

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

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A Half Century of Catholic Liberal Education College to Mark 50th Anniversary with Year-Long Celebration

Fifty years ago, a Catholic liberal arts college with just 33 students was set to open its doors on a rented campus in Southern California. This new institution would be animated by a spirit of faith seeking understanding, dedicated to timeless truths and a time-tested pedagogy. Great Books and Socratic discussions, rather than textbooks and lecturing, would guide students in pursuit of truth under the light of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

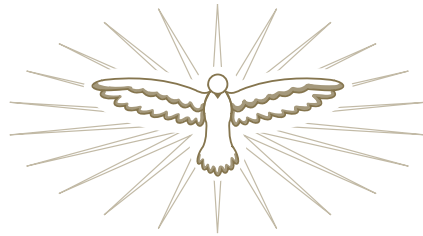
This vision, both ancient in its practice and revolutionary in its time, defied all conventional wisdom about what constituted education and what was required for a school to thrive.

“In the early 1970s the all-but-universally held opinion in academia was that liberal education was dead, that intellectual inquiry was incompatible with Catholic fidelity, and that truth was unknowable and not worth pursuing,” recalls Dr. Michael F. McLean, president of Thomas Aquinas College. “Our founders left good, tenured positions elsewhere to do something that most of their peers would have thought fanciful, if not preposterous, and certainly destined for failure.”

Yet this fall, that same college — now operating with beautiful campuses on

both coasts, with a growing student body of some 500 students, and with a hard-earned reputation for academic excellence — will commence its 50th academic year. Having survived early brushes with insolvency, having overcome challenges from regulators and bureaucracies, and having withstood natural disaster, Thomas Aquinas College has emerged stronger and more vibrant than ever, inspiring the numerous other faithfully Catholic schools that have sprung up in its wake.

“We know that God has been at work in the life of the College because the extraordinary successes of these 50 years could never have been achieved through merely human effort,” says Dr. McLean. “This glorious gift of Divine Providence must be celebrated properly — which is to say, extensively.”



50TH ANNIVERSARY

A Year of Celebrations

To mark the 50th Anniversary of Thomas Aquinas College, no less than a full year of celebrations — held on both campuses and at various points in between — will do.

The festivities will begin, fittingly, with a **Mass of Thanksgiving**, offered in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, followed by a luncheon on the California campus. Set for September 26, the College’s two West Coast ordinaries — the Most Rev. José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, and the Most Rev. Robert Barron, Auxiliary Bishop for the Santa Barbara pastoral region — will serve as presiding prelates.

Less than a month later, the College will host its **50th Anniversary Gala** at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills on October 16. Highlighting this night of

fine dining and dancing will be an address from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, who has graciously agreed to serve as the keynote speaker. From there, more celebrations will follow throughout the country, with events in the works for **Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York**. Finally, the year of celebration will conclude in the fall of 2022 on the College’s new campus in Northfield, Massachusetts, with a **Mass of Thanksgiving** and formal reception.

“We are trying to hold many events, in a wide range of locations, so that we can include as many friends as possible,” says Dr. McLean. “We have so many people to thank, from our founders and faculty, to our governors and benefactors, to the parents who have entrusted their children to us, to the alumni who have demonstrated through their lives the goodness and durability of this education. Most of all, though, we are grateful to God, Who has deigned to make Thomas Aquinas College possible, and to let us all play our small roles in its great story.”

To sign up for updates about 50th Anniversary events as they become available, please see thomasaquinas.edu/50.

Michael F. McLean to Step Down as President in 2022

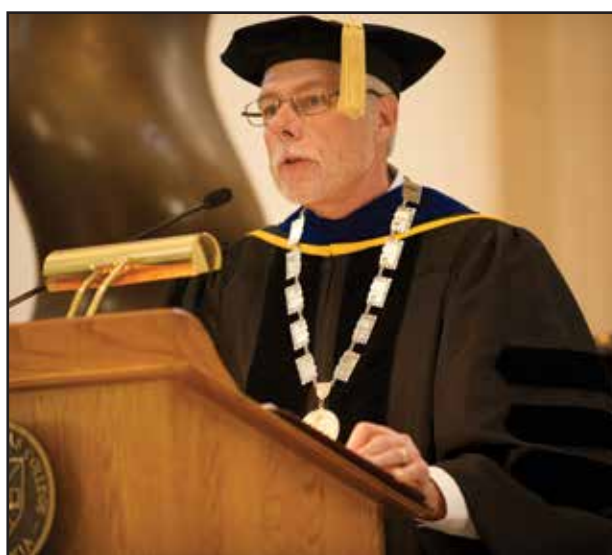
Tenure Included Defeating the HHS Mandate & Launching TAC, New England

After 11 years as president of Thomas Aquinas College, Dr. Michael F. McLean has announced that he will retire in 2022, with plans to return fulltime to the classroom.

“I have been blessed to serve as president during a tremendous period in the history of the College, complete with hardships as well as triumphs,” says Dr. McLean. “After my second six-year term draws to a close, I would like to focus once more on what led me to become an educator and brought me to Thomas Aquinas College in the first place — and that is a love of teaching. I look forward to sitting at the classroom table and discussing the Great Books with our students, free from any administrative responsibilities.”

Dr. McLean assumed the presidency at a trying time for the College, shortly after the tragic death of President Thomas E. Dillon, who was killed in an automobile accident in 2009. As a longtime tutor, former dean, and onetime vice president for development, he was able to provide a much-needed sense of continuity and leadership, uniting the College’s faculty and Board of Governors to adapt to changing circumstances and press forward with the important work of Catholic liberal education.

During his presidency, Dr. McLean successfully led the College in a four-year legal effort that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, securing an exemption from a federal mandate that compelled employers to provide free contraceptive, abortifacient, and sterilization coverage to their employees. He also saw the College through



the 2017 Thomas Fire, memorably spending the night on the California campus even as flames swirled around it. And for the last year he has navigated the ever-changing regulatory landscape of COVID-19, enabling the College to safely maintain in-person education at a time when most schools retreated to online learning.

Meanwhile, Dr. McLean has overseen the completion of the California campus with the addition of St. Gladys Hall (classrooms), the St. Cecilia Lecture and Concert Hall, and the Pope St. John Paul II Athletic Center. In 2018, he facilitated the purchase of more than 700 acres on the surrounding Ferndale Ranch property, effectively expanding the size of the campus six-fold, and creating

both a new buffer and student recreation areas.

Yet most notable of Dr. McLean’s accomplishments was the 2017 acquisition of a second campus — for free, thanks to the generosity of the National Christian Foundation — in Northfield, Massachusetts, and the launch of TAC, New England, in 2019.

“When Mike was elected President 11 years ago, life at TAC and in our culture was so much simpler,” says Chairman of the Board of Governors R. Scott Turicchi. “He has brought his great administrative skills to the challenges of fundraising, battling the federal government over the HHS mandate, overcoming natural disasters, and launching a second campus. On behalf of the board, we are very grateful for his friendship, service, and dedication to the College.”

“I am indebted to many people who have been of invaluable assistance to me and the College throughout my presidency,” says Dr. McLean. “First and foremost, to my wife, Lynda, but also to Peter DeLuca, who served as president between Tom Dillon’s death and my appointment; to Paul O’Reilly, our vice president for advancement, who was a driving force behind the expansion into New England; to Brian Kelly, John Goyette, and Tom Kaiser, who have served as deans; to Chairman Scott Turicchi and the entire Board of Governors; as well as to the faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, and many benefactors of Thomas Aquinas College. It has been an honor to serve as president, and I look forward to continuing to serve the College in other ways moving forward.”

“A Mission and Vision Worth Preserving”

President McLean’s Address at the 2020 Thanksgiving Dinner

Many colleges and universities up and down the West Coast and across the country have shut down in-person education; thanks be to God, we, on the contrary, soldier on.

Even in the midst of a pandemic, we have so much to be thankful for. Near the top of my list are you students. Deans Goyette and Kaiser, Assistant Deans Kuebler and Gardner, and I, along with all of our faculty, staff, and chaplains, are deeply grateful for the many ways in which you have rallied behind our COVID protocols, for the myriad sacrifices you have made and continue to make, and for your continued and steadfast dedication to the mission and well-being of Thomas Aquinas College.

My question this evening is this: Why is Thomas Aquinas College so important, and why is it worth the sacrifices we are making? There are many ways in which this question might be pursued. Bear with me for a few minutes while I share one of those ways with you.

When our founders wrote the College’s founding and governing document (the Blue Book), their principal concern was to outline a positive and robust vision of Catholic liberal education — a vision which takes our faith and the best of the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition seriously and fashions a curriculum accordingly.

The authors were equally insightful, however, about describing the state of undergraduate education, including undergraduate Catholic education, in the late 1960s and in identifying the underlying causes for its decline.

Chief among these causes was the wholesale and uncritical acceptance of the doctrine of academic freedom, understood, in the words of the Blue Book, “as the mentality of free inquiry, the mentality which sees itself as not enslaved to a fixed conception but free to subject every doctrine to critical examination and possible rejection” (p. 19).

With this as a principle, it is not hard to see that a Catholic college which considers the articles of faith as non-negotiable and beyond doubt, and which takes the Magisterium of the Church as an infallible guide in directing us to the best and most reliable of teachers — in short, a college which proposes Catholic education as essentially *faith seeking understanding* — is almost inconceivable. But conceiving such a college — conceiving Thomas Aquinas College — is precisely what the founders did.

The authors of the Blue Book identify a number of important and extremely harmful educational consequences of this understanding of academic freedom. First is what, at the time, was the growing secularization of American Catholic higher education, which follows, in the words of the Blue Book, “from the view that a college views its Catholicity as something that is subject to negotiation ... that it has rejected the traditional doctrine that the essential purpose of a Catholic college is to educate under the light of faith.”

Second, incoherence in the curriculum: Courses in the latest disciplines such as sociology and modern psychology proliferated, while the colleges also proposed courses in philosophy and theology that were based on a general conception of reality opposed to the philosophical presuppositions of the newer disciplines.

Third, incoherence in the philosophy curriculum itself: Faculties themselves were fundamentally divided on the question of whether there *is* philosophy, or merely philosophies.

Fourth, the isolation of religion courses, which in no way performed a sapiential function with respect to the rest of the curriculum. No attempt was made to acquaint students with the greatest Fathers and Doctors of the Church, or to deepen their understanding of the richness of the Catholic heritage.

Fifth, the substitution of vocational education for what was once an education judged to be intrinsically



good for the human person.

Sixth, the acceptance of an instrumentalist pedagogy, which proposed that successful education occurs in direct proportion to its compliance with the interests of the student — an interest which is assumed to be antecedent to enrollment and already fully determinate.

Finally, the deluge of course proliferation, which created the modern college catalogue, stemmed from the denial that one course of instruction might be more educative than another — and from the related conviction that the student’s academic freedom had, in a significant sense, been enhanced by the multiplication of options set before him.

These ills are pointed to in the Blue Book itself. They are as real today as they were then. Your choice of Thomas Aquinas College has enabled you to avoid them, unlike so many of your peers in other colleges.

Underlying these ills is a profound skepticism which despairs of the possibility of acquiring truth about reality and the most important questions which we all must face. This skepticism culminates in what the authors of the Blue Book see as a “profound confusion which is bearing its unhappy fruit in the irrational academic uprisings and revolutions, with their endless and aimless proposals for reform.”

Some 50 years after the Blue Book, it’s not at all clear that things in higher education generally have gotten any better; in fact, they’ve probably gotten worse. Christine Rosen, writing in the current issue of *Commentary* magazine, implicitly noting the confusion, uprisings, and revolutions, says, “we have moved beyond miseducation into an era of re-education.”

Rosen cites Ibram X. Kendi, who heads the Antiracism Center at Boston University. According to Rosen, Kendi “captures the contemporary mood in his center’s mission statement: ‘To produce knowledge for change’s sake.’” Contrary to the view expressed in the Blue Book that some knowledge is good for its own sake and that education should be ordered to wisdom, Rosen writes that “for Kendi and his ilk, knowledge is not an end in itself or even the purpose of an education. Education is merely a means to an end, a tool for ideological and political transformation.”

Rosen points to Duke University, which issued a statement this summer committing to “incorporate anti-racism into our curricula and programs across the university, requiring that every Duke student — in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs — learns of the nature of structural racism and inequity.”

Rosen also mentions the University of Florida, the Rochester Institute of Technology, UCLA, and Princeton University, among others. More colleges and universities will no doubt follow in their footsteps.

Now to come to the point of this talk: I’ve called your attention to examples of miseducation from the Blue Book, and of re-education from Rosen’s *Commentary* article, as a way to highlight our College’s commitment to genuine education and its opposition to education which is little more than political indoctrination. This commitment and this opposition render the College uniquely fit to help nurture the Church and restore American society.

Thomas Aquinas College has an unapologetic commitment to the Catholic faith: to pursuing the truth about God, nature, human goodness, and the political order — and the confidence, contrary to the skeptics, that such truth can be found. The College proudly declares that, for undergraduates, certain things are more worth knowing than others, and that such knowledge has to be pursued in the proper order and according to the proper method. Finally, the College declares that some are more worthy than others to be called teachers — chief among those most worthy being, after Our Lord Himself, St. Thomas Aquinas — and that some books are more worthy than others of our time, interest, and attention.

These commitments have produced generations of alumni who are helping to renew the face of the earth — alumni who are serving well, and will continue to serve well, their communities, their country, and their Church. God willing, you will do likewise.

These commitments, and others I could mention, have made Thomas Aquinas College truly countercultural for all of its 50 years and will continue to do so for the next 50 years.

As countercultural as the College is, it has been very successful. It owes its success, first, to the grace of God and to the vision of its founders. Second, to the dedication, generosity, and wisdom of its Board of Governors and all those who have served on the Board over the years, to all of the parents who have entrusted their children to us, to the benefactors who have contributed to the College’s strength and well-being, and to the faculty and students who have dedicated themselves, as you are now dedicating yourselves, to the College’s mission and educational vision, a mission and vision worth preserving, worth fighting for — and, yes, worth sacrificing for when necessary.

Let us take this opportunity to rededicate ourselves to that mission and vision even as we labor under our present hardships. Let us thank God for our success — as we thank all of you for our success — and pray fervently that He will continue to bless Thomas Aquinas College.

Thank you and may God bless you.

“Thomas Aquinas College has an unapologetic commitment to the Catholic faith.”

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



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

Please contact Paul Blewett, director of gift planning
pblewett@thomasaquinas.edu
805-421-5924



St. Thérèse of Lisieux Legacy Society

Selecting a New President

Faculty, Board of Governors Work to Name Dr. McLean’s Successor

When Dr. Michael F. McLean announced that he would not seek a third term as president of Thomas Aquinas College, he set into motion a process that may be the only one of its kind in the United States.

Most American colleges and universities conduct nationwide, or even international, searches for their presidents, typically hiring the services of a headhunting firm for the task. Perhaps it should come as little surprise, though, that Thomas Aquinas College — which has a wholly unique academic program and largely eschews most popular trends in the modern academy — would conduct its presidential searches differently.

“At the time of our establishment in the late 1960s,” says Peter L. DeLuca, one of the College’s founders and its third president, “when many Catholic colleges were wavering in their mission, we sought to ensure that our future presidents would be committed to implementing the College’s founding principles in the classroom.” As such, the College’s bylaws require that its president be chosen from among senior members of the teaching faculty, so as to safeguard the institution’s Catholic character and its commitment to liberal education.

“It wouldn’t work for us to choose a president who has no firsthand experience of our academic program, or who regards the presidency as a stepping stone to office elsewhere,” says R. Scott Turicchi, chairman of the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors. “We therefore limit prospective candidates to Catholic tutors who have earned permanent appointment to the teaching faculty. We want presidents who understand that the academic program and formation of our students are paramount — all duties of the president serve these ends. We want a president who is committed to Thomas

Aquinas College, and whose focus is on excellence in the classroom through fidelity to our mission and to the Teaching Church.”

Of course, to be a successful president one must have a thorough understanding of the academic program as well as an aptitude for the office’s administrative duties, which range from personnel to development to public speaking, public relations, and campus planning. “It’s not common for someone to possess all these gifts,” says Mr. Turicchi. “But our tutors, by virtue of their experience with liberal education, are usually dynamic and quick learners. For nearly 50 years, God has consistently provided TAC with presidents who are up to the challenges of the position.”

The process for choosing the new president began earlier this year, when the College’s Instruction Committee appointed a three-member Faculty Committee on Presidential Candidates, comprised of senior tutors drawn from both campuses, to determine suitable candidates. That committee then met personally with members of the faculty, tutors and administrators alike, to solicit their input and recommendations.

“Our interview process is thorough by design,” says John Baer, chairman of the Faculty Committee on Presidential Candidates. “The College’s founders wanted to ensure not only that new presidents are drawn from the faculty, but that they also have the *support* of the faculty. The process aims to protect the unity of the College by ensuring that whoever is elected has the approval of both the faculty and the Board.”

After completing their interviews, the committee’s members met with members of the faculty and presented two nominees. Faculty members were then permitted to make additional nominations, after which the entire



Three Presidents: Dr. Michael F. McLean, Peter L. DeLuca, and Dr. Ronald P. McArthur at President McLean’s inauguration in 2010

body voted on the selection of two final candidates.

These two names, in turn, were presented to a committee of the Board of Governors, which is charged with interviewing the candidates extensively. The committee will next choose between the two finalists or ask the faculty for more names to consider. Once the committee has arrived at its decision, it will present its recommendation to the entire Board for approval. The president-elect will then be able to work alongside Dr. McLean for the remainder of his term, which expires on June 30, 2022.

“Giving the new president some time to prepare for his new post will help ready him for office and smooth the transition for everyone,” says Mr. Turicchi. “It is a demanding and arduous job, but I am confident that, by God’s grace, we have a system in place that will allow us to choose the best person to fill it.”

New Governors

Board Elects Richard F. Spencer, Martha Reichert to its Ranks

Richard F. Spencer

Alongtime resident of Central California, Richard F. Spencer began fixing and renting out homes — with the help of his great-aunt — while still a high school student. From that young age, he manifested an entrepreneurial knack.

He continued to develop his gifts at St. Mary’s College in Moraga, California, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in economics and pursued graduate studies in real estate finance and development. “Two years after I graduated, I went into business with my father,” he recalls. “We started the real estate business and kind of hit it right in terms of Fresno.”

Mr. Spencer later launched his own real estate company, Spencer Enterprises, which constructs hundreds of units between Los Angeles and San Francisco every year. Over the years he has also purchased Harris Construction and founded three other businesses: Equipment Parts Wholesale (EPW), California Manufacturing and Engineering Company (C-MEC), and the California Consortium for Agricultural Export.

His first visit to Thomas Aquinas College came in the summer of 2010, when he and his wife, Karen, attended a seminar on the California campus. He soon fell in love with the College’s rigorous and classical training in the liberal arts, reminding him of his own education at St. Mary’s. “What I learned is how to think, and then you can move from that and be trained into anything you want,” he says. “I see



that as a very classical education, where you can apply it toward anything you like.”

In the fall of 2020, Mr. Spencer joined the College’s Board of Governors, and he looks forward to participating in the effort to aid the cause of Catholic liberal education. “I will continue to do whatever I am able for the TAC mission,” he says.

Mr. and Mrs. Spencer have been at the forefront of the formation and growth of Central California Right to Life and Catholic Charities of Central California. In addition to serving for seven years as a trustee of St. Mary’s College, he has been on the California State University, Fresno, Foundation for 20 years and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Review Institute.

In his free time, Mr. Spencer enjoys fishing and travel, having visited 6 continents and embarked on over a dozen cruises. He also harvests 3,000 acres of almonds, is fond of collecting good wine, and loves spending time with his 6 children and 13 grandchildren.

Martha Reichert

“My husband and I frequently tell others that we view TAC as providing the best Catholic higher education in the world,” says Martha Reichert, who was elected to the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors at its meeting last November. Her admiration for the College is both theoretical and observed. She believes in what it stands for, and she has witnessed the good that it achieves.

As a mother and as a professional — Mrs. Reichert is the president emeritus of Endow, an international Catholic apostolate whose mission it is to educate on the nature and dignity of women — she is committed to forming young women of faith, leaders who are confident, well educated, and eager to serve Christ in the world. At the College, she has watched her daughters, Meghan (’18) and Nancy (’23), grow into precisely such women. “I have seen and indirectly experienced the product,” she says of the College’s academic program, and she wants others to experience it as well.

Mrs. Reichert’s support of the College, however, predates this experience. “Well before our daughters attended, I was an admirer of the founding and governing document, *A Proposal for the Fulfillment of Catholic Liberal Education*, which offers a model of clarity and sanity in a domain that has lost both,” she says. “Of late, I am impressed by how prescient the writers of the Founding Document were in writing about what they described as the ‘pro-

found confusion’ afflicting most colleges and universities.”

A graduate of Franciscan University of Steubenville, Mrs. Reichert is a founding member of Endow’s board of directors, which she has served since 2003. She also developed and implemented the group’s outreach program to poor, homeless, and incarcerated women. From 2014 to 2018 she served as the organization’s president, a position that led to prominent speaking engagements at the Vatican, Legatus, and the World Meeting of Families.

Mrs. Reichert is additionally involved with several other Catholic organizations, including the Augustine Institute, Creatio, Katalyst, FOCUS, and the Missionaries of Charity. She resides with her husband, Tim, in Golden, Colorado. She enjoys hiking the Rocky Mountains, fly fishing, reading, and spending time with family and friends.

“The Reichert family has a great love for St. Thomas Aquinas, who happens to be my husband’s patron saint,” Mrs. Reichert notes. “We also have a great love for Thomas Aquinas College.”



“She had the Biggest Heart”

California Students Mourn Loss of Maggie Yanoschik (’23)

At 3:55 p.m. on March 24, the students of Thomas Aquinas College, California, filled Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel to pray the Rosary for sophomore Maggie Yanoschik, who was hospitalized and not expected to live much longer. Less than two hours later, they received word that their friend had gone to her eternal rest.

From the afternoon she had suffered a brain bleed nearly three weeks earlier, until the moment of her death on the eve of the Feast of the Annunciation, Maggie had been lifted up in prayer. Two days earlier, students had kept vigil for her at all-night Adoration. Throughout her hospitalization, she had family praying at her bedside and friends praying at parishes across the country. Her spiritual director, College Chaplain Rev. Paul Raftery, O.P., gave her the Sacrament of Anointing, and he was there with Maggie and her family as she left this world.

In this Year of St. Joseph, patron of a happy death, Maggie was blessed with a very happy death, indeed. She also had a very happy life.

Maggie suffered from an arteriovenous malformation (a tangle of blood vessels that disrupts blood flow and oxygen circulation), which impaired her vision and would ultimately claim her life. Yet this condition neither repressed her joy, dampened her love for others — especially children and the elderly — nor



diminished her great talent for drawing, painting, and most any artistic endeavor.

“She was a wonderful artist,” notes Christopher Sebastian (’13), who had the good fortune of knowing Maggie in two capacities. Growing up, their families were friends in their home state of Michigan; and later, Maggie would first graduate from, then teach Latin and visual arts at, the Mother of Divine Grace distance-learning academy, where Mr. Sebastian is the director of advancement. “Even though she was limited in her sight, she fully embraced what she could see, seeking to find the beauty in everything around her,” he says.

This yearning for beauty, as well as truth and goodness, also guided her spiritual and intellectual life. The fifth child of Anne-Marie and Matthew Yanoschik, Maggie followed the lead of her four older siblings by attending Thomas Aquinas College. “She truly saw the good of the Catholic classical education, what it

had brought to her own family, and she desired that for herself,” says Mr. Sebastian. “When health issues made it difficult for her to do the readings, she worked even harder and did an excellent job.”

Her tutors describe her as attentive and caring. “Whenever Maggie entered into our theology discussions,” recalls tutor Dr. Drew Rosato, “it was clear that she was a thoughtful person who took the matters we were discussing very seriously.”

“We all feel like we learned a bit more how to love the little things, laugh at the big ones, and trust God with everything through Maggie’s example.”

Her fellow students remember Maggie’s compassion and humor. “She had the biggest heart. She was full of joy and laughter. She was the best at bringing the wing together, whether it was for game nights, Bollywood dance workouts, or nerf-gun battles,” wrote the women who lived with her in St. Monica Hall. “We all feel like we learned a bit more how to love the little things, laugh at the big ones, and trust God with everything through Maggie’s example. She was so sincere in her faith and so intentional in seeking to love Christ. God’s love poured out on all of us through Maggie’s life. We miss her pres-

ence, but we still feel her love, laughter, and joy in everyday moments.”

The day after Maggie’s death, students filled the Chapel once more for the mid-day Mass, which Chaplain Rev. Cornelius M. Buckley, S.J., offered for the repose of her soul, as well as for the consolation of her friends and family. “She was singularly blessed — and in a very special way, particularly by the wonderful family she had, which mourns her passing, but also particularly by the people here who are in this church, by her classmates and the people that she lived with, by the tutors, by all of you who have come to pray for her,” said Fr. Buckley in his homily.

“I think, for that reason, Maggie will spend the rest of eternity praying in thanksgiving for your presence in her life, and praying also that you will be able to do the will of God in a special way. She will probably be with you, especially those of you who were very close to her, for the rest of your lives. What a wonderful blessing that is! Thank God for that.”



Sharing the Mission

New Additions to TAC’s Development Team on Both Coasts

Patrick Ford

As Patrick Ford reflects on how he came to live in New England — a region he had never set foot in before driving a moving van to Northfield, Massachusetts, in June 2020 — the College’s director of East Coast development observes that he has truly walked by faith, and not by sight, in his journey to Thomas Aquinas College.

Born and raised in Loveland, Colorado, Mr. Ford crossed the Mississippi River for the first time in his life to attend Hillsdale College in southern Michigan. At the time a Lutheran, he describes the experience as “a really robust, four-year-long, ecumenical dialogue.” That dialogue would soon lead him into the Catholic Church. By the time he and his soon-to-be wife, Erica, graduated in 2005, they were “well on our way” to becoming Catholic.

After completing a master’s degree in Catholic theology at Villanova University, Mr. Ford worked for two years at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, followed by nine years at Belmont Abbey College, where he oversaw campus ministry and directed a Catholic leadership program. He then worked as a project and marketing manager at The Catholic Company before coming to the College’s New England campus last summer.

Now with five children, the Fords have become full-fledged members of the TAC East community. “My family was warmly welcomed from the day we got to campus,” Mr. Ford observes. “This is a college like none other. It’s a joy to be able to share such a faithful and unique institution with benefactors who want to aid us in our mission.”



Morgan (Furore ’15) Pirrall

As Thomas Aquinas College’s associate director of East Coast development, Morgan (Furore ’15) Pirrall lives in the Philadelphia area, from which she travels to meet with the College’s friends and benefactors all along the Eastern Seaboard. Though she works remotely when not on the road, she always looks forward to her visits to the New England campus in Northfield, Massachusetts.

“As an alumna, it’s amazing to see the TAC education and community — which have been such an important part of my formation — coming to life on the opposite side of the country,” she says. “When you go on campus, it’s immediately evident that something special is taking place.”

After graduating from the College in 2015, Mrs. Pirrall began working in Wilmington, Delaware, as a major gifts officer at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. There she added her efforts for nearly five years until early 2020, when — in addition to marrying her husband, Matt — she came to work for her alma mater, where she helps secure funds for the budding East Coast campus.

When she introduces people to Thomas Aquinas College, New England, Mrs. Pirrall finds that the excitement is contagious. “It’s a historic moment for the College to be growing in this way, especially at a time when numerous liberal arts colleges are closing their doors,” she says. “So many people out there are worried about the future of our country and the future of our Church, and to be able to show them that TAC not only exists, but is growing, is a tremendous cause for hope.”



Matthew Plaisted (’18)

“I think most graduates of TAC would say that their time here was an inflection point in their lives,” says Matthew Plaisted (’18), the College’s director of annual giving. “Perhaps their daily habits, careers, or families are today shaped in some meaningful way by the exposure to the classics and immersion in Catholic culture. For me, all three are true.”

Following his graduation in 2018, Mr. Plaisted worked as an admissions counselor at the College before starting a career in non-profit fundraising and development with Catholic Charities. Having refined these skills, he now returns to the California campus, where he works to help the College meet its yearly financial aid needs.

One of the benefits of his new position, Mr. Plaisted says, is connecting with fellow alumni in support of their alma mater. In March he busily contacted old friends for the Alumni Giving Weekend, and they responded generously, contributing nearly \$150,000 — more than double the previous record. “It’s been a blessing to experience more people coming together in support of the College,” he remarks. “The enthusiasm is electrifying.”

He can see why. “As someone who rediscovered the Faith at TAC and started my career here, I’m its biggest advocate,” he explains. He is amazed at the continual blessings which God has showered upon the College, and he is grateful to be part of the preparation for its next 50 years. “My professional life is filled with witnessing God’s providential work in action,” Mr. Plaisted observes. “I couldn’t ask to be in a better position than that!”



One Program, Two Coasts

Recent Events and Happenings

New Bishop Visits East Coast Campus

Thomas Aquinas College, New England, was blessed with a visit on March 5 from its newly appointed bishop, the Most Rev. William D. Byrne.

His Excellency arrived on the Northfield, Massachusetts, campus in the morning for a meeting with College officials. He then offered the midday Mass in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel, during which he blessed the Stations of the Cross and a recently acquired statue of St. Joseph. The Bishop then joined students for lunch in the Gould Commons.

“A word of thanks to Dean Kaiser and to Fr. Markey for inviting me to be here ... and for the privilege of being able to bless St. Joseph in this, his year, and the Stations of the Cross,” His Excellency remarked. “I look forward to being here with you many times.”

Ever since the previous Bishop of Springfield, Massachusetts — the Most Rev. Mitchell Rozanski — was transferred to St. Louis last June, the College has eagerly anticipated the appointment of a new shepherd, praying regularly for a holy and faithful leader. The Lord answered those prayers in October, when His Holiness Pope Francis appointed Bishop Byrne to the Diocese of Springfield. Two months later, His Excellency was installed as the diocese’s tenth bishop.

“We feel very blessed to have him as our bishop,” says Dr. Thomas J. Kaiser, dean of the New England campus. “We prayed hard before a bishop was appointed, and I don’t think we could have gotten anyone better.”



College Launches New Website

On the evening of March 11, Thomas Aquinas College launched a new website, replacing its beloved but well-worn predecessor, which served the College ably since 2011. Along with visual improvements and enhanced accessibility, the new site features stunning video footage of both campuses atop each section’s landing page, plus a new welcome video produced by alumnus videographer Jake Schmiedicke (’09).

“Our new site reflects more than a year’s effort on the part of a dedicated team here at the College, working

with our partners at KWALL, who developed the site,” says Chris Weinkopf, the College’s director of communications. “We are thrilled with the way it’s turned out, and we are hopeful that it will help us better connect with prospective students, alumni, parents, benefactors, and other friends about our unique program of Catholic liberal education.”

While some of the improvements to the site are cosmetic, others reflect more substantial changes, including enhanced portals for alumni, students, and parents. “The biggest difference, aside from the overall appearance, is that the new site is built to serve two campuses,” adds Mr. Weinkopf. The new website offers news, events, a faculty/staff directory, and Admissions information all organized by campus. The site also takes advantage of a wider aspect ratio by including panoramic banners and beautiful campus photography on most every page. Friends of the College are encouraged to check it out and visit it regularly!

New Altar in New England Chapel

On the eve of the 48th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, students at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, prayed in adoration for the victims of abortion at a new altar in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel.

Earlier that day workers installed the altar, a reredos, and a matching tabernacle in the Chapel’s sanctuary. Their work brings the century-old building’s transformation to a Catholic place of worship one step closer to completion. Ecclesiastical painters are currently painting the sanctuary, which should be complete by the end of the academic year.

Yet even now, anyone entering the Chapel cannot help but be riveted by the white marble of the altar, standing out in sharp contrast to the rich, intricate carvings of the tabernacle. From there, one’s eyes move irresistibly upward to the breathtaking centerpiece of the reredos. The Chapel is now possessed not only of an unshakable orientation toward Heaven but also of a worthy place to adore the Word made flesh.

Throughout the evening, as well as the early hours of Friday morning, the College’s students gazed upon Our Eucharistic Lord in the fittingly beautiful setting of the newly renovated sanctuary, praying for His mercy and peace.

“The altar itself is a marvelous work of craftsmanship, with all the floral carving and pointed grandeur of medieval churches,” reflects sophomore Thomas Aldredge. “But over and above that, it feels as if the Lord has taken up His rest, as the Psalmist says, ‘Let us go into His sight in exultation ... for the Lord is sweet!’ (Ps. 99:2,5) Now the campus has a permanent center.”



Pope St. John Paul II Athletic Center

Work on the Pope St. John Paul II Athletic Center, which began in earnest last summer on the California campus, is now well under way, and the building is taking shape. Among the recent developments, a crane installed the large wood tresses that now undergird the building’s roof.

“On top of the tresses, a lock deck of 4x8 tongue-and-groove wood beams were installed that will serve as a nice interior ceiling for the main gym,” says Vice President for Operations Mark Kretschmer. Workers have also poured concrete for sidewalks, a barbeque area, and bleachers on the east side of the field.

In keeping with the history of the campus, and the Doheny family’s arboretum-like landscaping, a large elm has been planted on the north side of the site. The adjacent athletic field features catching nets behind the soccer goals and an expanded beach volleyball court. Students are already making use of the field, which offers a small taste of what is to come when the athletic center is completed in time for the 2021–22 academic year.

The College is deeply grateful to the Fritz B. Burns Foundation of Los Angeles, whose generous grant has made construction of the Pope St. John Paul II Athletic Center possible.

Tracy Student Center

Students are at last enjoying one of the most exciting additions to the New England campus’ Tracy Student Center: a state-of-the-art coffee shop that opened its doors on Super Bowl Sunday.

Last summer, when College officials contemplated re-opening the campus for the academic year, they were mindful that — to protect against COVID-19 infection — students would need to remain on campus as much as possible. To that end, they moved to make Tracy Student Center a fun, desirable spot where friends could gather and socialize. Over the summer, workers carefully repainted the interior of the building and installed a handsome oak floor. Meanwhile, Dr. Thomas J. Kaiser, dean of the New England campus, sent out an email asking the College’s benefactors to help furnish the building.

Friends of the College responded generously. An anonymous couple contributed \$375,000 toward the building’s renovation. The family of S. Prestley Blake — an alumnus of the Northfield Mount Hermon school (which previously occupied the New England campus) and the founder of the Friendly’s restaurant chain — contributed funds for ice-cream-making equipment and a freezer. TAC parent Greg Simia provided the beloved espresso machine in memory of his late wife, Sandra, and countless others came forward with gifts for couches, pool tables, and other amenities.

The campus community is elated to watch Tracy transform into a comfortable, attractive, and popular spot on campus. “Since our classes utilize the Discussion Method, they really rely on students becoming better and better friends,” observes Resident Director Isaac Cross (’19). “Having a spot on campus where people can regularly go after class to spend time together and relax — I think students have been looking for that, and it’s nice to afford them a space to enjoy themselves.”

Board Freezes Tuition for 2021–22

To help ease the financial burden that the coronavirus and its attendant lockdowns have inflicted on students and their families, the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors has voted to freeze the cost of tuition and room & board for the 2021–22 academic year.

“The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing governmental countermeasures have rendered the global economy highly volatile,” says President Michael F. McLean. “By helping to keep our students’ education costs stable, we hope to do our part to support their families, many of whom are suffering from unemployment or reduced income during these difficult times.”

Tuition at both the California and New England campuses will remain at \$26,000, and room & board fees at \$9,400. Thus the total cost of attendance, including books and all fees, will be \$35,400 — well below the national average of \$53,102 for private, nonprofit institutions.

“We are deeply grateful to the College’s benefactors, whose generosity allows us to subsidize our tuition rate, thereby putting the cost of education within reach of many more families,” says Dr. McLean. “And for those families who need further assistance, our benefactors also make possible our robust financial aid program, through which all qualified students — regardless of their financial status — can access the blessing of a Catholic liberal education.”



Senior Reflections

Heart Following Head

By Sarah Francis ('21)

Note: The following essay is adapted from comments made before the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors at its November 14, 2020, meeting.

I am sincerely honored to be here before you today. I am humbled to have reaped the benefits of all the hard work that you have put into preserving the life that we have here, particularly with the pandemic going on. I would like to thank you for everything that you have done to make it possible for us to be here.

I am from Virginia, from a military family, raised Catholic my whole life, homeschooled at Mother of Divine Grace. I had an excellent religious formation. But I did not want to come to Thomas Aquinas College. I had no interest. I thought I already had everything I needed to be a good Catholic.

The thing is, even though I had learned much about the Church's teachings, my heart really hadn't followed my head. It wasn't until I came here that I realized that I didn't love my faith enough, and that love can follow knowledge. That is exactly what has happened since I arrived here for the first day of my High School Summer Program. I then decided to come here, and I applied immediately.

As a freshman, I was incredibly intimidated by what I knew to be a very rigorous curriculum, but I enjoyed studying, and I enjoyed school, so I was up to the challenge. I have been challenged in every way, and I love it. I thrive on it.

I remember walking out of the freshman writing exam, and I realized that I had just written an essay where I had to argue for something that I thought was right and prove it, without any of the text in front of me, just based on what I knew. From then on, I was going to be forced, in the best way, to do difficult things and to do



them well. It amazes me after every final and every 150-page reading that I am able to accomplish something so difficult and accomplish it well.

I love the Discussion Method, which we use in our classes. I love being able to talk to people. When I discuss a text with my classmates and the tutor, we all take

something different from it. The Great Books are the gifts that keep on giving. I could read everything in the curriculum, again and again, and learn something new from it every time.

The social life is also an important aspect of the TAC experience, and I have made some of the best friends that I could ever make here. The reason these friendships are so important is that we are all working together to develop and cultivate an interior life and spiritual life. My friends are helping me to live well, and I know that I want these people around me for the rest of my life.

All of which leads me to address my spiritual growth at the College. Here I experience a peace that I have never known anywhere else. I think it's the people, the education, the books, the environment — all of it is so conducive to living well.

Yet TAC does not automatically make you a good person. The College gives us the formation, the support, the environment we need to achieve the excellence for which we were created — but it's up to us to put these God-

"The College gives us the formation, the support, the environment we need to achieve the excellence for which we were created — but it's up to us to put these God-given gifts to their proper use."

given gifts to their proper use. TAC has offered me something precious, with the implied condition that I have to live morally, to live well. It's helped me to do that within certain bounds, and now I need to be able to continue to do that when I leave.

I'm still here — I'm not ready to graduate just yet — hopefully by the time that comes, I will be ready. I plan to teach. I am privileged to have been able to come here, and I want to be able to give a little bit of what I have received to others. I have seen here that I am capable of sharing knowledge and truth in a way that I love. So I hope I will be able to do that just as my tutors have done for us. I have had the best examples.

If I could convey nothing else to you today other than how grateful I am to have been able to attend this school — to be surrounded and formed by the people whom I have come to know and who have come to know me, to have learned the things I have learned, and to think the way I think — then I would consider this a successful talk.

Actions speak louder than words. Please know that I intend to take what I've learned here — to take who I have become and who I will become after I graduate — to please God and to do some good in this world. The rest of my life is simply for God's greater glory and the good of my soul.

Thank you.

Miss Francis is from Suffolk, Virginia.

The Integrated Life

By Joseph Guinee ('21)

Note: The following essay is adapted from comments made before the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors at its November 14, 2020, meeting.

I am excited to share my experience of Thomas Aquinas College with you today, but before I do that, I want to thank you all for the work that you have done for this school, so that we students can receive a Catholic liberal education. In particular, I want to thank you all for the work that you have done to ensure that we could have in-person classes this year, because when we went to Zoom last year, it became clear that this education needs to happen in person, and it needs to happen in a community where everyone is living and learning together. The work that you have done has given us that, so I really want to thank you for your generous efforts.

Now, when I was asked to talk about my experience at TAC — I'm going to be honest — my initial reaction was to say "no," mostly because I knew that I loved my time here, but I didn't know how to express that. Upon thinking about my time and reflecting on it more, I came to realize that there was one particular aspect of this school that really stood out to me, and I am hoping that I can convey that to you today.

When I was growing up, I was always told that my faith, my education, and my relationships — all the aspects of my life — were supposed to be intimately



"TAC naturally disposes one to cultivate the virtue of charity. It orders everything that we do toward God."

connected, united, and ordered toward God. I was supposed to be living one life.

But that was not something that I really had an experience of; my life felt fragmented. I had my faith, but then I had my life at school, then I had my friends. It came to the point where, during high school, I started to believe that the three could not be connected. They were just going to remain separate, and I was going to have to live a fragmented life.

The first time that I actually experienced and understood that not only could these parts of my life be unified — but that

they needed to be — was when I attended the College's High School Summer Program. For two weeks I lived a unified life. My prayer, my work in the classroom, my friendships — all were ordered toward the same end. From that point on, I was hooked. I knew that this was the college that I needed to come to, because I knew that it gave unity to my life. I have now spent three years living that unified life.

One particular instance of this really stands out to me. This happened two weeks ago. My friends and I wanted to take a break. We wanted to get off campus and have some fun. We took some longboards, rode them to the

pier in Ventura, and then we went to the beach. We then sat down, and we started talking about what we thought the school had given to us — what the greatest skill was that we learned here. Then we started talking about what it meant for knowledge to be for its own sake. That led us to talking about the Trinity. In the end, we saw that all that we were learning at the College was ordered toward God — that's where it all finds its end.

To me, in that moment, all three were present: I had my education, my faith, and my friends, and they were brought together.

The experience of this unity helped me to choose my senior thesis topic, which is, "Charity as the Sole Emblem of the Church." Charity is friendship of man for God, and so it requires ordering everything that you do toward Him. TAC naturally disposes one to cultivate the virtue of charity. It orders everything that we do toward God.

The experience I have had here has had a profound effect on my life, such that I now plan to come work in the College's Admissions Office after I graduate. I want to share with other people this experience that I have had, because I know that it will change their lives for the better. If they come here, they will not live a fragmented life. They will live an integrated life, and they will live that whole life until, by God's grace, they reach Heaven.

Looking back on my time at Thomas Aquinas College, I want to thank you all for it — on behalf of myself, of all the students who have come to TAC, and of all the students who are still to come. The work that you all have done has allowed us to have this gift, and it is priceless.

Thank you. It has changed my life.

Mr. Guinee is from North Andover, Massachusetts.

Bicoastal Prefects

College’s Two Campuses Come Together for High School Summer Programs

For the better part of two decades, rising high school seniors from across the U.S. and the world have come to Thomas Aquinas College for two weeks each summer with one thought on their minds: Do I want to spend my next four years here? And ever since the College opened its East Coast campus in 2019, they have had an additional question to consider: California or New England?

Serving as their guides in this discernment are the prefects of the High School Great Books Summer Program. As current TAC students and recent graduates, the prefects — who work hard to make the program a faithful and fun reflection of the intellectual, spiritual, and community life of the College — are well suited to help answer these questions. And whether serving on the California program or its New England counterpart, they are prepared to answer questions about either campus.

“We’ve used a mix of prefects from both campuses on both programs,” says Director of Admissions Jon Daly. “There have been prefects from the New England campus on the California program, and vice versa. We’ve even had some hearty prefects who worked the California program, then jumped on a plane, and started work on the New England program the very next day!”

One Program, Two Coasts

For the prefects, working with peers from across the country — some of whom they have never met before — poses little difficulty. Last summer on the College’s Northfield, Massachusetts, location, two students from the two campuses worked side-by-side as the head women’s prefects: Irene Collins (NE’23) and Maggie Dillon (CA’21). The two soon became fast friends.

“Maggie and I met each other around the same time that a lot of the Summer Programmers were meeting one another,” says Irene. “But she and I just had this instant connection, which surprised them and made them think we had always been best friends. We were able to illustrate to them how it is that we are all united because of our common goal that we are working toward.”

In the prefects, the abstract notion of “One College, Two Campuses” takes on a human form. “Irene and I worked really well together because, even though we had different experiences on different campuses, it was all grounded in the same core values,” Maggie reflects. “We

worked so well together because we’re literally going to the same school.”

On their separate campuses, the prefects take the same classes, read from the same Great Books, and partake in rigorous conversations by way of the same Discussion Method. “When we prefects were leading the high school students through discussions about the curriculum, we were able to work together to convey to them the beauty of what we learn here because we had all been through the same program,” says Tanner Sheffield (NE’23), who served as a prefect on both coasts last summer.

“What makes both campuses feel like home is that everyone shares a love of the education and the Faith.”

The Decision

So, why should a prospective student choose one campus over the other?

“One evening at the New England program, Irene and I were sitting around the fire, and we had students asking us why we chose our respective campuses,” recalls Maggie. “We told them that the choice between one campus or another is based purely on accidentals — where you feel most at home.”

Some prefer the century-old, red-brick buildings of Massachusetts; others, California’s Mission-style architecture and Santa Paula’s proximity to the beach. “The two campuses are different only in the environment — the location,” says Tanner, a California native who opted to spend his four student years in Massachusetts. “But, in the end, it doesn’t matter whether you went to the California or New England Summer Program — the beauty of the one curriculum remains the same.”



Prefects from the 2020 High School Summer Program: Irene Collins (NE’23), Andrew Rossi (CA’13), Barbara O’Brien (CA’18), and Isaac Cross (CA’19); Jean Guerreiro (NE’22), and Tanner Sheffield (NE’23)

For Maggie, the experience of being a prefect on an unfamiliar campus only deepened her love for the College’s program of Catholic liberal education. “I fell in love with the school all over again,” she observes. “The amenities of each campus are bonuses, but what makes both campuses feel like home is that everyone shares a love of the education and the Faith.”

Working together to give the Summer Programmers a wonderful experience, all three of these prefects reported that, on both campuses, their shared experience in roundtable discussions, devotion to the Catholic faith, and dedication to the mission of the College enabled them to give the high school students a beautiful two-week taste of life at Thomas Aquinas College.

“We’re there to show all the kids what the school, on either campus, has to offer,” adds Irene, “and to be examples of who you could be, should you come here.”

Calling All Rising High School Seniors

The College is now accepting applications for the 2021 Summer Program — two weeks of Great Books, great friends, and great adventures!

California: July 11–24
New England: July 25–August 7

thomasaquinas.edu/summerprogram

Outpouring of Generosity

Alumni Smash Records & Goals for 2021 Giving Weekend

When the Thomas Aquinas College Alumni Giving Weekend began in earnest on March 5, organizers were hoping to meet an ambitious goal of \$100,000. “Last year we had 287 alumni make gifts for a total of \$62,000,” says Robert Bagdazian, the College’s director of alumni and parent relations. “So \$100,000 seemed like a big leap.”

Yet the alumni of Thomas Aquinas College dramatically eclipsed that total, contributing 684 gifts for \$141,226. “The response was staggering,” says Mr. Bagdazian. “The alumni showed their love for the College in dramatic fashion.”

The reasons for the outpouring of generosity are many: a new Alumni Giving Weekend website, a raffle for a seven-day luxury cruise for two — won by Cyndi (DeLuca ’88) and Anthony Montanaro (’82) — and student volunteers who telephoned alumni throughout the weekend to encourage their participation. Yet the biggest factor, by far, was a herculean effort on the part of the alumni themselves.

“In past years, the seed money for Alumni Giving days has come from non-alumni members of the Board of Governors,” says Paul J. O’Reilly (’84), the College’s vice president for advancement. “This year, for the first time, it was alumni who made all the matching gifts, which inspired even greater giving.”



To get the Weekend started, Nona (Haggard ’00) and Matthew Kelsey (’94) offered to match the first \$10,000 in gifts, dollar for dollar. Two anonymous alumni couples quickly followed suit, and on Saturday afternoon — after the initial \$100,000 goal had already been attained — Angela (Andersen ’87) and Jack Connelly offered the fourth \$10,000 matching gift of the weekend, continuing the momentum.

Meanwhile, many graduates took it upon themselves to petition classmates to make gifts, hoping to claim first prize in the annual competition to see which class can achieve the highest giving percentage. The Class of 1979

took an early lead, and the Class of 2020 was in contention all weekend long, but ultimately victory belonged to the Class of 2013, whose members were relentless in their support of their alma mater.

“What the Class of 2013 achieved was incredible,” says Director of Annual Giving Matthew Plaisted (’18). “They have set a very high bar for the rest of us — but we will be up for the challenge!”

Among the highlights of the 2021 Alumni Giving Weekend was a virtual tribute forum, where alumni could make gifts in memory or in honor of chaplains, tutors, classmates, or anything they liked. “A lot of great memories were stirred up in those tributes and the photos that accompanied them,” says Dr. O’Reilly. There were some 167 tributes in all, ranging from the poignant — recalling some of the College’s late founders and tutors, priests, and fellow alumni who died far too soon — and the lighthearted. (The Burger Bar; Rusty, the campus dog; and washing machines all got honorable mentions.)

“The tributes were a wonderful touch,” notes Mr. Plaisted. “I kept coming back to the site to see who, or what, my fellow alumni wanted to remember. There are so many people who have sacrificed so much to make this education possible — it was great to see so many of them being honored, and to pay our generosity forward to the next generation of TAC students.”

Teaching to the Choir

Stephen Grimm ('75) Brings Family's Musical Tradition to TAC, New England

Whether he is raising the thundering peals of the organ during Sunday Mass, rehearsing the student choir to perfection, or giving quality musical instruction to any that ask, Stephen Grimm ('75) is bringing first-rate music to Thomas Aquinas College, New England — just as he did as a member of the College's first class in California nearly 50 years ago.



"I already consider New England to be home," says Mr. Grimm, who, along with his wife, Laura, moved to Northfield, Massachusetts, in 2019 to become the first choir director on the newly opened East Coast campus. In taking on this position, Mr. Grimm continues his family's storied musical history at the College, while serving as a counterpart to his brother Dan ('76), who directs the choir in California.

Born in Burbank, California, Stephen is the fifth of Irene and Bill Grimm's 17 children, 14 of whom, like Stephen, attended Thomas Aquinas College. As a boy, Stephen and six of his brothers and sisters would pile into a minibus and perform across the state as the Grimm Family Choir. "We were like the Von Trapps," he muses.

It was while attending Loyola High School in Los Angeles that Stephen met Laura, whose father was a major opera singer, performing around the Mediterranean in France, Italy, Egypt, and Malta. The two shared an intense love of music, which has continued through-

out their marriage. As Stephen neared his high school graduation, his father eagerly watched as Thomas Aquinas College prepared to open its doors in 1971. As the story goes, Bill was so enthused that he drove four of his children to the College's original campus in Calabasas for interviews. What followed was an impromptu audition, with the Grimms singing Palestrina in the building's foyer, much to the delight of the College's founders. There would be six Grimms among the College's first five freshman classes — the backbone of the early TAC Choir — including Stephen, one of just 33 students in the first class.

The presence of the Grimms during the College's formative years was invaluable. "It was providential that they were there from the beginning," says Dr. Thomas J. Kaiser ('75), a fellow member of the first class who now serves as dean of the New England campus. "I remember being at a Christmas party, and someone put some rock music on. Marya (Grimm '76) Krestyn had the nerve to go up and just take it off and put on some beautiful Handel. Some people were upset about it, but it really set the tone for the rest of the history of the school."

After college, Stephen wed Laura, and the couple would go on to welcome three children. Meanwhile, he pursued studies in piano and opera at California State University, Northridge and Los Angeles, and soon began directing church choirs, most notably at Sts. Felicitas and Perpetua Parish in San Marino, where he served 22 years.

In addition to teaching music and leading various school choirs, Mr. Grimm was a member of the L.A. Master Chorale for over 30 years, the artistic director

for Pasadena Pro Musica, and a former participant in the L.A. Opera. He has soloed in performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Vaughn William's *Mass in G Minor*, and Benjamin Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*; and he has sung in many movies, including *Air Force One*, *Frozen*, and *Dracula*.

Yet when he learned about the possibility of Thomas Aquinas College opening a second campus on the East Coast, Mr. Grimm offered to quit his longtime home in California so that the Grimm family could give TAC East what it first gave to TAC West nearly a half-century before. "Retiring from our respective jobs, Laura and I both felt ready for a new adventure in our life together," he reflects. "While many of my musical colleagues have not been able to sing and conduct, the New England campus has provided a haven from the Covid virus restrictions on worship and choral singing. *Deo gratias!*"

His role on campus extends far beyond that of choir director. In addition to conducting weekly choir rehearsals, Mr. Grimm directs a men's Schola Gregoriana, offers lessons in voice and piano, directs a student orchestra, and is a regular presence at campus events. "He's always showing up places," observes Paul Dinan ('22), a member of the student choir and occasional organist. "He comes to all kinds of dances, lectures, dinners in the dining hall with Mrs. Grimm. He's kind of like a father figure to us, and he brings a smile to our faces whenever we see him."

"He's kind of like a father figure to us."

Alumni Updates

Graduates Put Faith in Action

Rev. Matthew Maxwell, MC ('08)

At Sweetest Heart of Mary Church in Detroit on November 21, 2020, the Rev. Matthew Maxwell, MC ('08), became Thomas Aquinas College's 74th alumnus priest — and, more notably still, the first American-born priest for the Miles Christi religious order.

"We are here with a conviction that God is about to do something great," said the Most Rev. Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit, in his homily at the ordination Mass. "He is about to do the great work of grace because it is Christ who makes Br. Matthew a priest. It is Christ Who acts, Who consecrates you."

Dedicated to helping the laity grow in holiness through spiritual direction, Ignatian spirituality, and sound doctrinal formation, Miles Christi is a young order founded in Argentina, but with a small, burgeoning presence in the U.S. Fr. Maxwell's ordination marks the culmination of a 10-year journey, which began with his entering the order in 2011. He now ministers in the Archdiocese of Detroit, where he offers spiritual direction, organizes formation groups, and contributes to the formation of Miles Christi seminarians.



Alumnae Vintners

Five women winemakers — three of them Thomas Aquinas College alumnae — have come up with a novel way to make the most of these difficult times.

With many stores closed, the demand for shipped

products is greater than ever. Yet wine is a notoriously expensive product to mail, with full glass bottles weighing three to four pounds apiece.

Enter the Distaff Wine Co., owned by Angelica (Ellis '88) O'Reilly and daughters Moira ('19), Roisin, Marie-Therese, and Brigid ('16). The company has launched the Nomen line of wines, which are sold in bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate, weighing just 1.4 pounds each. Boxes of these shatterproof bottles weigh less than half of those containing most other wines.



The "Nomen" name is a play on words, honoring Distaff's all-women ownership and, through its Latin meaning ("family name"), the company's male accomplice — David ('87), husband of Angelica, father of her co-owners, and the founder of the famed Owen Roe winery. Mr. O'Reilly offers the ladies minimal guidance, he told the *Oregonian*, while "trying to steer clear of the trail they are blazing."

Attorney Helps Re-Open Churches

In one of its early pandemic regulations last spring, the State of Massachusetts closed all locations that provided "non-essential" services, effectively making in-person religious worship impossible.

Kris Casey, pastor of Adams Square Baptist Church in Worcester, decided to defy the directive and offered services at his church — with social distancing, handwashing, required masks, and other precautions — for which the city issued him two citations and a \$300 fine. The pastor then sought legal protection and, with the assistance of the Massachusetts Family Institute and

the Christian Law Association, alumnus attorney Carl Schmitt ('90) took his case.

After a letter to the governor of Massachusetts went unanswered, Mr. Schmitt filed a lawsuit against state and local officials. In short order, the Assistant Attorney General contacted him to negotiate a new order that would respect churches' religious liberty. The state accepted his suggestions and in May issued a revised COVID-19 order that allowed residents once more to safely assemble in their houses of worship.

"We needed help," says Pastor Casey of Mr. Schmitt's representation. "And God brought the reinforcement."

Matthew Bryan ('15)

Just five years after graduating from Thomas Aquinas College, and two after being elected to the City Council of Dunsmuir, California, Matthew Bryan ('15) has been elected the city's mayor.

Mayor Bryan was the subject of a recent profile in the *Mount Shasta News*. "Dunsmuir's new mayor, Matthew Bryan, is committed to following through with the reinvention of his beloved historic town," wrote reporter Sharen Strauss, "to build a diverse, service-based economy and increase jobs during the pandemic."

Known for its fishing, skiing, and sightseeing, the Northern California city is a popular tourist destination. Mr. Bryan is a manager at the Mount Shasta Ski Park and a realtor. He was elected to the part-time City Council in 2018, where he previously served as vice mayor before his colleagues elected him mayor.

As a city heavily dependent on tourism, Dunsmuir has suffered from a dearth of visitors during the pandemic. Yet the new mayor remains optimistic. "I encourage everyone to have patience," he says. "These are unprecedented times. We will emerge and prosper."



Alchemy, Teenagers, and the Christian Artist

An Interview with Alumna Novelist Samantha (McCall '06) Cohoe

Samantha (McCall '06) Cohoe is the author of the recently released young-adult novel *A Golden Fury* (Wednesday Books) — a historical fantasy which chronicles the perilous adventure of a teenage protagonist who risks her life and her sanity in pursuit of alchemy’s greatest prize: the Philosopher’s Stone. Mrs. Cohoe lives with her husband, Caleb ('06), a philosophy professor at Metropolitan State University of Denver, and their three children in Colorado.



What is the one-sentence pitch for *A Golden Fury*?

On the eve of the French Revolution, a teenage alchemist is on the verge of a great discovery — and she finds that the cost may be her mind.

Why did you choose that particular setting and time?

I liked putting it at the beginning of the French Revolution because it’s both a hopeful and ominous time. So much changed and was about to happen, and the goals are so big but also so dangerous. It sort of mirrored alchemy in that way — something with these huge goals and aspirations, but also these really terrifying possibilities.

What led you to choose alchemy for your subject matter?

Alchemy interacts a whole lot with history, theology, and science, and the goal of alchemists always seemed like it was worthy of having a fantasy story written about it. It just takes such boldness to believe that, if you get everything right, you can actually create eternal life and turn lead into gold. Somehow I came upon the idea of alchemy taking place in an academic setting, which ended up kind of being a side part of the book, but basically it would be something like “Alchemy at Oxford.”

That is an unusual twist, isn’t it? You have given alchemy a more respectable face than it usually gets.

Right. The alchemists in my book think of themselves as scientists, not occultists.

Given the supernatural associations around alchemy, should parents be concerned about letting their children read *A Golden Fury*? Are kids likely to come away from it with a heightened curiosity about dark magic?

A Golden Fury is, at its heart, a story about the dangers of ambition and the price of power. My characters believe that alchemy is a science and pursue it as such, but yes, they do run into some supernatural stuff. Without spoiling too much of the plot, I would reassure parents that any child who comes away from the book with a heightened curiosity about dark magic would have had to misread the book very badly. I would also add that any book can depict evil without endorsing it, as readers of great books know.



What is your book’s genre, and what age is the target audience?

The genre is historical fantasy, which is a pretty small category. I think the book is honestly more historical than fantasy in its feel, but you can’t have a magical science without there being some fantasy.

The publishing age category is “young adult,” which means 13–18-year-olds, but we are aware that, these days, a huge portion of our readers are actually adults. Still, I think it’s important to always keep the teen reader foremost in our mind, even if, in reality, a lot of our sales come from women like me.

How do you do that? Do you try to get back into your 16-year-old mind and envision how this book would affect you?

That’s a big part of it. Until this year I taught Latin at a classical high school, and that was helpful for keeping in touch with students, but mostly what I do is access that

part of myself. So far it hasn’t been difficult. For me, the teenage years were so vivid and so interesting and full of change, and those years seemed longer than the years now, because so much happens and your psyche is just a tumultuous place to live.

Sometimes I find, when I’m reading young adult novels, that the heroine has the confidence and the maturity of a 30-year-old woman. When you are used to reading that kind of teenage protagonist, you kind of forget what teenagers are really like, and then you get really annoyed when you get teenage characters who actually *act* like teenagers — because teenagers can be annoying! I mean, I love them, but they do make a lot of bad decisions, and those decisions really annoy readers sometimes.

You can see that in your protagonist, Theosebeia: On the one hand, she is obviously learned and sharp, but she is also lacking in wisdom and practical experience. She can be headstrong and over-confident.

That’s exactly what I was like as a teenager. I was really smart, or at least I thought I was. There was this deep strain of over-confidence running alongside insecurity. Ask anybody who had me in seminar at TAC!

I think over-confidence often comes with insecurity, where you are projecting too much confidence in order to cover your own sense of doubt. Especially at the College, there is a temptation to over-confidence because you are learning so much. You look back and think, “Wow, look how much more I know now than I did before I got here.” Or you compare yourself to the people you know from high school who went to other colleges. But, of course, the curriculum isn’t meant to do that. The founders and the tutors were always reminding us, “This is only the beginning. Make sure that you’re just starting out on your journey — this is not where you stop when you leave.”

Would you say you grew — emotionally, spiritually, intellectually — at the College?

Definitely. It was absolutely the best place I could have gone. There were a lot of places I could have gone where I would have gotten lost. But TAC is a really good place to realize that the world, although small, can be bigger through ideas and through connecting with the history of ideas.

Did you want to become a writer when you were a student, or did that come later?

It’s a little bit of a twisty path. I left TAC and went to graduate school for philosophy at Yale, and then discovered I did not enjoy graduate school. It’s not nearly enough talking! What’s great about TAC is the seminar, and I had hoped that grad school would be like that, but it really was a lot of being alone by yourself in the library.

My husband was at Princeton (well, he wasn’t my husband yet), and we decided I was going to quit grad school and we would get married. We had babies right away. I started writing my first book just for fun when my first son was born, and it took me about seven years to finish it, because babies are very distracting! My first book took seven years to write, and it took another five years until I was published. So it’s a long road.

You definitely see hints of your liberal education pop up throughout *A Golden Fury*. You have multiple ref-

erences, for instance, to Rousseau and to Latin. Are there other ways you think your education may have helped to inform your writing?

To write historical fantasy you have to do a lot of research. The ability to engage with primary texts and get into the mind of a thinker from a different time, with a different worldview, is important if you want to write in a way that doesn’t end up being anachronistic, as historical fiction is prone to do. Reading primary sources and really getting into the minds of those writers in that time and seeing the coherence of their worldviews — rather than just judging them from a modern perspective — helps me to write better historical fiction.

“The ability to engage with primary texts and get into the mind of a thinker from a different time, with a different worldview, is important if you want to write in a way that doesn’t end up being anachronistic, as historical fiction is prone to do.”

Theosebeia says that her mother valued alchemy “for its own sake,” which is reminiscent of how liberal education values knowledge for its own sake.

That’s a direct parallel — she’s talking about valuing alchemy for its own sake rather than the utility of it, which is how Thomas Aquinas College thinks about education. So, yes, I absolutely had that in mind when I wrote that line.

A Golden Fury is written for a broad audience, and it never claims to be a Christian book, but there are some Christian themes in here — human dignity, natural law, the meaning of parenthood, and even small hints about chastity. How would you explain that?

Wasn’t it C.S. Lewis who said that we don’t need Christian books, we need Christian writers, or that we don’t need Christian art, we need Christian artists? If you are a Christian, then what you believe and the values you are formed in will be expressed no matter what you are doing.

I am not writing Christian books; I am not writing for a Christian ghetto. I’m certainly not marketing these books as Christian, because they are not. There is nothing evangelical about them. But they are products of my mind and my heart, and if you weren’t able to catch glimpses of how I have been formed as a Christian, then I would be pretty worried about my formation, because that has to come out. A book is an expression of its creator.

The story itself is largely secular, but you do have one character who is a practicing Catholic.

I do, and he is the best one! Dominic is the only unambiguously good character in the whole book, and I do have a moment where he is in confession, and Thea is thinking about what that means, to be able to confess, and how much she does not have that in her life. If you don’t have anyone to ask forgiveness from, then there isn’t any humility in your worldview — and there isn’t for Thea. She and her mother don’t have any limits on their aspirations. They don’t acknowledge any priests but themselves, and so they don’t really have any way to ask for forgiveness.

Tell us a little bit about your next book.

It’s called *Bright Ruined Things*, and it’s another historical fantasy stand-alone. Let me see if I can give you the pitch: It’s a retelling of *The Tempest*, but more like *The Tempest* meets *The Great Gatsby* — set in a glittering 1920s world. It’s about the powerful Prosper family, which controls a magical island, and its teenage ward, Mae, who tries to seize the magic that has always been denied her. It’s coming out in the fall of 2021.

In Memoriam

Dr. Henry Joseph Zeiter, 1934–2020

Dr. Henry Joseph Zeiter died in his Lodi, California, home on Sunday, December 20, 2020. A beloved husband, father, and grandfather, a world-renowned ophthalmologist, and a generous philanthropist, he was also a faithful friend of Thomas Aquinas College, having served for 34 years on its Board of Governors.

Henry was born in Serhel, Lebanon, on July 31, 1934, to Yousef (Joseph) and Budwyeh (Antoinette) Zeiter and was baptized a Maronite Catholic in the village church. The youngest of seven, he attended a Christian Brothers primary school, where he learned French (his second language after Arabic). At 14, he and his parents moved to Caracas, Venezuela, to live near family, and there he added Spanish to his repertoire.

At 16, his family relocated to Windsor, Ontario, where he completed secondary school and learned English. (Later as an adult he became fluent in his fifth language, Italian.) He attended Assumption College in Windsor, where he studied philosophy and literature as well as the natural sciences, which led him into the field of medicine at the University of Western Ontario Medical School. He did his internship and residency in ophthalmology at Harper Hospital and the Kresge Eye Institute in Detroit, Michigan.

It was in Detroit that Dr. Zeiter met the love of his life, Carol Joyce Schooff, whom he married eight months later. After Dr. Zeiter completed his residency, the family relocated to Stockton, California, where he established a downtown surgical practice. Ophthalmologists from around the country came to learn his techniques. Over the next 40 years, he would perform more than 30,000 operations for cataracts, glaucoma, corneal transplants, and other disorders of the eye.

For more than 15 years, Dr. Zeiter served as a visiting surgeon with Orbis Eye Missions in the Far East, performing eye surgeries and training local surgeons. In Bulgaria and in his native Lebanon, he helped to set up a surgical demonstration project through the American University in Beirut. He also established a charitable association to help provide medical supplies and surgeries for indigent patients.

“I’ve never seen a U-Haul following a hearse,” Dr. Zeiter once quipped. “It’s OK to be a capitalist, but only so long as you’re a philanthropist.” He was also a passionate lover of music, travel, and philosophy. “I specialized in ophthalmology because it was limited to only one organ in the human body,” he said. “I knew I could master it quickly and then spend the rest of the time with philosophy. I read constantly.”

Indeed, it was his love of the liberal arts that brought Dr. Zeiter to Thomas Aquinas



College. In his living room he had a set of Great Books that came with the Encyclopedia Britannica, and he often said that if only there were a college with a Great Books curriculum, it would provide a marvelous education. When his daughter Suzie (Andres ’87) was considering colleges and received a letter from Tom Susanka explaining the program at Thomas Aquinas College, both father and daughter were thrilled. When Dr. Zeiter and Suzie visited the California campus in 1983, she found her future alma mater, and he found an institution he would support and promote for the rest of his life.

“Our initial visit yielded great fruits and friendships during an unforgettable Mardi Gras weekend,” Suzie recalls. “Students in the men’s dorm where my dad stayed still remember their night staying up with him till 3:00 a.m., discussing everything under the sun and being entertained by some of his many amazing stories. Our visit didn’t conclude until my dad pressed a check — the first of many! — into Ron McArthur’s hands. Dad had been so impressed by the intense Catholicity of the students, which reminded him of his own college days, that a lifelong relationship with the founders, faculty, and student body began.”

In 1986 Dr. Zeiter was elected to the College’s Board of Governors, where he served as chairman of the Committee on Academic Affairs. Over the years, he and Mrs. Zeiter regularly attended the Great Books Summer Seminars, often bringing friends with them. Members of the President’s Council and the St. Thérèse Legacy Society, the couple also established the Carol & Henry Zeiter Endowment for Financial Aid. In 2010 — in honor of their decades of generosity — they were inducted into the College’s Order of St. Albert.

Among his many other professional and fraternal memberships, Dr. Zeiter was a Discalced Carmelite Secular and a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. He is survived by Carol, their 4 children, 13 grandchildren, and a great-granddaughter. He was blessed to receive the last sacraments and say goodbye to his many beloved family members in his final days. He took his last breath with Carol and Suzie beside him, holding his hand and praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

“A genuine Renaissance man, Henry was a lover of great music, great books, and the Catholic Church who served with great distinction on the College’s board for over 34 years,” says President Michael F. McLean. “Please pray for the repose of Henry’s soul and for consolation for his wife, Carol, and for all the members of his family.”



In Memoriam

Peter Serkin — February 1, 2020

Pianist, performed the first concert in St. Cecilia Lecture and Concert Hall

Thomas D. Larkin — May 30, 2020

Legacy Society member

Martin Scheller Morehart — October 8, 2020

Benefactor

Paule M. Ford — October 16, 2020

Mother of Catherine (O’Donnell ’77), Paul (’78), Marguerite (Grimm ’79), Patrice (Atchley ’81), and Jacqueline (Lemmon ’87); grandmother of Genevieve Grimm (’05), Michael Grimm (’06), Maria (Mochow ’07), Paula Grimm (’08), Cecilia (Lemmon ’10) Dickman, Matthew Grimm (’10), Clare Atchley (’12), Kateri (Lemmon ’13) Whalen, Liam Atchley (’14), Angelique (Atchley ’14) Cotugno, Adrienne (LaFave ’14), Br. Faustino (Sebastian ’14) Lemmon, Sarah Lemmon (’16), Thomas (’17), Juliet Atchley (’18), Teresa (’19), Rose (Lemmon ’20) Brittain, Dominique Atchley (’22), Therese Lemmon (’22), and Abraham Lemmon (’24)

John K. White — October 20, 2020

Legacy Society member

Martha Mary Rita Smillie — October 24, 2020

Mother of Mark (’83), Susanne (Munro ’85), John (’87), and Andrew Smillie (’95); grandmother of Marie (Cantu ’10), Katie (Meckley ’10), Clare (Forrester ’12), Tess (Hohne ’13), Monica (’14), Sara (Finnegan ’15), Margaret (Bascom ’16); Michael (’18), Ciara (’21), and Hannah (’24)

Irene Montgomery — October 26, 2020

Wife of College Governor Mark

Lawrence M. Reilley — October 26, 2020

Member of the Los Angeles & Ventura Board of Regents

Alex Trebek — November 8, 2020

Friend

Mary Ann St. Arnault — November 10, 2020,

Mother of Nadine (’78), Nan (Barrett ’78), Natalie (Halpin ’80); grandmother of Rose (Halpin ’06) McCann and Meg (Halpin ’08) Tannoury

Mary Daly — November 21, 2020

Mother of Admissions Director Jon (’99), Ruth (Slack ’02), and Becky (Pfundstein ’05); grandmother of Brendan (’24)

Bob Turicchi — November 23, 2020

Father of Board of Governors Chairman Scott, grandfather of Kristina (’23)

Michelle (Firmin ’97) Halpin — December 5, 2020

Alumna, wife of Philip (’97)

Jerome Hronek — December 6, 2020

Legacy Society member

Charlie P. Diliberti — December 8, 2020

Legacy Society member

Margaret Hunt — December 11, 2020

Mother of Tutor Richard Ferrier; grandmother of Rose (Froula ’06), Eddie (’99), Austin (’07), Joseph (’10), Roland Ferrier (’20)

David Cain — December 18, 2020

Father of Tutor Steven; grandfather of Margaret Mary (Richard ’13), Sophia (Ford ’16), Thomas (’18), and Peter (’23)

Dr. Henry J. Zeiter — December 20, 2020

Member of the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors and Order of St. Albert; father of Suzie (Andres ’87) and Camille (’91); grandfather of Joseph (’12), Dominic Andres (’24), and Zach Zeiter (’21)

Frank R. Hall — December 29, 2020

Legacy Society member

Michael Enright — January 16, 2021

Grandson of Marie de Lorimier and Michael Wilmer, Legacy Society members

Jon L. Schrock, M.D. — January 23, 2021

Grandfather of Tahlia (’21)

John Menne — January 29, 2021

President’s Council member

Rev. Mr. George Keator — February 1, 2021

Benefactor

Thomas Wachtell — February 1, 2021

Husband of College Governor Esther

Lionel P. Adda — February 8, 2021

Legacy Society member

S. Prestley Blake — February 11, 2021

Benefactor

Thomas Bethell — February 12, 2021

Benefactor

JoAnn M. Seeley — February 15, 2021

Father of Tutor Andrew (’87) and Joe (’94); grandmother of Luke (’12), Felicity (’14), Br. Edward (’16), Elisabeth (’19), and Richard (’22)

Kenneth Filipski — February 27, 2021

Father of Soren (’99) and Gwen (Green ’07)

Carol Olson — March 3, 2021

Legacy Society member

Kristen Regina Kazyak (’80) — March 20, 2021

Alumna

Delmar Quackenbush — March 20, 2021

Father of Tutor David (’88); grandfather of Elizabeth (’13), Thomas (’14), Madeleine (’16), Margaret (’17), Joseph (’18), Gemma (’22), Rosie (’23), and Rachel (’24)

Margaret Yanoschik (’23) — March 24, 2021

Student; sister of David (’08), Michael (’11), Claire (’15), and Elizabeth (’17)

Friendship and Our Common Humanity

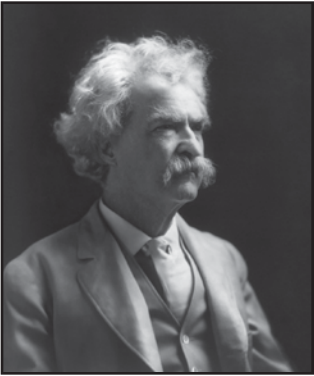
Why We Read *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

By Dr. John J. Goyette

The following remarks are adapted from Dean John J. Goyette’s report to the Board of Governors at its November 14, 2020, meeting. They are part of an ongoing series of talks about why the College includes certain texts in its curriculum. To read the rest of the series, see thomasaquinas.edu/whywestudy.

All of the books that we read in Thomas Aquinas College’s academic program are “great” either because of their own substantive merit or because their ideas and sentiments have been influential in shaping Western ideas and culture. Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* deserves to be included for both of these reasons. We read it near the end of the first semester in the Senior Seminar, which mainly includes great works of the last couple hundred years, such as Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, and also works of Hegel, Marx, Jane Austen, Tocqueville, Dostoevsky, Freud, and Nietzsche.

As a young man, Mark Twain, born Samuel Clemens, worked as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi River, until the Civil War put a stop to much of the river traffic. His pen name, which literally means “mark two,” is a phrase which indicated a safe depth for a steamboat. Twain had a deep love for the river: “The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book — a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day.” His description of the Mississippi River strongly suggests that his experience as a pilot on the Mississippi directly influenced his writing, especially *Huckleberry Finn*, which takes place primarily on the Mississippi River itself. Twain published *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884.



One of the elements that characterizes a Great Book is that it engages in a great conversation over the centuries. Elements of the storyline in *Huckleberry Finn* are reminiscent not only of Homer’s poetry, but also the Bible, works of Shakespeare, and Miguel Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. There are also subtle references throughout the story to a number of enduring conversations that span the centuries. Interestingly, although *Huckleberry Finn* is a novel, it has many elements in common with epic poetry. The story itself unifies the action of the “poem” in a way reminiscent of Homer’s *Odyssey* and Moses’ leading the slaves out of Egypt, as *Huckleberry Finn*, himself a runaway from a drunk and abusive father, helps Jim, a runaway slave, go down the Mississippi River. Many different episodes and different themes fit into the larger, overarching theme of the story.

The principal theme of *Huckleberry Finn* is Huck’s growing awareness, throughout his journey down the Mississippi, of his friendship and affection for Jim, and his consequent recognition of Jim’s humanity. This realization culminates in a crisis of conscience, wherein Huck pits his own love and friendship for Jim against what he thinks his conscience is telling him, a conscience which has been formed, or rather deformed, by a fundamentally unjust convention. Caught in the struggle between his own conscience, which is moved by natural law and ordinary human feeling, and a conventional morality that justifies slavery, Huck ultimately decides he is going to help Jim even if it means he will have to go to Hell.

The story also has themes contrasting nature and natural human society — symbolized by Huck and Jim’s life



“One of the elements that characterizes a Great Book is that it engages in a great conversation over the centuries.”

on the river — with civil society, which is characterized in the story by a veneer of manly virtue and Christian piety that covers an underlying current of widespread vice and hypocrisy.

It is a book that is funny, poignant, and at times dark and gloomy. There are hilarious episodes such as the one where we see Huck dressed up as a girl, only to have his disguise discovered by his threading a needle in a way that a boy might do it, not as a girl would. Huck and Jim also have an amusing discussion about whether Solomon could truly be wise, having taken on 700 wives. Another chapter features a hilariously botched performance of Shakespeare, which jumbles together elements from several different plays and speeches and presents them all together as Hamlet’s soliloquy.

These humorous elements are interwoven with touching moments, such as when Jim describes missing his own children. He recollects mistreating his four-year-old daughter at one point, even striking her for disobedience — only to realize later that her deafness was the reason she had not heeded his command.

The book is also very dark. There is a long episode in the story about Huck staying with a family involved in a feud with another family going back for generations. He befriends a boy named Buck, and ends up seeing him killed with nearly his entire family. The violence of this wholesale slaughter also highlights the hypocrisy of the families involved, who love to listen to sermons on brotherly love. Another shocking episode involves the cruelty and violence of a mob toward a couple of con men in revenge for having been deceived. Though the pair of con artists certainly deserves some sort of justice, Huck is horrified to see them tarred and feathered.

Given the book’s underlying and deep-seated criticism of slavery, it is surprising that *Huckleberry Finn* often comes under attack because its characters regularly use a racially charged epithet, namely, the n-word. But Twain uses this term to help manifest the jarring contrast between the humanity of Jim and the unjust convention of slavery. In fact, the book is so striking because it presents an honest and reflective consideration of our own problems as a nation and as human beings.

The *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is unquestionably one of the great American novels. It grapples directly with the problem of slavery, which has arguably been the fundamental issue facing our nation from the beginning, one that Tocqueville observed during his visit to America in 1831 and astutely identified as an underlying flaw and contradiction. It is a problem that has involved the whole republic and its effects are still felt today.

Moreover, *Huckleberry Finn* does not merely manifest the problem of slavery. It points to a solution. The friendship between Huck and Jim is one of the most moving in all of literature. Not only does it testify to the common humanity of the black man — and the horrific injustice of slavery — it also gives us hope that whites and blacks can be united in friendship and that the wounds of the nation might be healed.

St. Vincent de Paul Lecture and Concert Series*

Endowed by Barbara and Paul Henkels

Recent Highlights

New England

- Fall Concert
Paula Grimm ('08), soprano; David Kaiser ('09), tenor; Elizabeth Lademan ('08), viola



- November Lecture: Rev. Greg Markey Chaplain, Thomas Aquinas College, New England
“The Second Vatican Council: Pariah or Promise?”
- St. Thomas Day All-College Seminar
Summa Theologiae, Question 16 on Truth
- Presidents’ Day Lecture: Dr. Richard D. Ferrier Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College, California
“Born on the Fourth of July”

California

- Spring All-College Seminar
Gunnar’s Daughter, by Sigrid Undset
- Presidents’ Day Lecture: Dr. Andrew T. Seeley Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College, California
“The Declaration of Independence — Image or Shadow?”
- St. Thomas Day Lecture: Dr. R. Glen Coughlin Tutor, Thomas Aquinas College, California
“The Ground of Metaphysics”



- March Lecture: Dr. Carol A. Day Tutor Emerita, Thomas Aquinas College, California
“Lining Up Numbers: The Place of Books 7-9 in Euclid’s *Elements*”

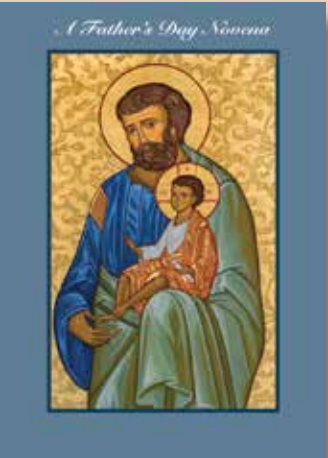
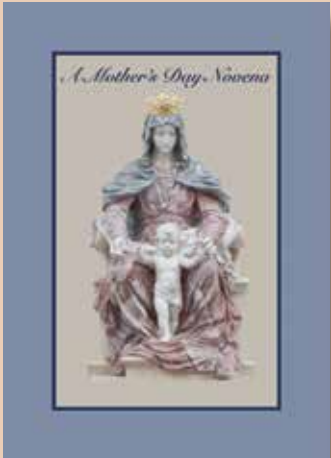
*Text and/or audio from select lectures is available at thomasaquinas.edu

Student Life



1. Spring arrives on the California campus. 2. The March Schubertiade in St. Cecilia Hall 3. Students recreate ... 4. ... and delight in the coffee machines in the newly refurbished Tracy Student Center. 5. A midweek Career Panel in St. Cecilia Hall 6. A weekend game of flag football in New England

This Spring
*Honor Thy
Father & Mother*
with a Novena of Masses



Beginning on Mother's Day (May 9) and Father's Day (June 20), the chaplains of Thomas Aquinas College will offer a novena of Masses for mothers and fathers, respectively. Each parent included in the novena will receive a beautiful, personalized card from the College.

Cost: \$5 per card for shipping and handling.
Mother's Day names must be received by May 7; Father's Day by June 18.

thomasaquinas.edu/novenas

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