

VENERABILE VIEW

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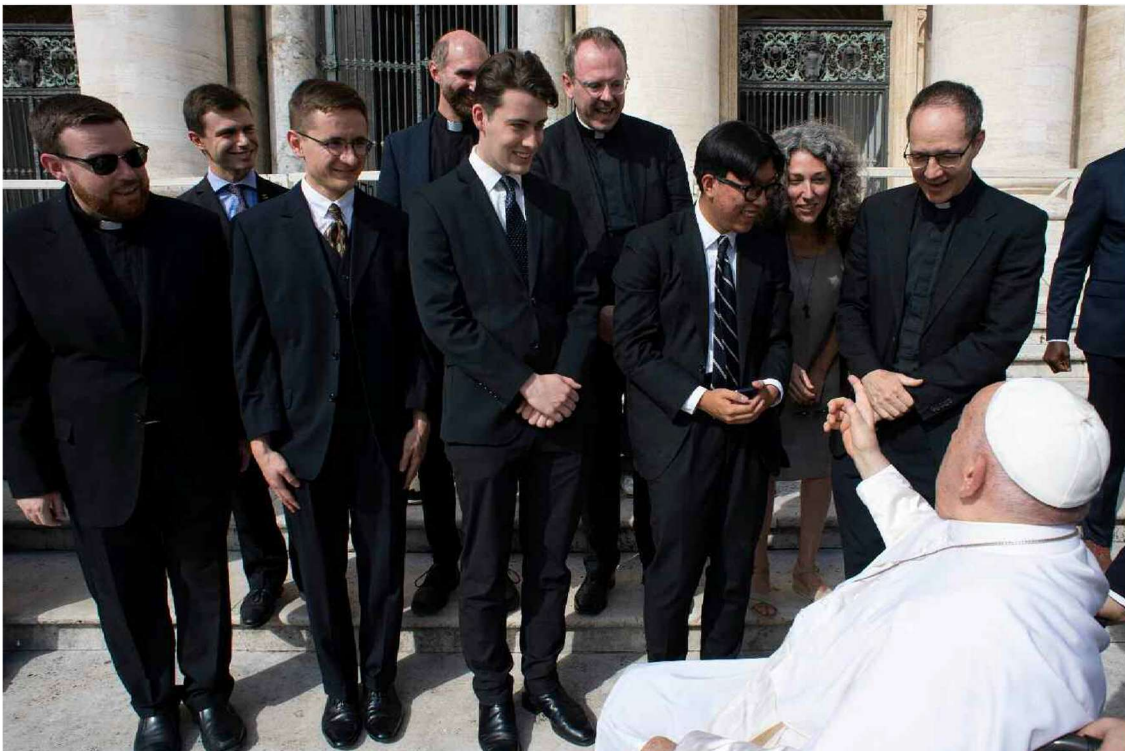
The English College Rome

FROM THE RECTOR'S WINDOW

January 2024

Fr Stephen Wang

We had seven new men join the community in September: three seminarians (two from Oslo, Norway, and one from Melbourne, Australia), and four priests in further studies (from France, South Sudan, Malta and Birmingham). So the formation community this year consists of twenty-one seminarians (two on year-long placements), four priests in further studies, four resident priests on the formation team, and our three non-resident formation team members. The new men and formation team were very privileged to meet Pope Francis personally at a Papal Audience.



Some of the New Men and Team meeting Pope Francis at the Papal Audience

The seminarians returned in September really energised by their pastoral placements and by their experiences of World Youth Day in Lisbon. The highlight of September was our pilgrimage to the Holy Land, guided by Canon Mervyn Tower. It touched us very deeply to be in the holy places, and it was a great time of community building as we travelled together. We arrived back safely just one week before the terrible violence started there, which has overshadowed our memories.



The Holy Land at Ecce Homo

Over the last few months we have celebrated the ministries of Lectorate and Acolytate, Admission to Candidacy, and various ordinations. Last spring, there were two diaconal ordinations, Rev Mark O’Farrell in Waterford and Lismore, and Rev Torbjorn Holt in Oslo; and Rev Edward Hauschild and Rev Trym Hellevig had their priestly ordinations. Many seminarians and team members were able to join the celebrations. We also had the diaconal ordination of Rev Hugh Donleavy back home in the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the July diaconal ordinations at Palazzola of Revv James Finnegan (Liverpool), Joseph O’Brien (Hexham & Newcastle), William Meehan (Hamilton), Martin Fyles (Liverpool) and Dave Bench (Birmingham), the priestly ordinations in their home dioceses of Fr O’Farrell and Fr Holt, and the diaconal ordination in Sweden of Rev Antonio Bajlovic in October.



Diaconate Ordinations at the Villa with Bishop Crosby

There have been a number of other highlights for community life in this period including the celebration of Holy Week (always the most important week of our year together), our Coronation Gala (a wonderful way to connect with people across Rome), Mass and lunch at the Beda, the Scots College here for Mass and supper (as a way of deepening friendships between seminarians in Rome), the Solemnity of St George - “balanced” by a

Nordic Night a few weeks later (to give due emphasis to all our national traditions), a pilgrimage to Divino Amore Sanctuary to dedicate our vocations to the Blessed Mother, and Martyrs' Day on 1 December.

The famous *Liber Ruber* has been signed by every VEC seminarian since our very first proto-martyr, St Ralph Sherwin, but the singing was usually done in private. This was the first year in our history when the *Liber Ruber* was signed by the new men in the College church in a context of prayer and celebration, with evening prayer and a short discourse from Prof Whitehead about the Missionary Oath.

We have new branded jackets with the College crest than makes us look almost as smart as the North American College seminarians.



Last Year's Community on Retreat with Fr John Armitage

We were pleased to welcome six guests who were participating in the Synod during October - the four delegates from E&W and the others from Malta and Perth, Australia. They had a very intense timetable which didn't allow for too much interaction with the community, but it was a joy to have them with us and there were some very good conversations over the period. Julian Paparella gave a very fruitful morning of formation about the Synod and an experience of "listening in the Spirit" for the community.

We have had some great visiting speakers (including Fr Mark Vickers on the faith of British Prime Ministers, and Sr Marie Kolbe on her work in the Synod Committee), some eminent visitors (the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, and Bishop Douglas Crosby of Hamilton, Canada, who came for our diaconal ordinations in July), some significant groups visiting (including religious education advisers and inspectors from E&W, Anglican ordinands from St Mellitus Theological College, Australian teachers on their way to World Youth Day, and 28 Jubilarians from E&W this November). Perhaps the most important visit was of the Vocations Directors and Promoters of E&W who stayed for a week at Palazzola and spent a day with us at the College, meeting the new formation team and getting a feel for our mission here, as well as joining us for Mass and a festal meal. I think they left with a good understanding of our life and our priorities and a greater ability to discern which of their candidates might flourish here with us.



Fr David trying not to show his competitive side in the pool tournament

We have wanted to keep the missionary focus to our formation and open up the house as much as possible. The seminarians organised a Night of Light in November, when the church was open on a Saturday evening with dozens of people coming in for prayer or simply out of curiosity, and they are also running an enquiry/evangelisation group after Sunday Mass for those who wish to learn more about the Catholic faith.

We are so grateful to Prof Maurice Whitehead for his work in the Archives, and to Dr Renaud Milazzo for his work on the rare book cataloguing. Maurice was at the launch of the Cardinal Pole exhibition at the Lambeth Palace Archives in London, which includes some significant VEC manuscripts. He also helped with the very prestigious JRR Tolkien Exhibition which is taking place here in Rome.

There have been a number of significant works done in the building, including: new windows on the main staircase; the restoration of the tiled floor in the main corridor; the restoration of the 18th century main entrance door, kindly funded by the Friends. The swimming pool at Palazzola has been re-tiled through a gift from the Roman Association.



The Coronation Gala - with banners!

The College Vault at Campo Verano Cemetery was completely restored this summer. It was in a terrible state, unworthy of the memory of the six men buried there. The marble has been restored, the lettering touched up, the whole site cleaned, and a new plaque with the names of those interred there has been added. The Roman Association has very kindly funded this.



The Holy Land looking over Jerusalem

Many of our chasubles were worn and needing to be replaced. The Friends of the Venerable have very kindly funded new sets of vestments for presiders, deacons and concelebrants. The design for the orphrey was taken from some of the decorative motifs in the College church - both in the ceiling and in the main wall of the sanctuary where the Martyrs' Picture hangs. The Polish company Alba have done a fine job of creating a unique woven pattern especially for our community.



The New Green Chasubles with Fr Richard Oduor from South Sudan

We are delighted that we now have two new portraits of St Ralph Sherwin and St David Lewis hanging in the Refectory. This is an 18-month project that came to fruition on Martyrs' Day, 1 December. We wanted to celebrate the martyrs in a more public way and put them at the centre of our life here: up until now the only images we have are hidden in the Tribune. The idea came about to commission portraits of the first and the last of the College martyrs, to represent all 44 martyrs. The two men in question, providentially, also represent England and Wales, and they are a secular priest and a Jesuit religious. They were painted by Spanish artist Raúl Berzosa. They now hang in the refectory beside our two founders, Cardinal Allen and Pope Gregory XIII. We could not have a more fitting tribute to the martyrs nor a stronger impetus to mission in our own time.



The two new Martyrs' Portraits that now hang the Refectory

We were very sad indeed to hear about the death of Mike Lang in October, Chairman of the Friends of the Venerable. He had such a love for the College and gave so much through his work with the Friends over many years. He will be much missed. We have been praying for him and for his wife Teresa.

I want to thank the Friends of the Venerable very sincerely for their support and prayers over these last few months. Your friendship and support mean a great deal to all of us at the VEC.

Michael Lang : 1937 – 2023



It was with great sadness that we learned that our Chairman, Mike Lang, had passed away on October 20th, 2023.

Although he had suffered ill-health for the past couple of years his unexpected death came as a shock to us all.

Mike fell in love with Palazzola in 1980 during his first visit there, with family, as part of a parish group. These were very much the early days of family groups enjoying holidays there even though the facilities were quite basic and, in some ways, could be uncomfortable.

Nevertheless, as Palazzola was developed during the mid to late 1980's, Mike continued to take groups almost annually and was very influential in encouraging others to do so.

He very quickly joined the newly formed Friends of the Venerabile, joining the committee in 2006, and served as Chairman from 2013 until his untimely death.

For 43 years he has supported the Rectors, Staff, and especially the seminarians who were always his priority, when discussing how the Friends could best serve the needs of the English College and Palazzola.

He will be greatly missed by all who knew and worked with him.

May he Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory.