

## Christmas 2008

When St. Francis of Assisi asked how he could best mark the Lord's birthday in the Italian village of Greccio, he decided to orchestrate a "live" Nativity scene inviting local people to participate, to remind his friends that "out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem." As we arrange our Christmas Nativity set here at the Lay Centre, we remember you, our dear friends, and hope that out of our homes, a "new Bethlehem" is made where we can imitate the confidence and trust of Mary and Joseph as they contemplate the Christ Child in simplicity, poverty, and humility.

**Best wishes for a Blessed Christmas  
and a Happy New Year!**

*Donna Orsuto*



**"Finally, the day of joy has drawn near,  
the time of exultation has come....  
Indeed, the manger is prepared...  
There simplicity is given a place of honor,  
poverty is exalted,  
humility is commended...."**

*Text from the Life of St. Francis of Assisi by Thomas of Celano (XXX)  
Photo of the Nativity from Sacro Speco in Subiaco (Anonymous, 13th century)  
courtesy of Sr Jean Orsuto*

### Lay Centre Alumni News from Around the World: Congratulations to the Recent New Doctors

Several former Lay Centre students have recently completed their doctorates. On 27 November, the Lay Centre celebrated a "double" Thanksgiving because Jean Kabahizi defended his doctoral thesis on that day at the Gregorian University in the Social Science Faculty. His thesis was entitled *L'impact de l'agriculture subventionnée sur les pays en développement: Implication dans la crise du secteur cotonnier en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Afterwards, he and his Rwandan friends gathered at the Lay Centre for a festive American Thanksgiving meal with turkey and all the trimmings. On the exact same day in Lebanon, Luna Farhat finished her doctorate at the Lebanese University in the Law Faculty. Her thesis was entitled *Religious Freedom in Comparative Law*. On 29 November, Lejla Demiri's graduation ceremony took place in Cambridge, England. Lejla did her Ph.D at the

Divinity Faculty. Her thesis was entitled *A Medieval Muslim Commentary on the Bible: Najm al-Din al-Tufi's Response to the Christians*. She is now working as a research fellow at Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge. Congratulations also go to Andrius Gudauskus whose doctoral defense at the Gregorian University in Social Communications was on 4 December. His thesis was entitled *Lo stile cinematografico di Andrej Tarkovskij. Una strada verso l'esperienza della trascendenza*. Finally, special congratulations go to Theresa Notare who received her Ph.D at the Catholic University of America in Church History on 31 October. Her thesis was on the Lambeth Conference of 1930's Resolution #15 as the first official break in the Christian moral tradition on the issue of birth control. Theresa stayed at the Lay Centre in 1986 when it first opened. She works at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.



(Left to right) Donna Orsuto, Lejla Demiri and Dr. Timothy Winter.



Jean Kabahizi from Rwanda finished his doctorate this fall.

## Art & Spirituality Are the Focus of the New VPI Course Beginning 8 January 2009

The age of Bernini, Borromini and Pietro da Cortona possessed a vision of spirituality through art that remains unrivaled in Rome's history. Please join us for **Faith Alive in the Art of Baroque Rome**, an inspiring four week course in which Dr. Elizabeth Lev will explore some of the artistic treasures in the Eternal City and the faith which inspired their creation. Thursday mornings from 9:30 until 12 noon: 8, 15, 22 & 29 January. Each morning features two 45 minute presentations and discussions, a coffee break and the opportunity to participate in the Celebration of the Eucharist. *The first day of the course will conclude with a light luncheon at 12 noon at the Lay Centre.* To register and for more information about this program, please contact us: [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org).



*Dr. Elizabeth Lev teaches art history at Duquesne University's Rome campus. She also writes for Inside the Vatican and is a regular contributor to the Zenit news agency.*

## Announcing the Patrick and Mary Dorgan 2009 VPI Memorial Lenten Weekend Retreat

The VPI is organizing a weekend retreat in Rome from Friday, 6 March through Sunday, 9 March. For the second year in a row, the retreat will be held at the Retreat House of the Passionist Fathers. The retreat, entitled "To Walk in the Newness of Life (Romans 6:4)," will be led by Rev. Timothy Costello, SM, a psychologist and professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The weekend will help us reflect on what it means to be alive in Christ as we journey through the forty days of preparation for the Easter Triduum. To register and for more information, please contact us: [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org).

## Register Now for New 2009 Study Programs

Three exciting new study programs have been announced for the new year. Please visit [www.laycentre.org](http://www.laycentre.org) for the latest schedule and information about **St Paul the Apostle for Today: A Pauline Year Prayerful Study Program** (14 April - 19 April); **Women at the Well: Witnesses to Contemplative Living** (30 May - 6 June) and the **Third Annual Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: Rome Seminar** (1 July - 6 July).

*If you would like to receive this newsletter and other publicity by email, please write: [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org).*

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009

The Lay Centre will once again co-sponsor an event to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Centro Pro Unione on the Piazza Navona. This year's Ecumenical Lecture, entitled "The Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Oriental Churches 2004-2008," will be offered by Rev. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Rector of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm. The lecture will be followed by an Ecumenical Celebration of the Word at which Rev. Msgr. Roderick Strange, the Rector of the Pontifical Beda College, will preside, and the Very Rev. David Richardson, Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome will preach. RSVP before 14 January: [info@laycentre.org](mailto:info@laycentre.org).

## Lay Centre Expands Its Resident Community

This new academic year 2008-2009, has seen a significant growth in the Lay Centre resident student community. In order to house six extra students, we have opened up a satellite Lay Centre at the Passionists' General Curia on the Caelian Hill in Rome. Affectionately referred to as "Lay Centre II," the new space includes six bedrooms, a small kitchen, bathroom facilities and a laundry room. The students come to the Lay Centre on the grounds of the Pontifical Irish College for all of their meals, for common prayer and for community meetings. Eleven students continue to live at "Lay Centre I" where the administrative offices, classroom, dining room, and chapel of the Lay Centre are located.

## Save the Date: the Annual Benefit Evening for the Lay Centre in Washington DC

Date: Tuesday, 10 February 2009

Place: Georgetown Visitation

Time: 18:30 - 21:30

Vespers, Reception and Presentation

***Our Brother Paul: The Apostle and His Message for the 21st Century***

Rev. Donald Senior, CP & Dr. Aurelie Hagstrom

For more information: [Nelindsay@aol.com](mailto:Nelindsay@aol.com)



*A view of one of the gardens on the grounds of the Passionist Monastery. Six of the Lay Centre students now live in a completely separate part of the property. Pictured are the Passionist Retreat House, the bell tower of the Basilica of Sts John and Paul and the monastery.*