured speakers include Dr. Christopher Kaczor of Loyola Marymount University, Dr. Michael Pakaluk of The Catholic University of America, Rev. Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem., of St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California, and the College's own Dr. John J. Goyette and Dr. John Francis Nieto.

Registration remains open until May 13. For more information, see thaq.co/tsc. ❖



President O'Reilly on "Anchored" Podcast

"When I left Ireland and came to Canada, I was 16 years old, and two things struck me: the amount of liberty that you have in North America and the wealth that is present," reflects Dr. Paul J. O'Reilly, president of Thomas Aquinas College, in a recent episode of the Classic Learning Test's "Anchored" podcast. "It had an effect on me. That's what I wanted. I wanted to be a wealthy man. That was my goal: pursue the Almighty Dollar, and I was accepted in a very good business school until the Lord, and then my mother, intervened."

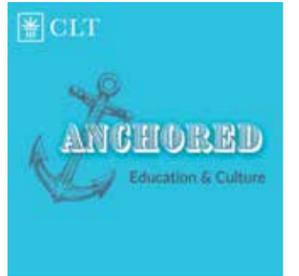
At his mother's suggestion, a priest recommended that Dr. O'Reilly, whose family had fled to Canada to escape the Troubles in Belfast, spend a relaxing week in Southern California. "I fell for that trap," Dr. O'Reilly laughs — and his life would never be the same.

Over the course of his 30-minute conversation with Jeremy Tate, founder and CEO of the Classic Learning Test — as well as an enthusiastic champion of the College — Dr. O'Reilly shares his life story: how his family endured violence and persecution, how he unexpectedly became a TAC student, and how this journey would ultimately lead to his becoming a husband, a scholar, a father of 12, and the College's president.

"I thank God for those four men, because without them I don't think we would have the renaissance in Catholic education that we now have."

Dr. O'Reilly and Mr. Tate also discuss the history of Thomas Aquinas College and the nature of its program of Catholic liberal education. As an entrepreneur himself, Mr. Tate is especially fascinated by the example of the College's founders, some of whom sacrificed tenured positions, and all of whom risked financial insecurity, to bring their vision to life. "It was a remarkable venture of faith," says Dr. O'Reilly. "I thank God for those four men, because without them I don't think we would have the renaissance in Catholic education that we now have."

The College has flourished in the 52 years since its founders' initial act of faith, but its true legacy, observes Mr. Tate, remains its alumni. "Before ever going to campus, I would say, 'TAC is my favorite college I've never been to,' because I knew the curriculum and I knew graduates," he adds. When speaking to those graduates, he often finds himself thinking, "You're some of the most thoughtful people I've ever had a conversation with." ❖



Scan to listen to the podcast.



Notes from the All-College Seminar

God's Justice and Mercy

By Brian T. Kelly, Ph.D.

Each semester, the students of Thomas Aquinas College gather for a Friday-night All-College Seminar, in which we discuss a work that's not part of the ordinary curriculum, in groups composed of students from all four classes.

The reading for this spring's All-College Seminar, St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Q 21, addressed the rich and mysterious topic of God's mercy and justice. All of us want to know — is God just, or is He merciful? If He is one of these, how could He be the other? St. Thomas's hypothetical objector in article 3 says that "mercy is a relaxation of justice." Surely, then, God could not be all just and all merciful, since to be merciful at all He would have to

"All of us want to know — is God just, or is He merciful? If He is one of these, how could He be the other?"

weaken His justice. This is a great and unavoidable question. If God is all mercy, then there is hope for us. If God is all just, we are in a world of trouble.

In our classroom conversations, we considered a few insights where St. Thomas helps escape this dilemma. He shows that jus-

tice and mercy cannot ultimately conflict. God is justice itself; but He is also mercy itself. And since there is no composition in Him, He cannot be partly just and partly merciful. These two must be one and the same thing in Him. Surely some distinctions must be made here.

First, we should note that when we say that God is "just," and that He is "justice itself," we are not appealing to any and every sense of justice. One kind of justice is called *commutative*, and "it consists in mutual giving and taking, as in buying and selling and things of this sort ... Commutative Justice does not belong to God" (art. 1). When we say that God is just, we have in mind the *distributive* sense. This "justice consists in distributing ... to each according to his dignity. Just as a congruous order in a family or any governed multitude exhibits justice in the one governing, so the order of the universe shows that God is just in this sense" (art. 1).



California students gather in classrooms across campus for the All-College Seminar on February 9...



Now *mercy* normally means being moved by the misery of another as if it were one's own (art. 3). But when we say that God is merciful, we don't mean to imply this, since God can't properly be moved. But we do mean that He does the work of the merciful man, He "acts to drive out the other person's misery." And, assuredly, this is the most important and perfect part of mercy.

"When God acts mercifully, then, we should not say that He acts against justice, but rather that He goes beyond justice without in any way opposing it."

But isn't this where the difficulty comes in? Should He drive out the misery of the one suffering justly? Isn't it unjust to remove the suffering of a punishment that is justly enacted? Isn't the punishment a debt that must be paid?

Not when one remembers that God's justice is found in giving appropriately to each creature. And surely being just in this way does not limit God's generosity and mercy. If I owe you \$10, I would be unjust if I failed to pay it. But it would not make me unjust if I paid \$20 instead. In giving the extra money, I go beyond justice, but I don't sin against it. Likewise, if I owe you money and you forgive the debt, the claim of justice is resolved by your generous gift. Nothing more is owed.

When God acts mercifully, then, we should not say that He acts against *justice*, but rather that He goes *beyond* justice without in any way opposing it. St. Thomas supports this answer with a quotation from James 2:13, "mercy transcends justice." And thank goodness for that! Without God's mercy we will never find our true peace. ❖

Dr. Kelly is a tutor on the California campus.



... followed by a pizza party with the faculty in St. Joseph Commons.

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

Endowed by Barbara and Paul Henkels

NEW ENGLAND

October Lecture

Dr. Peter Koritansky
Professor of Religious Studies
University of Prince Edward Island
"The Moral Basis of Criminal Punishment:
Thomistic and Platonic Reflections"

November Lecture

Dr. Marie George ('79)
Professor of Philosophy
St. John's University
"The Gradations of Things
in the Realm of Material
Living Beings"



Christmas Concert

The Thomas Aquinas
College Choir &
Orchestra



January Lecture

Dr. John Francis Nieto ('89)
Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College
"Lying with Tom Aquinas
& Huckleberry Finn"

January Concert

Peter Blanchette
Classical Guitarist



Presidents' Day Lecture

Walter J. Thompson
Fellow, Dean
Thomas More College of
Liberal Arts
"Politics and Happiness"



St. Thomas Day Lecture

Dr. Kevin White
Associate Professor of Philosophy
"Joy and Woe are Woven Fine:
St. Thomas on Pleasure, Pain, and Learning"

CALIFORNIA

November Lecture

Dr. Adam Schulman
Tutor
Saint John's College, Annapolis
"The Discovery of Entropy
and its Significance"



Concert: The Poetry of Christmas

The Thomas Aquinas College Choir &
Orchestra



January Lecture

Dr. David Appleby
Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College
"Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade"

January Lecture

Dr. Therese Cory
John and Jean Oesterle
Associate Professor of
Thomistic Studies
University of Notre Dame
"What Does It Mean for Intellect and Intelligible
to Be Identical?"



Spring All-College Seminar

St. Thomas on the Justice and Mercy of God
Question 21 of the *Prima Pars of the Summa*, 2-9

Presidents' Day Lecture

The Hon. William P. Barr
Former Attorney General of the United States
"Today's Challenges to Our Constitution"

St. Thomas Day Lecture

Dr. Josh Hochschild
Professor / Director of
Philosophy, Politics &
Economics Program
Mount St. Mary's University
"Recovering the Substance
of Eucharistic Doctrine:
Metaphysics, Logic, and the
Conceptual Framework of
"Transubstantiation"





Leaps & Bounds

To Meet Rising Demand, College Enlarges New England Student Body

Effective this fall, Thomas Aquinas College will enlarge the size of the freshman class on its New England campus by one-third — the first step in an expansion plan that will boost overall enrollment by more than 60 percent over the next four years.

“Ever since adding the New England campus five years ago, we have seen the number of applications continue to rise,” says President Paul J. O’Reilly. “The College has, therefore, decided to meet the increasing demand — to the extent prudently possible — by adding a fourth section to this fall’s freshman class as well as to the classes that will follow.”



“We expect a net gain of around 100 students by the time next year’s freshmen become seniors, bringing us up to about 280 students in New England — more than five times as many as we began with when we launched the campus in 2019.”

Every class of students at Thomas Aquinas College is divided into “sections,” groups of 16 to 19 students who take their weekday classes together. The first freshman class on the New England campus, which enrolled in 2019, included just two sections; in 2021, the number of freshman sections rose to three. In light of the College’s decision to expand the 2024-25 freshman class, that number will now rise again, with four sections entering this fall.

“When you consider that each of the next four, enlarged freshman classes will replace smaller classes that graduate the year before, the expansion is quite dramatic,” adds Dr. O’Reilly. “We expect a net gain of around 100 students by the time next year’s freshmen become seniors, bringing us up to about 280 students in

New England — more than five times as many as we began with when we launched the campus in 2019 — with the ultimate goal of educating 800 students per year, coast to coast.”

Driving the growth in enrollment is a steady increase in the number of applications. Since 2019, TAC-New England has seen its applications more than double, with a 21 percent jump in the last year alone.

“Even though we had long since reached maximum capacity in California, opening a second campus on the other side of the country required a leap of faith,” says Director of Admissions Jon Daly. “But we were hopeful that the Northeast would be ripe for our program of Catholic liberal education, and we have been thrilled by the results so far.”

In 2017, the College took ownership of the historic campus in Northfield, Massachusetts, which formerly belonged to a local preparatory school. Two years later, TAC-New England began its first academic year with a new freshman class and a group of sophomores transplanted from California. The student body has grown steadily ever since, and the campus held its first annual Commencement in 2021.

“To ensure that we hire only the best faculty, and that new members show a real understanding of our academic program, we have taken a deliberately slow approach to growth,” says Dr. O’Reilly. “But that hasn’t

curbed applications.”

Meanwhile, the California campus has benefitted from the additional exposure and reach provided by an East Coast counterpart. “At the same time that we have seen the number of applications double in New England, they have grown by a healthy 25 percent in California,” says Mr. Daly.

Contrary to what one might expect, students at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, do not hail exclusively, or even predominantly, from the Northeast. “Just as in California, we draw students from all over the U.S., as well as from abroad,” says Dr. O’Reilly. “There is a deep yearning, among both students and their families, for a rigorous, excellent, and faithfully Catholic education. We are grateful to God to play our part in answering that yearning.” ❖



OFF THE GRID

California Campus Achieves Energy Independence, Saves \$600k per Year, with Revolutionary Green Power Plan



Officials from Carbon California, which has provided free natural gas and technical expertise, and Thomas Aquinas College, stand before the Capstone microturbines that now power the California campus.

Days before Thomas Aquinas College began its Thanksgiving break, a momentous change reflecting years of study and months of work — yet unnoticeable to the students themselves — occurred on the California campus. With the flip of a switch that didn’t so much as cause the lights to flicker, the campus broke free of the state’s notoriously unreliable power grid.

Thanks to the ingenuity of the wider College community and a unique partnership with Carbon California, LLC, operators of a neighboring oil field, TAC-California launched an alternative-energy program that has all but eliminated its carbon footprint while saving \$600,000 a year. “This energy-management plan and technology portfolio,” says Lawrence Youngblood, director of Brompton Energy, “will put the College on such a high level that it will lead other universities throughout the United States.”

That’s a remarkable claim to make about a college that emphasizes faculty teaching over research and employs a classical curriculum

“This energy-management plan and technology portfolio will put the College on such a high level that it will lead other universities throughout the United States.”

drawing mostly upon ancient texts. But it’s not entirely surprising. “While the College is not in the business of technological innovation, this sort of innovation flows naturally from what we do,” says President Paul J. O’Reilly. “We are in the business of analytical thinking, of asking questions, of learning from and working with nature. And as a Catholic institution, we are very much in the business of shepherding our resources responsibly, partnering with our neighbors, and being good stewards of Creation. Our new energy independence program reflects all these qualities.”

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE PLAN

Thomas Aquinas College, California

2 ENERGY SITE

On the campus's periphery, Capstone green microturbines convert the natural gas into green energy; surplus electricity is stored in a high-capacity Tesla battery.

3 CAMPUS

The College benefits from free, clean energy, at a savings of \$600,000 per year.

1 OIL FIELD

Carbon California provides free natural gas, a byproduct of its pumping operations just north of campus.

Power Struggles

The origins of TAC energy independence can be found in the 2017 Thomas Fire, which encircled and threatened the California campus. The wildfire began as a spark off a high-voltage power line, but high winds quickly whipped that spark into one of the largest conflagrations in state history. Soon thereafter, utilities began the precautionary practice of cutting off power whenever the winds kicked up, thus subjecting the campus to routine blackouts throughout the fall and winter — on top of the state's perennial power shortages and rolling blackouts in the spring and summer.

The resulting lack of stability, coupled with dramatically increasing utility rates, led the College's Board of Governors to conclude that full energy independence was necessary. But how?

Initially, the only feasible solution appeared to be solar power, a prospect that troubled Senior Tutor and Governor Dr. Thomas Kaiser ('75), who spent much time in the Mojave Desert while conducting research for his doctorate in biology. "When I go out there now, I see nothing but square miles of solar panels," he says. To meet the energy needs of some 400 students using only solar power, the College would have had to despoil the campus by installing two acres of solar fields — a fate that Dr. Kaiser was determined to avoid.

Recognizing that trepidation alone is not constructive, Dr. Kaiser wracked his brain for another solution. The California campus, after all, is situated next to an oil and gas field. That was when he realized he knew exactly whom to contact: Lawrence Youngblood.

A licensed electrical engineer with more than 30 years of experience designing energy solutions in locales as widespread as Kazakhstan, Angola, Indonesia, and Italy, Mr. Youngblood is also the husband of an alumna, Brigitte (Curphey '92), and the father of two alumni and one current student: Megan ('18), Roman ('21), and Josephine ('24). Given his professional accomplishments as well as his personal connections to the College, he would understand well its power predicament and furnish insights into how to resolve it.

"We knew that providing the natural gas to TAC, free of charge, was the only way for the system to be economically feasible. And we wanted to be a good neighbor."

The engineer was intrigued. "If the College could get a contract for free natural gas in perpetuity from Carbon California," he said, "it would be a very economical decision." The question, of course, was how to make such a contract worth the company's while.

A Plan Coheres

To the pair's pleasant surprise, the company welcomed the proposal with open arms. "We knew that providing the natural gas to TAC, free of charge, was the only way for the system to be economically feasible," says Jane Farkas, Carbon California's vice president of

land and regulatory affairs. "And we wanted to be a good neighbor."

Yet the company's neighborliness extended far beyond its generous contribution of natural resources. There were innumerable technical, environmental, and regulatory details to resolve, requiring creativity and many hours of labor. With the assistance of Carbon California's engineers, Mr. Youngblood, Dr. Kaiser, and Mark Kretschmer ('99), the College's vice president for operations, developed an innovative and environmentally sound solution to the campus's energy conundrum, working at the intersection of physics and regulation.

Oil and gas naturally combine in subterranean deposits accessed by oil wells. "But when the gas reaches surface pressure," explains Mr. Youngblood, "it evolves and separates." Companies process and



The architects: Lawrence Youngblood, director of Brompton Energy; TAC Vice President for Operations Mark Kretschmer ('99); and Dr. Thomas J. Kaiser ('75), Senior Tutor and Governor

sell the separated gas, but harvesting it depends on the alignment of multiple factors, none of which are constant — unlike the physical laws governing pressure. "If there's a power outage or an upset at a processing plant, we have to flare the gas periodically," notes Ms. Farkas. Flares twinkling in the foothills at twilight may be a familiar sight to Californians, but state regulators consider them an emissions hazard.

The group's proposal exploits that regulatory hostility. "We have a gas stream that comes out of the wells near the campus, and we've allowed the College to tap into that line," says Scott Price, president of Carbon California. Diverting the gas from that stream to the College provides an alternative to periodic flaring, leading to an appreciable reduction in Carbon California's emissions profile while helping the College meet its power needs.

The collaboration marks yet another chapter in TAC and the company's long, neighborly history. "We have a good working relationship with the College," says Ms. Farkas. The College makes portions of campus infrastructure available to the company's vehicles, and Mr. Kretschmer has testified in Carbon California's behalf before county officials. "We appreciate the relationship we have with TAC, so when they approached us about the proposal, we thought it was a good thing to help out," says Ms. Farkas.

Rational Mechanics

If the natural gas is still burned when it reaches the College, however, are the touted emissions reductions only apparent?

No — thanks to another College connection. R. James Wensley, a member of the Board of Governors, served as CEO at Capstone Green Energy from 1993 to 2000.

At his recommendation, Mr. Youngblood looked into Capstone's design for a natural-gas turbine, which is, he discovered, as green as it gets. "According to the Air Quality Management District, the Capstone turbine uses the most recent, best available control technology on the market," says Mr. Youngblood. "Rather than flaring at high emissions, we can burn gas using that turbine's efficient combustion technology at much lower emissions."

Having thus found a way both to reduce Carbon California's flaring and to generate electricity for the campus in a manner that is both greener and more efficient than most of the state's own power

"The College's example could make it a real driver in innovation at other institutions."

plants, the College's pitch to the Ventura County Planning Division passed without a hitch. With the necessary permissions secured, construction proceeded apace. Throughout the summer and early autumn months, the College's operations crew worked with Brompton Energy to tap the pipeline, install the Capstone turbine on the lower campus, and modify the upper campus's electrical infrastructure. "We had never done anything like this before," says Mr. Kretschmer. "There's no way we could have completed this project, let alone so quickly, were it not for the countless hours of technical support and manpower that Carbon California provided throughout the installation, and which it continues to provide as we work through all the engineering and technical challenges."



Next up: College officials are investigating ways to cut energy consumption at the boiler plant on the New England campus.

Along the way, the project also expanded in scope. The mounting inconvenience of frequent power outages in the aftermath of the Thomas Fire led to California's 2020 Self-Generation Incentive Program (SGIP), under which the state subsidizes the installation of power-storage units that charge from the state grid during low-use hours and then discharge at peak times. To provide an added layer of energy resilience, the College enrolled in SGIP and acquired a free, high-capacity Tesla battery.

Although completing the project was time-consuming, it was financially advantageous. The natural gas comes free of charge, courtesy of Carbon California, as did the high-capacity battery, by way of the SGIP subsidy. The installation of the turbine and the project's supporting infrastructure, meanwhile, cost \$4.5 million, but — due to tax incentives and energy savings — will pay for itself within six years or less, should utility rates continue their decades-long climb. What's more, the College is currently in negotiations with Southern California Edison to sell surplus energy back to the grid, which will result in even greater savings for years to come.

Setting a Precedent

Given its proximity to the oil and gas field and its congenial relationship with Carbon California, the College's California campus was uniquely placed to transition to energy independence. But in light of this success, the Board of Governors has already begun working with Mr. Youngblood to lower power costs at the recently acquired, but century-old, New England campus, as well.

"We went out there and looked at the boiler plant, looked at the buildings, and we came up with a plan to try to reduce the demand and improve efficiency," says Mr. Youngblood. "If everything goes well, just simple energy management on that level will reduce our bill by 15 to as much as 30 percent. And then we'll put together a long-term plan and start investing in higher-efficiency equipment."

Beyond New England, Mr. Youngblood predicts that many other institutions will learn from Thomas Aquinas College's experience. "This school collaborated with its neighbors and with its regulators to find a solution that not only works, but gives back to the wider community," he says. "The College's example could make it a real driver in innovation at other institutions, just by the way we all brought this mission to life." But while the College's story testifies to the rewards of neighborliness, it also demonstrates the critical thinking and openness to innovation that TAC's academic program encourages, and which its alumni, administrators, and friends have displayed by implementing this revolutionary approach to energy management.

That, after all, is as it should be. As a faithfully Catholic institution, the College is mindful that "God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2402). As Mr. Youngblood puts it, "Why can't TAC — which leads the way in Catholic liberal education — not also be the leader in implementing green technology as good stewards of God's creation?" ❖

SENIOR REFLECTIONS

The Best Beginning

By Jack Gardner ('24)
Moscow, Pennsylvania

Growing up the second of 11 homeschooled children in a busy and crowded house, I never thought much about TAC. I just saw it as my parents' alma mater. During my sophomore year of high school, my older brother, Dominic, visited the California campus. He fell in love with the classes and Discussion Method. I did not share his enthusiasm.

I had no interest in drudging through dusty old tomes and reading Latin and studying things that had no bearing on "real life." I applied instead for dual-enrollment classes of business at a local community college, fully expecting to go from high school to a business program.

God, however, had other plans.

My brother was, and still is, my best friend, and so soon I was on a plane to pay him and TAC a visit. Surprise, surprise, I fell in love, too.

The classes were wildly different from what I had expected. The first one I attended was Junior Philosophy. The stu-

dent was just beginning Book 8 of the

Ethics and were engaged in an enthusiastic discussion about friendship. After a few minutes I was on the edge of my seat, fully absorbed in the conversation. At several moments I had to catch myself to keep from jumping into the discussion! That *Ethics* class stands out in my mind to this day, but every class I visited captured my interest and attention in a similar way. For the next three days, I sat in on all the classes I could, swept up in Freshman Theology and bewildered but fascinated by Senior Philosophy. And, just like they say in the brochures, the conversations continued after the classes. Everywhere I went, students welcomed me, asked me where I was from, why I was here, and what I thought of the College. They were so excited to hear my story and share theirs.

Through these interactions, I made two important realizations. First, philosophy, theology, and everything else in the College's program of Catholic liberal education were nothing at all like I had thought. The books were old, but they were far from boring and dusty. Rather, even in that brief visit, I glimpsed a peek at the way that liberal education influences every aspect of life by forming the

hearts and minds of those who take it seriously. Second, the College was not only for people who "loved school," it was for anyone who is interested in truly understanding God, the world, and the people in it. I may

not have loved the boring and repetitive math and science of high school, but without even knowing it, I had always been looking for an education like TAC's.

Now, as a student, my experience at the College is much the same. Reflect-



ing back on these four years, full of the countless memories, challenges, and amazing experiences that have shaped me in such a short time, I find it difficult to capture the deep and hopefully lasting impression that the College has made on me.

Once you start to learn and appreciate the wisdom of the authors of the Great Books, whether they were right or wrong, you cannot go back to a life uninformed by their words. For example, once you have seen the account of sensation given by Aristotle in *De Anima* and struggled with the compelling and opposing account of Kant, you must take a side. It affects your outlook on the meaning of the world around you.

Then there is the spiritual life of the College. With four Masses, Adoration, and the Rosary offered daily, students have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make Catholic worship a constant presence in their days. In all things, but especially in our scholastic pursuits, the constant reminder of the Ultimate Cause of all goodness, meaning, and truth helps direct our endeavors.

My adult life is still just beginning, but I know that my time here has prepared me better, spiritually and mentally, than many more years of experience elsewhere could have. I am excited to go out in the world, get a job, and hopefully start a family, but I will always look back at my time here as the best beginning I could have ever made. ❖

“I Could See that I was Part of Something so much Bigger”

By Sophia Colarelli ('24)
Lockport, Illinois

My parents and three older siblings are TAC alumni, so talk of Thomas Aquinas College was always common at my family's dinner table. When my siblings would return home for breaks, I noticed changes in them, in how they held conversations and how well they could articulate their thoughts. Their discussions were of ideas, not just of things or people, and I wanted to be a part of those conversations.

“Over these past few years, my mind has been running free, chasing the trains of thought provoked by the Great Books. I have been inspired by the honest intellectual pursuits of my peers under the incredible witness of my tutors.”

I visited the College several times throughout high school and, with each visit, I fell more in love. Sitting in on my siblings' classes was delightful, as I saw students not too much older than myself talking about profound ideas with respect and vigor. I was awed by the liberality embraced by the tutors. As someone who has always had an eagerness for learning, I saw TAC as the perfect place for me. Not only did this program have a space for wonder, it revealed in it. So, my path was laid. I would follow my parents and my siblings, and here I am.

Over these past few years, my mind has been running free, chasing the trains of thought provoked by the Great Books. I have been inspired by the honest intellectual pursuits of my peers under the

incredible witness of my tutors.

I will never forget the first semester of freshman year, when my philosophy tutor was preparing my section for our first week of college finals. He said he wanted us to get ready by ordering a pizza and smoking a cigar! Joking aside, he was speaking to something TAC embodies that is so rare nowadays: a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, not for the sake of a good grade,

another degree, or a high-paying job. Cramming for finals is not what this school is about, and I find that absolutely beautiful.

Two years into the program, I veered from the usual path by

taking a gap year. After completing my sophomore year — and loving it — an opportunity to be an au pair in Italy fell into my lap. What a gift TAC was to my experience of Europe, and what a gift my experience of Europe was to my remaining two years at TAC!

Having completed freshman and sophomore years, I had read Greek texts, studied Latin, and learned the history of my faith from some of the Church's greatest theologians, which made visiting Athens and Rome amazing. Knowing that Aristotle and Socrates had walked these same streets, being able to understand the Latin inscriptions on the buildings, and attending Mass in St. Peter's Basilica with a deeper understanding of my Catholic faith were



blessings I could have never imagined. The history of my faith came alive to me. I could see that I was part of something so much bigger than just my parish back home.

After some time, though, I became disheartened by the lack of faith in the culture around me, especially among young people. I was reminded that I was not blessed with my TAC education simply for my own sake, but for the sake of reviving the faith in the culture of my generation — not just here in the U.S., but *everywhere*. When I returned to campus, I was remotivated to give my all to the program. I was here not just to follow in the footsteps of my family members, but to learn as much as I could for the sake of others.

Upon graduation, I am hoping to share the gift of my TAC education as an international teacher. Some of the options I am pursuing include a classical K-12 school near Buenos Aires, Argentina, as well as one in Cork, Ireland. I am already in the process of obtaining my Irish citizenship through my maternal grandfather.

No matter the country or the continent, though, I feel called to be a teacher, and I have complete confidence that my time here is preparing me well. Each class is a lesson in listening, and every discussion encourages me to evaluate, articulate, and wonder about the truth in a community of individuals united in the same goal. ❖

Faith in Action

News from TAC's Alumni Blog

Neuroscientist-in-Training

The months since last year's Commencement have been busy for Ian Cochiolo (CA'23). One month after his graduation, he wed classmate Elayne (Piquette CA'23), and in November he accepted a postbaccalaureate research fellowship in neuroscience through the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in Bethesda, Maryland, where he studies visual perception in monkeys. But these few eventful months have only been the latest stages of a far greater journey — from atheism to the Catholic faith.

“Since high school, I thought I'd go into medicine,” says Mr. Cochiolo. To that end, he traveled far from his home in Clovis, California, to enroll at Scotland's University of Edinburgh to study biochemistry. Having received a thoroughly secular education in high school, Mr. Cochiolo was surprised to find that the more science he studied in college, the less he was convinced that atheism — often considered the precondition for practicing science — was an adequate framework.

Fueling those doubts were his conversations with a high school friend, Lauro Platas ('22), who enrolled at Thomas Aquinas College when Mr. Cochiolo traversed the Atlantic. The pair called often during their year apart, and their discussions focused increasingly on science and religion. “In some indescribable way, God was entering into my life,” says Mr. Cochiolo.

“Neuroscience is speculative in nature. The immediate end of our research is not to produce technology, but to understand.”

Eventually, he faced an uncomfortable epiphany. “It hit me towards the end of my time at Edinburgh that I had to know if there was a God,” he says. “And for some reason, I knew in my heart that I would find out if I came to TAC.” The obvious problem, of course, was that the College was nearly half the globe away — and he was already pursuing another degree. But the question was too pressing: He pivoted and joined Mr. Platas in California the following year.

Mr. Cochiolo dove into his studies with the expectation that he would find an answer somewhere in the pages of the Great Books, but it was not that simple. “I assumed that, if there is



Elayne (Piquette) and Ian Cochiolo (both CA'23)

a God, someone would give me an argument and I would be logically convinced,” he remembers. But when he brought the question to then-Chaplain Rev. Paul Raftery, O.P., he received an unexpected response. “Fr. Paul looked at me and said, ‘Ian, there's not an argument that's going to prove it to you.’ That struck me.”

The liturgy did what logic could not. “One Sunday, Lauro ambushed me with an invitation to Mass,” laughs Mr. Cochiolo. “He said, ‘Just come once and see.’ So, I went — and I was blown away. Something important was happening that challenged all of my notions. I was confused but interested.” That interest kept him coming to Mass for the next few months, and somewhere in that time, faith awoke. “It dawned on me almost as if it were something that happened in the past,” recalls Mr. Cochiolo. He thought he would find God, but as it happens, God found him. He was baptized in the spring of 2020.

But God was not finished. Nurtured by the College's integrated curriculum, Mr. Cochiolo found himself entering new and intriguing intellectual vistas. The more he studied, and the more he considered his future, the more he was drawn to the questions that only neuroscience could answer. When the opportunity to answer those questions arose late last year, he could not pass.

Somewhat to his surprise, although far from the College, the NIMH has proven an intellectual home away from home. “Neuroscience is speculative in nature,” says Mr. Cochiolo. “The immediate end of our research is not to produce technology, but to understand.”

Even so, it is unlike any speculating he did at the College. “We're studying certain regions in the monkey's brain, with the hope that that will tell us how our brains are structured,” he explains. “I'm part philosopher, part computer programmer, part animal trainer, and part monkey neurosurgeon.” ❖

ALUMNI PRIESTS & RELIGIOUS

Dominican Leaders

At its annual provincial chapter earlier this year, the Western Province of the Order of Preachers selected Rev. John Winkowitsch, O.P. ('04), to serve as its



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



Rev. John Marie Bingham, O.P. ('00)

new director of vocations, succeeding Rev. John Marie Bingham, O.P. ('00), who is assuming the role of novice master. Together, these two Thomas Aquinas College alumni will shape the next generation of Dominicans ministering to

God's people along the Pacific coast.

Fr. John, who last fall served as the College's Convocation Speaker in California, entered the priesthood in 2020 after a long and dramatic spiritual journey, first to Catholicism and then to the Dominicans. Having walked an adventurous road of faith, he now looks forward to helping young men navigate their own. "When I was a little kid growing up in Montana, I was always inviting my friends over to visit our house," he tells *Mission West*, the province newsletter. "As Vocation Director, I cannot wait to make new friends and invite them over to visit our Western Dominican Province." When some of Fr. John's new friends decide to stick around as postulants and novices, they will fall under Fr. John Marie's watchful care. "As a novice 21 years ago, I enjoyed a graced year of growing in friendship with Christ and of learning to live the apostolic virtues of the Friars Preachers," the article quotes him as

saying. "I am sure I will be asked to die to myself in many ways as novice master. But the joy of such death is that it gives way to true life." ❖

Another Ordination!

The College has received the joyful news that another alumnus has entered the Sacred Priesthood of Jesus Christ: Rev. Patrick Rooney, O.P. ('15), ordained on May 26 at the hands of the Most Rev. Michael Barber, S.J., Bishop of Oakland.

Fr. Rooney's journey follows seven years of preparing to follow in the footsteps of St. Dominic as a mendicant preacher of the Gospel. In a recent video from the Western Province of the Order of Preach-



Rev. Patrick Rooney, O.P. ('15)

ers, Fr. Rooney reports that his feelings are "certainly joy, certainly gratitude to the Lord for all that He's given me, and gratitude to everyone who has been so generous to us." Nonetheless, he adds, "I feel like there's a lot of work to be done!"

Fr. Rooney will begin that work as the parochial vicar of St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco, where he will assist the pastor — a fellow alumnus and the College's 2022 Convocation Speaker, Rev. Michael Hurley, O.P. ('99) — gladly spending themselves and being spent for souls. ❖

Alumna Elected Norbertine Prioress

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph in Tehachapi, California, have announced that, on December 5, 2023, they elected Mother Mary Oda (Jennifer Tilley '02), O.Praem., as their new prioress.

"Giving thanks to God," the sisters wrote in their announcement, "we ask you all to pray for Mother Mary Oda and



Mother Mary Oda (Jennifer Tilley '02), O.Praem.

always the saintly example of our holy fathers, St. Augustine and St. Norbert."

Shortly after making her solemn profession in 2011, Mother appeared in a promotional video for her community, in which she discussed how she came to Thomas Aquinas College and then to religious life.

"I went to Princeton University first, and I was Protestant, but I came to a fuller understanding of the Catholic faith, and so I converted while I was there," she said. "Then I decided that I wanted a deeper experience of living that Catholic faith and knowing more about it, so I

for us all, that, by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of our Order, we might be of one mind and one heart on the way to God, and be made worthy of the promises of Christ, following

transferred to Thomas Aquinas College in California. Part of my thought in going there was that it would be a good place to find a good Catholic husband, but I

"I wanted a deeper experience of living that Catholic faith and knowing more about it, so I transferred to TAC in California. Part of my thought in going there was that it would be a good place to find a good Catholic husband, but I found a really good husband in Christ as my spouse."

found a really good husband in Christ as my spouse. I came to realize that, really, I was being called to the consecrated life."

Mother Prioress's term lasts 12 years. Please pray for her leadership and for the continued success of the Norbertine Canonesses. ❖

"Brothers in Arms"

Our Lord began His public ministry by calling pairs of brothers to follow Him, and it is a practice that continues, as Isaac ('19) and his older brother, Frater George (Patrick '14) Cross, O.Praem., can attest. Isaac is currently studying for the priesthood for the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts, and Frater George is in the novitiate at St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California.

Both began their discernment when, as recent TAC graduates, they took up jobs at their alma mater. Frater George was the first employee to live on the New England campus, where he held down the fort in comparative solitude until his colleagues and the first students arrived in 2019. Solitude did as solitude does,

directing his thoughts to God. "I started thinking about the priesthood," he says.

His priestly thoughts would soon influence his younger brother. "Pat's discernment put the priesthood on my radar



Isaac ('19) and Frater George (Patrick '14) Cross, O.Praem.

without my realizing it," Isaac observes. Isaac soon also took a job on the New England campus, serving as a resident director, while writing freelance articles and exploring a career in journalism in his spare time. "My thought was to write full-time after I finished my stint as an RD," he says, but that was not to be. "As I got more exposed to the journalism world, I started to realize that I didn't want to do it, after all. I had spent so many years pursuing it, so I felt a little lost."

Praying in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel, Isaac soon had an epiphany. "As a journalist, I wanted to bring the education I got at TAC

into the world and use it to bring people closer to Christ," he says. "But all of a sudden, it hit me that there's no better way to do that than as a priest, because you're not doing it alone — Christ is doing it through you." That realization left him determined to act: He visited a few religious congregations before becoming a seminarian at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 2021.

"It's not easy to choose this life, but God gives back so much more than you give Him."

Isaac's swift decision struck Frater George, who — though he never stopped thinking about the priesthood — had not yet translated his thinking into action. "It's how things have worked our whole lives," he laughs. "Isaac makes decisions quickly, and I have a lot of inertia. I don't know if I would be in religious life unless he had thought about seminary." Inspired, Frater George committed to the long-considered idea of discerning a Norbertine vocation. He began postulancy at St. Michael's Abbey in 2022 and received his religious name that

Christmas when he was formally admitted to the novitiate.

Although the brothers still have several years of discernment ahead, they are both at peace with their decisions. "Over the years, it's looked increasingly clear that this is what I'm supposed to do," says Isaac, who recently expressed that clarity at the Candidate Mass, a lesser-known stage in seminary formation. "In the Rite of Candidacy, seminarians declare their intention to finish their formation, making me officially a candidate for Holy Orders in the eyes of the Church," he says. "It's a pretty serious moment."

Although now 3,000 miles apart, the brothers support each other through prayer, as the early apostles must have done during their missions spanning the Mediterranean. But they also find time for the occasional visit, such as when Isaac stopped by St. Michael's Abbey this summer to see his fellow Cross on the road to Calvary.

"We're brothers in arms. It's not easy to choose this life, but God gives back so much more than you give Him," says Frater George. "Part of what He gives back is knowing that I have a brother doing this, too, and the encouragement and grace that come with that knowledge." ❖

Entrepreneur Turned Mechanic

After more than two decades in a career that has included stints at Boeing and NASA as well as founding his own tech company, Joe De Kroon ('91) has embarked on a new and no less exciting venture. A lifelong car enthusiast, he now shares that love through Apex Euro, a premier mechanic shop in Atlanta, Georgia, specializing in European vehicles.

Upon graduating from the College in 1991, he went on to study mechanical engineering at Arizona State University, then worked as a contractor with Boeing on NASA's International Space Station program before pursuing a doctorate in engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology. His doctoral work kept him busy, yet he gradually lost patience with academic engineering. "I wanted to solve problems and do real-world work," he says. "But the goal in academia isn't to solve problems, it's to pose problems for the next generation of engineers."

One way he found to scratch that problem-solving itch (and make some extra money) was to fix computers for families from his children's school community. "Eventually I took on a corporate customer," he says. In short order, he founded CrownTech Computer Services in 2000, and the enterprise proved a tremendous success.

The company has thrived for the last 23 years, making it possible, at long last, for him to realize an old dream. "I was an adult with 10 kids and had driven all the minivans," laughs Mr. De Kroon. "Now I had enough money to get a fun car." When problems arose, he found himself unimpressed by the local mechanics



Joe De Kroon ('91)

specializing in Euro maintenance. "I got tired of taking my cars to shops that took advantage of me or weren't competent in their diagnoses," he says.

So, when he stepped back from day-to-day operations at CrownTech a few years back, Mr. De Kroon knew exactly how

"I was an adult with 10 kids and had driven all the minivans. Now I had enough money to get a fun car."

to spend this next act of his life: Apex Euro, which he founded alongside some like-minded friends. "My goal at CrownTech was to be Christ-like in service mentality," he says. "The goal with Apex Euro is, in like fashion, to give people the best possible service and charge them fairly. If you do that, you have customers for life."

Mr. De Kroon looks forward to many more years of working with intricate engines, which — like the equally intricate ideas he studied at the College and the programs he designed for CrownTech — are fruits of time, patience, and love. ❖

JAG-OIC Headed to Italy

A member of the U.S. Army's Judge Advocate General's Corps, Major Tuls L. Rogers ('98) has been assigned the Officer-in-Charge for the legal office at Camp Darby, in the Tuscan region of central Italy, between Livorno and Pisa.

"Camp Darby's primary mission is to logistically support combat deployments that include war reserve storage and maintenance, maintenance of weapons and vehicles and their movement for rapid reaction, and crisis-response operations spanning the globe," he explains. "We provide legal services to U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa, U.S. Army Garrison Italy, the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), and other tenant units."

When he came to the College as a freshman in 1994, Major Rogers was already 22 years old and a member of the Army Reserve. (He served part time with a unit in Santa Barbara.) He earned his *juris doctor* at Ave Maria School of Law in 2004 and went on active duty in 2007. His new tour of duty marks his third assignment in Europe, having twice served in Germany, but his first in Italy.

In other news, Maj. Rogers and his wife and classmate, Audrey (Keeler '98) will soon be TAC parents, with their daughter set to enroll as a freshman this fall! ❖



Major Tuls L. Rogers ('98)

Attorney Behind the Ampersand

Jamie Hanson ('02) recently lent his name to his law firm, Lang Thal King & Hanson, the latest step in an unlikely journey that has wound its way through high school teaching and the halls of state — though it began at Thomas Aquinas College.



Jamie Hanson ('02)

After graduating in 2002, he found short-lived work as a winemaker in Oregon before joining the faculty of Veritas Preparatory Academy, now a part of the Great Hearts network. "My boss hired me because he knew that TAC alumni tended to take the intellectual life seriously, which is what he wanted for his school," he says. The opportunity was a pleasant surprise. "Teaching caught me and sustained me," he says. "I loved it."

Mr. Hanson spent the next six years at Veritas, during which time he wed his wife, Alishia. The couple soon realized, though, that raising children on a teacher's salary was a tall order. He therefore enrolled at Arizona State University College of Law and earned his J.D. In 2011, he clerked for the Hon. Peter B. Swann of the Arizona Court of Appeals until 2012. He then joined his current firm, at that time named Lang & Klain, where he worked in contract law.

In 2015, his career took an upswing. "When Gov. Doug Ducey was elected, he changed leadership at the Arizona Registrar of Contractors, and the new ROC Director named me its chief counsel," he says. Although his tenure at the Registrar was brief, it was a momentous step for the teacher-turned-lawyer. "I was this young, pipsqueak attorney who was suddenly running the legal department for a state agency," he laughs.

Mr. Hanson found himself especially indebted to his alma mater during his time at the Registrar. "I had to read the Registrar's statutes, make decisions, and think outside the box to get this state agency to run in a way that made some sense," he says. "The seminar method gave me the intellectual capacity and the spine to say, 'Here's what we're going to do and why.'"

"The seminar method gave me the intellectual capacity and the spine to say, 'Here's what we're going to do and why.'"

In 2017, Mr. Hanson took his deepened experience back to Lang & Klain. He brought such value with him that, last year, his contributions led to a name change (Lang Thal King & Hanson), making him, in his words, "the man behind the ampersand." Mr. Hanson credits his enduring value in large part to his time at the College. "It wasn't easy," he says, "but TAC gave me great confidence. There's now a well of insight and wisdom that I can draw on." ❖

Alumni Spouses, Online Entrepreneurs

Caroline (Burnham '00) and Dr. Richard King ('99) knew that life would be an adventure, but the parents of seven — including current students Peter (CA'24) and Jason (CA'26) — never expected that theirs would be an adventure in e-commerce. Yet in late 2020, the couple purchased the Catholic Faith Store, which has since become their principal livelihood.

Dr. King became a licensed chiropractor in 2010 and practiced full-time until pandemic restrictions made it difficult to keep his doors open. "Caroline and I looked around and thought that we should look into something that's not as dependent on the whims of regulation," he says. As Providence would have it, Mrs. King was working part-time at a small-business brokerage when she made an exciting discovery in the spring of 2020: an online Catholic bookstore that was up for sale.



The Caroline (Burnham '00) and Dr. Richard King ('99) family

The couple contacted the sellers, two former computer programmers who had started the bookstore on the side. "They had built a retail website for a client that turned out so well, they made one of their own — selling Catholic stuff," says Dr. King. "They wanted to sell it to a younger Catholic couple who would carry on the work not just as a business but as a ministry." Evidently, God's plans coincided with the sellers'. By September of 2020, the Kings took ownership — and they have not looked back.

"Running the Catholic Faith Store has been a true blessing to our family," says Mrs. King. But making the most of the blessing has required the couple to lean on skills they acquired while students at Thomas Aquinas College. "Being able to think outside of the box, being able to think creatively, use our brains, we've been able to jump into this online business and run it well," says Mrs. King. "Those foundations in learning how to think and reason are so important," adds Dr. King, "because e-commerce is an ever-shifting landscape." ❖



OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Chapel Statuary & Iconography Celebrate Church Triumphant

Shortly after Thomas Aquinas College acquired its century-old New England campus in 2017, the College began the careful work of transforming the erstwhile Sage Chapel — built in 1909 for Protestant worship — into a fitting home for our Eucharistic Lord and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Craftsmen cleared a central aisle between the pews; built an altar, tabernacle, and confessionals; and added holy-water fountains, kneelers, and Stations of the Cross. A mosaic of the Chapel's patroness, Our Mother of Perpetual Help, was incorporated into the building's façade, just above the main doors, and an icon bearing her likeness was placed just to the left of the altar.

Since then — and thanks to the generosity of several benefactors — the College has also installed saintly statues throughout the building, bringing tangible signs of the



“We are reminded, first, of our duty as Christians to ‘preach Christ crucified’ and, second, of the College’s mission of Catholic liberal education.”

Church Triumphant in Heaven to members of the Church Militant in the congregation.

When visitors enter Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel's narthex, they are greeted by a large statue of the young Mary with her mother, St. Anne, who explains the Ten Commandments to her daughter. The statue was a gift of the late Rev. Joseph Santos, pastor of the Church of the Holy Name of Jesus in Providence, Rhode Island. “Fr. Santos was an avid supporter of the College and visited the campus on multiple occasions,” says Patrick Ford, director of East Coast development. “He called me

up one time and asked if we wanted a statue of St. Anne. We were happy to have her, of course!”

As if led by St. Anne's guiding hand, visitors pass from the narthex to the nave, where they immediately encounter the baptismal font, above which hangs a print of Polish painter Eugeniusz Kazimirowski's original depiction of the Divine Mercy, as described by

St. Faustina Kowalska. The print was a gift from the family of Clara Ramos ('23), who was among TAC-New England's first students. “This image has strengthened my family in tough times,” says Miss Ramos. “Kneeling and praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet has always been a source of strength and hope for me and my family.”

In the back of the nave, one also finds a statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel holding the Child Jesus. Along with glass eyes, distinctive of European sculpture, both the Blessed Mother and Our Lord's faces bear expressions of peaceful joy, as the Child reaches out His hands in love. “Our Lady was my gift to the school,” says Rev. Greg Markey, head chaplain in New England, who purchased the statue in Spain. In addition to greeting worshippers, the statue is used for Marian processions, carried around the campus on a custom-built platform.

Continuing down the aisle, visitors approach the resplendent sanctuary. Above the tabernacle hangs a large Gothic crucifix,

“There are just as many students who pray in front of St. Joseph as there are in front of Our Lady. I was happily surprised that so many students have such a devotion to him.”

flanked by carvings of the Blessed Mother and St. John the Beloved, recreating the scene at Calvary. On either side are two niches containing statues of St. Thomas Aquinas, patron of the College, and St. John Henry Newman, a champion of Catholic liberal education. “In the sanctuary's statuary, we are reminded, first, of our duty as Christians to ‘preach Christ crucified’ and, second, of the College's mission of Catholic liberal education,” says President Paul J. O'Reilly. “And we see how the latter flows directly from the former.”

Beside the main altar stands a statue of St. Joseph, commissioned by the late Dr. Nancy Ann Faller, who served as the campus nurse for three years before dying of cancer in 2022, and who collaborated



with Fr. Markey to create a custom effigy of Our Lord's foster father to grace this place of worship. “We worked closely with the King Richard's statuary company while it



was being carved in Italy,” says Fr. Markey. “We wanted him to have the lily as a sign of his innocence and chastity, and to be holding the baby Jesus, who has a wooden cross in His hand, both as a sign of His father's trade and foreshadowing Christ's passion in the future.”

But the statue features an additional symbol: St. Joseph stands above a replica of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel. It is a venerable tradition that St. Joseph be depicted holding St. Peter's Basilica, symbolizing his universal patronage of the Church. Deeming it presumptuous to replace St. Peter's with the New England chapel, Fr. Markey and Dr. Faller opted instead to place the replica at his feet — symbolizing his paternal care.

Given both its unique symbolism and its association with the beloved nurse, the St. Joseph statue has become a favorite among students. “I just happened to put a kneeler in front of the statue when it was first set up,” Fr. Markey says. “There are just as many students who pray in front of St. Joseph as there are in front of Our Lady. I was happily surprised that so many



students have such a devotion to him.”

Now fully renovated, Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel is both a fittingly beautiful place for the worship of God, as well as a mosaic display of the dedication of the College's many friends, whose generosity and prayers have brought Thomas Aquinas College, New England, to life. ❖

Charles R. Norman

1930 – 2023

The California campus of Thomas Aquinas College is famous for its beauty, including its landscaping, for which much of the credit belongs to Charles R. Norman, a generous benefactor and friend, who died on October 2, 2023.



For over 70 years, Mr. Norman owned and operated Norman's Nursery, one of the premier wholesale plant nurseries in California. "This work was his pride and joy," his published obituary notes. "He dedicated himself to it, reviewing sales and inventory reports even in his final days." A shrewd businessman, he nevertheless made room for charity, donating many thousands of flowers, plants, and trees to various Catholic institutions over the years — including Thomas Aquinas College.

"Mr. Norman had been donating plants to the College since around 2006," says Benedict Coughlin, landscape projects supervisor on the California campus. "His first donation included flowers and trees for the gardens around Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel." That initial gift was followed by yearly contributions of tens of thousands of dollars' worth of plants. The remarkable beauty of the California campus — which Sir Anthony Hopkins once compared to "Shangri La" — would be unthinkable without Mr. Norman's kindness.

His humility was equal to his kindness. "One of the conditions for his donations was that we not recognize him with a public plaque," says Mr. Coughlin. "He wanted to be a silent benefactor." These self-effacing tendencies extended further than aversion to the public eye. Says Karim Obagi, executive director of development, "Mr. Norman often said, 'I get a lot of credit, but it's not right. The credit belongs to the folks who work for us, because they do all the hard work.'"

"Charles Norman was a quiet soul who, like St. Joseph, dedicated himself to his family, to his work, and to the good of the Church," says College President Paul J. O'Reilly. "His generosity and the hard work of the staff at Norman's Nursery have made Thomas Aquinas College a fittingly beautiful haven for the pursuit of the truth. We pray for the repose of his soul and for the consolation of his family: May he soon see the face of the Truth his kindness helps our students seek." ❖

J. R. Smeed

1929 – 2023

A generous benefactor and friend of Thomas Aquinas College, J. R. Smeed passed away on October 13, 2023.

An entrepreneur who worked and lived throughout the world — from America's Midwest to its West Coast to Canada and Africa — Mr. Smeed and his wife, Claire, were members of the Order of St. Albert, which honors those who support the College to an outstanding degree. Their business ventures took them into such diverse industries as cable television, life insurance, microwave technology, banking, newspapers, real estate, and automobiles. Over the decades, they were also passionate philanthropists, giving largely to political and legal organizations that defend Constitutional freedoms.

Mr. and Mrs. Smeed learned of the College in the early 1990s from their friend Tom Sullivan, the second chairman of the Board of Governors. As Mr. Smeed remembered it, one day Mr. Sullivan needed to get to the College in a hurry. "He mentioned, 'Ah, gee, I've got to go back there — we're having a real struggle. We're trying to get reaccredited, and the powers that be want us to conform to what they want us to do. We're fighting all by ourselves.'"

Mr. Sullivan was referring to the College's historic clash with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. At a time when it was itself seeking reaccreditation, the College led a fight against the adoption of a new accreditation standard that threatened to dilute its classical curriculum. Although still young and unknown, the College resisted this effort, and was eventually able to enlist some of California's leading private colleges and universities in the cause.

That skirmish — with the College playing the role of David against Goliath — caught the Smeeds' attention and won their admiration. Despite not being Catholic themselves, they admired the



Chairman of the Board of Governors R. James Wensley presents Claire and J. R. Smeed with a bronze bust of St. Albert the Great, marking the couple's induction into the Order of St. Albert, at Commencement 2009.

College's deeply held faith and commitment to its mission of Catholic liberal education. "Let me know what we can do," Mr. Smeed told Mr. Sullivan.

Soon thereafter, the Smeeds became members of the President's Council and visited the California campus regularly for graduations and the weekend-long Summer Seminars held for Council members. They even introduced friends and family members to the College, at times chartering buses to bring entire groups down from their home in Bakersfield.

As a small expression of its profound gratitude, the College inducted Mr. and Mrs. Smeed into the Order of St. Albert at Commencement 2009. Their names are engraved, alongside the names of the Order's fellow members, on the pedestal of a statue of St. Albert just outside of Albertus Magnus Hall on the California campus. "The Smeeds were prominent benefactors of Thomas Aquinas Col-

"We are grateful for such good friends, who have faithfully supported the College over many years, especially during tough times."

lege," notes Mr. Smeed's published obituary. "The College and its mission held a special place in his heart."

Mr. Smeed passed away peacefully at the couple's home in Bakersfield, with Mrs. Smeed, as always, lovingly at his side. "Please join us in praying for the repose of J. R.'s soul, as well as for Claire's consolation," says President Paul J. O'Reilly. "We are grateful for such good friends, who have faithfully supported the College over many years, especially during tough times. May he rest in peace." ❖

Mary Alice Isaacson

1930 – 2023

Mary Alice Isaacson and her late husband, William, were some of the earliest and most committed friends of Thomas Aquinas College. When the College was young and fledgling, they entrusted its founders both with their philanthropy and with the formation of their children. Twenty-eight years after her husband's death, Mrs. Isaacson passed away on November 4, 2023.

Troubled by the social trends of the late 1960s, the Isaacsons contributed however they could to strengthening the Catholic Church, both in their hometown of Chicago and throughout the United States. They assisted Rev. John Hardon, S.J., in founding the Institute for Religious Life (IRL) in the early 1970s, for instance, and took an interest in the renewal of Catholic education, which Dr. Ronald P. McArthur and his co-founders were attempting at Thomas Aquinas College.

The couple saw clearly what the College could become, leading Mr. Isaacson to join the Board of Governors in 1979. His experience further convinced him and his wife of the value of TAC's program of Catholic liberal education, and, in short order, all three of their children — Will ('82), Sr. Marcella



Mary Alice Isaacson with children Sr. Marcella (Maggie '86), M.C., and Rev. James, S.J.C., ('88)

(Maggie '86), and Rev. James, S.J.C. ('88) — would enroll.

After her husband's death, Mrs. Isaacson sustained friendship with the College with singular generosity. She was a member of both the President's Council and the St. Thérèse of Lisieux Legacy Society, but also found more creative ways to express her affection and admiration for the College's mission. In 2011, for instance, she and her son, Fr. James, donated an 1800s-era oil painting of St. Albert the Great to adorn the walls of Albertus Magnus Science Hall.

Mrs. Isaacson's benevolence was not limited, of course, to Thomas Aquinas College. "She attended every IRL National Meeting banquet up until this year and was a generous benefactor to religious communities in

so many unseen ways," the IRL noted in its memorial. Added the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius in their own statement, "Mary Alice was fondly referred to as 'Reverend Mother' by many in Chicago, especially the sisters of the Missionaries of Charity and the Little Sisters of the Poor."

The Catholic Church and the many institutions that serve it have benefitted greatly from the Isaacsons' devotion. "Mary Alice and William were mainstays of the College in its earliest years, when it needed sound guidance to weather the many challenges that young institutions face," says TAC president Dr. Paul J. O'Reilly. "Thanks be to God and, in no small part, their friendship, Thomas Aquinas College is where it is today. May they both rest in peace." ❖

IN MEMORIAM

Augustine and Bertha Cervantes
 October 30, 2021
 November 26, 2021
 Parents of Mary Elena ('86), Irene (Kacke '88), and Therese (Kulda '89); grandparents of Paul Kulda ('17)

Mary Guadalupe and Daniel Nelson McCarty
 January 21, 2023
 November 14, 2023
 Grandparents of Stephan ('05), Michael ('15), and Erin ('27)

Peter H. Bond ('95)
 February 13, 2023
 Alumnus

Paul Gonzales
 June 7, 2023
 Husband of Norma, former member of the Board of Governors

Gary Stanley Greig
 August 8, 2023
 Father of Jonathan ('10)

Charles R. Norman
 October 2, 2023
 President's Council Member

J. R. Smeed
 October 13, 2023
 Member of the Order of St. Albert

Mary Alice Isaacson
 November 4, 2023
 Mother of Will ('82), Sr. Marcella, M.C. ('86), and Rev. Jim ('88)

Mary M. Wasick
 November 24, 2023
 Grandmother of Peter ('13), Andrew ('15), Mary (Laetdke '18), James ('22), and Margaret LaFave ('23)

Aurora Steichen
 January 3, 2024
 Granddaughter of Ann (Skahill) and Jon (both '81)

Gregory Henderson
 January 18, 2024
 Father of Estevan ('26)



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.

Siaosi Tuliau
 January 18, 2024
 Grandfather of Dillon ('24)

Richard Kunz, Sr.
 January 26, 2024
 Father of Rich ('96) and John ('02)

Andrew Karas
 February 5, 2024
 Father of Dominic ('22)

Paul McMenemy
 February 11, 2024
 Father of College Governor Martha Reichert; grandmother of Meghan ('18) and Nancy Reichert ('23)

Carol Levine
 February 13, 2024
 Mother of Rev. Joseph ('89)

Dr. James Patrick
 March 3, 2024
 Friend

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



Please contact Paul Blewett, Director of Gift Planning
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... help shape the future with a legacy gift today.



The St. Thérèse of Lisieux Legacy Society

UPCOMING EVENTS

-  50th Annual Commencement.....May 11
-  3rd Annual Commencement May 18
-  West Coast Alumni Dinner & Reunions June 1
-  Thomistic Summer Conference.....June 13-16
 "Virtue, Law, and the Common Good"
 thomasaquinas.edu/tsc
-  One-Week Summer Program for High School Students June 23-30

-  Two-Week Summer Program for High School Students July 7-20
-  Two-Week Summer Program for High School StudentsJuly 14-27
-  Convocation.....August 24
-  Convocation.....August 26

More Events:
thomasaquinas.edu/events

Campus Mass schedules: thomasaquinas.edu/masstimes

Support the 2024 Friends Week of Giving!

June 24 - 30, 2024 Early-bird gifts are welcome!



thaq.co/gift

STUDENT LIFE



1. The St. Genesius Players perform A Man for All Seasons in St. Cecilia Hall. 2. A member of the student grounds crew beautifies the campus. 3. Sophomores mingle at the fall Ice Cream Social. 4. Chaplains bless students with a relic of St. Thomas Aquinas during finals week. 5. Chaplain Rev. Jorge Lopez leads a group of TAC mountaineers on an expedition to Yosemite's Half Dome over Columbus Day Weekend. 6. Couples take to the dance floor for the salsa/rumba/tango competitions at the St. Valentine's Day Dance. 7. Michael Johnston ('24) dons a fur coat at the seniors' annual Russian Tea Party, held just before the spring's first seminar on The Brothers Karamazov.



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1. Students craft tostadas at January's late-night snack in the Bl. Frassati Student Center. 2. College marchers join the Mass and March for Life in Springfield, Massachusetts, hosted by the Most Rev. William Byrne. 3. A TAC squad bests a visiting team from Thomas More College of the Liberal Arts in a friendly soccer match. 4. Freshly returned from Christmas vacation, students gather over cookies and cocoa. 5. Sophomores stage a live Clue game at the Mardi Gras Dance. 6. Stephen Grimm ('75) directs the Thomas Aquinas College Choir and Orchestra at their Christmas Concert. 7. Head Chaplain Rev. Greg Markey distributes ashes on Ash Wednesday.



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