



# **The Lay Centre Web News**

2022



## Introduction

In the following document, you will find all the notes from The Lay Centre for the year 2022. To easily locate a specific note, you can use the "Command + F" function (or "Control + F" on Windows) and search for relevant keywords. This feature allows you to quickly navigate through the document and find the notes you are looking for. The document serves as a comprehensive collection of all The Lay Centre's notes for 2022, helping you access the information more efficiently.



## 2022

# Community evenings discuss outreach to peripheries, friendship and dialogue in Church, society

**By The Lay Centre**

The second round of Lay Centre community evenings for the 2022-2023 academic year continued this fall. They included meetings with important actors in the life of the Church in Rome and in various Vatican dicasteries, foundations, ecclesiastical universities, and ecumenical and interreligious centres.

[READ MORE: Highlights of the academic year's first round of community evenings in 2022-2023](#)

In particular, evenings in November and early December turned to themes concerning the lay vocation, synodality, and dialogue in the Church and society. Among the guests we welcomed were:

- The members of the Passionist general curia in Rome, including their superior general, Father Joachim Rego, CP. [WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)
- Father James Martin, SJ, editor at large for America Media and consultant to the Dicastery for Communications. [WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)
- Father Bernhard Eckerstorfer, OSB, rector of the Pontifical Atheneum of St. Anselm (Anselmianum).
- Dr. Isabella Bruckner, professor at the Anselmianum, chair in “Thought and Forms of the Spiritual,” and winner of the 2022 Karl Rahner Prize.

This academic year, community evenings have been held around themes that touch on the synodal dimension of the Church. This time, among the 10 thematic nuclei proposed by the Synod, we discussed “Listening” and “Dialogue in Church and Society.”

### Outreach

Father Martin visited The Lay Centre Nov. 16 and, in an open discussion after dinner, he talked about his ministry with LGBTQ Catholics in the United States

and abroad. His most recent initiative is the website “Outreach” which, he said, responds to Pope Francis’ invitation to “closeness, compassion and tenderness” toward those in the existential peripheries.

About the criticism he receives for doing this kind of pastoral work, he said that when one works on the margins of society, one risks, at times, crossing some boundaries. However, he continued, his work is based on the model of Jesus in Scripture and Church teaching, and is supported both by his superiors and the pope. During his time in Rome, on the occasion of the plenary of the Dicastery for Communications, Father Martin was received by Pope Francis in a private audience.

In his homily, during Mass and before dinner at The Lay Centre, Father Martin reminded the community about the importance of being constantly focused on God’s reign, living lives of love, mercy, and compassion toward others.

#### Praying with Roman Saints

Father Eckerstorfer joined The Lay Centre community Nov. 23, together with Dr. Bruckner.

Coincidentally, on that day, the Church remembered Pope St. Clement I and St. Felicity, martyr. During the celebration of the Eucharist, Father Eckerstorfer noted that living and studying in Rome becomes more special when a student recalls that they are preceded by the continuous flow of the Catholic faith for 2,000 years, including by people who were ready to witness to the Gospel and be martyred for it.

Praying with Roman saints, he said, is a powerful spiritual resource that helps us live our faith in a deeper, stronger manner.



'Enlarge the space of your tent' (Is 54:2)

After dinner, Dr. Bruckner spoke about her work and mission as a lay woman and theological scholar in the Church. She offered insights about the concept of synodality and the powerful outcomes – spiritual and practical – of “walking together.”



She reflected, particularly, on the image of the tent used in the working document for the continental stage of the Synod on Synodality (2021-2024). This image, the document says, makes reference to “a vocation for God’s people and his Church”: “Enlarge the space of your tent!” (Is 54:2).

The image of the tent, she said, is perhaps even more powerful than that of the Church as a body, used in the letters of St. Paul, as a metaphor for synodality. In her view, that is because the tent inspires the idea of a Church that is always open and dynamic, in motion, as the tent is not a solid construction, but one that is itinerant, adaptable, and on the move.

### Celebrating friendships

On Nov. 30, feast of St. Andrew the apostle, our community welcomed the general council of the Congregation of the Passionists, as well as the superior of the community on the Caelian Hill, in Rome, where The Lay Centre is housed. The eucharistic celebration was presided by the superior general, Father Rego, who commemorated all of The Lay Centre’s deceased friends, benefactors, and alumni. The life and legacy of Father Donald Senior, a Passionist priest who passed away in November, was commemorated in a special way.

Father Senior, a renowned biblical scholar and professor, was also a Lay Centre board member. He helped build bridges between The Lay Centre and the Passionists. “He was one of those people that, when you meet them, something changes in you,” Father Rego said in his homily.

“I tried to reflect on ‘What is it about Don?’ His desire was to be a missionary and when he was ordained, he asked to go to South Korea as a missionary, but the provincial asked him to study Scripture.”

Father Senior was the type of person who would listen and do what he was asked to do, he said.

“He was asked to teach and for the rest of his long life as a Passionist, that became his ministry: teaching and the many other works that came about. His desire was to encounter Jesus each day,” said Father Rego. “He did that by his ordinary relationship with Jesus in prayer and by his scientific work, his study. And he shared with the rest of humanity about who Jesus is.”

Contributed:  
Filip Veber  
Joseph Tulloch



# Adrian Teodor Oancea: Synodality and autocephaly in the Eastern Orthodox Church | Dies Academicus

**By The Lay Centre**

In an opportunity to present the work of community members to an external audience, The Lay Centre held an “Open Day on Synodality” Nov. 12. The morning was rich in intellectual dialogue, held among Lay Centre residents and friends. Four scholars gave talks on topics directly or indirectly linked to the theme of synodality. The session was moderated by Loredana Fabijanic, an Angelicum doctoral student from Croatia.

A Romanian Orthodox student of Jewish-Christian dialogue at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Adrian Teodor Oancea, explored the roots of synodality in his tradition. He recalled the etymology of the term “synodality,” which combines the Greek words for “way” or “journey” (hodos) and “together” (syn).

Within the Orthodox Church, Oancea explained, synodality refers to the process of collegial collaboration and discernment in decision-making, particularly among bishops sitting in council, but also involving, to a certain extent, priests and lay people.

That exercise of collective discernment, he said, is more than the mere sum of the many parts that compose the Orthodox communion. In the words of the late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, the aim of a synod is to “attain a common mind,” reflecting “the presence of Christ Himself, active among” the participants “through the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

It is the attainment of that truly “common mind” that gives synodal decision-making its dynamic character, Oancea noted.

He explained that the Orthodox Church comprises 15 autocephalous churches, each with its own synod of bishops, who meet two to three times a year to make decisions about Orthodox life and practice.

At first blush, the practice of synodality at the local level appears limited; only bishops – not lay people, and not even priests – participate in synod assemblies.



However, Oancea said, on a more local level, the laity have important roles for the synodal path.

In the Orthodox Church of Romania, for example, lay people and parish priests are elected to serve on diocesan councils for four-year terms, and each diocese elects two lay people and one parish priest to take part in the National Assembly of the Orthodox Church of Romania. Lay participation in church decision-making, he said, is “not symbolic or a mere formality, but a functioning fact.”

### Local and Universal

Oancea also described what he termed a “tension” between the local and the universal in the Orthodox Church: How can unity be guaranteed when each autocephalous church has its own synod? He recognized that the Orthodox Church struggles to find the right balance between unity and autocephaly, or local ecclesial authority, more even so in today’s globalized context.

Among local churches, unity is expressed in shared tradition, dogma, canonical regulations, liturgy, and reception of the Eucharist. It also takes shape in synodal leadership exercised by all bishops, in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople – a *primus inter pares*, or the “first among equals.”

Oancea also analyzed the expectations and accomplishments of the pan-Orthodox council that was held in Crete in the summer of 2016. Unfortunately, he said, only 10 of the 15 autocephalous churches attended – the Russians’ decision not to attend the assembly was particularly disappointing. All the same, he believes that council was not a failure.

It brought much of the Orthodox world together, he noted, pushing against the temptation to fragmentation, isolation, and division. It also provided an opportunity to deepen the church’s understanding of the interplay between synodality and unity.

Reflecting on the remarks of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the council, Oancea said that “synodality is intimately linked to the nature of the church and assures its unity,” preventing catholicity from dissolving into the pursuit of mere individual or national interests. The 2016 council, Oancea echoed, “initiated a new era of synodality in the Orthodox Church at the universal level, [in] an epoch of globalization.”

Additionally, Oancea mentioned that some of the Orthodox churches have proposed convening another pan-Orthodox synod to resolve the dispute involving



the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate over Constantinople's 2019 decision to grant autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, allowing it to govern itself apart from the Moscow Patriarchate. To date, however, the dispute is ongoing.

Contributed: Filip Veber, Joseph Tulloch





# Aljaž Krajnc: 'Religious diversity is willed by God,' a reflection on human fraternity | Dies Academicus

**By The Lay Centre**

In an opportunity to present the work of community members to an external audience, The Lay Centre held an “Open Day on Synodality” Nov. 12. The morning was rich in intellectual dialogue, held among Lay Centre residents and friends. Four scholars gave talks on topics directly or indirectly linked to the theme of synodality. The session was moderated by Loredana Fabijanec, an Angelicum doctoral student from Croatia.

Aljaž Krajnc, a doctoral student of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, who is conducting research at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), focused his presentation on a single line from the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” a joint statement signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in 2019. The document calls for peaceful coexistence and social friendship of all people of faith and is among the inspirations for the papal encyclical “Fratelli Tutti.”

The document says: “The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings.”

This sentence – and in particular the statement that “religious diversity is willed by God” – has caused heated debate, Krajnc noted. The plurality and diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are all characteristics of human beings, thus placing the plurality of religions in the context of theological anthropology, Krajnc pointed out.

Furthermore, the document situates these “pluralities” in the context of the divine act of creation and in the context of God’s will and wisdom. One is invited, Krajnc argued, to understand this statement in the context of the creation of a human being. In other words, it means that every single human being is willed by God and, if we want to accept another person, we must accept all of them as they were created.



## Being Created

Krajnc addressed the question of identity as the departing point of his reflection. “An important part of my identity are the elements without which I would not be myself,” he said. “Those are the parts of my identity that define me the most.”

Krajnc termed this approach as “integral” or “holistic” anthropology, which means that the different characteristics or constitutive elements of an individual cannot be separated from the person, as together they define a person’s identity.

“One of these elements is definitely being human. I am a human being and this defines me. If you were to change this, I would not be myself anymore,” he said. “It is even absurd to think otherwise. I [who am Slovenian] cannot imagine myself being Chinese. I do not want, obviously, to say that I am better because I was raised in Slovenia. I just want to say that this defines me so much that I would simply become someone else if I were born and raised somewhere else.”

“Another important part of my identity is that I am a Christian,” he continued. “This defines me in a profound way, so profound, that it is almost impossible to understand me without knowing that I am a Christian. I would be someone else if I were not a Christian. I know that if I were born in India, I would most probably be a Hindu. But, alas, I know only one me. And this one was born in Slovenia.”

Like all created beings, “I am created as a whole,” he said, with an “indivisible unity” that is synonymous with having been created as a concrete being. This concreteness means “there are some characteristics of mine that are impossible to be taken away from me,” he added.

“I am Aljaž and as such God wants me,” he said. “My constitutive elements are such an important part of me that I am not myself if you take them from me.”

In meeting other individuals, Krajnc argued, one realizes that they, too, were created within a certain human context, with their particular constitutive elements, including their faith and religion.

Accepting another person cannot mean accepting only one part of them, as doing so would mean not truly accepting them, Krajnc said. Part of accepting the other is knowing that their religion is willed by God because it is a constitutive part of that person, he concluded.

Contributed: Filip Veber, Joseph Tulloch



# Clemency Flitter: Synodality and inclusion in the Church of England | Dies Academicus

**By The Lay Centre**

In an opportunity to present the work of community members to an external audience, The Lay Centre held an “Open Day on Synodality” Nov. 12. The morning was rich in intellectual dialogue, held among Lay Centre residents and friends. Four scholars gave talks on topics directly or indirectly linked to the theme of synodality. The session was moderated by Loredana Fabijanic, an Angelicum doctoral student from Croatia.

An ordinand of the Church of England and Angelicum student, Clemency Flitter, spoke about the historical concept of synodality in her tradition. Her analysis began in 1529, more than a year before King Henry VIII formally broke with the Catholic Church and instituted the Church of England, passing through the [Colloquy of Marburg](#), a historical effort to unite the various nascent Protestant movements in Europe.

She gave concrete examples of how the Church of England has charted its own distinctive identity throughout its history, trying to find balance between the different traditions rooted both in Protestant and Catholic fields.

- [Maria Teresa Ávila: Lived synodality and the concept of ‘bridge-people’](#)
- [Aljaž Krajnc: ‘Religious diversity is willed by God.’ a reflection on human fraternity](#)
- [Bruno Hermes: The Gospel groups of Amazonia’s Acre River](#)
- [Adrian Teodor Oancea: Synodality and autocephaly in the Eastern Orthodox Church](#)
- [WATCH ALL ‘DIES ACADEMICUS’ LECTURES ON OUR YOUTUBE PAGE](#)

Flitter discussed the [Book of Common Prayer](#), which has been used since 1549 and still liturgically unites the worldwide Anglican Communion today. Reviewed a few times, it was carefully worded to encompass, among other things, different theological understandings about the Eucharist. In this way, communion and common worship were preserved, although there was room for a certain amount of doctrinal difference.



The compromises struck in the Book of Common Prayer reflect the Church of England's larger self-conception as a kind of "via media" or middle way, she said. Various figures contributed to the concept of the "via media" over the centuries, from Richard Hooker to John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement.

Turning from history to our day, Flitter offered a few illustrations of the ways in which the Church of England's big-tent approach remains alive and well.

At the highest level, the church is governed by a [General Synod of three houses](#), all of which must agree to any significant changes in doctrine or practice. Private members, both lay and clerical, are allowed to make motions in the synod, and footage of synod meetings is available for anyone to watch.

At lower levels, different churches within the worldwide Anglican Communion may follow different rules regarding discipline and practice – such as the ordination of women to the priesthood and giving them roles of pastoral leadership.

This point illustrates synodal decision making in the Church of England, Flitter noted. When the Anglican Church decided to allow the ordination of women in the 1990s, some disagreed. The church as a whole reached a compromise: Although individual and local churches are obliged to accept the official position, they are not required to ordain women as priests. As well, neither parishes nor church communities are obliged to accept a woman as pastor.

Principles were established to facilitate this delicate balance between affirmation and respect. As Flitter acknowledged, however, such a compromise is difficult to maintain. A "big-tent" approach in the church requires that members with different theological views are in constant dialogue. If the church fails to be inclusive, Flitter said, it does not make itself bigger; it just makes the sacred table shared by its members smaller.

Contributed: Filip Veber, Joseph Tulloch



# Bruno Hermes: The Gospel groups of Amazonia's Acre River | Dies Academicus

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A Brazilian doctoral student at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Bruno Hermes De Oliveira Santos, presented some results from his research, which he conducted in the state of Acre, northwestern Brazil, part of the Amazon rainforest. His work is connected with two synods of the pontificate of Pope Francis: the Synod on the Amazon (2019), after which the pope published the post-synodal exhortation “Querida Amazonia” (Beloved Amazonia), and the ongoing Synod on Synodality (2021-2024).

Santos’ sociological research is composed of field research and analysis. He conducted ethnographic research for about nine months in the Amazonian village of Assis Brasil, situated on the Acre River, which forms a natural border with Peru and Bolivia. Most people in the state live in rural areas; small towns are very far from each other.

Religious diversity is also a strong characteristic of the region. Most people are Evangelical Protestants. Although the presence of the Society of Jesus and other missionaries is recognisable, the lack of Catholic clergymen is notable. It is not possible to celebrate Sunday Eucharist regularly. Native communities often celebrate the Liturgy of the Word. Lay people and religious women often take on roles of community leadership.

However, he also noted that, especially among the elderly, a hierarchical view of the Church prevails in that they expect the clergy to lead most of the time. The idea of adopting a different model is more common among younger Catholics.

The Catholic Church finds many different expressions in the region, and there are many other alternatives for religious affiliation. There is no longer a “monopoly” of



Catholics in the region, as was the case when Brazil was a Portuguese colony that welcomed many European Catholic missionaries.

Preachers in the Amazon are of different Christian denominations. Along with local traditional and indigenous leaders, they compete against each other for the people's attention and membership. The faithful often do not notice a big difference between them, be they Catholic or Evangelical, and easily transit between one church and the other. In spite of that fluid sense of affiliation, Amazonian communities are very vibrant and autonomous, he noted.

Contributed:

Filip Veber

Joseph Tulloch



# Maria Teresa Ávila: Lived synodality and the concept of 'bridge-people' | Dies Academicus

**By The Lay Centre**

In an opportunity to present the work of community members to an external audience, The Lay Centre held an “Open Day on Synodality” on Nov. 12. The morning was rich in intellectual dialogue, held among Lay Centre residents and friends. Four scholars gave talks on topics directly or indirectly linked to the theme of synodality. The session was moderated by Loredana Fabijanac, an Angelicum doctoral student from Croatia.

Maria Teresa Ávila, an Angelicum licentiate student from Mexico, discussed the concept of “bridge-people,” that is, people who historically were bridge-builders between different social and ecclesiastical groups. She began by raising a question: “What are the characteristics of a bridge?” She picked up on one element in particular, the fact that bridges connect two separate entities.

“Bridge-people,” she said, are people who move on the frontiers, are able to speak two or more languages and translate for others, as well as inspire others to welcome and “make space” for newcomers. They also find common denominators: Where others only see divergence, opposition, and dissent, bridge-people find common ground. Moreover, while they might differ in personality, area of study, ideology, or politics, bridge-people have in common the ability to enlarge their own and others’ perspectives.

This definition led Ávila to quote from Pope Francis’ recent encyclical letter “Fratelli Tutti”: “In imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth ... in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity ... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation” (276).

Bridge-people in history

Ávila provided concrete examples. The first group of bridge-people she considered were priests from the 1800s. She then turned to consider examples of lay women and men. They were:



- Severinus Boethius (480-525) was a Roman senator and philosopher who bridged the classical philosophical and scientific tradition with Christianity. Ávila quoted Pope Benedict XVI: Boethius was convinced that harmony between cultures and values was possible and considered his mission to reconcile and unite the Classic and Roman cultures.
- Robert Lammenais (1782-1854), a French priest and philosopher, built bridges between the Catholic Church and democratic political movements, also supporting the separation of church and state. Although he was officially condemned by the Church in his lifetime, his views are now upheld as part of Catholic social teaching.
- Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), an Italian priest, deplored the division between clergy and lay people in his book “The Five Wounds of the Church” and urged clergy and laity alike not to forget that they are one Body in Christ. Like Lammenais, he had problems with Church hierarchy during his life but was beatified in 2006.
- Wilhelm von Ketteler (1811-1877), a German bishop famous for his dialogue with socialist theorist Ferdinand Lassalle, acted as a bridge between socialism and Catholicism, acknowledging the differences and similarities, and worked in favor of social ethics, worker rights, unions, and the welfare state.
- Giuseppe Toniolo (1845-1918), a Catholic sociologist, economist, and writer, built bridges between Christianity and democracy and worked to integrate economic systems and moral principles, for example, by promoting labor unions. For this work, he was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI.
- Georges Rutten (1875-1952), a Dominican priest who lived with and wrote about the conditions of miners. He built bridges not only between the socialist class struggle and Christian social justice efforts but also between academia and social action.
- Dorothy Day (1897-1980), an American journalist, activist, and pacifist, was an anarchist in her youth and wrote for communist publications. After converting to Catholicism, she continued her radical activism, founding the Catholic Worker Movement with Peter Maurin.
- Eileen Egan (1912-2000), a lay Catholic writer, activist, and journalist, was the first lay professional to work with Catholic Relief Services. She built bridges between Mother Teresa and organizations such as the National Council of Catholic Women, as well as between Christianity and pacifism through her work on the Consistent Life Ethic.





Ávila concluded her presentation with another quote from “Fratelli Tutti”: “Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter!” (217).

Contributed: Filip Veber, Joseph Tulloch

# Christmas Message: 'Today Emmanuel, today God is with us'

**By Donna Orsuto, director**

During the Christmas liturgy, we will hear the words, “Behold, the Virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us’” (Mt 1:23). The 12th-century Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx reminds us that with the birth of Jesus we can truly affirm that “God is indeed with us.”

Aelred continues:

... Today Emmanuel, today God is with us.

He is with us in our nature,

with us in his grace;

He is with us in our weakness,

with us in his kindness;

He is with us in our wretchedness,

with us in his mercy,

He is with us in charity,

with us in loving care,

with us in affection,

with us in compassion.

O Emmanuel, O God with us!

This is the gift we celebrate this Christmas. Wherever you are in the world, whatever you are doing, whether you are happy or sad, busy or bored, delighted or depressed, stop for a moment, gaze at the Christ Child, and consider the sheer immensity of God’s gift to you.



He brings a love that knows no bounds. He brings a love that is faithful from the womb to the tomb. He brings a love that reaches to every corner of the world and especially to those who are suffering: those in hospitals, in war-torn zones, in situations of dire need.

Know that today, Emmanuel, God is with you. Do not doubt His presence.

He came as a baby more than 2,000 years ago and He is coming now to you, this Christmas, if you but welcome him in your heart.

Stop for a moment, gaze at the Christ Child, and consider the sheer immensity of God's gift to you and to all humanity. Welcome Him now and He will bring you his light, his peace, and his joy, wherever you are, whatever you are doing.

Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Liturgical Sermons, The Durham and Lincoln Collections, Sermons 47-84* (Collegeville: A Cistercian Publication/Liturgical Press, 2018), Sermon 57, p. 130.



# A Christmas with less spending': One click to donate thermal jerseys for Ukrainians

**By The Lay Centre**

Recently, Pope Francis advised Christians to live "a Christmas with less spending," "more humble," urging them to send what they save to alleviate the suffering of so many who suffer from cold, hunger, and lack of care. In other words, "a Christmas with Ukrainians in our hearts." On the crowdfunding platform Eppela, one can donate even a small amount to help buy thermal jerseys for the people of Ukraine.

[CLICK HERE to donate thermal jerseys to Ukraine, through the Vatican](#)

The Apostolic Almoner (Dicastery for the Service of Charity) launched an appeal for clothing donations to be sent to the Vatican. "The response of the people," explained Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Almoner of His Holiness, "has been most generous because the hearts of Italians are sweet, open and good," ready to respond with impetus to the difficulties of those living through war. Many clothing factories were contacted and have already donated thermal jerseys. Some also facilitated the purchase at production or discounted prices.

As soon as the material is collected and loaded on trucks, along with purchased power generators, the cardinal himself will bring everything to Ukraine. But the delivery does not mean that the collection will be interrupted, because the winter is long and hard. It is indeed necessary to be ready for any new needs.

"Let's make this Christmas gift": is the invitation of the Almoner because, as Pope Francis said in his homily at Mass at Casa Santa Marta on Nov. 26, 2018, "generosity is an everyday thing," it is "the generosity of small things."

Source: Dicastery for the Service of Charity

# Tomáš Halík: Toward a 'deep reform' of the Church

**By Lay Centre scholar Joseph Tulloch, originally published on Vatican News (source [HERE](#))**

Monsignor Tomáš Halík paid a visit to Rome recently to promote the Italian translation of his new book *Afternoon of Christianity: The Courage to Change*.

The Czech intellectual, who was clandestinely ordained a priest in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and now ranks as one of Europe's most well-known theologians, spoke to Vatican News after a panel discussion at the John Paul II Institute.

*Afternoon of Christianity*

Msgr. Halík began by discussing some of the themes of his new book.

"I use the metaphor which Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, chose as a metaphor for an individual life, and I use this metaphor for the history of the church," he said.

"The morning is the pre-modern time," he explained, "time to build up the institutional and doctrinal structures of the church. Then came the noonday crisis, the time of modernity and secularisation. And now I think we are on the threshold of postmodernity, the post-secular age. This is the afternoon of Christianity, a time for maturity, to go deeper."

The Monsignor drew a connection with the Gospel passage when the disciples are struggling to catch fish:

"The fishermen are very tired and told Jesus 'We have worked all night and we caught nothing. We have empty hands.' I think many Christians have a similar feeling today, that the churches are half empty, and the seminaries and monasteries too."

"But," he pointed out, "Jesus said to the fishermen: 'Try again. Go to the depths.' I think that is a challenge for us too, to try again, to not repeat our old mistakes, but go to the depths."



## The misuse of religion

An important aspect of this process of reform, Msgr. Halík stressed, is an awareness of the ways in which religion can be abused.

Some populist politicians, he said, “are close-minded, and use Christianity as a weapon, as a sign of collective identity.” Others, not only politicians, see Catholicism “as a contra-culture against modernity, Protestantism and so on.”

“But,” he stressed, “this is the wrong way... This closed system of Catholicism is now dying because it's not able to communicate with the other systems of the society.”

We should, rather, he said, let ourselves be inspired by St Paul, who “had the courage” to transform Christianity from “one of many Jewish sects” to “a universal offering for the whole culture at that time.”

“I think this universalism of Christianity is the challenge even for today.”

## The role of synodality

Msgr. Halík also suggested that the synod could help with the process of reform.

“I think the way of synodality is very important, because this abuse crisis was not just a failure of many individuals. It was – and I think Pope Francis recognises this very well – a crisis of the whole system of the church.”

Thus, “we need a deep reform. I hope that synodality, the ‘common way,’ might be such a reform.”



# Paying tribute to two vibrant Lay Centre Alumni

## By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre community was saddened to learn of the deaths of two alumni.

Angus Trumble, a member of the first Lay Centre community that formed in 1986, died suddenly on Oct. 8; he was 58. Marie Czernin, who lived at The Lay Centre from 1994 to 1998, died on Oct. 28; she was 51.

Angus was born in Melbourne on Oct. 6, 1964. He graduated with a degree in fine arts and history at the University of Melbourne in 1986, after which he enrolled in a graduate program that included study at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, where he joined the first cohort of The Lay Centre at its original location on Piazza Navona.

Upon graduation, Angus worked a few years as an aide to the governor of Victoria, Australia. He pursued further study as a Fulbright scholar at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 1994.

In 1996, he began serving as associate curator, and later as curator, of European art at the Art Gallery of South Australia. In 2003, he returned to the United States to work as the curator, and later as the senior curator, of paintings and sculpture at the Yale Center for British Art.

In 2014, he was named the fourth director of Australia's National Portrait Gallery, leaving in 2018 to pursue personal writing projects. Between 2019 and 2022 he was a senior research fellow at the National Museum of Australia.

"Angus was incredibly witty and brought much joy and laughter to the community," said Lay Centre Director Donna Orsuto. "It was no surprise that later he wrote a book called *A Brief History of the Smile*."

Angus also wrote *The Finger: A Handbook* (2010), co-authored *Edwardian Opulence: British Art at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (2013), and was a regular magazine contributor. At the time of his death, he had secured a book deal for another manuscript he had written.

Angus will be remembered for his vibrancy, scholarship and deep love of family.



Marie was born in Klagenfurt, Austria, on July 18, 1971. She moved to Rome to study literature and art history at Roma Tre University. Feeling called to explore art and spirituality, as well as life in an intentional Christian community, she began theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University and joined The Lay Centre community in 1994.

She embraced a career as a journalist, working freelance for several years. In 2011, she joined the editorial team of *allewelt* (“The Whole World”), the monthly magazine of the Pontifical Mission Societies, known as *Missio* in Austria, in Vienna. She covered stories about the life of the church in far-off, unknown — and sometimes dangerous — places. She also co-authored a book about retired Archbishop Elias Chacour of Haifa.

“With her winning nature, she met countless people on her tireless journeys to the sacred places of this world and a large number of them became true friends of life,” reads a tribute published by *kath.net*, an Austrian Catholic news site.

“I visited her for the last time on Oct. 24,” said Father Karl Wallner, national director of *Missio*. “Her parting words were, ‘I sacrifice everything for the Pope, for the Church and for the Pontifical Mission Societies.’”

“She was unique in making contacts,” he said. “She was a missionary with heart and blood.”

“Marie was a generous, kind, and prayerful person,” said Dr. Orsuto. “I remember especially her beautiful clear voice as she sang in our chapel. May she continue to sing to the Lord for all eternity as ‘his mercy endures forever.’”

Marie died in Vienna, surrounded by family and friends, after a three-year battle with cancer.

We extend our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Angus and Marie.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.





# Giving Tuesday: support the lay vocation in the Church and in the world

## By The Lay Centre

In this season, please consider supporting The Lay Centre.

If you would like to support our mission, please make a donation to a special fund set up by our benefactors through the National Catholic Community Foundation (NCCF).

To make gifts online in U.S. dollars, simply go to the [NCCF website](#).

Click on “Donate” and choose “Friends of The Lay Centre Fund” among the non-profit organizations listed under “Gift Designation.”

Gifts made by check in U.S. dollars should be made payable to “NCCF/Friends of The Lay Centre” and mailed to: The National Catholic Community Foundation, 1321 Generals Highway, Suite 202, Crownsville MD 21032, U.S.A.

If you would like to donate your time and talent, please contact us at: [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org)

Thank you for your support.

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# Highlights of the academic year's first community evenings

## By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre began the 2022-2023 academic year with unique opportunities for dialogue with people involved in the life of the Church in Rome, working in various Vatican dicasteries, foundations, ecclesiastical universities, and ecumenical and interreligious centres.

By sharing their experiences and knowledge, they help students understand the universality of the Church. This October, we welcomed Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Sister Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ, Fathers Mí?éal O'Neill, O.Carm, John Dardis, SJ, Avelino Chico, SJ, and Robert Geisinger, SJ.

This academic year, community evenings will be held around themes that touch the synodal dimension of the Church. In October, some of the 10 thematic nuclei proposed by the Synod were broached: "The Journeying Companions," "Co-responsible in the Mission," "Authority," "Discernment and Deciding," and "Dialogue in Church and Society."

Some highlights from the first weeks are:

- Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for relations with states within the Vatican's Secretariat of State, visited The Lay Centre on All Souls' Day. After Mass, he discussed today's main geopolitical challenges and their repercussions on the diplomatic relations of the Holy See. Archbishop Gallagher expressed his concern about the ongoing wars and the complexity of international relations but invoked hope in the commitment of the entire Church.

Lay Centre Scholar Alexander Campbell commented: "I found the evening with Archbishop Gallagher insightful and I believe it has caused much reflection among the community. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss ongoing global issues and we were given a genuine account of the diplomatic work of the Holy See."

- Sister Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ, undersecretary at the General Secretariat of the Synod, attended an ecumenical prayer service at The Lay Centre, followed by dinner with the community. She shared about her experience



and work in that office, remembering also the many years she spent working in youth ministry for the French bishops' conference and her participation in the Synod on Youth in 2018. She told The Lay Centre community to follow the synodal process and not to be discouraged by negative experiences, lack of openness, or setbacks. Only by invoking and trusting the Holy Spirit can the synodal process be implemented in the local churches and at the level of the universal Church, she said. Lay Centre Deputy Director Filipe Domingues said: "The friendship with Sister Nathalie began during the youth synod in 2018 and continues to this day. She has brought great energy to the centre of the Church in Rome and has helped us to think more about how to promote the lay vocation and to prepare lay men and women to be more participative and active in a synod-style Church."

- Father Mícéal O'Neill, O.Carm, prior general of the Carmelites, is a good friend of The Lay Centre. The community had the privilege to welcome him on one of the first evenings of the semester, in a family atmosphere, including some members of the staff.
- Father John Dardis, SJ, gave an introduction on spiritual conversation and presided over Mass on the first week of the academic year, during the lay leadership formation program. The pilot program, part of a series of training initiatives for lay people organized by The Lay Centre, recognized the need to discuss the role of the laity in the Church and in the world. Read more about it here.
- Father Avelino Chico, SJ, who works at the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, discussed its activities in connection with Pope Francis' reform in the Roman Curia, through the apostolic constitution "Praedicate Evangelium."

Lay Centre scholar Filip Veber said: "His experience working with the homeless, poor, and migrants is a living testimony of how essential it is to have an open heart toward those who need our help and to be ready to be surprised by their stories, which often contradict thoughts and perceptions we may have." Father Chico underlined how he is convinced that – due to the displacement of millions of people forced to leave their homes everywhere in the world – global and local migration will continue. Particular churches and bishops' conferences need to face this emergency by strengthening their efforts to help and serve those who are suffering under such circumstances.

- Father Robert Geisinger, SJ, promoter of justice at the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and professor in the canon law faculty at the



Pontifical Gregorian University, discussed his daily work and spoke of the shared responsibility of all the baptized – which implies that synodal processes need to be implemented, also when working in a tribunal.

Lay Centre Scholar Maria Teresa Avila said: “I appreciated that Father Geisinger highlighted how much he values the work of lay men and lay women at the dicastery and added that he would like to have more lay people collaborating with them – given also the importance of the perspective brought by those who are parents.”

Father Geisinger inspired participants with the idea that more and more lay people are getting involved in safeguarding and protection in the Church to help prevent serious crimes that undermine the dignity of human beings and irretrievably wound their faith.

For 36 years, The Lay Centre has kept alive this tradition of celebrating the Eucharist in community, listening to the Word of God, and then sharing meals with friends. This is key to understanding others and growing in true friendship.

Contributed: Filip Veber



# Community retreat, inspired by ‘Fratelli tutti,’ reflects on personal call to show mercy, embrace dialogue

**By The Lay Centre**

Merciful and vulnerable leaders are always more necessary, as they represent a revolutionary way of thinking about leadership. Keeping this in mind, from Oct. 14 to 16, The Lay Centre community gathered in Frascati, a town in the Alban Hills southeast of Rome, for a weekend retreat led by Brother Emili Turú, FMS. Brother Turú is the former superior general of the Marist Institute and secretary general of the Union of Superiors General in Rome.

He based his reflections on two pillars: the Taizé icon of mercy, which represents different scenes from the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and Pope Francis’ social encyclical “Fratelli tutti.”

“Fratelli tutti” expresses the need for social convergence in a polarized and fragmented world. In the document, the pope invites all people to work together toward social cohesion and friendship, by following the example of Jesus who “challenges us to put aside all differences and, in the face of suffering, to draw near to others with no questions asked” (FT, 81).

In a world where often forceful and dominant leaders seem to prevail, going against the tide and proposing a model of honesty, transparency, and courage to show one’s vulnerability is the response to the call to a love that includes everyone.

The meditations led by Brother Turú were also inspired by the Taizé icon of mercy, with Christ at its center, surrounded by images that tell the Parable of the Good Samaritan (cfr. Lk 10:25-37). The icon was chosen by the Taizé community to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of its founder, Brother Roger, in 2015. The icon depicts Christ in a way that is almost identical to the victim in the parable. In the scene, Jesus is attacked by robbers – whose position recalls Andrei Rublev’s icon of the Holy Trinity (a Trinitarian interpretation of Gen 18:1-16, the episode in which “three men” visit Abraham and Sarah and promise them a son).

While meditating on the Gospel passage, participants were encouraged to remember that, in order to be merciful to others, we first must be merciful to



ourselves. They were encouraged to identify with the wounded Judean, the victim in the Parable of the Good Samaritan – more commonly Christians are invited to identify with and imitate the Samaritan – and to reflect on the questions: Who is the Good Samaritan for me, in my weaknesses and sorrows today? We must let Jesus – our Good Samaritan – take care of us and bandage our wounds. Only then can we think of being a Good Samaritan to others.

The retreat offered the space that is essential to generate a new perspective on oneself and on one's neighbor, in a community that is being formed, where everyone is called to have a merciful attitude toward oneself and others.

The retreat was held at the Capuchin Friars retreat house in Frascati. Enjoying the gorgeous view of Rome from a distance – about 20 km away – it was possible to see the dome of St. Peter's Basilica peeping through the fog. The silence of the surrounding hills, with the beautiful sunset over the vineyards nearby, facilitated meditation and personal recollection.

The biblical figure of Job in the Old Testament was another source of inspiration during parts of the retreat. Small group discussions were an opportunity to share personal stories and experiences. Brother Turú invited participants to live the virtue of hope, recalling the Conciliar document "Gaudium et spes," which calls all people to embrace "joy and hope" and to take the road less traveled because it is also the road that Christ took.

Prayers organized by Lay Centre residents were opportunities to gather around the cross. The joy of being together brought a renewed sense of hope and a stronger feeling of the need to change the world starting with small daily gestures.

The retreat concluded with Mass, celebrated by Father Peter Lah, SJ, pro-dean of the faculty of social sciences at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Contributed: Filip Veber



# Remembering Rev. Donald Senior, C.P., an exceptional priest, biblical scholar, and friend

**By Donna Orsuto, Director**

The Rev. Donald Senior, C.P., an exceptional priest, biblical scholar, and friend of many, died Nov. 8. All of us at The Lay Centre express our deepest condolences to his family, members of the Passionist Congregation, and the administration, staff, and students of Catholic Theological Union, where he served as president emeritus and chancellor.

We were privileged to know him for he served on The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas board from 2004 to 2014. Even amid many other commitments, he always made the time to share his creativity and wisdom with The Lay Centre. We are grateful for all he did, especially for his instrumental role in assisting The Lay Centre in moving to our current home on the Caelian Hill in Rome, where we have lived for the past 12 years.

A few current and former Board Members and friends shared their memories of Father Senior. Sonia Vandama wrote, "An extraordinary man, a world-renowned biblical scholar, author, lecturer, educator, and pastoral leader. Don Senior was above all a gracious, soft-spoken, and powerful communicator with the gift to inspire. He taught by example with his friendly, unassuming personality and enriched the lives of many, including mine."

Echoing these words, Joseph Lynaugh remarked, "He possessed a unique and extraordinary combination of graciousness, scholarship, political savvy, and the ability to get things done—all grounded in a deep faith."

"I remember him with warmth and fondness," said Nancy Lindsey, who served as chair during Father Senior's time on The Lay Centre board. "Though with heavy demands on his time in the wider world, he was of great service to The Lay Centre and always a congenial presence. May he rest in peace now and rise in glory."

All of us join with Cardinal Joseph Tobin in recognizing that "Father Senior opened the richness of the Word of God to disciples across the world. May he now enjoy the fullness of redemption."



On Nov. 30 at 7 p.m. Rome time, The Lay Centre will remember Father Senior at Mass, along with other alumni and friends who died recently. The Mass, in the Feast of St. Andrew, which will be livestreamed, will be presided by the Rev. Joachim Rego, C.P., the superior general of the Passionist Congregation. A link for the livestreaming will be advertised as soon as available.





# Lay Centre Open Day 12th November 2022

## By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre cordially invites you to the Dies Academicus on 12 November 2022 starting at 9:00 a.m.

The highlights of the day will be the presentations of our Lay Centre scholars on the topic of Synodality from different perspectives: ecumenical, theological, sociological, and historical.

This is an in-person event, and presentations will be delivered in English and Italian. [Prior registration via our online form is required](#), as lunch will be offered to those attending.

We look forward to celebrating together the first Dies Academicus of our Community in 2022.

Scholars and topics:

- Adrian Teodor Oancea is currently studying in the Licentiate program in Judaic Studies and Jewish-Christian relations at the Cardinal Bea Centre of the Pontifical Gregorian University  
Synodality and Autocephaly in the Eastern Orthodox Church - general information
- Maria Teresa Avila has a bachelor's degree in International Relations and a Master's degree in Theology; she has worked in NGOs and education for over a decade.  
Live Synodality: Bridge-People in Church History
- Aljaž Krajnc is a Lay Centre scholar currently preparing a doctoral thesis on the Qur'an and its relationship with biblical tradition.  
A Reflection on Some Recent Developments in the Catholic Theology of Religions
- Bruno Hermes de O. Santos is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where he obtained his Licentiate in 2019.  
Religion as a performative system: an ethnography among the gospel groups of the upper Acre River
- Clemency Flitter is an ordinand in the Church of England. She has a BTh in Theology for Ministry from the University of Cambridge and currently



studies at the Angelicum.  
Historical Roots of Synodality and Inclusion in the Church of England



# Two podcasts about Church and society with Filipe Domingues, Lay Centre deputy director

## By The Lay Centre

In September, Father Lawrence E. Frizzell, director of the Institute of Judaean-Christian Studies and professor in the Jewish-Christian Studies (JCST) Graduate Program at Seton Hall University, interviewed Filipe Domingues, journalist and deputy director at The Lay Centre in Rome, about the research he conducted in preparation for the Vatican's Synod on Young People in 2018, on the podcast The Kinship of Catholics & Jews. In their 30-minute conversation, they discussed the challenges of evangelizing young people today. [The full episode can be listened to here.](#)

Domingues also joined the team of the Religion Media Centre for their podcast, hosted by Leo Devine, ahead of the Brazilian elections in early October to consider ethics in public life and the growing phenomenon of "faith voting" that is influencing the elections in his native country. The Religion Media Centre podcast gathers a panel of regular contributors, including journalists, broadcasters, writers, comedians, and subject experts, to discuss topics related to religion and the media. [The full episode can be heard here.](#)



# Lay ministry of catechists at the core of summer reflections

## By The Lay Centre

With his apostolic letter "Antiquum ministerium," issued in May 2021, Pope Francis established the "ministry of catechists." Although an ancient ministry, it requires ongoing and contemporary reflections in order for it to keep up with the needs of our time.

This past summer, the director and deputy director of The Lay Centre, Donna Orsuto and Filipe Domingues, contributed to this broader reflection on different occasions.

In July 2023, in partnership with Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology (ICSST), The Lay Centre will host a weeklong event in Rome on the ministry of catechists. The ecumenical pilgrimage and symposium will explore the theme of catechesis in the ministry of St. Paul. For more information, please contact us at [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org).

Orsuto taught a course titled "Catechesis in an Ecumenical and Global Context" at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. Quoting Pope Francis, she said that "being a catechist means that you 'are a catechist,' not that you 'work as a catechist.' It's an entire way of being, and we need good catechists who are both companions and teachers."

The course presented a dozen or so testimonies of catechists from different Christian denominations and different parts of the world. In a video recorded at the Vatican, Archbishop Vittorio Viola, secretary of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, explained that the ministry of catechists is one of three baptismal ministries appreciated by Pope Francis. The others are the ministries of lector and acolyte, which the Holy Father has opened up to lay men and women.

From left to right: Dianne Traflet (Associate Dean, ICSST), Filipe Domingues (The Lay Centre), Donna Orsuto (The Lay Centre), and Monsignor Joseph Reilly (Former Rector/Dean of ICSST)

"Joyful messengers of challenging proposals" (EG 168)



On Saturday, July 13, about 100 religious educators and faith-filled leaders gathered at Seton Hall University and online for a retreat day on the ministry of the lay catechist. “The Joy of Discovering and Communicating Our New Life in Christ: Catechesis in the 21st Century” was coordinated by Dianne Traflet, associate dean of graduate studies and administration and assistant professor of pastoral theology at ICSST. She is also a Lay Centre alumna and board member.

The retreat was part of ICSST’s “4:12 initiative,” a reference to St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians and shorthand for “The 4:12 Pathway for Pastoral Leadership: Building an Authentic Culture of Discernment, Encouragement, and Accompaniment” — a project funded by the Lilly Endowment.

In her presentation at the event, Orsuto invited her audience to find God in their daily life and to seek joy in their experience as catechists. She turned to the writings of Sts. Paul and Augustine to draw inspiration for catechists seeking to be more impactful.

“My greatest concern is that ... those who catechize do so with joy,” she said, quoting St. Augustine.

What is the place of holiness in catechesis? It is, she said, the path to teaching morality, summed up in the call of Pope Francis that we be “joyful messengers of challenging proposals.” Ultimately the challenging proposal is one — the message of Christ crucified. Being joyful is not always easy, but it is essential to being a good catechist. Christians are called to “put on the Lord Jesus” (Rom 13:14), to be conformed to him so that, little by little, there is greater coherence between their lives and the Good News they wish to communicate.

She gave a longer discourse on this same topic at the Vatican’s Third International Congress of Catechists, organized by the Dicastery for Evangelization.

During the Seton Hall retreat day, Domingues presented on the theme “Christ is Alive! Young People and the Ministry of Catechists.” Young generations thirst for the true meaning of life, he said, and they wish to look to the future with renewed hope.

Young people need credible witnesses to help them rediscover their vocation and to be inspired to follow Christ, he added. Domingues led a reflection on the meaning of “being young, new and full of life,” inspired by Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation “Christus vivit,” and expressed the need to trust younger generations in the decision-making processes in the Church.



“Young people need to know that the Church needs them. Without them, we are incomplete. But they also need to know that they will find Christ in the Church, this awesome friend who is always with them,” said Domingues.

Domingues was also interviewed by Father Lawrence E. Frizzell for his podcast, “The Kinship of Catholics & Jews,” hosted at Seton Hall University. He spoke about the research conducted in preparation for the Vatican’s Synod on Young People in 2018, which he compiled and analyzed in his book, “Selflessness in the age of selfies: What young people can teach us about social media’s throw-away culture” (G&B Press).



# Academic year kicks off with lay leadership program on Synodality

## By The Lay Centre

A synodal-style Church will require more preparation of lay men and women to lead ecclesial projects and communities, as well as an ability to work with people at different levels and in different contexts in a participatory way. With that in mind — and with the objective of forming new lay leaders — The Lay Centre held a weeklong formation program, from Sept. 26 to 30, titled “On the Way: Crossing the threshold of a synodal Church.”

The pilot program, part of a series of training initiatives for lay people organized by The Lay Centre, recognized the need to discuss the role of the laity in the Church and in the world, to find concrete ways to implement co-responsibility among all members of the Church and to commit to “walking together” on this journey. The resident community will continue to reflect on this topic during the current academic year.

Program participants were the members of the 2022-2023 Lay Centre community, who came to Rome from 10 different countries to begin their academic studies or to volunteer in the dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

Topics discussed during the week included the concept of synodality and the challenges of putting it into practice; the concept of mission and the relationship of the Church with a pluralistic society; individual, family and collective discernment in the life of lay Catholics; the role and presence of lay people in the Church and how Catholic education can promote the formation of new leaders; collaboration between lay and religious people, including young people involved in social action and specifically as regards human trafficking.

“Crossing the threshold of a synodal Church” is the image that best represents a community that walks together in a constant spirit of prayer and discernment, which Pope Francis in a series of reflections said is “indispensable for living.”

On the first day, participants made a short pilgrimage to St. Peter’s Basilica, taking with them the prayer intentions collected via The Lay Centre’s email and social media and offering them at Mass, celebrated near the Tomb of St. Peter by Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the former Pontifical Council for Culture and a member of the Dicastery for Bishops.



After Mass, Lay Centre Deputy Director Filipe Domingues set the stage for the weeklong program during a session held in the office of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. He emphasized the importance of taking the first steps as a community toward preparing to be participative and active in a Church that adopts a synodal style. The session included a discussion with Argentinian theologian and lay woman Emilce Cuda, secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, on “encounter as a mission” in the cultural landscapes of the Catholic Church in the Global North and the Global South.

The program examined the different challenges posed by synodality through the contribution of Father Daniel Patrick Huang, S.J., professor of missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Missionaries and members of the Christian Life Community, Alwin Macalalad and his wife, Rojean, spoke about discernment in ordinary life, giving witness to how discernment applied to their personal journeys. Alwin works for the Listening and Dialogue Section of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development as the delegate for Asia and Oceania; Rojean is the executive director of the Catholic Safeguarding Institute.

Father John Dardis, S.J., general counselor for discernment and apostolic planning for the Society of Jesus, gave an introduction on “Spiritual Conversation” and celebrated Mass. He recalled that God is waiting to work in each person and “leadership is about ensuring that generative listening and speaking take place.”

The program closed with a concrete example of the international coordination team of the anti-human trafficking network Talitha Kum, represented by Sister Abby Avelino, M.M., and Marion Paparella. They spoke about how young people can become ambassadors of social justice.





# Lay Centre enters new phase after staff changes

## By The Lay Centre

Due to the upheavals related to the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, both large and small organizations have experienced periods of great change in the past two years. At The Lay Centre, some of these changes are part of a gradual move into a new phase of its history. The past year has marked some new developments among our staff and we would like to acknowledge and thank deeply all those who dedicated years of their personal and professional lives to our mission.

First and foremost, The Lay Centre's co-founder, Riekie van Velzen, officially retired from her position as administrator in 2021. Together with Donna Orsuto, who remains The Lay Centre director, Riekie started The Lay Centre in 1986 and has accompanied it every step of the way. She continues to contribute to the mission as a consultant and as a board member.

Another hallmark in our history was the retirement of Heather M. Walker (pictured) in June 2022. She dedicated 15 fruitful years to The Lay Centre, showing particular care for interreligious dialogue and the promotion of Christian unity. Heather worked in different roles at The Lay Centre and, in the last few years, was assistant director for programs and communications. She left a significant legacy, having built strong friendships with others in Rome and abroad.

We are proud to say that working at The Lay Centre opened important doors for some of our collaborators. Clarissa Amaral de Oliveira, who was assistant director of finances and worked with us since 2016, left our team in March 2022, shifting into the investment sector in Luxembourg. In September 2022, Isaias Marcano, a Lay Centre alumnus who studied social sciences and served as our community life coordinator for about a year, took on the role of assistant rector at a university in Rome.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to all who crossed our path and enriched our lives with their presence and their talents.

Currently, alongside Donna Orsuto in the senior staff, Filipe Domingues serves as deputy director and Christiaan Santini as operations manager. In September, Lay Centre alumna Claudia Giampietro joined our staff as programs coordinator. The



Lay Centre will soon fill the positions of financial consultant and community life coordinator with new professionals.

We are also extremely grateful to those who offer catering, cleaning and external consulting services for our organization.



# Fall 2022: A message from The Lay Centre Director, Donna Orsuto

**By The Lay Centre**

"On the way."

The Lay Centre joyfully launched the new academic year on Sept. 26, with the first stage of the lay leadership development program entitled "On the Way: Crossing the threshold of a Synodal Church."

We are "on the way" — on a journey that has already begun. It is like the journey of the travelers and guests of the Holy Trinity depicted in the icon by the school of Vladimir-Susdal in our chapel. It is a synod, a coming together of people through prayer, study and work.

It is important to recognize that many themes associated with the synodal process have been an integral part of The Lay Centre journey over the past 36 years. The journeying companions are the past and present members of our community, ready to listen to each other and make sure that all voices are heard. They welcome friends and visitors and celebrate the milestones of the journey; they nourish the desire to always be in dialogue with the Church and the world. They wish to be discerning people whose hearts are burning for unity.

We are "crossing the threshold of a synodal church." This is an invitation to go deeper, to embrace the full meaning of our baptism and to explore new ways of exercising co-responsibility in the Church.

This academic year, 2022-2023, will highlight efforts in this direction. As we journey together, we also remember you, dear friends, who join us "on the way."

Donna Orsuto, Director



# Canon lawyer: Human connections are 'most important' aspect of safeguarding conference

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — Lay Centre alumna Susan Mulheron said a recent conference in Rome provided an opportunity for people working in safeguarding to network, share their expertise and make concrete recommendations on how to improve procedures in preventing and reporting abuse in the Church.

The Pontifical Gregorian University's International Safeguarding Conference gathered canon lawyers, psychologists and other professionals June 20-22 to discuss issues related to reporting abuse and how they are handled in different contexts. The conference theme was "Reporting Abuse: Obligations, Dilemmas and Reality."

Dr. Mulheron was among the participants. The canon lawyer serves as the chancellor for canonical affairs for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis in the United States. She also serves as canonical adviser on sexual abuse and clergy misconduct issues in the Church at the local, regional and national levels.

Mulheron said prior to the June conference, she had participated in a 15-member North American working group that met in a series of 3-hour online meetings dedicated to discussing the focus areas of the Rome conference.

"It was an interdisciplinary collaboration, an opportunity to share expertise with each other," Mulheron explained. "The working groups were focused on coming up with very practical suggestions and concrete recommendations that could be passed on to the Holy See and others working at very high levels in safeguarding."

The groups passed on their conclusions to Father Hans Zollner, SJ, who heads the Gregorian's Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care and is one of the leading experts on safeguarding and prevention of sexual abuse.

When Mulheron was invited to attend the conference, she was eager to participate for a number of reasons.



“I wanted to continue that collaboration and the conversations, especially with people outside of the American context,” said Mulheron. “I wanted to be able to network and expand my pool of people that I can connect with and get advice from.”

The first part of the conference was focused on the motu proprio issued by Pope Francis in May 2019, “Vos estis lux mundi,” which outlines “procedures [to] be universally adopted” in the Church “to prevent or combat” the “crimes of sexual abuse.”

Participants discussed how “the document is designed to work, where is it working well and where it is not working well,” said Mulheron.

She said “Vos estis lux mundi” is in the process of being revised and conference participants had the opportunity to recommend revisions as practitioners for the past three years.

“I am always thinking about these things from the canon law perspective,” she said, and the conference provided opportunities to have many “good conversations with people about how canon law fits into this whole process.”

She rated the conference a success for its content, process and opportunity to speak with others working in safeguarding from other countries.

“You realize that we have the exact same problems,” she said. “They are at different levels of being addressed on a systemic level, but every country has the same fundamental problems and is trying to come up with solutions.”

“I met so many amazing people who have incredible insights about working with victim survivors that now I know I can reach out to them,” she added. “The human connections I was able to make were probably the most important aspect of the conference. You gain resources, but also make friends and in this type of work you always need that web of friendship and support.”

Mulheron said while she works with a “great team” at her archdiocese, an official and professional support network for those who work in safeguarding does not yet exist. She said conference participants discussed the question of support and proposed having a mini-retreat, either before or after the next conference, especially related to secondary trauma.

Mulheron added she was impressed by the students at the conference enrolled in the Gregorian’s diploma in safeguarding program, who have been charged by



their bishops to set up safeguarding programs in their dioceses and the ways they are handling their challenges.

Three Mexican women, who were Lay Centre residents this past semester, Maria Guadalupe Gonzalez de Costilla, Aida Aguirre Alonoso and Diana Fabiola Hernandez Guevara, were among the diploma students at the conference. Mulheron left with the impression that the diploma program prepares people well for their work ahead.

Mulheron also met up with another Lay Centre alumna at the conference, Claudia Giampietro, a canon lawyer who works as the project officer at the Office of Care and Safeguarding of the International Union of Superiors General, an organization of about 2,000 women religious leaders.



# Safeguarding diploma graduate intends to create, teach prevention training workshops for minors

## By The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre was pleased to welcome three women from Mexico, who studied for the diploma in safeguarding at the Institute of Anthropology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome this past semester.

In this article, Diana Fabiola Hernandez Guevara from Mexico City shares what motivated her to enroll in the program and how she intends to apply what she learned in her work with the seminary in Mexico City.

Could you tell us something about yourself: your country, your experience, studies and work?

I am a psychologist with a master's degree in human resources administration. I worked for 10 years in human resources, selecting, hiring, and training personnel.

Later, I had the opportunity to change my area of work and I started consulting in psychology and human development, teaching workshops on child development and effective parenting.

About seven years ago, I began working as a religion teacher and later at the university level. I currently teach in the faculty of psychology at the Lumen Gentium Catholic University. I also collaborate with the Conciliar Seminary of Mexico, where I carry out psychological assessments of seminary applicants and seminarians during various phases of their formation. Likewise, I offer counseling to seminarians who require it.

Furthermore, I collaborate with CEPROME, which is an organization of professionals from various disciplines focused on promoting a safe environment in the Church for children and adolescents, as well as for vulnerable adults. I am part of the psychodiagnostic evaluation team of CEPROME and I counsel victims who have suffered sexual abuse by a member of the clergy.

What inspired you to study for the diploma in safeguarding?



At present, the sexual abuse of minors is an issue that concerns the Church and great effort is being made to prevent it and to support victims as much as possible. Abuse is terrible, but it becomes more alarming when the act is carried out by a member of the Church. This is why it is important to receive specialized training in the ecclesial sphere, in order to develop tools that will allow us to create filters in the selection and formation of those who will become clergy. We reduce risk factors by looking for committed, stable individuals, who experience social and emotional satisfaction that would enable them to live their ministry well.

How will you put to good use what you learned in Rome when you return home?

I will be able to use the resources acquired in my work at the seminary and at CEPROME, but with a broader, much more specialized vision. It will also give me the opportunity to create and teach prevention training workshops for minors.

What challenges did you face coming to Italy during the pandemic?

The first challenge was the decision to take time off, due to my stage in life, since it required me to leave part of my job, my security, stability, and above all my family. It entailed a great change and a great effort, not only for me but also for my loved ones. It tested my abilities. On the other hand, it was also a recognition of my efforts in my career. It was not an easy decision. But now I see it was a wise decision, given all the fruits I have been reaping.

Could you tell us something about your experience at the Institute of Anthropology of the Pontifical Gregorian University and The Lay Centre?

Studying at the Pontifical Gregorian University and living at The Lay Centre were both enriching experiences, due to the opportunities they offer for intercultural exchange and ways of thinking and seeing the world. They offer perspectives and alternatives that are different from one's own reality and the possibility of finding different answers and solutions when it seems there are no other options.

The Gregorian University gave me the opportunity to form a support network, which I am sure will always be available when we return to our respective countries. I am confident that I am with professional and compassionate people who share the same objective: to make the Church a safe place.

At The Lay Centre I found a great family that offers support and affection, which is very necessary when you are away from home, away from the people you love. They made me feel at home and I knew I could count on the members of this great family that was formed.





Why is it so important to spread information about child protection?

It is important in order to reduce the incidence of cases, since sexual abuse has an impact not only on a person's physical health but also on their emotional health. The consequences are usually permanent if they are not attended to in a timely way and are reflected in all areas of a person's life, which is why it is important to disseminate information about it for its prevention.

Diana Fabiola Hernández Guevara is a psychologist and university instructor of psychology. She works as a psychotherapist at the Conciliar Seminary of Mexico and at CEPROME. She previously worked in occupational psychology for 10 years.



# Safeguarding program creates global network of people working in protection, prevention, says lay woman

**By The Lay Centre**

The Lay Centre was pleased to welcome three women from Mexico, who studied for the diploma in safeguarding at the Institute of Anthropology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome this past semester.

In this article, Aida Aguirre Alonso from Hermosillo, a city in the state of Sonora, Mexico, shares how she began her work in safeguarding in the Church, which stemmed from her clinical practice as a psychologist.

Could you tell us something about yourself: your country, your experience, studies, and work?

I am from the state of Sonora in beautiful Mexico. I am 42 years old and married for 17 years. I have three lovely children, ages 12, 11, and 7. Professionally, I am a psychologist. I have three master's degrees—in family therapy, the Gestalt approach, and the pastoral care of prevention in ecclesial environments. I have worked as a psychotherapist for seminarians in the seminary of my diocese for 12 years and as a consultant for 15 years. Currently, I also serve on the Commission for the Protection of Minors of my Diocese of Hermosillo, promoted by Pope Francis in "Vos estis lux mundi," a motu proprio published in 2019.

What inspired you to study for the diploma in safeguarding?

As a committed lay woman since the age of 18, I have always served in my church in various apostolates, including with liturgy and as a Eucharistic minister. I learned to love and serve the Church. It was in my clinical practice that I first heard a testimony of a young man who had been abused by a priest and had developed several emotional problems. I couldn't believe it could happen, and nobody knew or was doing anything about it.

Then I was invited to work at the seminary, and I thought maybe I could find more answers there. It has been a great journey to see God's call in the lives of seminarians, watching them grow in faith and knowledge, being formed in imitation of Jesus.



I was invited later to establish the Commission for the Protection of Minors of the diocese, and I thought it would be a great way to study the phenomenon of clericalism and abuse of power, which sometimes leads to sexual abuse if it is not stopped. I sum it up in Pope Francis' "zero tolerance" policy, aimed at stopping these unhealthy ways in the Church.

My main motivation is my children and the world's children. I want them to have a safe place in the Church. I want them to have a loving and safe experience in the Church, as I did growing up.

The diploma in safeguarding teaches the process and ways to acknowledge risks and to develop protocols to prevent and protect minors and vulnerable people from abuse.

Even though in 85% of cases, abusers are people close to and known to the child, such as a parent, a grandfather, or a teacher, 3%-5% are priests. This may seem like a small percentage, but it is still terrible given what a priest represents. A person abused by a priest not only goes through trauma but loses faith and their spiritual closeness to God.

God, who suffers alongside the victim, is pushed away because of grief and pain. But he continues alongside those who are broken, holding them and giving them what they need to heal. Safeguarding has become a source of hope for this abuse to stop and to have a safer Church for our children.

We need a worldwide network to strengthen children's mental health in all possible environments—and an important environment is the Church. So, we are trying to create a safe home, a safe church, so this abuse will never happen again. We are starting with prevention, with safeguarding.

How will you put to good use what you learned in Rome when you return home?

The whole purpose of this diploma is to create a worldwide network of people who work in the field of protection and prevention in the Church, to continue helping our classmates and to multiply what we have learned about safeguarding, enabling all our local parishes to strengthen their community life with a safe environment and inviting our priests to embrace further their commitment to the protection of minors and all vulnerable people.

When I return home, I will share what I learned, help people distinguish good behavior from bad behavior, and know what to do if a relationship feels uncomfortable.



Taking good care of our priests will create a healthier community for everyone.

What challenges did you face coming to Italy during the pandemic?

Initially, there was a great deal to do. I was very fearful to travel after two years of only remote work. I was worried about catching COVID-19 on the plane. When I got to Italy, I had to spend time in quarantine because I tested positive. But after quarantine, I made it to Rome and I managed to settle in quickly and start classes.

Initially, I was frightened I might fall ill again. So, although I was really keen to get to know the city, I simply went to school and back home for a few weeks.

Could you tell us something about your experience at the Institute of Anthropology of the Pontifical Gregorian University and The Lay Centre?

The Institute of Anthropology was a great discovery. I saw it was well structured. Every class had a clear purpose, and the leaders and teachers were so well prepared. They made every student want to learn and commit to what we were experiencing.

As for The Lay Centre, it is a perfect setting since it felt like home. Being away from our families, this really helped. The students and staff inspired respect and lay achievement, which I so admire.

Why is it so important to spread information about child protection?

Mainly because children are our future. Our boys and girls will be tomorrow's teachers, priests, and parents, and their lives, here and now, and their childhood memories should all be healthy and secure.

No child or vulnerable person should ever be mistreated. From the youngest person to the eldest, everyone should receive God's love in many ways and especially through the tender and caring ways of the Church.

Now that we know what can happen, we should strive to work with the Church and with those who work in the Church to stop whatever wrong has been done and to start again, with sorrow, but committed to the things that are right, with love and respect.

Aida Aguirre Alonso is a psychotherapist working professionally with adults and adolescents, as well as collaborating with the diocesan commission for child protection and the seminary of the Diocese of Hermosillo.



Photo courtesy Aida Aguirre Alonso



# Psychologist hopes to contribute her 'grain of sand' to healing Church abuse crisis

**By The Lay Centre**

The Lay Centre was pleased to welcome three women from Mexico, who studied for the diploma in safeguarding at the Institute of Anthropology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome this past semester.

In this article, Maria Guadalupe Gonzalez de Costilla from Monterrey, a city in the northern state of Nuevo León, Mexico, shares her motivation to study and work in safeguarding.

Could you tell us about yourself: your country, your experience, studies and work?

I am a clinical psychologist. My family is very hard-working and holds many values, especially the values of family unity and respect.

I studied at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León in the faculty of psychology, from which I graduated in 1985. Later, I did post-graduate studies in clinical psychiatry and psycho-diagnosis at the same university. I earned a master's degree in psychodrama and a second master's degree in the pastoral care of prevention, the latter at the Pontifical University of Mexico. I graduated from CEPROME, which is the center for the protection of minors in Mexico, and I have been collaborating with CEPROME since 2021. I have earned teaching diplomas.

I have worked in various health care institutions, orphanages, a psychiatric hospital, a center for juvenile offenders, my state's health department, and in various universities. I also taught psychodiagnosis in a diploma program at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León for 20 years. For the past two and a half years, I have worked for a diocesan nonprofit institution called "Fundación el Roble," which is a center for the protection of minors and the prevention of sexual crimes. I have also taught at the diocesan institute that confers diplomas in prevention.

I worked as coordinator of the psychology department of the seminary of the Archdiocese of Zacatecas, Mexico, for 13 years.



I give workshops in different seminaries and formation houses for male and female religious in Mexico, and I offer psychological counseling to priests, seminarians, and religious men and women.

What inspired you to study for the diploma in safeguarding at the Pontifical Gregorian University?

In the first place, my love for the Church, the desire to collaborate by contributing, as we say in Mexico, “a grain of sand,” to be prepared to care for child victims of abuse and to understand the psychodynamics of abusers and how to approach working with them.

I am also motivated to bring knowledge to my country, share it with my colleagues and students, and collaborate in prevention and ongoing training.

How will you put to good use what you learned in Rome when you return home?

In my daily work and in supporting the “Fundación el Roble,” in teaching and in counseling practice. I will also put it to use working in primary and secondary prevention, in workshops, and in the classes that I teach, both at the university and at the diocesan institute.

What challenges did you face coming to Italy during the pandemic?

My main challenge was being away from my family, my patients, and work activities. It is important to mention the health protocols and the care that were taken to follow them and to encourage us also to be careful.

Could you tell us something about your experience at the Institute of Anthropology of the Pontifical Gregorian University and The Lay Centre?

I feel very honoured to have studied for this diploma in safeguarding at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The teachers were of the highest quality, very humane and committed to the issue of protecting minors. The methodology was also extraordinary, since it allowed us to learn, analyze, reflect, propose and create. As well, a clear instruction from the teachers was not to do homework or assignments, but to rest on our free time — an aspect that was very comforting due to the sensitivity of the issues we addressed. The people at the university are very kind and empathetic and literally “opened the doors for us.” My classmates were mostly Latin American. We also had colleagues from Slovenia and Spain. An environment of great support, solidarity and care was created. This is a network of support and shared knowledge and experiences.



I am very grateful for the understanding, support, and closeness of The Lay Centre staff, which was very committed to helping us make the transition from our homes to Rome. It has a friendly and family-like atmosphere, warm and very fraternal. With regard to health protocols, it was impeccable, always taking care of us and inviting us to take care of others. The staff was very aware of our needs. The love with which they prepared our meals and the attention they paid to everyone are things that have no price.

Why is it so important to spread information about child protection?

We have seen through history that minors and vulnerable adults are the most defenseless and exposed to the decisions and actions of all adults, which can lead to a multitude of abuses, including sexual abuse. This abuse damages the individual for life. The damages are personal, social, and spiritual. The pain they experience is a pain that does not end, which is not fair; it is not correct and it is not human. Minors have rights and one of those rights is to be respected in their dignity and integrity as human beings.

The pope challenges us to protect minors with transparency, respect, and accountability and by giving priority to their dignity.

Maria Guadalupe Gonzalez de Costilla is a specialist in psychiatry and psychodiagnosis. She is married for 36 years and lives in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico.





# Doctoral student Emma Wall talks about her stay in Rome and 'love of all things Italian'

**By Emma Wall**

ROME - I am a final-year doctoral student at Durham University, in Durham, England, with a love of all things Italian.

My doctoral research is on Petrarch's "Canzoniere" and the influence of Augustan lyric poetry collections on the architecture of the work, as Petrarch reimagines what a collection of vernacular lyrics might look like as part of a project of reviving classical works for his contemporary audience.

I first came to Rome as part of an interdisciplinary doctoral training week at the British School in Rome in January 2019. On this trip we visited the Venerable English College as one of our site sessions. I was immediately taken by the archives of the college, which are largely uncatalogued and have huge potential for opening up various aspects of English and Welsh Catholic history in Rome. I later received a grant from my doctoral training partnership to spend five months on placement prior to the pandemic, between October 2019 and February 2020, to assist in the archives. Although it is a very different area to my own PhD research, I found working in the archives on the cataloguing project fascinating.

As a result of the success of this collaboration, I have now returned to Rome for two months to work on a research project focusing on the history of the English College in Piacenza. After a seminary was added to the English Hospice in Rome in 1579, it quickly became apparent that the existing endowment of the hospice, which had sustained its functions since 1362, was insufficient to support a seminary as well. As a result, in 1581 Pope Gregory XIII granted the new English College possession of the Abbey of San Savino in Piacenza and its abbey lands, and later the Priory of Santa Vittoria, as an endowment to support the seminary in Rome.

The archives of the English College contain about 20 "buste" of material (approximately 15,000 folios) pertaining to the management of the extensive property portfolio in and around Piacenza, as well as the history of the abbey prior



to when the college was granted possession of it in 1581. These collections in the college archives in Rome have yet to be explored. I am conducting an initial survey of the material, the findings of which are to be presented at a conference in September. This project will revive a forgotten part of the history of the English College and the region around Piacenza and Parma.

During these two months in Rome I am staying at The Lay Centre, which has been an ideal environment in which to spend my time in the city. The community has been incredibly welcoming and friendly, and as the only British resident it has been wonderful to connect with students from other cultures and backgrounds. My rusty Italian is also slowly coming back to me! As a place that facilitates interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue, I have found the experience so far of staying at The Lay Centre very helpful to my studies and personal development. I am looking forward to the last few weeks of my stay.

Once I return to England, I will submit my PhD thesis in July and take up a job in September teaching classics at a high school. Spending these months in Rome and at The Lay Centre has been a lovely way to round off my time at university before joining the world of work.



# Lay Centre resident returns for belated Harvard commencement

**By Heather Walker**

ROME - Lay Centre resident Pedro Paulo Oliveira Weizenmann flew back to the United States last month for his in-person commencement ceremony at [Harvard University](#). Due to the pandemic and ongoing restrictions, the ceremony was postponed, and, on May 29, the classes of 2020 and 2021 came together in Harvard Yard to celebrate their commencement.

“It was a very special moment of closure for me to meet my friends from college once again, and to be with my family after almost two years without seeing them,” said Weizenmann.

A graduate in government, with a minor in economics, his senior thesis was entitled “Catholic Human Rights Thought: The Latin American Contribution.”

After commencement, he went to Germany with his parents to participate at an event of the [Schoenstatt Movement, Pentecost Congress 2022](#), held June 8-12. [Weizenmann](#) has been living at The Lay Centre since September 2021 and working at the Ecology and Creation Sector of the [Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Development](#).



# Research and diplomacy bring Hungarian scholar to Rome

## By The Lay Centre

Rita Lengyel, from Hungary, studied law at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and is currently finishing her degree in psychology at Eötvös Loránd University. An Erasmus scholarship offered an opportunity to come to Rome for two months. In this interview, she tells us about herself and her Roman experience.

What brought you to Rome?

I received an Erasmus scholarship to spend two months in Rome to carry out research in church history at the Pontifical Gregorian University, which is one of the most important European centers for teaching and researching theology, church history, and canon law. The library has a collection of about 500,000 volumes and aims to contribute to the mission of the university.

I chose the library of the Pontifical Gregorian University as my host institution. During these two months, I was able to access materials that are essential to my topic of research, namely on the history of the early Christian Church and the law of the late Roman Empire during the reign of Constantine. The time spent in the library and the processing and interpretation of the resources, as well as the visits to the sites necessary for the topic, such as the historical archives, the library, and museums, were very useful for my studies. Also, the Institute of Psychology of the Gregorian University is the most significant European center of religious psychology today, which is why the university library's collection of religious psychology books is extremely rich.

This was very useful for my psychology studies; I was able to complete a study on the psychology of religious experience, based on the work of William James.

I also took part in an internship at the Hungarian Embassy to the Holy See, which helped me gain useful experience in religious diplomacy.

Would you recommend this kind of experience?

Of course! Rome is the Eternal City, after all! There are plenty of things to see here. I have spent the majority of my time discovering the wonders of the city. I have visited the most important parts of the classical heritage: Roman Forum, Domus



Aurea, Catacombs of St. Peter's, etc. I also have a keen interest in church architecture, and I managed to discover not only the grand basilicas but also the "hidden," less famous churches of the city.

One of my most treasured experiences was to "meet" the pope. Thanks to The Lay Centre's generosity, I was able to attend the Easter liturgies at St. Peter's Basilica. I also very much enjoyed visiting St. Peter's Square on Sundays to listen to the Regina Caeli and the Angelus in person.

Have you enjoyed your stay at The Lay Centre?

I can honestly say that one of the greatest experiences of being here was the time I spent at The Lay Centre. Luckily for me, I had the opportunity to meet other scholars at pontifical universities—fantastic people with whom I had a wonderful time during these two months. I believe I have acquired lifelong experiences as a member of this community. It was a great pleasure to get to know members of a community with an interest similar to mine, but with completely different backgrounds and views on life.

I especially loved the events, shared meals, when we had the opportunity to have long, meaningful conversations with each other. I think these intellectual conversations did not only serve my personal growth but—since the members of the community are from many parts of the world—they broadened my point of view on ecclesiastical matters as well.

The Lay Centre is also a perfect place for a spiritual retreat. Taking long walks in the garden and meditating was a wonderful opportunity for self-reflection. Also, the quiet surroundings of the residence create a very peaceful environment that encourages calm and academic study.

What are your plans for the future?

My dream is to become a scholar. I believe this experience was an important step toward pursuing an academic path. I am looking forward to starting my doctorate in Roman law. According to my plans, my future thesis would focus on the relationship between Roman law and the early Christian Church. I would also like to start a new degree in classical philology next year.

I have a lifelong passion for traveling, which is something I would like to continue in the years to come. I have yet to see Jerusalem and Cape Town, but exploring South America is high on my bucket list too.



Last but not least, one of my future plans is to stay in touch with The Lay Centre community.



# Wedding News

## By The Lay Centre

Davidson, North Carolina - May 1

Congratulations to Lay Centre alumna Rebecca Cohen and her husband David Haynes.

We wish them every happiness.



# Join us in praying the Pentecost Novena

**By Donna Orsuto**

ROME - From the very beginning of The Lay Centre, we have had the tradition of praying the Pentecost Novena especially for:

- All our generous benefactors and friends
- The unity of all Christians
- A greater sense of dialogue among all believers in God
- For past, present, and future members of The Lay Centre

The Lay Centre community comes together at Night Prayer between Ascension and Pentecost for this short prayer.

Perhaps you would like to join us by praying the Novena wherever you are in the world.

Please know that also your intentions are included in this “tempo forte” period of prayer.

Novena Prayer

Blessed Spirit of WISDOM, help us to seek God as the centre of our lives and order our lives according to his will, so that love and harmony may reign in our hearts.

Blessed Spirit of UNDERSTANDING, enlighten our minds, that we may know and love the truths of faith and make them truly our own.

Blessed Spirit of COUNSEL, enlighten and guide us in all our ways that we might always know and do Your holy will. Make us prudent and courageous.

Blessed Spirit of FORTITUDE, uphold us in every time of trouble or adversity. Make us loyal and confident.

Blessed Spirit of KNOWLEDGE, help us to know good from evil. Teach us to do what is right in the sight of God. Give us clear vision and firmness in decision.

Blessed Spirit of PIETY, possess our hearts, incline them to a true faith in You, to a holy love of You, our God, that with our whole being we may seek You, and find You, our best, our truest joy.





Blessed Spirit of HOLY FEAR, penetrate our inmost heart that we may ever be mindful of Your presence. Make us flee from sin, and give us intense reverence for God and for our brothers and sisters who are made in God's image. Amen.

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Regina Caeli, laetare, Alleluia.

Quia quem meruisti portare, Alleluia.

Resurrexit, sicut dixit, Alleluia.

Ora pro nobis Deum, Alleluia.

Nostra Aetate scholar travels from Kazakhstan to learn more about Christianity, Christian-Muslim relations

Aigerim Dyussenova, from Kazakhstan, came to Rome in February 2022, sponsored by Nostra Aetate Foundation, which is linked to the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. Aigerim has a Master's degree in Religion and Theology from the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and works at the Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Information and Public Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, where one of the important tasks is to ensure interfaith harmony.

Would you tell us about your work at the Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Information and Public Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan?

With pleasure. I have been working at the committee for more than two years. Our committee is a department of the Ministry of Information and Public Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which implements state policy in the field of religious activity. The main tasks of our committee are to strengthen secular principles of state development, develop harmonious state-confessional and interfaith relations, and prevent the spread of radical ideology in society. The committee has eight departments, each of which has its own tasks and responsibilities. For example, I work in the Department of Religious Studies Expertise, which identifies compliance and contradictions of objects of religious content, such as information materials with religious content, religious literature,



etc., with the norms of the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as violations of the rights and freedoms of citizens by destructive religious groups. Taking into account that social networks are very popular, especially among young people, we also monitor various internet resources in order to identify illegal and destructive content. The monitoring of religious literature is a sensitive topic, as it affects a wide range of aspects — from the rights and freedoms of believers to issues of national security.

What led you to choose this area of work and what studies did you do?

Since my school days, I was interested in history and, thanks to successfully passing exams, I won a grant to do a bachelor's degree in religious studies, for which I am very grateful. I liked the training and decided to continue and enrolled in a master's degree. During my master's studies, I was interested in the role of women and their religious studies education in the fight against religious extremism in my country, as well as their participation in promoting peace and security issues in general. Therefore, I have written several articles on this topic.

Also, during my master's degree, I was offered a job at the Committee on Religious Affairs. I agreed because it is a great idea to apply knowledge gained and to be part of the implementation of state policy. I must say, right away, it was not easy to do a master's degree and work at the same time. But if you really love what you are doing, it is not difficult for you.

Nostra Aetate Foundation is sponsoring your stay in Rome. Could you talk about your experience, the courses you are following and the opportunities for dialogue? How will this experience help you in your work?

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the [Nostra Aetate Foundation](#) for giving me an excellent opportunity to stay in this beautiful city. I study at two universities: the [Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas](#) (Angelicum) and the [Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies](#) (PISAI). At the Angelicum, I have three classes: History of the Ancient Church, Introduction to Christian Worship and Introduction to the Great World Religions. At PISAI, we study the history of Christian-Muslim relations. As I noted above, the main task of our committee is the development of harmonious state-confessional and interfaith relations. Christianity is the second-largest confession in my country in terms of the number of followers and religious affiliation. Therefore, it is very important to strengthen and expand my knowledge in this field, to know the main features of the Christian religion, its history, creed, etc. These disciplines help me in this. In addition, I regularly visit the office of the [Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue](#) to



read important ecclesial documents related to interreligious dialogue, such as the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* on the approach of the Catholic Church toward non-Christian religions and the Document on Human Fraternity signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. So, I hope the knowledge I have gained will help me promote dialogue between representatives of different religions in my country and promote them at a higher level, because interreligious dialogue is a bridge between East and West, which must be preserved, strengthened and continued against the background of the spread of conflicts with religious overtones, manifestations of neo-Nazism and xenophobia in the name of creating a safe world.

Staying at The Lay Centre already gives you an opportunity to live in an international, interfaith community. Is your stay living up to your expectations?

I would like to express my gratitude to The Lay Centre for the warm hospitality, attention and friendship. This is my first experience of living in such a community. Firstly, living at The Lay Centre gave me the opportunity to see some dimension of Catholic Christianity in practice. I was lucky enough to attend the Holy Mass that takes place here on Wednesdays, adoration and religious holidays. It touches my soul and it's valuable. In addition, it also inspires me to pray more often and learn more about my religion. Secondly, it gave me the opportunity to get acquainted with the culture of different countries. I learn a lot of interesting things by communicating with the people who live here. Thirdly, life at The Lay Centre provides an unprecedented example that members of two or more religions can live together in peace, harmony and understanding and, moreover, like a family, because here I found support and care as in my family.

This is your first trip to Rome. What have been the highlights so far?

It wasn't easy for me in the beginning. For the first time in my life, I was so far away from my family. I missed them very much. My habitual rhythm of life has also changed. But thanks to the support of my friends at The Lay Centre, I feel much better now. Rome also helped me in this. It is a very beautiful and historic city. Each place, building and detail has its own history, which I previously saw only in textbooks at school. I like the climate here and the many green spaces. During my stay, I visited some tourist sites and very beautiful churches, saw the works of famous sculptors and artists. I am sure that I will go home filled with a lot of memories and inspiration.

Kazakhstan is the world's largest landlocked country, the largest and northernmost Muslim-majority country in terms of land area, and the



ninth-largest country in the world in terms of total area, with a population of 19 million. But these are mere facts. Would you like to tell us something about your home country?

The Republic of Kazakhstan is located in the heart of Eurasia. The word of Turkic origin “Kazakh” means “free man,” and Kazakhstan is a country that has been inhabited historically by freedom-loving nomads.

For thousands of years, the inhabitants have bred and grazed numerous herds on the pastures and fertile lands of the region, in the foothills and river valleys. The Great Silk Road passed through the Kazakh lands, sable furs were transported from Siberia through the boundless Kazakh steppes. Kazakhstan was the most important link in the chain of cultural, trade and economic relations between Asia and Europe.

Kazakhstan has become a homeland for people of different nationalities and faiths united by a common historical destiny. This diversity of traditions, spiritual heritage and languages is especially valued in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Citizens of Kazakhstan are proud of their multinational state. For centuries, a good tradition of friendship and good relations between peoples has been passed down and maintained in Kazakhstan from generation to generation.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a secular country. Currently, representatives of about 130 nationalities and 18 confessions live in peace and harmony in Kazakhstan. Followers of all faiths have ample opportunities in Kazakhstan to meet their spiritual needs. The state creates equal and favourable conditions for the confessions to carry out their functions.

Despite the fact that the Republic of Kazakhstan occupies the ninth place in the world in terms of territory, for many it remains an unknown and mysterious country. Even the most avid traveler will discover a lot of interesting and beautiful things in Kazakhstan: mountain peaks covered with snow, vast plateaus, deep rivers, arid deserts, endless fields covered with flowers and protected forests.



# Lay Centre 35th anniversary celebrates inspiring women

**By Donna Orsuto**

ROME - When I first arrived in Rome 40 years ago to study at a pontifical university, I was quite a rarity. While women had already been admitted to study at pontifical universities at that time, we still were few in number and many questioned why lay women would choose to study in a mostly male, clerical, and ecclesial environment.

Much has changed since then. While only a handful of pontifical universities have statistics readily available online, the percentage of lay women studying at these institutions in recent decades has visibly increased.

The paths that bring them to a pontifical university's door are all very different, but their motivation is similar: to serve the Church and its people with compassion, integrity, and profound knowledge of the faith. Like many of the men who study here in Rome, they, too, feel called.

They leave their homeland, seeking to be formed in the tradition and in the mind of the Church — and in the heart of the Church — so as to be authentic witnesses and remarkable professionals in their chosen field. Here, in Rome, they find the combination of knowledge and experience that leaves an indelible mark on their formation and, consequently, on their careers.

We at The Lay Centre are blessed to have met and even welcomed many of these women over the past 35 years. Many of them have gone on to serve the Church in wonderful and outstanding ways. Their commitment is inspiring.

For this reason, we decided to compile the series “Lay Women Study at Pontifical Universities,” which offers the testimony and experiences of 12 women who chose to study at a pontifical university and how it has impacted their professional lives.

The first interview in the series features Dr. Linda Ghisoni, who is under-secretary for the lay faithful at the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life since 2017. Dr. Ghisoni studied and taught at the Pontifical Gregorian University. We were delighted that she accepted to be part of this series.



Over the past 35 years, there were many exceptional Lay Centre alumnae to choose from, more than we could possibly accommodate in our first go at this series. However, we tried in our selection to be representative, inviting women from various parts of the world of different ages, cultures, and professions.

We hope you will enjoy this series and find their insights, experiences, and service to the Church and the world both edifying and inspiring.



# Meet Adrian Teodor Oancea - Lay Centre 'Impact Fellow'

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — Adrian Teodor Oancea has been working to raise awareness about modern slavery since he joined The Lay Centre community in September 2021. A graduate in Orthodox theology from the University of Bucharest, Oancea is studying in the licentiate program in Judaic studies and Jewish-Christian relations at the Cardinal Bea Centre of the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Oancea's mission as a Lay Centre Impact Fellow is to raise awareness about human trafficking and modern slavery in Italy within an ecumenical initiative, called "Out of the Shadows," that runs out of All Saints' Anglican Church in Rome. The initiative resulted from a series offered by All Saints in Lent 2021, called "Women in the Shadows." [Out of the Shadows](#) is a project of [The Clewer Initiative](#) of the Church of England to combat modern slavery. Oancea meets regularly with members of the Out of the Shadows initiative. The group consists mainly of members of the various Protestant, Anglican, and Catholic churches in Rome as well as Mediterranean Hope, the Refugee and Migrant Programme of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI).

As a Romanian Orthodox Christian, Oancea has also involved the Romanian Orthodox church and Romanian community in Rome in this initiative.

Through the generosity of Lay Centre benefactors, Oancea was granted a scholarship for this project for the 2021-2022 academic year. However, we are seeking benefactors to support his work in 2022-2023, as well as the work of other Impact Fellows.

Take this opportunity to help our students make an impact in the Church and in the world. Make a donation to the "Friends of The Lay Centre Fund," set up through National Catholic Community Foundation (NCCF).

[Click here to make a donation](#). Select "Friends of The Lay Centre Fund" from the drop-down list, "Designate this donation for a specific purpose."

Contact [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org) for further information.



Thank you.





# Jewish biblical scholar to give public lecture on 'Mary Magdalene at the Movies'

**By Laura Ieraci**

CHICAGO — Canadian biblical scholar Adele Reinhartz will give a lecture at The Lay Centre on May 10, entitled “Mary Magdalene at the Movies.”

Reinhartz, a professor in the classics and religious studies department of the University of Ottawa, is in Rome this semester to teach a course at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Biblicum) on the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. The course studies primary sources that help explain how these two communities formed as distinct groups, as well as the changing scholarly theories about what led to their formation.

Reinhartz wrote a book, published in 2018, related to the topic, called “Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John.” She argues in her book that the Gospel of John’s appropriation of Jewishness and subsequent repudiation of Jewishness and anti-Jewish comments contribute to a parting of the ways.

A person who reads the Gospel of John without any prior knowledge of Jews and Judaism would “come away with a very negative view of Jews because of the way that John talks about them,” she said.

While many reviews of her book have been positive, there has also been some pushback, she said.

“And this is because I’m challenging the view that a book that’s part of the sacred Scriptures can’t also be a book that is problematic from the point of view of its portrayal of other people,” she explained.

When scholars consider biblical texts “ahistorical,” that is, not tied to particular times and places, and “eternally relevant,” there is the tendency not to “want to engage in... an ethical critique of the texts themselves,” she said.

To have the courage to engage in this type of critique — which she calls the “hermeneutics of chutzpah” — would allow for “a deeper understanding of the role that Scripture has or should have in the life of a faith community,” she said.



“It doesn’t mean that we throw out the Scriptures or that we throw out the faith that’s attached to these Scriptures,” she added. “It just means we are honest with ourselves about what we take as normative for our time and place and what we don’t.”

Reinhartz’s journey to biblical scholarship was a case of one interest leading to the next. Unsure of what she wanted to pursue as a career after high school, she enrolled in the bachelor of arts program at the University of Toronto. There, she decided to pursue Jewish studies out of personal interest.

“I had a certain type of Jewish upbringing, but I felt there were a lot of gaps,” she said.

Without a Jewish studies designation at the University of Toronto at the time, she graduated in religious studies. Still unsure of which career to pursue, she followed her interest and applied to the graduate program in religious studies at McMaster University, located west of Toronto. The program there focused on Judaism, Christianity and the Greco-Roman period.

Her first class was on Galatians with renowned New Testament scholar E. P. Sanders, who also supervised her doctoral research, and it inspired her career path.

In this class, she realized how her Jewish studies background was an asset to understanding and contextualizing the New Testament and she thought “it could be an interesting thing” to be a Jewish New Testament scholar and “a good thing for (students) and a good thing for the Jewish people.”

Over time, Reinhartz also developed an academic interest in the use of the Bible in American film and, in particular, Hollywood’s portrayal of Jesus and his Jewishness in film. She published two books on the Bible in film.

“Jesus movies suffer from a major disadvantage,” she said. “There are a number of exceptions, but, in almost all films, Jesus is presented as a flat character.”

Entertaining films normally develop along a story arc that includes characters who are somewhat flawed and, through a significant life journey, undergo change. However, Jesus is perfect and sinless from the very beginning of almost each film, she said.



“So, what filmmakers often do is they play up the two characters you can do something with, that is, Judas and Mary Magdalene,” Reinhartz said. “In the more interesting Jesus movies, Mary Magdalene gets a lot of attention.”

The portrayal of Mary Magdalene in Jesus films in this context will be the focus of her lecture at The Lay Centre.

Reinhartz said she is developing some book projects, among them a new book on the parting of the ways and one on the portrayal of Catholicism, particularly of religious women and clergy, in Quebec film.

The Catholic Church in Quebec “has a very specific history,” with a “major shift in the power of the church with respect to education, healthcare and politics” starting in the 1960s, she said.

“The (Quebec) films that come out now are still reflecting that transition,” even more than 50 years on, she said.



# Jesus Christ: Our Light and Our Hope

**By Donna Orsuto and Filipe Domingues**

These first months of 2022 will be remembered for the war in Ukraine, the tragedy of people losing their lives and millions of people fleeing for safety. We are mindful that this will also negatively impact those already suffering in various parts of the world.

At the same time, this period will be remembered for the millions of people who welcomed refugees, offering hospitality, showing tenderness and charity. Concretely, we at The Lay Centre ask ourselves: “What are we called to do?”

We were able to welcome the mother of one of our scholars from Ukraine who is staying with us for a while. It is a privilege for our community to have her here as our special guest.

In these times, it is good to remember above all that it is Jesus who accompanies those who carry a heavy burden as He did on the road to Emmaus. Still in shock and despair after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, the disciples trudge along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus with heavy hearts. Then, they meet a stranger, who becomes their companion on the journey, a listener to confide in: “But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place” (Lk 24:21).

At first, they fail to recognize Him, but He was for them as He is for us, a Messenger of Hope. They invite Him to stay with them: “And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight” (Lk 24:30-31).

Light and hope return to their world and it returns to ours as we welcome Him into our midst.

The risen Jesus, the unseen stranger, is walking with us, today, tomorrow and always.

When our “Emmaus” road is filled with discouragement and despair, let’s walk it with Jesus. Walking with Jesus, our path will become a great journey of companionship, conversation, belief and hope.



Christ is risen from the dead! Christ is the Savior and hope of the world!



# Donate: Lay people make an impact in the Church and the world

**By Filipe Domingues**

ROME — Our Easter newsletter offers a small sample of the many activities at The Lay Centre over the past few months. We have welcomed students and young professionals from 12 countries, mostly from the Global South.

Through the generosity of our benefactors, The Lay Centre has been able to provide a welcoming environment and additional formation opportunities for the members of our community. Today and in the future, they are the lay people scattered around the world, who carry out activities of profound impact wherever they are.

Among them we have a new group of students that we decided to call “Impact Fellows.”

They are students of the pontifical universities whose presence in Rome is marked not only by their academic journey but also by a serious involvement in an impactful project outside The Lay Centre community, tied to the local Church or to other social action initiatives.

Currently, we have four Impact Fellows, originally from Croatia, Italy, Romania, and Ukraine, who are working on projects linked to social action (raising awareness about modern slavery); service (supporting our local church with liturgical and musical assistance); dialogue (offering support through listening and self-help groups); and spirituality (peacebuilding, Christian unity, and pilgrimage).

As we continue our mission of hospitality and formation, we look forward to welcoming an Afghani refugee to our community in 2022-2023. This young man, who will study at a pontifical university, will help to promote dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

By engaging with projects outside the resident community, these fellows open up to new horizons and prepare to make a real impact now and in the future.

The Impact Fellows have become an essential dimension of our expanded “Lay Leadership” program, through which The Lay Centre aims to promote the lay vocation in the Church and in the world, by recognizing its different expressions.



You can help us sustain Impact Fellows studies and projects by making a donation to the “Friends of The Lay Centre” fund set up through National Catholic Community Foundation (NCCF).

[Click here to make a donation](#). Select Friends of The Lay Centre Fund from the drop-down list “Designate this donation for a specific purpose.”

Contact [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org) for further information.

Thank you.

Don't miss the latest news.



# Lay Centre scholar reunites with mother who fled Ukraine

**By Heather Walker**

Lay Centre community from Romania, Italy, Ukraine and Greece pictured leaving for March 25, 2022 Penitential Celebration in St. Peter's Basilica and Act of Consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

ROME — Born in Boryslav, Ukraine, Lay Centre "[Impact Fellow](#)" Olena Shust came to Rome in 2016 to study psychology at the Salesian Pontifical University, where she is currently in the doctoral program.

Her road to Rome began while studying for her PhD in chemistry at Lviv State University. She would often look out the laboratory window and see the Cathedral of St. George. She was drawn to the church and she gradually became involved in parish activities. Over time, she realized faith was important for her life and her vocation. Despite her career at a pharmaceutical company, she was certain she could contribute more to the world as a psychologist, and her bishop supported her decision to study in Rome.

"I wanted to study in a Christian environment and serve the Church," she said.

When Olena left for Rome, Ukraine had been fighting a war against Russian-backed separatists for two years already.

In the past eight years, 14,000 Ukrainians died in the war being fought in Donbas. This experience of war has influenced her area of research, which she explained as "the prospect of peacebuilding in Ukraine from a psychological perspective."

Ironically, in carrying out some field research in January, she asked 164 subjects their feelings about the threat of a possible Russian invasion. Like so many other Ukrainians, she herself hoped war would not break out. But on Feb. 24, Russia launched its invasion on Ukraine.

Olena's mother, Oksana, was living in Ukraine at the time of the invasion. She felt completely helpless in the face of the war and the inaction of the international community.

"It is as if everybody is looking at Ukraine being crucified," said Olena.





Oksana realized she had to get out of Ukraine, and Olena knew she had to help her. Oksana arrived in Rome and is now trying to learn Italian so she can communicate more easily. Olena said the warm welcome her mother received from the staff and scholars at The Lay Centre has really helped.

Both Olena and Oksana have been very anxious in recent weeks and have turned to prayer for solace. People in Ukraine, too, have been praying together every day, all day, she added.

“My only hope is in God,” Olena said, comparing Ukraine’s chances against Russia’s military might to “a war between David and Goliath.”

“If you think about this, Ukraine doesn’t have a chance,” she said. “But from a religious point of view, we can have hope.”

Her biggest hope is that good will overcome the forces of evil.

“We always try to believe that something good will happen, even if it may not be possible. We have endured and survived so much,” she said, recalling how her grandfather was sentenced to a gulag camp in Siberia for 25 years. However, upon Stalin’s death in 1953, there was an armistice and he was released after only 10 years.

“When he returned home, he lived in silence, but he was very strong,” Olena said. “He didn’t lose his dignity nor his national identity.”

Olena and Oksana attended the penitential liturgy March 25 at St. Peter’s Basilica, when Pope Francis consecrated both Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Olena described it as an incredible moment and a historical day.

“The consecration is not a magic remedy, but it gave us all a lot of hope,” she said.

The mother and daughter together now look toward the hope of Easter.



# Jesuit author's new book seeks to demystify and encourage everyone to pray

**By Laura Ieraci**

CHICAGO — A new book on prayer begins with an invitation couched in a matter-of-fact statement: “Everyone can pray.”

Father James Martin, SJ, said he wrote his latest book, “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone,” published in February, with the intention of demystifying prayer so more people would feel comfortable taking it up.

Not only can everyone pray, he said during a webinar with scholars, alumni and friends of The Lay Centre in March, but everyone has the desire to pray — and that desire is planted within them by God, who wants to draw them closer to himself.

Therefore, prayer is first “a response” to God’s invitation, he said, which should inspire confidence in people to pray.

However, many people — including many Catholics — “do a number on themselves” and convince themselves their prayer is not good or effective. Under the impression that prayer should involve grand visions or moving experiences, they get discouraged when “nothing really happens” or when they get distracted. Then, unsure about what is “supposed to happen” during prayer, many people either abandon prayer or don’t engage at all.

After offering several definitions of prayer in Catholic tradition, Father Martin offered his own: “a conscious conversation with God.”

Expounding on prayer as a personal relationship with God, he said the characteristics that make a good friendship, such as honesty, time spent together and attentive listening, are equally applicable to a good relationship with God.

Father Martin addressed the concern of “many Catholics who think they’re doing something wrong if their prayer is dry.” But dryness in prayer is normal, he said.

“We have to remember that, even though any time spent with God is transformative in some way, sometimes it will seem on the surface that not much is going on.”



As well, it may seem there is not much going on in prayer because people are unaware of what to look for or are simply not being attentive. Father Martin offered six common experiences a person could expect as a fruit of prayer and should be attentive to, as they are ways God speaks.

The first is insight. An insight into a passage in Scripture or a situation in one's life or something to act upon may be small, "but it unlocks something in you," he said.

Emotion — such as regret or sadness — or desire — such as to be a better person — may emerge to draw attention to aspects in one's life to improve or act upon. Memories — good or painful — may emerge in prayer: the former to console and the latter as an invitation to look at with Jesus. Feelings — of peace or calm — are also common. Finally, people may also expect words or short phrases to clearly pop into their mind in response to a question or concern, "almost like remembering the lyrics to a song or a poem."

Father Martin explained how to evaluate these experiences in prayer as coming from God. First, the desire, feeling, emotion or image must be inherently good, that is, not morally compromised.

"If it is manifestly bad, it's not coming from God," he said.

Second, it must "fit with what we know about God," as a loving and merciful God. Third, it must make sense in the context of the person's life. Fourth, it inspires a desire for or leads to an increase in faith, hope and charity. Fifth, it almost "feels like it comes from outside you," especially words and phrases, he said. "So there's a kind of otherness about it."

He encouraged his listeners to trust themselves in discerning these experiences and not to be discouraged by distractions.

Distractions in prayer, too, are commonplace, he said, and what is necessary is to distinguish between "unimportant distractions" and "important distractions."

Important distractions consist of concerns that arise repeatedly during prayer, such as a troubling feeling, memory, relationship or situation. Repeated distractions may be "something that God is raising up" for a person to address and resolve.



Citing Catholic spiritual writer Margaret Silf, he said unimportant distractions in prayer, such as noise from the outdoors, should be acknowledged and allowed to pass, like “birds coming into your field of vision and going out.”

Father Martin said he is distracted in prayer, he prays: “God, I’m distracted, but I’m still with you.”

“We all have lives and bodies and problems,” he said. “So, even in the distractions, God can be with you.”



# New apostolic constitution envisions greater participation of laity

**By Filipe Domingues**

ROME — On the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, March 19, Pope Francis promulgated the new constitution “Praedicate Evangelium” (“Preach the Gospel”), nine years after his election as pope, closing the cycle of preparation for the reform of the Roman Curia.

The Roman Curia is composed of various bodies that help the pope govern and shepherd the Church. The reform is the culmination of a process that started with the pontificate of Paul VI and continued with John Paul II.

Pope Francis underlines in the new constitution that “every Christian is a missionary disciple” and, therefore, all the baptized faithful can assume roles of government and leadership in the Curia. He also reorganizes dicasteries — a term that ceases to be a generic reference to the different sectors of the Curia — merging some and reducing management structures.

Priority is given to evangelization, as the “new” Curia must function as a living instrument of support for the bishops’ conferences and the Eastern churches, “gathering and elaborating the presence of the Church in the world.” Pope Francis said he hopes the Curia will be a true “expression of catholicity” and universality of the Church.

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which will become a dicastery in the reform, presented the new constitution March 21. He said the long-awaited reform meets the need to “reorganize the Roman Curia in a new way and in accordance with the needs of the times,” as requested by the Second Vatican Council.

## WHAT WILL THIS REFORM MEAN FOR THE LAITY?

“Praedicate Evangelium” envisions an even greater presence and participation of the lay faithful in the Roman Curia, “including in roles of governance and responsibility,” said Cardinal Semeraro.

The document states “any member of the faithful can preside over a dicastery or a curial body, given their particular competence, power of governance, and



particular function.” This is feasible since every institution of the Curia acts in virtue of the power entrusted to it by the pope.

According to Bishop Marco Mellino, secretary of the Council of Cardinals, there will no longer be the need for dicasteries to be headed by a “cardinal prefect,” assisted by an archbishop secretary. Not even the Secretariat of State, which had a supervisory role over the dicasteries and now has only coordinating prerogatives, will necessarily be headed by a cardinal.

Canon law expert Father Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, said the members of the Curia share directly in the Petrine ministry, which makes their power only “vicarious.” In other words, the power they hold “does not come from the hierarchical rank received, but from the power they receive from the Roman pontiff and exercise in his name,” he said. As such, a Curial position can be exercised by a lay person, religious, consecrated, cleric, man, or woman, as long as it is in the pope’s name.

Father Ghirlanda believes this change puts an end to the confusion between the so-called “canonical mission” of administration and governance and the “divine mission” conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders, which has been debated since the Second Vatican Council.

#### SPIRIT OF UNITY AND MISSION

Pope Francis begins the constitution by recalling that “[p]reaching the Gospel is the role that the Lord Jesus entrusted to his disciples.”

The primary mission of the Curia, he says, is to “serve” every person, all of humanity in today’s world. Christ, who “left us the example when he washed the feet of his disciples,” is the model for this service, he said. Caring for brothers and sisters in a spirit of “missionary conversion” should define the Roman Curia.

The Curia must bring to the world the love of Christ, “who is the light of the world,” he continues. It must bring the world closer to the missionary experience of the apostles and must help all members of the Church “walk together,” in synodality, in mutual listening, with the pope as the main sign of unity among all the bishops and all the faithful.

While all of the new dicasteries of the Roman Curia are all juridically equal, three dicasteries will stand at the helm: the Dicastery for Evangelization, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Dicastery for the Service of Charity. The latter, responsible for the pope’s charitable works, was formerly the Office of Papal Charities.



According to Bishop Mellino, these three dicasteries together set the tone for the entire ministry of the Curia. “Evangelization, faith and charity” are at the basis of everything, he said.

The new Dicastery for Evangelization will unite the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, formerly “Propaganda Fide,” which served mission territories, and the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, which promoted evangelization where the Church is already present. It is the only dicastery that will be presided by the pope himself as prefect, assisted by two “pro-prefects.”

Cardinal Semeraro described this reorganization as historic.

“It can be understood in the light of the epochal change that is taking place that inevitably asks the Church to face new challenges, projecting herself toward new frontiers, whether in the first mission ‘ad gentes’ (to all peoples), or in the new evangelization of peoples that have already received the proclamation of Christ,” he explained in the presentation of the document.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also becomes a dicastery and continues to have an important role, but now alongside the other two — evangelization and charity — “forming a unity in the missionary action to which the Roman Curia is called,” said Bishop Mellino.

“Praedicate Evangelium” comes into force this Pentecost, June 5, fully abrogating and replacing “Pastor Bonus.”



# Zambian lay woman takes on new role at Caritas Internationalis

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — Musamba Mubanga has recently joined the world headquarters of [Caritas Internationalis](#) in Rome. As a senior advocacy officer, she will coordinate and facilitate Caritas' work on integral ecology, food security, climate change, water, biodiversity and conflict.

Jumping right into the action in her first few weeks on the job, she served as a speaker for a series of Caritas webinars, called "Caritas Celebrates Women," and presented on the theme "[Women as Builders of Solidarity: Caring for the Poor and for Our Common Home](#)" March 29.

Mubanga's talk drew from her experience of more than seven years as a development analyst with Caritas Zambia in the areas of policy and community-related issues.

Upon arriving from Zambia, her home country, Mubanga spent her first month at The Lay Centre while settling into life in Rome.

"So far, all is going well," Mubanga said. "I am happy that The Lay Centre was the first stop, although I was a little skeptical to begin with. But now a month later, I feel blessed to have been part of this amazing community."

Mubanga spoke of the warm welcome she received from The Lay Centre's "super amazing house community," as well as the management team.

"The centre was definitely a good and warm place for me to be, as I got over the challenges of moving to a new country so far away from home," she said. "I would come back again and again for this experience."

Before moving to Rome, Mubanga worked at Caritas Zambia as [a livelihoods and climate change specialist](#), after completing her bachelor's degree in agriculture science — not her first choice of study, she stressed — at the University of Zambia.

In this role, she worked with communities and farmers to understand "in-depth their livelihood sources and how climate change is impacting their many different sources of livelihood," she said.





It was here that she discovered her “great passion” for development work and “for helping find solutions through many different advocacy initiatives,” she said.

“I was really excited to learn everything on how to build things and solve complex problems on livelihoods,” she said.

After only a few months in that role, she “was overjoyed with the amazing work in the communities and also struck by the many gaps in natural resource governance and management, which needed advocacy interventions.”

“This made me believe that development work — and in Church circles — is perfect for me,” she added.

In 2015, she began her master’s in environment management to enhance her knowledge and skills on climate change. The theme of her thesis was “Integrating Sustainable Livelihoods in Environmental and Social Assessments.”

Working for Caritas Zambia was personally fulfilling and “an opportunity that I can say was God’s grace,” she said.

It was “heart-warming to visit a community member who tells you how, through your interventions, their household food and income security has improved, and how they are now able to diversify their livelihoods to respond to the climate crisis,” she added.

Mubanga said the practical application of Catholic Social Teaching in development work also contributed to her love for her work.

“This great experience gave me the insight I needed to make a decision about my career focus and ultimately encouraged me be the development analyst I am today,” she said.

“I look forward to an opportunity now to contribute at the global level by sharing my experience from the field,” she added.

Mubanga said she believes the situation for women in the world is slowly improving as regards discrimination against women and their exclusion from positions of responsibility and leadership. She, too, has experienced discrimination in the past, she said.



“There is a lot that needs to be done, as women are still considered less for certain leadership roles and they are also not given certain responsibilities just because they are female,” she said.

Her advice to young women is to “rise up to the challenge, always push yourself to be as good as a man, challenge yourself to be a better version of yourself, based on your passion.”

If a woman stays in her comfort zone, “it’s difficult to make an impact; it is important to push boundaries,” she said.

“Every woman has a leadership blind spot,” a particular skill or gift hidden within, said Mubanga. “It is important to identify it and share it with society.”



# Welcome to Ephrem Joseph!

## By The Lay Centre

Lay Centre alumnus Alexander Aboutanos and his wife, Claire, became the proud parents of Ephrem Joseph Aboutanos in November 2021.

Congratulations from all of us at The Lay Centre.



# News from Lay Centre alumna Samantha Lin in Chicago

**By Heather Walker**

Samantha Lin is the associate director for school growth and student recruitment with the Cristo Rey Network, headquartered in Chicago. The 38 Cristo Rey Network schools across the United States are dedicated to providing Catholic, college preparatory education to low-income students. Samantha and her husband, Tommaso, met at The Lay Centre and moved to Chicago last September.

Since your wedding in July last year, you moved back to the United States. In addition to settling in, you have been completing your STL in Judaic Studies. Could you tell us something about this?

I was really excited to be able to finish my STL from the United States. I finished all my course requirements last spring and have been working on my thesis and preparing for the final exam since then. My thesis adviser and I worked closely together for the past month, going back and forth with edits and thoughts. I am so grateful to Rabbi Meyer for his guidance. I wrote about post-Shoah theology in Judaism and on modern Hebrew literature that incorporates some aspects of this theology. Rabbi Meyer pushed me to really tighten and strengthen my argument and I was able to write a thesis I'm very proud of and hope to publish one day. I started as a guest student at the [Pontifical Gregorian University](#) in [Rabbi Meyer's](#) class in 2016 when I was a [Russell Berrie Fellow](#) at the [Angelicum](#) and living at The Lay Centre. It is really cool to come full circle and get to finish my STL with Rabbi Meyer now.

What are you planning to do now?

I just started as the associate director of school growth and student recruitment at the Cristo Rey Network — a network of college preparatory faith-based high schools for students with limited economic resources across 24 states throughout the U.S. In my new role, I will be working with the admissions teams in our 38 high schools to strengthen their recruitment programs and with new areas of growth, where schools are being founded, like in Orange County, California, and Miami, Florida.

What inspired you to accept this role?



I am motivated by the mission of Cristo Rey to provide quality Catholic education to young people with limited economic means. I have been blessed to attend Catholic schools, including a Catholic university, [Georgetown](#), and the Pontifical Gregorian University, but think that Catholic education should be available to anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic background. I'm excited to work for an organization that has a strong mission to serve students in this way.

You have an interesting academic background and work experience, too. How will this help you in your new role as associate director for school growth in the [Cristo Rey Network](#)?

I think my academic background has given me insight into how important it is to engage with faith in all aspects and academic subjects. Faith is a huge motivator for so many people and I think it's important to be able to understand and talk about faith, which doesn't happen in every school. In the Cristo Rey Network, the schools serve students from all faith (or no faith) backgrounds, but they provide a Catholic education where students take religion classes. Talking to students, I've come to understand that no matter their background, they enjoy engaging with big existential questions from various points of view, including from a faith perspective.



# Century-old traditions, ecumenical prayer and charity are part of Lay Centre's Lenten pilgrimage

**By Heather Walker**

Station Mass at Basilica of Saints John and Paul

ROME — The Lay Centre community is gathering for fervent prayer and almsgiving this Lent, in response to the needs of the local community and our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

Each year, Lay Centre scholars take part in the local, annual tradition of Station Masses, celebrated at a different church in Rome each day in Lent. This year, The Lay Centre community will continue the tradition.

The tradition dates to the late second or early third century, when the bishop of Rome celebrated the liturgies of the church year at different churches throughout the city in order to visit the various neighborhoods and unify the city's different communities. Over time, a calendar was created to indicate where Masses would be celebrated on certain days in the year.

The first Station Mass was on Ash Wednesday. Since Pope Francis was unable to preside due to acute knee pain, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, led the “stational” liturgy, commencing at the Church of Saint Anselm. It began with a penitential procession along the road, leading to the Basilica of Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill, where Cardinal Parolin presided over Mass and read the pope's homily.

On March 4, Lay Centre Director Donna Orsuto and Lay Centre scholars attended the Station Mass at the Basilica of Saints John and Paul, just a stone's throw from The Lay Centre, and were happy to pray with our neighbors, the Passionist Fathers.

This Lent, The Lay Centre community is also gathering every Thursday evening for Adoration, praying especially for Ukraine and for peace, and on Friday evenings for Taizé prayer before a wooden cross made by Lay Centre alumnus Aljaž Krajnc for the Via Crucis during our first lockdown in 2020.



In a concrete effort to support the plight of the people of Ukraine, together with our parish of Santa Maria in Domnica “La Navicella” and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Basilica of Santa Sofia in Rome, we collected food and medicine. The Lay Centre Charity Team delivered everything to the parish on March 12 along with our monthly collection for the poor of the parish.



# Lay Women Study at Pontifical Universities

## By The Lay Centre

Ana María Celis Brunet is an associate professor in the faculty of law and the faculty of theology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, where she teaches canon law, law and religion, and post-graduate courses in different programs. In this interview, she talks to us about her Roman experience and studies, and how they became tools with which she continues to work to this day.

What was your area of study and which pontifical university did you choose and why?

Shortly after graduating as a lawyer in Chile, I started serving as a lawyer in matrimonial cases at the ecclesiastical tribunal in Santiago, when I learned about a diploma in canon law in Rome through a Chilean student who had lived at The Lay Centre. It was a one-year course (1992-1993) offered at that time exclusively by the faculty of canon law at the Pontifical Gregorian University. It was an opportunity for me to specialize in annulments, which helped me understand canon law as a legal system that seemed to me quite different from civil law, more complete and more oriented toward the good of the person.

I met one of the professors and sought permission to audit courses because I did not have a degree in canon law, which was a prerequisite. I eventually decided to do the licentiate in canon law (1994-1996). Then, I realized I wanted to teach, but I needed a doctorate to do that (1996-1999), especially since I did not have a degree in theology.

I arrived in Rome, without knowing any Italian, and lived there for a month before joining The Lay Centre. The Lay Centre presented the possibility of living in a community of lay students who, after all, are a minority at pontifical universities in Rome.

My first year was very difficult, as I was the only lay woman among nine priests from different backgrounds, all of whom already had a degree in canon law. I studied Latin and, at the same time, I learned Italian. At The Lay Centre, we spoke English.





Practical matters were made easier because I lived with people who were in the same boat as I was.

As for financing my studies, for some years I was supported by Adveniat and my family also supported me financially during my studies.

What opportunities did your studies offer and how are your studies and research at the pontifical university related to the work you do today?

Today, I cannot even imagine my professional life as it is, without my Roman education.

I have been a canon law professor in the faculty of law at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile since I returned to Chile in 2000. I started teaching in the faculty of theology in 2021. I have been a member of the legal team of the Chilean Episcopal Conference since 2000, a member of the National Council for Prevention and Support of Victims of the Episcopal Conference of Chile since it was formed in 2011, and was appointed president of the council in 2018.

I imagine, too, that my studies and subsequent activities led to my appointment as a consultant to the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life.

I am also specialized in what is known as the study of law and religion, and we have a Center for Law and Religion in the faculty. I am currently president of the International Consortium for Law and Religion Studies.

What advice would you give lay women who would like to study in Rome?

Go for it!

The option to study in Rome fulfils two relevant aspects for subsequent professional practice in one's own country. First, the training and current topics is provided by very qualified professors who often participate in the publication of the various texts studied. Second, there is the experience of the universality of the Church in one's fellow students and professors, as well as at the university and in the ecclesial environment. All these factors contribute to having a broader vision of service in the Church.

Moreover, specifically in the case of women, being present contributes to highlighting the relevance of women's participation, both in terms of their personal capacity and, for me the most important thing, the manifestation of



complementarity in the service of the Church. I believe that women's contribution is different and enriches the collaboration in the service of the Church.

How did your studies help you to become more able to serve the Church and society?

Perhaps we should ask other people to answer this question, to verify that my studies really have served their purpose!

I believe that having the experience of the universality of the Church, learning about it, the problematization of the issues, the method of analysis, gave me the serenity to tackle different problems and see the relationship between them. In that sense, my studies were the tools with which I continue to work to this day.

What do you think is an area of most pressing concern in your profession?

Today, in my country, penal canon law remains a priority to address sexual abuse committed by clergy in an ecclesial context. It has been very painful, especially for the victims who have felt abandoned by their Church. At an institutional level, I hope to contribute to creating the conditions to prevent abuse, detect it early and make reparation.

What, in your opinion, is the importance of the role of laity in the Church at a decisional level?

It seems to me that said participation tends to help see the Church more as a community of the faithful.

Although there are instruments or modalities in canon law that contribute to how decisions are made by Church leaders to avoid decisions made in an isolated or capricious manner, without a doubt, strengthening co-responsibility goes along the lines of expressing communion in the Church. However, for anyone who participates in the decision making, either by giving their opinion or their consent to certain decisions, it is important to act in good conscience, to be prepared and not to become someone who simply follows the opinion of others.

I have been able to observe the significant lay contribution in the area of abuse prevention and how complex it has been for ecclesiastical authorities — both diocesan and religious — to accept the observations, suggestions and paths proposed by lay professionals.



Ana María Celis Brunet is a professor of canon law and theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, where she directs the canon law department and the Law and Religion Center. Among her many roles, Professor Celis is president of the National Council for Prevention and Support of Victims of the Episcopal Conference of Chile, a consultant to the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, and president of the International Consortium for Law and Religious Studies. She is also a Distinguished Research Affiliate of the Kellogg Institute of the University of Notre Dame and participates in the advisory board of the Journal of Law and Religion of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion (Emory University) & Cambridge University Press.



# Lay Centre retreat focuses on St. Paul

## By The Lay Centre

ROME — Looking forward to the traditional second-semester retreat Feb. 19, Lay Centre residents set off energetically down the Caelian Hill, past Circus Maximus and up the Aventine Hill towards the Pontifical University of St. Anselm. The 20-minute walk under a pale winter sun was a perfect beginning to the day.

The Lay Centre resident community currently hails from 12 countries: Brazil, Canada, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Romania, Ukraine, the United States, and Zambia. They are either studying at pontifical universities or working as young professionals in Vatican institutions.

The one-day retreat offers a break from the daily routine and an opportunity for The Lay Centre community for spiritual renewal and relationship building. The group was accompanied by Lay Centre Director Donna Orsuto, Deputy Director Filipe Domingues, and Community Life Coordinator Isaias Marcano.

They were greeted at St. Anselm by Father Edmund Power, OSB, abbot emeritus of St. Paul's Outside the Walls and currently archivist at St. Anselm. He led retreatants throughout the day in a reflection on one of the most important characters for Christianity and for the Church in Rome — St. Paul.

The retreat began with morning prayer, led by Lay Centre Leadership Scholar Loredana Fabijanac. Father Power then led a reflection on Christian leadership. The students gathered in small groups to share their thoughts and enjoyed some quiet time in the gardens on the south side of St. Anselm, overlooking Rome's Testaccio neighborhood. The morning ended with mid-day prayer.

A festive lunch followed at a nearby restaurant.

Restored and refreshed, the group set off after lunch by subway to the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls. Some members of The Lay Centre community had attended Vespers with Pope Francis there on Jan. 25, at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Father Power shared insights with the retreatants into the basilica and the Benedictine community.

Retreatants began at the fountain in the quadriportico of the early 13th-century Benedictine cloister (main photo), and then moved to the most recently



constructed part of the basilica, the atrium. From there, they entered the basilica proper and made their way toward the apostle's tomb.

The retreat portion of the day ended at the foot of Arnolfo di Cambio's late 13th-century altar baldacchino, just above the confessio of St. Paul's tomb. But the Lay Centre community remained in the basilica for prayer, confession, and to explore some of the basilica's treasures. There was time for coffee, too! Finally, everyone gathered for Vespers in the colonnaded atrium before heading back to The Lay Centre.

"My favourite memory of the morning sessions was the introduction by Father Edmund of our English word 'text' as deriving from the Latin verb 'to weave' — texo, texere, texui, textum," said William Cooper, a doctoral student in archaeology at the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology, who is originally from Alaska.

He noted that the image chosen for the retreat booklet was one of Paul weaving by Antonio Berti. He said "the etymological connection between Paul's profession as a tent maker and his avocation as a letter writer was a fun one for me."

Amanda Achtman, from Canada, who is studying at the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, said the retreat offered her a day of renewal and "some orientation for the new semester to help us hold together certain paradoxes that are key for Christian life."

"Father Edmund led us in reflection on St. Paul and several questions on leadership and focus. He highlighted four traits of St. Paul's character, including his passionate love of Christ, life of prayer, unrestricted missionary zeal, and personality in tension, yet fully alive," she continued.

"As a community, we had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of always speaking the truth to one another in love," she said.



## Good news from alumni around the world

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — The past few weeks have ushered in good news from Lay Centre alumni around the world.

On Jan. 13, Dr. Sylvia Mullins (2012-14) of the United States and her husband, Michael, living in Helsinki, announced the birth of their daughter, Hazel. Ten days later, Jan. 23, Canadian alumna Katerine Perrault (2012-14) and her husband, Kenneth, living in Montreal, announced the birth of their son, Kristof.

Our congratulations also go out to Lay Centre alumnus Diogo Pessotto (2021), who successfully defended his doctoral thesis Feb. 9 at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. Since the defense was online, a number of Lay Centre residents and staff were able to follow it from Rome.

Pessotto's thesis is entitled, "Espírito e reforma. A noção teológica de reforma eclesial à luz dos enunciados pneumatológicos do magistério recente," concentrated on the theological concept of church reform, from the Second Vatican Council to Pope Francis.

Pessotto recently started working at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná in southwest Brazil as a manager in the area of identity and mission.

Photos below courtesy Diogo Pessotto - Defending his thesis on Zoom and a day in the park with his family.



# Lay women and men travel thousands of miles to study in Rome

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — Welcoming new students to The Lay Centre is always a very special moment. Just days before the start of the second semester, five new students crossed our threshold.

They travelled from as far as Mexico and Kazakhstan to study in Rome.

Aigerim Dyussenova is from Kazakhstan and is sponsored by the Nostra Aetate Foundation, set up by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to promote dialogue, mainly by according grants to people of other religions who wish to study Christianity.

Four students came from different dioceses in Mexico to study for one semester for the diploma in safeguarding at the Institute of Anthropology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. They are: Aida Aguirre Alonso (Archdiocese of Hermosillo), Liliana Sánchez Tirado (Archdiocese of Tijuana), María Guadalupe González de Costilla (Archdiocese of Monterrey), and Diana Fabiola Hernandez Guevara (Territorial Prelature of Mixes - Archdiocese of Antequera).

We also had the pleasure of welcoming returning leadership scholar Bruno Hermes de Oliveira Santos, who was in his native Brazil, where he was carrying out field research for his doctoral work in social sciences at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

We wish them well as they start their studies.

Are you thinking of studying at one of the pontifical universities or institutes in Rome? Contact us at [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org)



# Retreat facilitator studies spiritual theology in Rome

## By The Lay Centre

Eileen Meinert (centre) with Lay Centre residents heading to St. Peter's for Holy Mass with Pope Francis - opening of the Synod on Synodality, Oct. 2021

ROME — Eileen Meinert is concluding a diploma in spiritual theology at the [Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas](#). She began the course online in February 2021 and did her last semester in Rome. Originally from Houston, Eileen holds a master's in philosophy from the [University of St. Thomas Houston](#). She earned a certificate in spiritual direction in 2013, and soon after trained to give the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

She sees people for spiritual direction — on her big outdoor porch since COVID-19 — gives retreats, and is the head of a team of volunteers who provide retreats and ongoing spiritual companionship to people who have experienced homelessness and are in recovery from addiction. She has served as a catechist, spiritual director, and retreat facilitator, which she intends to continue after her studies.

She has been married for 22 years to David, an engineer. They have a 20-year-old son, John. In addition to conversations over coffee, she enjoys exercising outdoors, gardening, travel, and dancing.

We asked Eileen to talk about her studies and time in Rome and to share some of her favourite photos with us.

What led you to study for a diploma in spiritual theology at the Angelicum?

The long-ago root of the story is that as an undergraduate I ignored a desire to study theology and it could only be ignored so long! The more pertinent information is that in seeing people for spiritual direction, I listen to stories of their spiritual lives as they seek to grow in their relationship with God. So, I wanted to study more thoroughly, and in a more academic way than what was offered in my spiritual direction certificate program, the area called spiritual theology. Spiritual theology is hard to define but, in a nutshell, it is the juncture of moral theology with the lived experience of God around the question, “What is my heart’s deepest desires?” Spiritual theology includes studying people who had deep





spiritual lives — like Catherine of Siena and the Desert Fathers — and studying the way the spiritual life develops and matures in a person.

There is no accredited program in the United States. I knew the Angelicum had what I wanted, but when it kept coming up as the only place to study I repeatedly said, “Well, I am not going to Rome,” since I am married and had a son in high school at the time. The Angelicum does not have accreditation for online education.

One morning in January 2021, I woke up with a thought: “I wonder if the Angelicum is online because of COVID.” I had not been thinking about this at all, but there it was that morning. Yes, classes were all online, and it was the final week of registration. I found out that a normal course load is six classes, which meant I could finish half of the program in one semester, so I signed up, not knowing if I’d ever complete the second half. My husband is a dear man and, when I asked his thoughts about the possibility of my going to Rome for a semester, he said, “Well, that’s a really long time!” But yes, he was willing.

St. Catherine of Siena, Eileen’s favourite statue, can be found at the end of Via della Conciliazione, near Castel Sant’Angelo. “She apparently walked to Mass at St. Peter’s often, and I just like this purposeful stride she has,” said Eileen. “I think it captures her spirit.”

What were the challenges of studying online?

The biggest challenge for me was the general lack of interaction of the class with the professor. I am, however, that person in the class who will ask the question when no one else will, which was more of a stretch online with no one else asking questions, but still I did it. When I arrived to class in person, I learned that people remembered me — and my bookcase which appeared in my Zoom view — because I was the one that interacted with the professors. It ended up giving me a connection to people I had only seen online before.

The Lay Centre has been your home during your stay in Rome. How has the experience of living in an international and interreligious community enriched your time here?

There is so much new information, seeds of awareness planted and a cross-fertilization of ideas that it’s actually a bit overwhelming. That overwhelm is good though because it makes me see myself more clearly and it enriches my perspective. It has been said that experiencing Rome helps one to see that we are



all “standing on the shoulders of giants.” Living in the community of The Lay Centre helps me to be clear that I am standing shoulder-to-shoulder with people of great heart, mind and will to serve the Church. My heart is full with the richness of sharing in this community.

Sunset from Eileen's window at The Lay Centre

How will your studies help you in serving the Church?

Among other things, my classes have clarified and validated some of my instincts and given me words to address and ways to approach some common spiritual issues. I became fascinated with the dynamics of the Desert Fathers and would like to find a way to bring some of their style of living spirituality into the parish. In general, I have more awareness of and appreciation for the fellowship of all the sinner-saints who have gone before us. I also have many new avenues to consider for retreat topics.

Could you give some advice to people thinking about coming to Rome to study at one of the pontifical universities?

If God has planted that desire in you, look for how he is making the way possible. Remember that an education in Rome is not simply the education at the university. The city and its history and the people you will meet from so many places and variety of backgrounds, cultures and faith traditions will enrich your life in ways you won't even know until later. It is completely manageable, especially with living at The Lay Centre. And if a woman who hasn't studied in decades can do it, then you can too!

Eileen with Lay Centre residents pushing carts of food to our nearby parish, Santa Maria in Domnica, for the Monthly charity collection.

The Lay Centre is accepting applications for 2022-2023. For more information click [here](#) or email [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org)

# Ecumenical dialogue, spirituality and sacred art: Pope Francis' trip to Cyprus leaves lasting impression

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — Pope Francis' trip to Cyprus was both a historic event and a peaceful visit to one of the most ancient centres of Christianity, said Lay Centre alumnus Philippos Demosthenous, who lives in Cyprus and has a personal connection to the papal visit.

The pope's itinerary included a visit with Archbishop Chrysostomos II, leader of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. The two religious leaders discussed the current problems facing countries worldwide. They also discussed the matter of the territories that have been under the control of the Turkish army since 1974, resulting in 200,000 Greek Orthodox refugees and 520 occupied churches.

Immediately after the meeting, the archbishop and the pope visited the new cathedral dedicated to St. Barnabas the Apostle, patron and founder of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus. The cathedral choir sang a hymn (or apolytikion) of St. Barnabas, directed by musicologist Demetrios Demosthenous, who is Philippos' uncle.

The homilies of the two ecclesiastical leaders were followed by the exchange of commemorative gifts. The archbishop presented the pope with a sacred icon written in the style of the Palaeologue era, which spanned from the mid-13th to mid-15th centuries. The icon depicts the "Panagia Odegetria" — in English, "the one who shows the way." It depicts the Mother of God holding the Child Jesus in one arm and gesturing toward him with her free hand. The icon bears the inscription "Panachrantos," which in English means "most pure one."

The pope reciprocated with a volume of the Pauline letters, a replica of the ancient manuscripts in the Vatican.

Philippos, who is a member of the Byzantine Academy of Cyprus, described the meeting as a "historic event of deep spirituality and recognition of sacred and ecclesiastical art." He also works in the preservation and restoration of ancient monuments and ecclesiastical and cultural heritage with the Restoration



Laboratory for Ancient Icons, Books and Manuscripts at the Orthodox Archbishopric of Cyprus.

His father, who is a priest of the Church of Cyprus, was introduced to Pope Francis by the archbishop as the calligrapher of the cathedral's Book of Gospels, which was on display in front of the golden doors of the church's iconostasis (or icon screen).

Father Demosthenis Demosthenous' work includes 80 miniatures representing stories from the life of Christ and the Resurrection. His work took five years to complete. The pope congratulated Father Demosthenis and inquired about this artistic and spiritual work representative of Cypriot Byzantine hagiography.

The cathedral's Book of Gospels, also called the "Evangelion Cathredrico," forms part of the treasures of the cathedral and is used only for historical events and meetings of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus.

Pope Francis is not the first pontiff to make a visit to Cyprus. Benedict XVI had visited Cyprus in 2010.



# Studies in Rome prepare scholar for career in international business

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — Just back from their winter break, Lay Centre residents quickly organized for the monthly food collection for our local parish, Santa Maria in Domnica.

Gabriele Calista from Pescara, Italy, is among a number of Lay Centre scholars who has thrown himself into the project, taking solidarity very seriously. However, it was Gabriele's last time helping out with the food collection, as he will complete his studies in the coming months and head off to start his career.

Gabriele is finishing up his studies for his licentiate in social sciences at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). His thesis is titled, "The Role of the Manager: Between Ethics and Competitiveness." He believes his studies have prepared him to contribute to the family business in the wine industry in Belgium.

Although Gabriele will work in the private sector, he recognizes that the extended knowledge of Catholic social teaching he gained in Rome has given him a humanized view of leadership, business and economics, which will stand him in good stead in the future.

Living at The Lay Centre also gave him "the opportunity to get to know people from around the world, the chance to broaden my horizons and learn about different cultures," said Gabriele. "If you want to work in a globalized environment and be part of an international team, the more you know about other people the better."

He also perfected his English while living at The Lay Centre and studied Chinese. Two more languages to add to his fluent French and native Italian.

We wish Gabriele well as he starts a new phase in his life.

# Bible study group reflects an overcoming prejudice, taboo

**By Monica Prandi**

ROME — Members of the Vatican Ambassadorial Women's Association (VAWA) gathered for their first Bible study of the year Jan. 11. They reflected on the stories of two women in the Gospel of Mark, guided by the theme "A Woman Restored to Life: Overcoming Prejudice and Taboo."

In Mark 5:21-43, we read about two women who, while not knowing each other, both receive the gift of a new life through their encounter with Jesus. The passage begins with the dramatic news of the serious illness of a young girl. Jesus is moved by her father's faith and determination in seeking him out and sets out to visit the dying young woman.

Along the way, in the midst of the crowd that forms around the now famous teacher, an anonymous woman approaches Jesus in silence and discreetly touches the hem of his cloak. The woman has been suffering from a serious hemorrhage for 12 years and, after having tried everything to get better and spent all her riches, she decides to play her last card and entrusts herself to the power of Jesus.

In touching his cloak, she goes against Jewish law; she should not have done this in public. Furthermore, her loss of blood is connected with the concept of a lack of purity. But the woman's courage and faith push her to break "taboo" and the rules and to hope with all her might in the healing the Galilean preacher offers.

Not only is the woman healed, but she receives the attention of Jesus, who does not leave her in the shadows. He points to her as an example of true faith, declaring that her faith has given her salvation. Even if we do not know her name, we hear her called "daughter" by Jesus, who, with love and delicacy, gives her a healed life and a dignity as a loved person. With this healing, she can finally reintegrate fully into the community from which she was separated.

The story then turns back to the sick daughter who, in the meantime, has died. But death does not have the last word and Jesus revives her. She now has her full life ahead of her, a future, which death had almost stolen from her.



These two women offer witness to suffering and courage and to the barriers overcome by great faith and by placing oneself in the hands of Jesus of Nazareth who, today as then, can restore hope even when situations seem impossible.

VAWA will meet again next month for another Bible study. The theme for the program for the entire year is "Biblical Women Who Turned Their World Upside Down."

Bible Study meeting January 2022



# Lay Centre connection leads to surprise encounter in Istanbul

**By Heather Walker**

ROME — When Lay Centre scholar Amanda Achtman planned her Christmas break in Turkey, little did she know that she would meet up with Lay Centre alumna Dr. Betül Avci, associate professor of religious studies at [Ibn Haldun University](#) near Istanbul.

The Canadian scholar received a very warm “Lay Centre” welcome from Dr. Avci, who showed her some significant landmarks, including a rooftop view of the 16th-century Süleymaniye Mosque, where the longest-reigning sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Suleiman I, and his wife are buried. It was the largest mosque in Istanbul until 2019, when a larger mosque was completed.

Dr. Avci also shared stories over lunch of her time in Rome, including her meetings with St. John Paul II.

She is the first Muslim to complete her doctorate in missiology at the [Pontifical Gregorian University](#) in Rome in 2012, where she also completed a licentiate in interreligious studies. She earned a master’s in Islamic studies from the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Her academic work is in comparative theology, Muslim-Christian relations, cultural-religious translation, and alternative contemporary spiritualities. She is currently compiling an oral history on her family between the Late Ottoman and Early Republican eras, and she is editing a book on alternative spiritualities in contemporary Turkey.

Achtman is currently studying in the licentiate program in Judaic Studies and Jewish-Christian relations at the Gregorian’s [Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies](#). Prior to her studies in Rome, she worked as senior advisor in the office of Canadian Member of Parliament Garnett Genuis, shadow minister for international development and human rights. She earned a master’s degree in John Paul II Philosophical Studies from the [Catholic University of Lublin](#).

**The Lay Centre** welcomes scholars from around the world each year. For more information, please contact: [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org)