

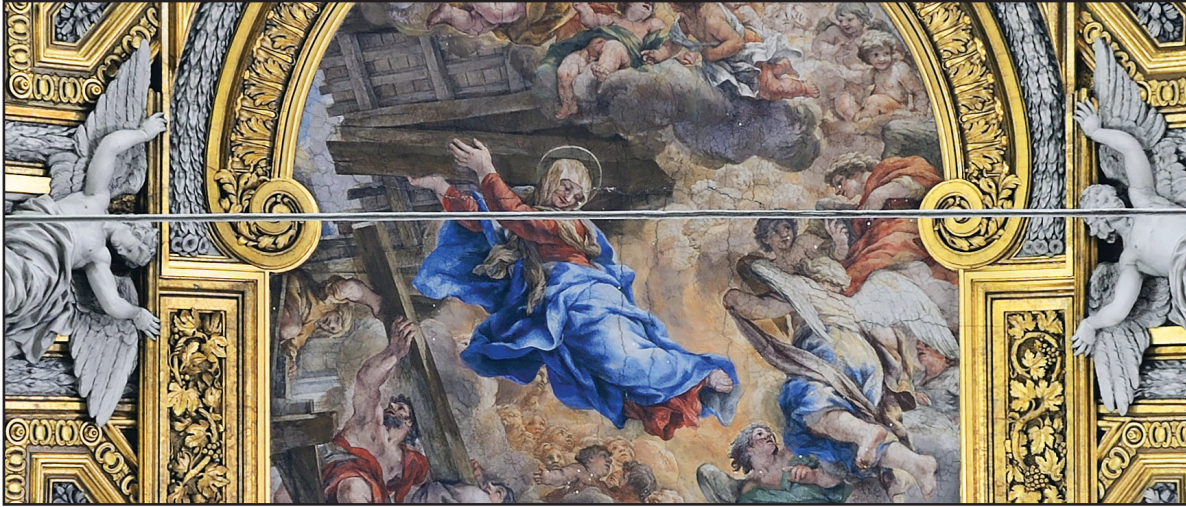


THE ORATORY TIMES

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1

NOVEMBER 20, 2023

“Magnify the Lord” Oratory Entrusts Capital Campaign to Mary



A painting on the church's ceiling in Vallicella, depicting St. Philip Neri's dream of Our Lady holding up the main supporting beam and keeping the roof from caving in.

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

It was the year 1576 and the reconstruction of Santa Maria in Vallicella – the new home of the Oratory – was underway. That is, until St. Philip Neri halted construction. “Last night,” he explained, “I saw the Holy Mother of God, who was holding [the roof] up with her own hands.” The workmen were astonished. Upon inspection, the main beam that supported the roof was off its support. Quick work was made to ensure the entire roof structure was properly supported.

We are in a similar situation. We are not rebuilding an entire Church, nor are we in danger of imminent collapse, but we are recognizing the miraculous work of Our Lady in preserving the Oratory in a time of amazing growth. Now that the Oratory building at 4450 Bayard Street is hitting its thirty year anniversary, we once again are entrusting the building, its renewal, and the ministry to Mary,

the Mother of God.

In 1994, the current home of the Oratory was built. The Oratory is a home where “heart speaks to heart”, where we encounter Christ in the Eucharist and one another. Thirty years later, the Oratorian community and the campus ministry is thriving, but the building is in need of renewal. The windows and roof are at the end of their lifespan. The restrooms are crying out for a serious remodel. Better quality lighting is now possible. The Student Center is begging for a refresh. Further, our retreat house, Rednal, is in pressing need of repair and renovations that far exceed the capacity of our yearly Rednal Benefit.

Where there is a need for a beam of sorts is the choir loft. Our current prayer balcony is too small for the choir of students and professionals. It lacks the acoustics to allow their voices to fill the chapel. Our current electric organ is holding us back – not only is it in need

of repair, but it also lacks the subtlety, nuance, and beauty of an actual pipe organ. With this capital campaign, we hope to raise funds for a pipe organ (custom designed by legendary organ builder Paul Fritts) and to install a beam across the back of the chapel to support an expanded choir loft and the new pipe organ. Practically, this is the only way to squeeze more space out of this small but intimate chapel and significantly increase the beauty of our sacred music.

Supporting our buildings, our sacred music, and our campus ministry ensures stability and the conditions for further growth. In this edition of the Oratory Times are the very promising results of the Capital Campaign Planning Study. We are hopeful that you can help us raise the full amount to positively impact university students and the whole Pittsburgh area, leading us all into a deeper praise of God.

Together, let us magnify the Lord.

Br. Leo on Six Months as a Deacon

By Rev. Br. Leo Dornan, C.O.

Before my ordination to the diaconate, I often prayed with and reflected on a series of homilies about the diaconate from Pope Benedict XVI. Throughout these homilies he reminds his listeners that Holy Orders is an invitation to enter into communion with Christ as Priest and as Deacon. Following after Christ the Deacon, deacons are given the task of being servants who lead others to the Eucharist. I was able to experience this in a very tangible way this summer when I helped Fr. Thomas visit and bring the Eucharist to patients at St. Margaret’s Hospital. In this particular work I felt especially diaconal.

In a unique way, the deacon is to be among the people and familiar with their prayers, their needs, and their concerns. Visiting those hospitalized due to illness, I found they did not hesitate to share their spiritual needs with me in a way that spoke to their great faith. Christ came to be with us and serve us as Deacon; being granted the opportunity to live after His example and to bring Him in the Eucharist to those at St. Margaret’s was a beautiful experience. There is such a joy and a peace in concretely living out my vocation in this way.

But on top of all this, I was also struck by how much I still could not do. Often patients would ask to go to confession or to receive an anointing, but I would have to remind them that I cannot quite do that yet, and send Fr. Thomas in later. In almost every room I would enter, people would see my collar, understandably assume I must be a priest, and treat me as such. So, while I felt emboldened and moved by my new role as a deacon, there was still a sense of expectation and growth to a further ministry. Following after Christ as a deacon has already been an amazing few months, while at the same time I can look forward to the next step I will take in living out my vocation.

Campus Ministry Launches into New Academic Year

Number of Students in Bible Studies Doubled!

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

These first few months of classes have been incredibly fruitful.

We prayed for a great freshman class and God has not disappointed. Our Freshman Retreat was a huge success. I noted that students who were otherwise on the fringe with their faith came back to campus ready to grow ever closer to Christ in college. Now we are a few retreats and a Barn Dance into the year, and I am so encouraged to see these students in Bible Studies and in the chapel.

At Pitt, Wednesday 9:00pm Masses in Heinz Chapel are still a hit with students. Bible studies are up and running, with student participation double what it was last year. Outreach on campuses from the beginning of the semester has proven very fruitful!

At CMU, the FOCUS missionaries

there report unprecedented growth and interest from new students. Fr. Thomas has been doing amazing work with a weekly Mass and discussion group – “Chit Chats with Fr. Thomas” – exploring the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

We started a Sunday Mass on Chatham’s campus and I can tell there is a real appreciation that Christ is there for them in the Eucharist. They are a small campus, but they are close-knit. Each week, we see growth in attendance at that Sunday Mass, and I think we are on the cusp of something really great. We’re even in the process of getting a men’s Bible Study off the ground.

Every week at Pitt and Chatham, I’ll set up two chairs facing each other with a sign nearby that reads “Catholic Priest Available.” I’ve been doing this with some regularity since my ordination

six years ago. It makes me intentionally engaged in the life of the campuses. For the students I encounter, it can be their only connection to God. Curiously, the greatest number of students that stop by are non-Catholics. Usually I am the first priest they have ever talked to. Conversations quickly turn toward what is most important in their lives – their relationships and their desire for something greater. As Christians, we are all bridges to Christ. I suppose this is even more true for us priests.

It is happening: souls are encountering Christ, being transformed by Christ, and telling others of their friendship with Christ, all right here in the heart of Pittsburgh. This semester has already proven to hold a remarkable quantifiable witness to the power of Christ’s love, only to spread farther and more deeply as the year continues.

More Voices Join Heavenly Choirs

By Nicholas Will,
Director of Sacred Music

September is always an exciting time. Days are filled with activity, resuming familiar schedules, and meeting new people. We plow into our work with renewed energy after a summer's rest, rejuvenated and enthusiastic for new projects and goals. The sacred music program at the Oratory has much to be thankful for in the past year and much to look forward to in the next.

A personal highlight for me has been the weekly 9:00pm Mass on Wednesdays at Heinz Chapel, instituted in August, 2022. What a glorious sight to witness the Mass being celebrated in such a grand edifice! Our faithful Oratory Choir sings for this weekly Mass during the academic year and for the 11:00am Mass at the Oratory year-round. I am grateful for their dedication, and it's been a joy to witness their growth as singers.

Beautiful sacred music doesn't just happen. It requires dedication and training, and the Oratorians are committed to cultivating the art in future generations. Training in singing and organ playing is already happening at the Oratory on a daily basis, but a series of recently launched Fellowships in voice, organ, and conducting will expand our music program, our outreach to the community, and our ability to raise up this future generation of church musicians.



The Oratory Choir, lead by Director of Sacred Music Nicholas Will, beautifully resounds during Mass at Heinz Chapel.

Another new development this year has been the addition of music at the 5:15pm Mass on all feast days and solemnities (Monday through Friday). On feast days, the music roughly takes the form of the "organ Mass," a time-honored Catholic tradition in which the Low Mass (or spoken Mass) is clothed with beautiful organ music. It's our hope that this practice will help us to observe the liturgical year more fully and joyfully.

In addition to our weekly music-making, one of my favorite aspects of the Oratory's sacred music program is the way in which we observe certain events and feasts close to the Oratory's heart. Br. Leo's Diaconate Ordination was a glorious affair, complete with a 20-voice choir, organ, and brass ensemble, all featuring musical

masterworks spanning the breadth of our musical tradition. Additionally, we are thrilled that the Oratory Choir was joined by the Schola Cantorum of South Hills Catholic Academy for our Feast of St. John Henry Newman Mass at Heinz Chapel on Monday, October 9. The choir is a very impressive (and large) group under the able leadership of Mr. Joseph Helinski, a friend of the Oratory. It was a particularly poignant moment for me, as I was serving double duty as organist/director and proud dad of a singer in the SHCA Schola Cantorum.

In all things musical, we remain committed to the vision and example of St. Philip Neri, who so faithfully supported sacred music and musician colleagues in Rome. May God continue to bless our growth and good work in His Name. St. Philip Neri, pray for us!

Rev Br. Leo Dornan, C.O. to be Ordained to the Priesthood



May 11, 2024
10:00am

Saint Paul Cathedral

All are invited to the priestly ordination of Rev. Br. Leo Dornan, C.O.

Light reception to follow.

Please keep Br. Leo in your prayers as he makes the final preparations for ordination and for his ministry as a priest at the Oratory.

Fr. Reed Goes Back to School

Looking forward to the coming years at Notre Dame

By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

Like many, the first reason I ever visited the University of Notre Dame was to attend a football game. I journeyed to South Bend with two friends, Conner and Sean, and watched the Fighting Irish lose to Duke. On that visit, little did I know while walking around campus that tucked between "Touchdown Jesus" and Notre Dame Stadium was Malloy Hall, home to the Department of Theology, where some of the finest theological minds in the country did their work.

A couple of years later, I began studies at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, and realized that two of the most learned and enjoyable professors in the seminary earned a PhD at Notre Dame: Dr. Owen Phelan in Medieval Studies and Msgr. Michael Heintz in Patristics. So, when it came time for me to think about doctoral studies, it was quite natural for Our Lady's university to be on the list of options.

As I considered that list, the best advice I received was, "don't think about programs; think about people." Whereas at the undergraduate or early graduate level, a student might have some 20 or 40 different professors over his or her years, at the doctoral level,

a student works closely with a limited number of professors, and especially with a single individual who directs his or her dissertation over the course of a few years. When I started thinking about doctoral studies in light of this, Notre Dame became the obvious choice: the people I would most want to spend years talking with were at Notre Dame. After being admitted to the doctoral program with an eight-year scholarship (we're hoping it doesn't take that long!), the choice was easy: I was going to Notre Dame.

I am pursuing a PhD in Theology with a concentration in systematic theology. Systematic theology revolves around two basic questions: "who is God?" and "what has He done for us?" I'm particularly interested in questions in the field of Christology (the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ) and philosophical theology.

The course of studies consists of two years of coursework, a year of preparing for and completing candidacy exams, and the following years to write the dissertation. The summers are spent focusing on languages—by the end of my third year I need to pass exams in French, Latin, and German. I am happy to report that French is already done!

While doctoral studies are a year-

round occupation, I do have the usual breaks of an academic calendar and I already look forward to my visits to The Pittsburgh Oratory, which will always be home.

While the University of Notre Dame is not without its blemishes, the people

here are wonderful, and I think it is the finest place for me to receive advanced intellectual formation so that I can best serve the Oratory and the Church in Pittsburgh. I think I'll also enjoy some more Saturday football games.



Fr. Reed in front of the famous "golden dome" at the University of Notre Dame.

“Ask the Provost” with Fr. Michael Darcy, C.O.



The public was asked to submit questions of any type for Fr. Michael to discuss. From Oratorian life to treasure hunting, Fr. Michael responds below.

Fr. Mike, what do you like best about being an Oratorian?

The best part of being an Oratorian is community life. It is wonderful to share a great life with great priests and priests-to-be. Our prayer together is inspiring and our social time together is full of edifying discussion and funny stories. A close second is being at the center of a dynamic ministry. I receive wonderful compliments from people who express their gratitude for the Oratory. It is gratifying to hear, but from my perspective as a priest it is wonderful to participate in a ministry that produces so much fruit and attracts so many supportive people excited about their faith.

How has Pittsburgh changed since you first became an Oratorian?

I first came to Pittsburgh in 1997 and a lot has changed since I first came. Back then there was a lot of talk of the number of people leaving the city and the need to attract businesses to keep the city alive. It seems to me there is less of that sort of discussion now and the city seems busier and more vibrant than it did back then. That seems particularly true of Oakland, where the Oratory is located. In the course of my time here, The University of Pittsburgh has built a great reputation as one of the best public schools in the nation, and Carnegie Mellon has remained a world-class institution that generates economic activity for Oakland and the city as a whole. I am sure that has a lot to do with the changes I have seen. It is exciting to be in a position to minister in a community that is active and growing.

The Oratory seems to have “opted out” of the vocations crisis that is prevalent in the Church. To what do you ascribe the Oratory’s success in having a plethora of vocations?

We have had a number of vocations in the past few years which is gratifying, but we have had a few departures too. So we have had our ups and downs.

Even so, I feel great about the Oratory’s future. Signs of grace are all around us: the ministry is flourishing, the reach of our activity is expanding, and, yes, we have a number of great, young members. We have had ordinations every year for the past four years and we have three more lined up (God willing) over the course of the next three or four years.

As far as I can tell, our vocations have come from our fidelity to the example of St. Philip Neri. He established a pattern of life, and over the years I have seen consistently that those Oratories that remain faithful to it succeed and those that do not struggle. We have had our struggles too, but these have inspired us to greater fidelity. That process continues, but by now we have solidly in place a number of practices that sustain us and I think explain our growth: the reverent and beautiful celebration of the sacraments, especially Mass and Confessions, Eucharistic Adoration, and a common life organized around prayer.

Fr. Mike, I’ve heard some stories about you treasure hunting. Where did you go and how did you hear about the treasure? Was it treasure you found, or was the treasure just the friends you made along the way?

Yes, I went in pursuit of the “Forrest Fenn” treasure. Forrest Fenn was an eccentric antiquities collector who wanted to encourage people to go into the outdoors and be adventurous, so he hid a treasure chest full of gold coins and other valuables. He released a poem that contained clues to the location of the treasure and invited people to try to find it. My friend worked out a solution to the clues and invited me to tag along on his search. I was the Sancho Panza to his Don Quixote. We went to Southwest Colorado with a mutual friend of ours who also happens to be a priest. We spent a few days camping, praying, and yes, hunting for treasure. It was a great time, but, alas, no chest of gold doubloons. Our adventure included time spent at a camp in a forest of Ponderosa pine trees near Durango, Colorado that gave out an amazing flowery pine scent. I will never forget it.

By the way, the Fenn treasure was found in December of 2021 by a medical student from Michigan. The exact location of the treasure has not been officially revealed but it seems to be the case that Mr. Fenn hid it in Yellowstone National Park on the bank of the Madison River near his favorite fishing hole. That is slightly more than 700 miles from where we were looking. I know that sounds bad, but I was glad to hear it. To my way of thinking, being a long way off is better than a near miss: I won’t have to live with the regret of having been within 10 feet of fame and fortune!

Continued on Page 8

Foosball Tradition Endures: If Foosball Tables Could Talk

By The Old Foosball Table

The Oratory maintains a tradition that goes back twenty years. Every time someone loses a game of foosball 10-0, they have to write their name on me and woefully earn the title of being “under the table.” Since arriving in the Oratory Game Room many years ago, I’ve acquired 72 signatures (with many more that are unrecognizable due to the use of a pen, a less permanent instrument). The picture of the bottom of the table and my transcription of the names is below. Many notable greats of the Newman Center have suffered the dishonor of being forced to write their name on me.

The immaculate victor of the improbable foosball contest does not have his or her name recorded on me. Instead, it is those that fell in ten consecutive points whose names are remembered. It is not a celebration of pride, but rather one of humility. In every game played afterwards, the humbled remembers that I am marked by their appellation. What begins in shame ends in honor, as they can tell others that they themselves have suffered complete loss. Here, we recall the words of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*:

*He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say ‘To-morrow is Saint Crispian.’
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say ‘These wounds I had on Crispian’s day.’
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he’ll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words—
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester—
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember’d.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,*

*But we in it shall be remember’d—
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother.*

With every goal ten times repeated uninterruptedly marring my underside, I serve as a reminder that we share more in Christ’s humility in every humiliation.

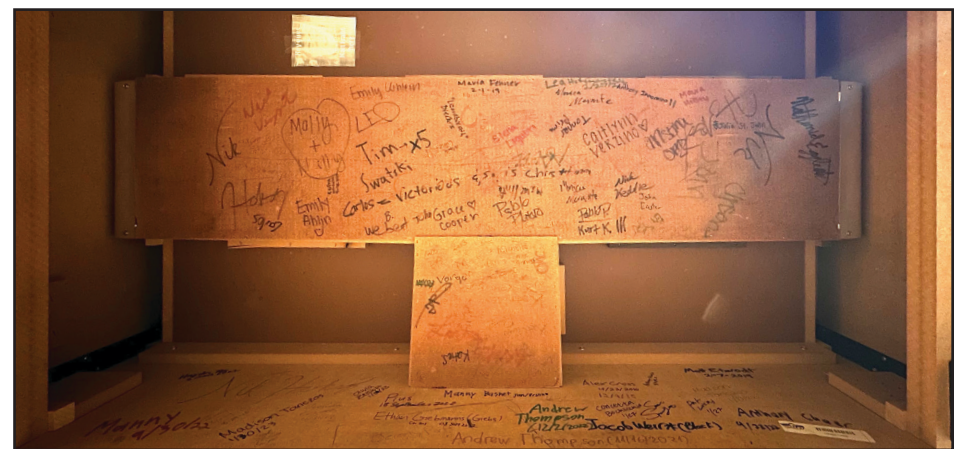
Now that I have come to see old age, I am retired to the basement of the Fratican. My lesser plastic parts broken, the black side players unable to stay pinned in, I am resigned to live out the remainder of my life, bearing in my own body the scars of defeat.

At my side, many brothers have been made, and their names remember’d.

A new table, younger and less-wounded, takes my place. Two names have been added: freshmen at CMU – the victor anonymous. The tradition continues.

The Fallen

Nik Hokaj	Kiera Segan
Nik Hokaj	Matthew Zischkau
Julia St. John	Manny Basnet
Caitlynn Verzino	Manny Basnet
Nick Keddie	Hayden Stec
John Easter	Vayda Farino
Pablo Platero	Gianmarco Febres
Kurt Kessler	Aaron Keehan
Maura Hilsey	Zach Wells
Christina Ortiz	Augustine McDermott
Tanner Prime	Scott McLeod x2
Monica Merante	Knox Martsof
Lea Hoffmaster	Ethan (Giebs)
Anthony Immormino	Ethan Giebmanns
Elena Ligouri	Ebrahim (Bob)
Maria Fenner	Quan Tran
Monica Merante	Grace Cooper
Pablo Platero	Carlos
“Lizard Breath” Dierkes	Andrew Thompson
Tim Swatski x5	Andrew Thompson
Emily Ahlin	Pius
Molly & Nelly	Olivia Zeisloft
Nick Hokaj	Jeremy Paff
Nick Vezzuto x2	Madison Tanczos
Carlos	Madison Tanczos
Leo	Manny
Emily Uihlein	Hayden Stec
Mark Littlefield	Alex Cross
Mikey Vargo	Concetta Bochicchio
Lars	Sean Springer
Lars	Anthony Scholle
Lars	Anthony Chaer
Lars	Pat Lucas
Michelle	Jacob Weir
Katie S.	Joseph P. Gruber
Nathaniel Eggleston	P.J. Gruber



Generations of names inscribed on the bottom of the foosball table.



Students and Oratorians alike battle head to head in hopes of foosball victory, and even greater triumph to get their opponent “under the table.”

Interview with a Student - Hunter Kelley

Hunter Kelley is a junior at the University of Pittsburgh where he studies psychology. He's originally from Williamsport, PA.

Tell me about how you became involved in the Newman Center.

I started out kind of rocky. My first year, before I had faith at all, I didn't have many friends. I was looking for the purpose for my life. At the end of my freshman year, my RA at my dorm asked if I wanted to go to Mass. I had no clue what Mass was. I remember going to an old pointy building (St. Paul Cathedral). That started my journey. I felt this sense of longing and for once I felt like I had hope of it being fulfilled. I came back in the Fall and I found the Newman Club. The FOCUS Missionaries eased me into it, helping me with my social anxiety. I started RCIA at St. Paul's and Keith [FOCUS Missionary] was my godparent when I came into the Church. His was the first Bible Study I attended. I felt close enough to him to ask questions and be helped along the process of becoming Catholic. I was invited to Seek [FOCUS Conference] and I was impressed by all the priests and 17,000 other students! Because I was going to daily Mass there, I kept that going when I came back. I was baptized and received into the Church on April 8, 2023. I now feel like I have a purpose.

Tell me about your experience this past summer at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Camp.

My growth in my Catholic faith led me to want to give back. I heard from my RCIA director and another student at Newman about Our Lady of Mount Carmel Camp (a summer camp run by Dry Bones Ministry in Volant, PA). I signed up and interviewed to be a camp counselor when I wasn't even yet Catholic! When I came to camp, I didn't know what to expect. It forced me out of my comfort zone. I grew a lot closer to the other counselors and camp staff at OLMC than I ever expected. It was amazing to see how Christ is working both through them and the campers.

How does the Oratory and the Catholic student community form you in your spiritual life?

Having the Oratory to lean on has been really good for my spiritual growth. Even just being able to have a place to go to when I need someone to talk to, there's always people here willing to listen. It's crazy having so many priests available and so many confession times. I didn't know that you could reach out to a priest for spiritual direction until I found out from the other Newman students in the Discord [online group chat]. Fr. Stephen has really helped me out. He's



Hunter (left) and friends catch up after summer break at the Newman Center Cookout during Kick Off Week.

a convert himself, and his perspective on a lot of things really relates to me. He's been there to help talk me through and to encourage me to persevere in the battles I'm going through.

Can you speak to the importance of Catholic friendship and community here?

Without having these personal connections in your difficult moments, it's easy to fall and stay down. The friendships I have here give me courage to live my life as God calls me to. I learn from how they live out their faith, and they learn from me as well.

What do you look forward to most this year?

I'm looking forward to talking to newer people. I learned this summer at camp to let go of some of my social anxieties in meeting new people. I want to take the chances that come up to do that.

What are you most grateful for from your time at the Newman Center?

I'm most grateful for the community here. There's only a few that live out their lives and become saints as hermits. But for everyone else, we need community to remind us that we are not in this alone. We have help carrying our crosses.

Building Christ-Centered Friendships at Rednal

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

"Students shared their hearts with each other for the first time."

Amanda, one of our Pitt FOCUS Missionaries, recounts the experience of students on retreat at Rednal. In a world that is more connected than ever before, we are ever more isolated. Inhibited from encountering others by screens and airpods while walking the streets of Oakland, students often feel like they have no other choice but to close themselves off from the world around them. However, Rednal opens them up to a world of depth and meaning, a world where they are loved by God and made for relationship with Him. In the peace and stillness felt at Rednal, they lay bare their hearts to Christ and to each other.

This semester so far saw five retreats, two Barn Dances, and one picnic. Away from the heaviness of college, Rednal provides a place where students enter into the joy of life with Christ.

The Oratory purchased the old farmhouse and 87 acres on Piper Road in 1967. Since then, it has proved an invaluable asset. We have added on whole sections of the house and transformed the landscape, clearing fields and dotting the hills with Stations of the Cross and Mysteries of the Rosary. Matt Ketcham, the most recent caretaker at Rednal, has handled projects and repairs, large and small.



New Student Retreat, Fall '23



Young Adult and Undergraduate Student Barn Dances

But we have some serious work still to be done!

Remember the septic project that we successfully fundraised for two years ago? We are now finally at the stage where we are drafting plans for a stream discharge septic system. The process was elongated by red tape and the inner workings of governmental bureaucracy, but it is underway. Optimistically, the new system will be installed this upcoming summer.

Other projects of similar scale are ahead of us. The new stresses from expanding the house and adding septic pumps are forcing us to look at

the possibility of rewiring the older portions of the house and adding another electric panel. The siding on the house is at the end of its lifespan, as is the main section of the roof. The upholstery in the kitchen and the conference room furniture haven't held up over the years. Chimney repair looks like a necessity. The foundation under the kitchen needs to be rebuilt. The well water system could benefit from additional underground water storage tanks. Inefficient electric baseboard heaters can be replaced with heating and cooling mini splits.

On the horizon are some major

fundraising efforts to make these necessities and aspirations into reality.

In our fifty-six years owning this parcel of land nestled in the hills of Ligonier, we have never regretted investing in Rednal, as it is truly an investment in the upcoming generation's relationship with Christ and their Christ-centered friendships. With your support and the support of all of the friends of the Oratory, this place is a blessing for all of us here.

We hope you can join us in supporting Christ-centered friendships at this year's Rednal Benefit on Saturday, February 10!

ExplOratory: 2023 Mission Trips & Pilgrimages

Christ in Colorado

By Fr. Thomas Skamai, C.O.

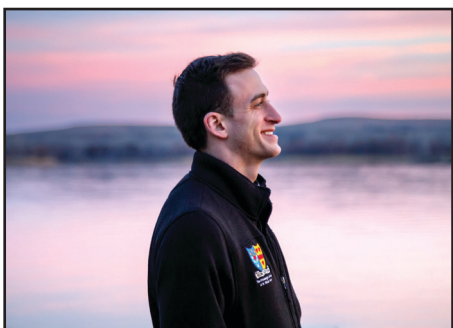
This past March, a group of thirteen students and I journeyed from Pittsburgh to Denver over spring break. We served with an organization called Christ in the City, whose mission is to become friends with the homeless and marginalized, encountering Christ within them and leading them closer to Him. In reflecting on this trip, there are at least three things that stand out to me.

The first is adventure. In my old age, I had really hoped to fly to Denver, but the students insisted on driving. With two minivans full of college students, the spirit of adventure abounded. We stopped to pray at a few churches along the way, saw a fire-breathing dragon in Illinois, ate some authentic barbecue in Missouri, and admired some fascinating rock formations in Kansas and Colorado.

Second, I was struck by our students' spirit of prayer. Once we arrived in Denver, we joined with students from several places across the country and

were immersed almost immediately into a fairly tight schedule. Yet, somehow it seemed that every time I went into the chapel for a few moments of prayer, there were students from Pittsburgh praying – and many times the only students in there! St. Teresa of Calcutta was right to insist that time with Christ in the Eucharist is essential for encountering Christ in the poor.

Hence, the third thing that stands out to me in reflection of our trip is encountering Christ in those we served. In stepping out of our comfort zones to care for the burdened and neglected, we encountered Christ in each person we met. In the Gospels, Jesus identified himself with the poor. Meeting the humanity of these people who have suffered much, yet remain hopeful and grateful, was a way of meeting the humble humanity of Jesus Christ. Thus, the adventure that we set out on and our seeking God in prayer led to its appropriate end in each of us: a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ.



A Mission Trip to Peru



Amanda, Pitt students, and other missionaries help build stairs outside Lima, Peru.

By Amanda Emerson, FOCUS Missionary, University of Pittsburgh

This article was originally written for and published by the Arlington Catholic Herald on March 24, 2023, and is republished here with permission.

I have been serving as a Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) missionary at the University of Pittsburgh for about seven months now, and it has been the best and most transformative time of my life.

We started talking about taking a mission trip with students back in August, and to see this trip come alive and to see students encounter Jesus all over again on the trip was the most incredible experience. For our recent spring break trip, March 3-12, 14 students, six missionaries and the chaplain from Pittsburgh traveled to Peru to serve in the mountains and desert shantytowns outside Lima.

For each trip, FOCUS partners with a local religious order, apostolate or organization that understands the

community's greatest need. Some teams serve the homeless and renovate community infrastructure, while others teach children or provide patient care services at medical clinics.

In Peru, we partnered with a local organization to meet this community's greatest need by evangelizing there and helping the residents to live a more dignified life. We built relationships with them as we built public staircases for them.

Our days would start with hiking about a mile up the mountain with lots of rock scrambles and treacherous conditions, a route that did not faze the locals, who make the trek daily. Then, we would greet the residents and catch up with all the kids, playing games, holding them, laughing and spending time together.

After that, we would get into the construction of the stairs. Some of us would mix concrete, while others would stand along the staircases to help

Continued on Page 6

Fr. Peter Leads Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

By Fr. Peter Gruber, C.O.

The Holy Land is not a land of peace. The earth that Christ walked has been riddled by wars and conflict throughout its history. From the ruins of the Temple to the Crusader castles, from the fortress of Masada to the Iron Dome, it is a land of profound conflict – not peace but the sword.

Likewise, my trip to the Holy Land began not in peace but in disaster.

The group – one priest (myself), seven students, three FOCUS missionaries, and two university alumni – was split up due to a canceled flight. After a night of minimal sleep, eight of us went to Frankfurt, Germany and five of us went to Dubai, United Arab Emirates. I got to see the tallest building in the world, a modern day Babel of greed and consumerism in the Burj Khalifa. Not exactly the beginning of the pilgrimage I expected!

We all arrived in Amman, Jordan (some of us without our luggage), and I celebrated Mass in a hotel with the supplies in my carry-on. Hardly the

holy ground I was hoping for, but I was grateful I packed my Mass kit separately!

All together and likely sleep deprived, we took an abbreviated trip to Petra, the tomb city of an ancient pagan civilization, and the backdrop of the ending of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. One of our pilgrims had his watch discretely stolen by a horse lender. Another hotel Mass, another day.

From Amman, we traveled to Mount Nebo, the vantage point from which Moses looked on the Promised Land. We celebrated the Mass of St. Moses (each location in the Holy Land has a special Mass for the location) and reflected on how Moses could only behold the promise, but we behold *and* receive the Eucharist. After Mass, the tour guide tracked me down to tell me I had left my laptop in Amman. Our entrance into Israel had to be delayed a few hours. At the border, I lost twenty dollars to an opportunistic Jordanian border agent. Crossing the Jordan

Continued on Page 6

Campus Ministry Recap



Students and Oratorians play volleyball on the Cathedral of Learning lawn.



Chicken wings at the Newman Center after Heinz Chapel Mass, "Wings & a Prayer."



Student service event, making bagged lunches for those in need.

A Mission Trip to Peru

Continued from Page 5

the locals pour the concrete and level it off. The locals would prepare lunch for us, and we would eat with them and the children.

In the afternoon, we played with the children on the basketball court, and really entered into a time of relationship-building with them. We would then head out and reflect as a group on our days up on the mountain.

It was no coincidence for me that this mission trip took place during Lent, where I encountered great poverty while physically being up on a mountain and in the desert. Going up the mountain, Jesus asks us to leave our possessions and attachments behind. It makes hiking up the mountain easier when we drop whatever it is that is preventing us from bringing our freest hearts there. It is also here that we are able to see more clearly what areas of our hearts are poor.

The joy of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ meets us in our brokenness and loves us deeply in our poorest places. I was able to encounter this in my own heart, but especially in seeing our students encounter this in their relationship-building with the neighbors.

The people who lived in these shantytowns are some of the poorest of

the poor, and loved with all their hearts — and the students really met them in that love.

A student who went on the trip with us, Regan Quigley, shared a stunning testament to how the trip changed her heart for good.

"Encountering true poverty allowed me to see where authentic joy comes from," she said. "A week is not that long, but little by little, each interaction brought us closer with one another and thus, so much closer to Christ. The language barrier between English and Spanish, though an obstacle at first, allowed us to communicate in a deeper way: through truth and charity. Being stripped of the supposed comforts of the life I am accustomed to allowed me to be so filled and free to let Christ pour himself into my heart and those around me. And I am confident in saying that it is not a trip-high or a fleeting flood of happiness but a radical conversion of heart and realization of identity and purpose."

I think this trip will take a lifetime to unpack. The fruits of encountering poverty in the neighbors and in our own hearts will last throughout the rest of college for these students and into their lifelong mission. Going on this trip was a great blessing as we start to bring this year at Pittsburgh to a close.

The Oratory Welcomes New Staff



Lindsey with her husband, Mark

If you've noticed another new face around the Oratory and at the Front desk, that would be our new Development Coordinator, Lindsey Gilloon! With our growing needs, we've hired Lindsey to handle all the internal operations as it relates to our development efforts.

Lindsey's History:

I grew up in Pawling, NY, a small town about two hours north of New York City (Fun Fact, it's the town that James Earl Jones lives in and where parts of the movie *A Quiet Place* was filmed). I'm the second oldest of six kids. In following my older sister's footsteps, I decided to go to Franciscan University, where I got a BA in Communications and a Minor in Theology. When I was a junior at Franciscan, my parents moved to Steubenville and it's where they happily reside today. Come 2025, all of my siblings will have graduated from Franciscan!

After graduation, I commuted into Pittsburgh from Steubenville and worked down the street from the Oratory on McKee Place. While I came to love the city, after a few years of long commutes and work unaffiliated with my degree, I decided to move to Maryland to take advantage of an opportunity to work at a branding and marketing agency. During this time, I developed a deep longing to be back in Pittsburgh and decided to move back in July of 2020. I tried my hand in a few different roles, including real estate, before happily landing at the Oratory in April 2023!

Shortly after starting at the Oratory, I got married to my husband, Mark, and we are currently living in Carnegie.

Lindsey's Interests:

In addition to the classic pastime of spending time with my family and friends, I love reading, anything creative (I make rosaries out of dried flowers), running (though not as frequently as I'd like), cooking, Monopoly Deal, and enjoying being a newlywed!

Fun fact about Lindsey:

I've been to 14 countries!

Lindsey's Work:

My time here at the Oratory has been spent on the internal operations of development! Sometimes that means I'll be at the front desk greeting visitors, while most other times I'm in the back office. I'll also be heavily involved in the operations and organization with the upcoming capital campaign!

Fr. Peter Leads Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Continued from Page 5

River was not as glorious as it was for Joshua.

Settling into our hotel in Nazareth, the next day was our main day at the Sea of Galilee. I made sure we could offer Mass on the Mount of Transfiguration. Apparently our new tour guide did not know that daily Mass was non-negotiable! In the Chapel of St. Moses in the Church of the Transfiguration, we let the words "This is my beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased" reverberate in our hearts, as we made full use of the acoustics of the chapel with the *Missa de angelis* Mass parts.

While visiting the sites along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, our tour bus broke down, and as we waited for a new bus we played games outside under a palm tree, our joy undeterred. As a result of the delay, our time in each of these holy sites was reduced to pithy ten minute visits. We had to weave through large and boisterous tour groups. We knew not to be attached to any preconceived notions of what this pilgrimage would be like. At least we had plenty of shawarma!

On a boat on the Sea of Galilee, we opted to forego loud music and traditional Israeli dance. With the wind blowing, the sun shining, and the neighboring boats not observing silence, we attempted an hour of silent prayer. I prayed we would have time to just sit on the shore and be still. It was on my heart to share with the twelve a reflection that I had found very meaningful.



Fr. Peter and his fellow Holy Land pilgrims at the Sea of Galilee.

Afterwards, we made our way to Magdala. From the recently built church there, there was a pathway to the shore of the sea with no other tourists around. I asked the tour guide if we could spend some time there. Sitting with our feet in the water, I read the account of the finding of the fish with the temple tax, the miracle that follows the account of the Transfiguration in St. Matthew's Gospel. I then read a chapter from Dom Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori's *Simon Called Peter*. In this account, Jesus makes clear to Peter that the sons do not need to pay taxes. "However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and for you." It dawns on Peter that

he is a beloved son of God the Father. After catching a fish with the one shekel temple tax coin in his mouth, he utters his first real prayer to his Father, tears streaming from his eyes as he sits on the shore. Unbeknownst to me while I was reading, a large (almost two feet long) catfish swims up to our group — the same kind of fish that Peter caught! Reflecting on the love of God the Father for each of us, we remained for at least thirty minutes, still and peaceful, only to be interrupted by the splash of a large stone in the sea — our tour guide needed us to get back to the hotel.

As we get on the bus, one of our students, James, finds a one shekel coin on the floor of the bus. That is enough "for me and for you," I tell him. God, our Father, is looking after us.

Children’s Holy Half-Hour: Not Just for Kids



Children and families light candles for Benediction and sing a litany of the children’s patron saints during the Children’s Holy Half-Hour.



By Adrienne DiCicco

In no small part because of the Oratory, Adoration is one of my favorite devotions. But, it can be a difficult devotion to instill in small children. My children take it at face value that Our Lord is present on the altar, but to interest them in sitting still for an hour is usually out of the question. In my experience, stopping in for Adoration with a five-year-old and a two-year-old is a wild affair: storm into the chapel, herd the children into a pew, struggle to keep them quiet for five minutes, and then leave in two.

Because of this difficulty, I can’t fully express the blessing that the Children’s Holy Half-Hour has been for our family. It’s very much an extension of the formation that I received as a young adult at the Oratory. The “smells and bells” that are so important to our Catholic faith convey to our children in tangible ways what is happening spiritually during Adoration. They learn praise through hymns, reverence through kneeling, the raising of our hearts and minds to Our Lord through incense, and giving

all to God through lighting candles (though I have no qualms about blowing out my children’s candles when the occasion arises). I especially appreciate the Oratorians’ involvement in the Children’s Holy Half-Hour. The same care and dedication that they show in their ministries is bestowed on a smaller scale to these little ones.

However, if I’m perfectly honest, I’m certain that I benefit more from the Holy Half-Hour than my children. I’m prone to getting caught up in the craziness of my life and sometimes forget that God is in charge and that I can and must do all things through Him and for Him. One of the most effective ways to restore my fervor is to put the truths of Catholicism in simple, childlike ways, while also being present, in both noise and in quiet, with my children. Our Lord bids the children to come to Him, and that includes the children the Holy Half-Hour was designed for, as well as their parents. I leave the Children’s Holy Half-Hour breathless each month, not just because of how much Our Lord loves us, but also because of the exertion of corralling my children.

The Financial Times

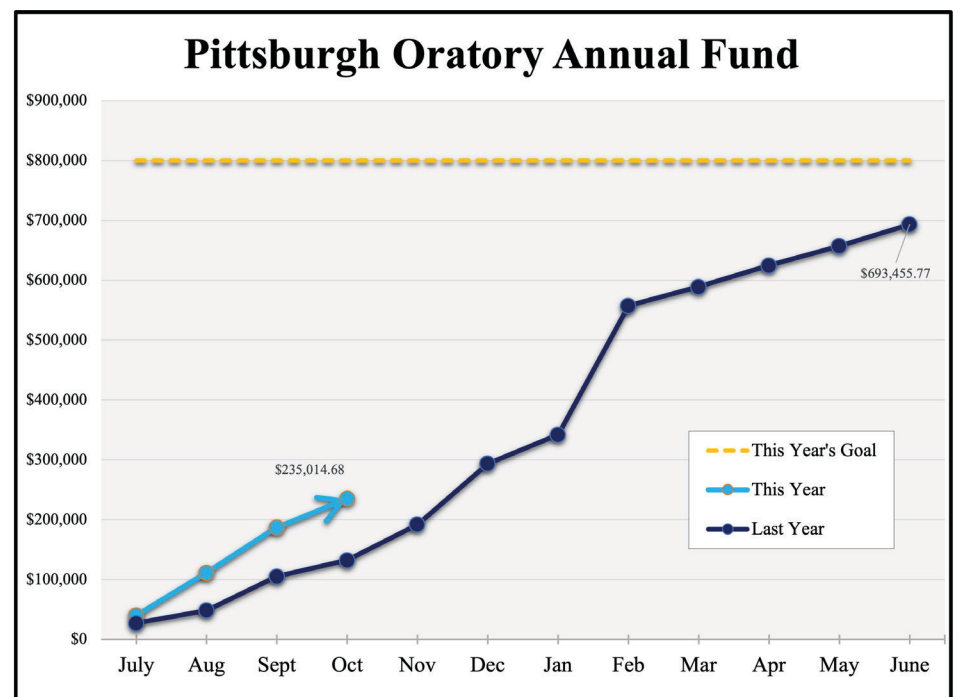
By Fr. Reed Frey, C.O.

Thanks to the loyal and generous spirit our friends have shown us over the past year, we have been able to expand our ministries in an exciting way. We have seen dynamic growth in the campus ministry at our universities with more student involvement and with greater vibrancy in our events. We have also expanded our Sacred Music Ministry, with our Director, Nicholas Will, bringing greater dignity at 5:15pm Oratory Masses on Feasts and Solemnities with the presence of organists and cantors. We have also been able to expand the pedagogical dimension of our Sacred Music Ministry by adding fellowship programs in vocals, choral conducting, and organ so that our students can receive individual attention from Nick, and have the opportunity to play and sing at our liturgies.

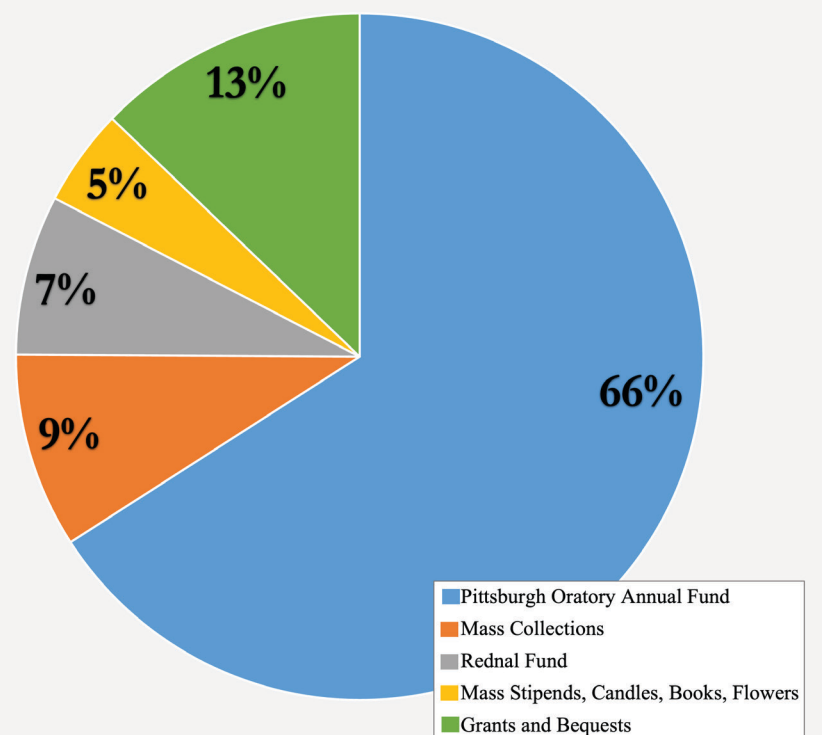
In the past year, we have witnessed Fr. Thomas’ priestly ministry bearing great fruit, both in campus ministry and in his work as a hospital chaplain. We also added Br. Matthew to our ranks, as he furthers his formation through his novitiate.

This growth serves as the evidence of the lively and active work of the Holy Spirit at the Oratory and on our campuses. However, this growth requires a commensurate growth in funds. We count on your trust and generosity to help us continue to grow our ministries. Your gifts are investments in us, our ministries, and the many people we serve.

This year, we have set an Annual Fund goal of \$800,000. This is a \$50,000 increase (approximately 6.6%) compared to last year’s Annual Fund, and we count on your support to allow us to reach our goal.



Total Donations Overview 2022-2023



Legacy, Stock, and IRA Giving

The Oratory is able to accept your legacy and non-cash gifts, which can be liquidated to assist with immediate needs, or invested to support future ministry. Donating gifts of stocks, mutual funds, ETF’s, and other equities or non-cash assets can offer substantial tax savings. Appreciated investments can be donated directly to the Oratory without paying any capital gains tax, increasing the impact of your gift by up to 20%, while still receiving a deduction for the fair-market value of the asset from your federally taxable income. We are also able to receive Qualified Charitable Distributions from a Traditional IRA, which can be especially helpful if you do not need all of the funds for your required minimum distribution.

Please consider the Pittsburgh Oratory in your estate planning or when writing your will. Your bequest could support the ministry for years to come!

Non-cash gifts are easier to make than you might think. Contact Fr. Reed, Oratory Treasurer, for more information at 412.681.3181 or at reedfrey.co@gmail.com.

Ask the Provost

Continued from Page 3

What is the most life-changing book you have ever read?

That's a toughy. I will exclude the Bible or any book of it for the sake of making my answer more interesting! A book that was important to my formation as a Catholic is one titled *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, which was written by a great Catholic philosopher named Josef Pieper. That book was important to me in its own right, but also for being my first introduction to Josef Pieper and his many other works. I have read a number of his books since and all of them are fascinating and insightful. *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* was the first book I read that suggested to me that there is a distinctively Catholic way of looking at the world, Christian life, and human history, especially the history of ideas. It suggested to me the importance of thinking in a Catholic way, and I have tried to do that ever since.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that my exposure to *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* coincided with my first intimate acquaintance with T. S. Eliot. He wrote the introduction to the edition of Pieper's book that I read, and I was so impressed by it that I

began looking into his poetry. It made a lasting impression. Though Eliot never became Catholic (he was born a Unitarian, lapsed into agnosticism, and then returned to Christianity and ended his life as a High-Church Anglican), his poetic works are full of references to Catholic authors like Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare (yes, he was Catholic), St. John of the Cross, and even St. John Henry Newman (Eliot wrote a poem called "Gerontion" that was inspired by St. John Henry's "The Dream of Gerontius"). His work also includes references to the Bible that are very catholic in their approach to the significance of the scriptures. I think of him as having taught me how to read the Bible. Eliot has been called "the schoolmaster of the modern mind," and he functioned that way for me at an important point in my life.

Fr. Mike, several years ago while posting your thoughts at a Penguins game on your Twitter feed, you posed the question, "After what length of time since someone last touched their nachos is it appropriate to ask for a bite?" We were wondering, have you come up with an answer yet?

I found out the hard way that it is best to buy your own nachos.

What is the difference between an Oratorian and Diocesan Priest/Brother/Seminarian?

The single biggest difference is living at the Oratory! The essence of our vocation is life in community: living at the Oratory, praying together, and working together. In our lives as priests we have a lot in common with diocesan priests, but that is the single biggest difference.

What is your vision for the future of the Oratory?

My vision is no vision! St. Philip often said that he was not the founder of the Oratory. He gave all credit variously

to the Holy Spirit or the spouse of the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Virgin. He had no "master plan" with respect to the development of the Oratory and its progress. According to him, it came into being as he relied on the inspiration of the Spirit to make the most of the opportunities that presented themselves. I try to take the same approach. With as many talented and zealous people as there are here at the Oratory, opportunities are always presenting themselves. The great challenge has been to make the most of them. God will be the judge of how we have done.



(from left to right): Fr. Joshua Kibler, Br. Matthew Grzybowski, Fr. Thomas Skamai, Br. Kurt Kessler, Fr. Michael Darcy, Fr. Peter Gruber, Br. Leo Dorman, Fr. Reed Frey, Fr. Stephen Lowery

The Results Are In

See the very promising results from our capital campaign planning study below!



THE PITTSBURGH ORATORY
OF ST. PHILIP NERI

PLANNING STUDY RESULTS SUMMARY


A campaign planning study was recently conducted at the Oratory to assess our needs and prepare for a possible capital campaign. Thank you to everyone who participated. Your feedback and insights were extremely valuable in determining our next course of action. We are happy to share this summary report which highlights the key study findings and recommendations for proceeding.

PARTICIPATION

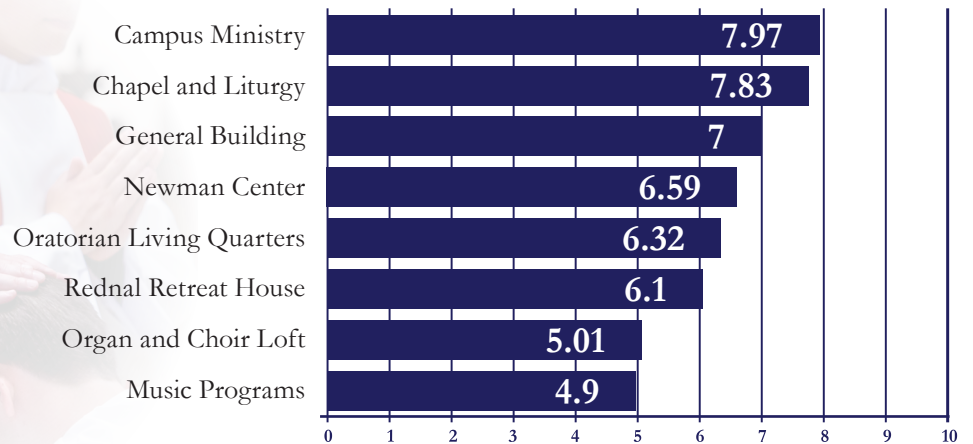
 **57** personal interviews

 **123** mail and after-Mass survey responses

 **% who will make a gift**
Yes: 92%
No: 6% | Unsure: 1%

 **50**
No. of people who will volunteer

PRIORITY OF GOALS



Scores were calculated by assigning a value of 10 points for a high priority, 5 points for a moderate priority and 0 points for a low priority. The cumulative value for each project was then divided by the number of responses for that project.

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

- People appreciate the reverent nature of the Oratory, the Perpetual Adoration program and the availability of sacraments.
- Study participants strongly support the campus ministry of the Oratory. Many referenced the impact that ministry had on their lives when they were in college.
- Participants also consider all of the maintenance projects to be moderate to high priorities.
- The high percentage of people who will give to a campaign and the number of people who will help with the effort are strong indicators of the ability to conduct a successful campaign.
- For the Oratory to run a successful campaign, it needs to broaden its current base of supporters.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the positive feedback from this study, the Oratorians voted to move forward immediately with a capital campaign to address the initiatives proposed in the study. Detailed funding goals will be finalized during the preparation phase of the campaign.

We are very pleased to see the number of people who agreed to help with the campaign. Over the next several weeks we will be confirming those commitments as we form the campaign leadership and volunteer teams. Please consider volunteering if you are asked.

In the coming weeks we will communicate details of the campaign and keep everyone informed of its progress. Please pray for its success as we look to further our mission and expand our ministries here in Pittsburgh.