

Rome Program Celebrates 5th Anniversary in Heart of the Church

The idea of studying abroad is one about which many students dream. And it was the same for Christendom College President Dr. Timothy O'Donnell. He wanted Christendom students to be able to experience life living in the Heart of the Church—the Eternal City, Rome—just as he did as a graduate student at the Angelicum in the late 1970s. To



this end, in the Fall of 2002, Christendom launched its Semester in Rome Program for Juniors. Now celebrating its fifth anniversary, the impact that this program has made on the participants is beyond what O'Donnell had ever expected.

“Making eye contact with the Holy Father stills all the frustrated rumblings of one’s heart, and time itself seems to stand still. It was incredible, really. I still can’t exactly believe it,” says Senior Nicole Hill while reflecting on her semester that she spent in Rome during the Fall of 2006.

Before settling in to their apartments in Rome, the students begin their semester in Florence where they spend one week in an intensive Italian program. Following a weekend retreat in Assisi, the students then head to Rome, where they begin their semester in the heart of the church.

Although a number of colleges and universities offer their students an opportunity to

study in Rome, Christendom’s program is unique in several important ways.

First, an intimate group of just 20 to 40 Juniors takes part in the program each semester, thus allowing deeper friendships to occur and more individualized attention to be given by the teachers and Rome Program Directors. Also, all students involved in Christendom’s Rome Program are Christendom College students. They do not join up with another school’s program and Christendom does not allow other schools to utilize its program.

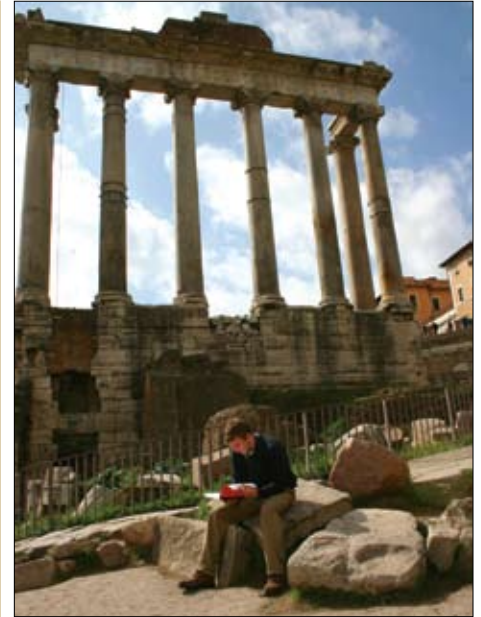
Secondly, no other college can boast such a convenient location in Rome. The students currently live in the Residence Candia, located just outside the northern walls of Vatican City. Students make a ten minute walk, cutting across St. Peter’s Square, to get to their classes each day at the Istituto Maria SS Bambina, a convent replete with classrooms, chapel, and a balcony literally overlooking St. Peter’s Square. In fact, from their balcony, students can easily see and hear the Pope during his weekly Wednesday audiences.

The last major difference is that Christendom charges a nominal “Rome Program” fee of approximately \$700, not the normal added expenses of \$2000 – \$4000 charged by other colleges. This policy aims to make the program attainable for all students.

Christendom alumni Ben and Heather Akers currently serve as the Rome Program Directors. They both graduated in 1998 and Ben is now working toward his doctorate at the Angelicum. Along with teaching the students, the Akers act as both mentors and escorts in the exploration of Rome’s intellectual, cultural, and spiritual treasures.

The classes offered in Rome include Modern and Medieval Philosophy, Apologetics, Moral Theology, Art and Architecture, Italian, and Roman Perspectives, a course that spans from Livy to the Church Fathers.

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“She skillfully illuminates the major periods of art history and she includes weekly tours where we actually see the wonders we learn of in the classroom. What could be more enjoyable than a stroll through Bernini’s San Andrea al Quirinale after a lecture on the Baroque period? Bernini said this church was his favorite, and was often lost in contemplation there.”

“Even three months in the heart of the Roman Catholic Church can change the students’ lives,” Professor Ben Akers says. “You cannot walk the same streets upon which trod countless saints, upon which millions of pilgrims have traversed, and upon which martyrs have shed their blood, without being challenged to deepen your faith.”

“Seeing the Pope never got old,” Senior Flannery O’Connor recounts. “I remember one audience in particular, when Christendom was announced and we all jumped up and held the Christendom banner proudly and shouted ‘Amamus te!’ to Pope Benedict. We received a warm look as he raised his hand in recognition of the College. The Holy Father then drove by us as we all stretched with all of our might to touch his hand.”

“We just recently returned from visiting with our students,” says O’Donnell, “and they are so happy to be there. They are taking advantage of being in Rome during Lent, visiting the many station churches throughout the city, and making their own pilgrimages to places such as the Scala Santa, the Sacred Stairs, the staircase which Jesus ascended during His Passion while proceeding to Pi-

late’s praetorium.”

Because of their prime location so proximate to the Vatican, the students are able to easily attend the Sunday Angelus with the Holy Father, attend daily Mass at St. Peter’s, and walk to the many churches and sites of Rome.

For meals, students have kitchens in their apartments and receive a weekly stipend to buy necessary groceries for breakfast and dinner. Lunches are shared in common at a cafeteria near where they take classes.

On weekday evenings, the Akers usually arrange various group activities: Mondays they have pizza together at a local ristorante; Tuesdays they play outdoor soccer together; Wednesdays they volunteer with the Missionaries of Charity and help feed the hungry; and Thursdays they get together and have one of the apartments cook for everyone else.

“Christendom is known by many of the hierarchy in Rome,” says O’Donnell. “A number of the cardinals who head the various pontifical councils and congregations are good friends of the College, for example, Francis Cardinal Arinze, Renato Cardinal Martino, Alfonso Cardinal Lopez-Trujillo, and J. Francis Cardinal Stafford. Additionally, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI was the Chairman of our 25th Anniversary Honorary Dinner Committee in 2002. We definitely have a special bond with Rome!”

Since the program’s inception, 318 students have attended the Rome Program and have fond memories of their time spent in the Eternal City.

“To live in Rome, at the heart of the Church, for nearly three months teaches one what it means to be truly Roman Catholic. It has



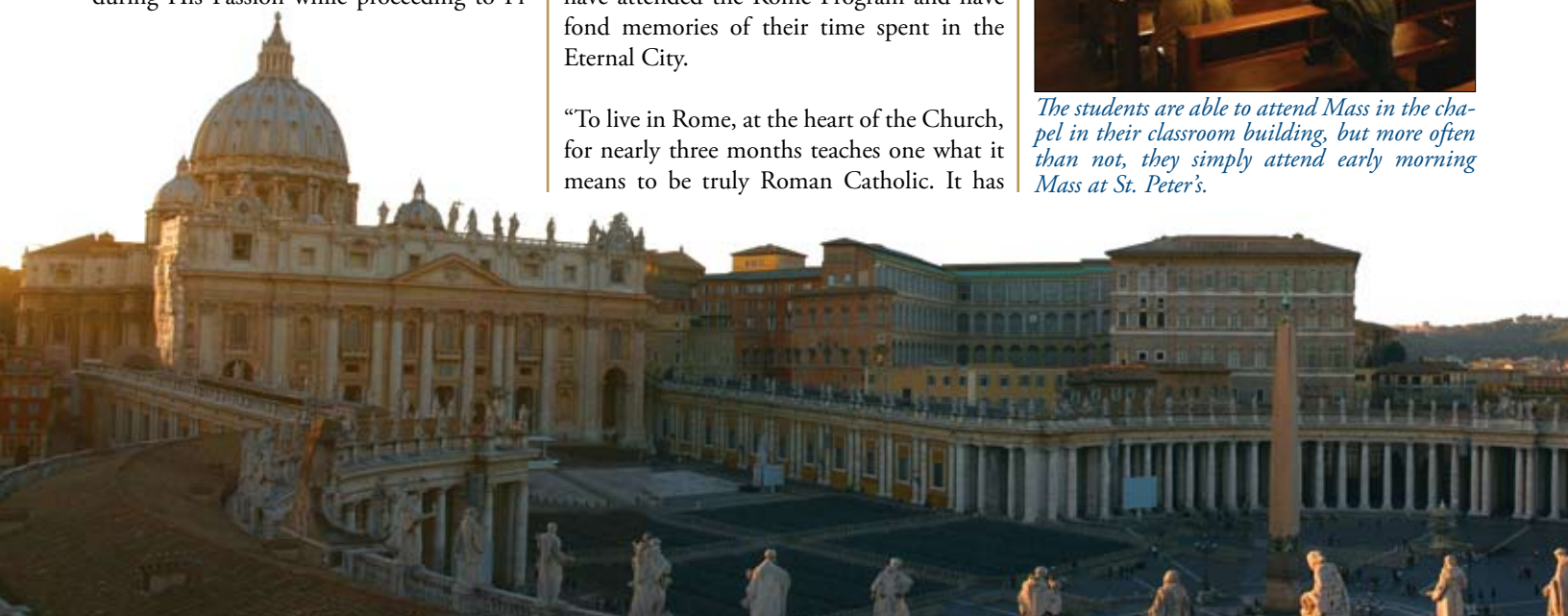
The students attend classes in the Istituto Maria SS Bambina, pictured above right. The only thing separating this building and the colonnade surrounding St. Peter’s Basilica is a narrow road.

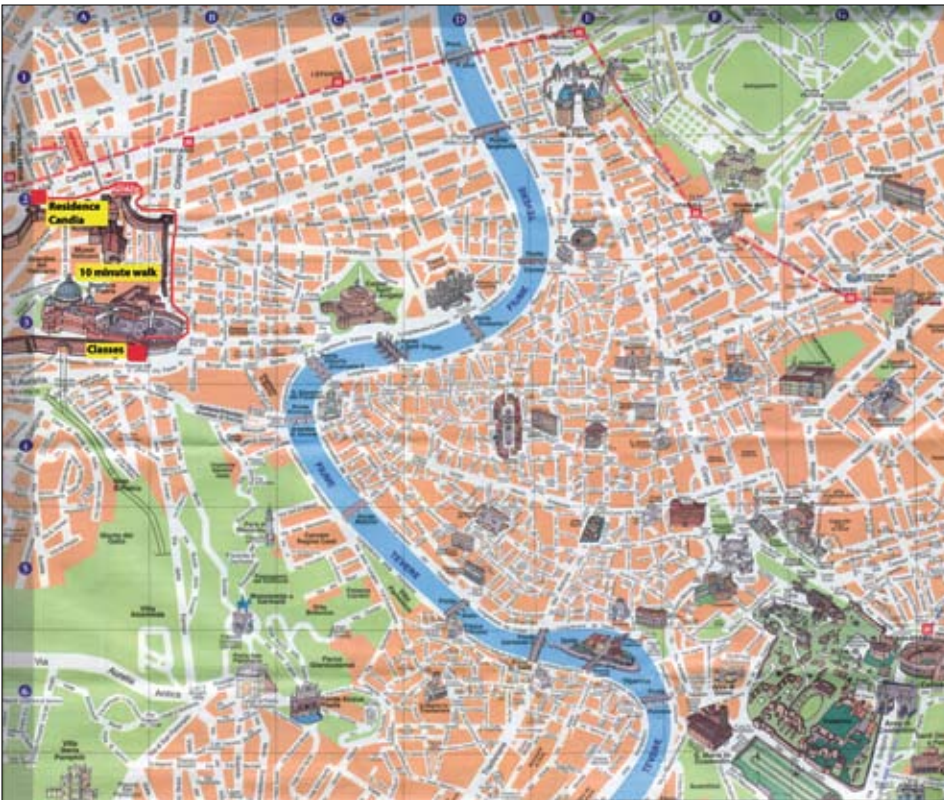


Students study History of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Moral Theology/Apologetics, Art and Architecture, Italian, and Roman Perspectives while in Rome.



The students are able to attend Mass in the chapel in their classroom building, but more often than not, they simply attend early morning Mass at St. Peter’s.





The location of their apartments makes Rome very accessible to the students. They can walk from their apartments to the Coliseum in about 45 minutes, or take the metro or hop on a bus.

taught us that being Roman Catholic is to be rooted in the very Mystery of the Incarnation,” says Junior Matt Anderson. “Because God became man, earthly things take on a more supernatural meaning. Rome has taught us that Catholicism must infiltrate every aspect of our lives, not just our prayer lives, but also the very material and ordinary aspects of our lives as well.

“From the architecture of churches to the statues of the saints—found on nearly every corner—Rome testifies that God must be the ultimate end for every single one of our actions, and if He is not, then the action is meaningless. Catholicism is not something to be kept in the Churches; no, it is something that should pervade our culture as if it were in the very air we breathe.”



The students are able to ascend to the balcony of the Istituto where they take classes and from there they can look out onto St. Peter's Square. This is the only balcony in Rome with this view (see below)!



“The Rome program was an experience unlike any other. Each one of us was given the opportunity to experience Rome to the fullest. We were able to travel all over the country and continent and to truly experience the Church in Her most Universal sense. The most amazing aspect of our semester abroad was that we were able to witness the inner-workings of the Church first hand. Living in the heart of the Faith for three months instilled in us a new appreciation for it that I hope will remain for the rest of our lives.” **Kate Beer, Spencer, Massachusetts**

“Rome, for me, was truly and absolutely life changing. My Faith was realized in a way that it never has been before. To pray to a saint and to profess obedience to the Pope and then to see the tomb of that saint and to see the Pope; this actualization of the Faith is discovered in Rome. So many aspects of the Faith were tangibly presented to us. I have so much to hold on to now; I have so much experience to tap into and upon which I can meditate. Rome was, and will remain, such a blessing, such a gift.” **Anne Kulick, Wolfstown, Virginia**



From the balcony of their apartments, students are able to see the Vatican Walls – they're that close!



The apartments have kitchens so that students can cook for themselves most nights for dinner.



Each bedroom is large enough for three students.



Four days a week, the students have lunch together in a nearby cafeteria.



Ben and Heather Akers give tours of and explanations about many of the most famous sites in Rome.



The students often travel around Rome on their own, finding sites that interest them.



Dr. O'Donnell usually visits once a semester and takes the students to some of his favorite sites in Rome.



Students are expected to take notes as they tour the various historical and religious sites.



Sometimes you have to have a little camera fun!



Fr. Heisler visits with the students as they prepare to tour St. Peter's with Dr. O'Donnell.



Students take the bus/metro all around the city with one easy pass that they are provided each month.