

Fourth Annual ACCU Rome Seminar: *una magnifica esperienza!*

By Hunt Helm

It would have been worth it just for the vicarious thrill of seeing our colleague, Rev. Augustine Kelly, OSB, of St. Anselm's College, experience his first visit to St. Benedict's cavern, and the Monastery of the Sacro Speco.

It would have been worth it just to meet the instantly loveable and approachable Monsignor Charles Burns, OBE, at a marvelous lunch at the residence of the British Embassy to the Holy See -- and then to learn from others that "Charlie" was the retired head of the Vatican's Secret Archives.

It would have been worth it just for the hour-long visit to the awesome *Redemptoris Mater* Chapel in the Apostolic Palace – and then, on the way out, to pass by the Papal Residence, and see a large doorbell.

But the Fourth Annual Rome Seminar of the Association of Catholic Colleges & Universities (June 15-19, 2008) was so much more.

It was an opportunity to meet 16 colleagues from nine American Catholic colleges and universities, and to engage with them in the real experience of the officials of Rome, and overcome any preconceived notions of church bureaucracy we might have had. It was an opportunity to share the good things we are doing on our campuses, with each other and with officials in Rome.

The highlight of the seminar was our general audience with the Pope. We had rare, great seats on the platform, off to the side and just a few rows back. And our group applauded when we were identified as being among the English speaking groups.

It was amazing to look at the crowd – tens of thousands of Catholics from all over the world – to think that equal numbers come to St. Peter's to see the Pope every Wednesday, and then to contemplate what that means about the breadth and depth of the Catholic faith.

We visited the amazing, daily 5:30 p.m. service and "light show" at the Church of the Gesu, and then Rev. Michael Paul Gallagher, SJ, gave us a thought-provoking guided visit to the rooms of St. Ignatius.

And of course we had excellent daily sessions on topics such as "Understanding the Structure and Mission of the Holy See," "Promoting Ecumenism in Catholic Higher Education," "The Spiritual Principles of Catholic Education" and "Mission, Identity and the Future of Catholic Higher Education."

Throughout this trip of a lifetime, we were in excellent hands while learning a city most of us did not know well. Michael Galligan-Stierle, vice president of the ACCU, Donna Orsuto, director of the Lay Centre in Rome, and Robert White, the Lay Centre's assistant director, were the most gracious hosts and the perfect tour guides. They planned a very full schedule of activities that were intellectually challenging and spiritually stimulating. And they executed this very full schedule with grace and precision.

Plus, we ate well!

And finally, Bellarmine University President Dr. Joseph J. McGowan, who sent me and two of my vice presidential peers to this year's seminar, generously gave us time to do some of our own exploring when

the seminar was over. I not only made a trip to St. Ignatius Church, to see St. Robert Bellarmine's mortal remains, light a candle and visit with P. Ferruccio Romanin, SJ, the rector, but also had time for a visit to Montepulciano, Tuscany's loftiest hill town, where Bellarmine was born.

All in all, *una magnifica esperienza!*

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