

# Hallowed Legacies: A Golden Jubilee Celebration



**T**his year the Pontifical North American College celebrates its fiftieth anniversary on the Janiculum Hill. Our priestly house of prayer and formation is grateful for its enduring history and rejoices as it continues to work for Christ and his Church. To mark this momentous occasion, William Cardinal Keeler '56, who in fact was a second year theologian when the new College was dedicated, presided at the celebration of the

Eucharist for the College community on October 14. Also, William Cardinal Baum generously donated a signed portrait of Blessed Pius IX at the Anniversary Banquet that evening. The fifty year history is one that is interwoven with the early story of the United States and of its Catholic episcopacy.

The American Church held its first formal plenary council in Baltimore in 1852, with six archbishops and 35 suf-

fragan bishops attending. At that time, Pope Pius IX, who had traveled extensively throughout the western hemisphere as a papal delegate before his election to the papacy, sought to internationalize Rome and called on the hierarchies of the New World to establish houses of formation in the Eternal City. Pius IX made one such invitation to the American bishops at the Baltimore Council; the bishops joyfully accepted the invitation and resolved to have an American seminary built in Rome. It was not until seven years later that the College was created in an old convent on Humility Street. In 1859, twelve seminarians, including the nephew of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, from diverse regional cultures, came to Rome to continue to make the history of the College.

Decades later, with great sadness, the College closed its doors as the United States prepared for the Second World War. After the war, however, the College reopened its doors and began to construct its new building. Now the American episcopacy could finally create the campus and facilities which had



always been only a dream and stretched hope. In 1953, the seminarians, coming from a united country bearing the noble scars of a just war, moved into their new home on the Janiculum Hill. Pope Pius XII visited the College and dedicated it himself, saying, "The united action taken in this matter by the American hierarchy, always so ready and generous in their support of all measures for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ, once more demonstrates the flourishing condition of the Faith in your great nation." It is this apostolic hospitality and venerable history that the Church in the United States and the alumni and friends of

College hosted the American bishops as they established their general committee to coordinate participation in the Second Vatican Council. This

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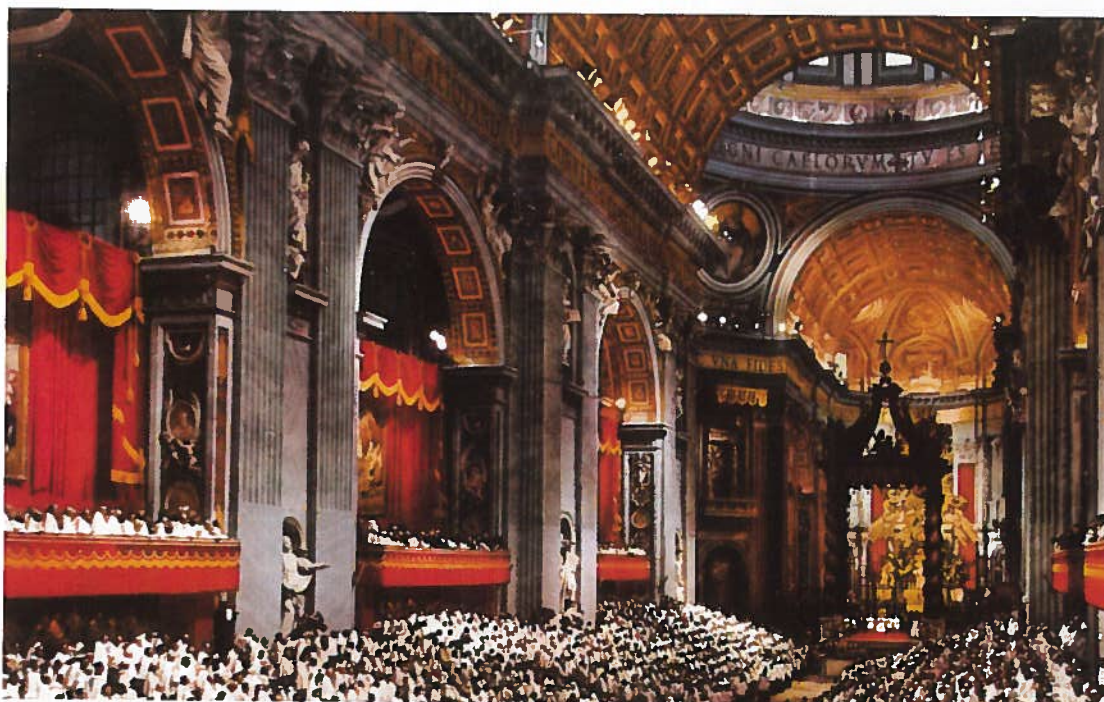
meeting, and the almost weekly meetings of the American episcopacy thereafter, was the impetus and hallmark of

American involvement in the Council.

Since the United States had sent only 48 Fathers to Vatican I in 1868, the universal Church was surprised when it sent one of the largest contingencies with 240 Fathers, along with a staff of over 400, to Vatican II. This opportunity helped the American hierarchy to emerge and enter into the universal ecclesial scene. Even though the bishops were unable to live at the College because of their numbers, they still used the College as their meeting area, research station, and rally point.

In addition to being an institution for the discernment and formation of future priests, the College showed itself

capable of assisting in the Church's own discernment of herself and contributed to its formation of authentic reform and renewal during Vatican II. The openness and availability of the American fathers to one another, and their ability to exchange and argue points and documents among themselves, would have been extremely difficult



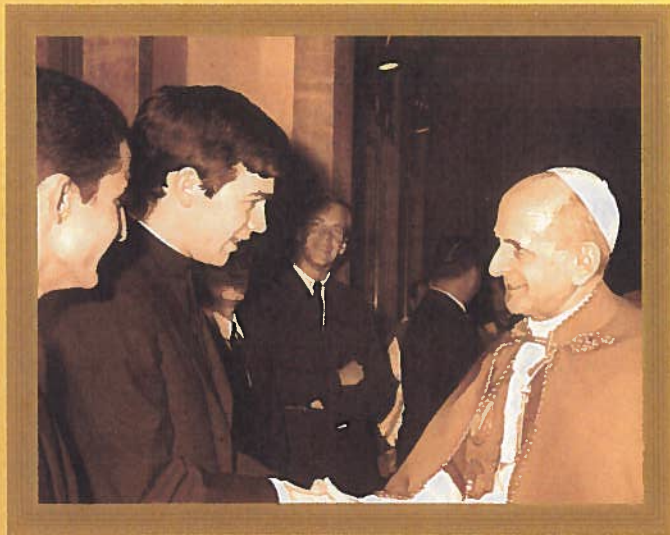
*Above: Vatican Council II in session*

the College fondly remember and emotionally celebrate this year.

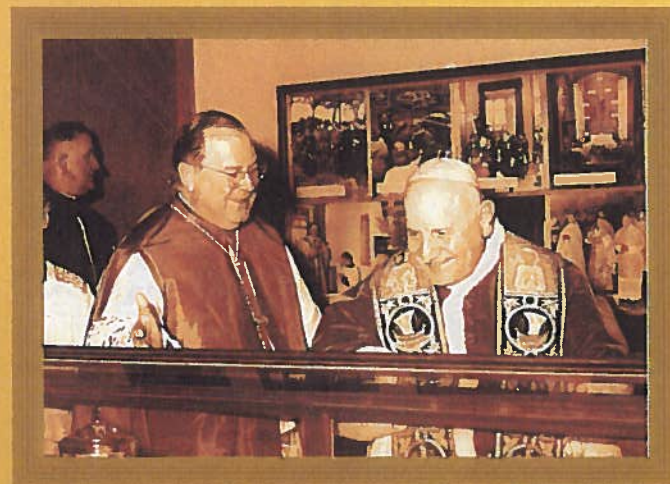
One of the defining moments in the College's fifty year history was its involvement with the Second Vatican Council. Less than a decade old, the new College was able to prove itself in assisting to shape the future of the Church. On October 21, 1962, the



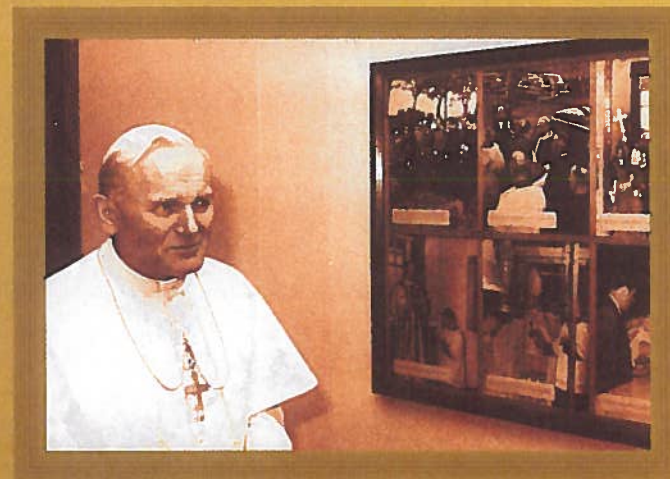
# The Popes' Visits to the College



*Pope Paul VI greets seminarians.*



*Pope John XXIII with Bishop O'Connor, rector.*



*Pope John Paul II noting the visits of his predecessors.*

without the North American College and its resources. The new building and the hospitality of the community greatly assisted the bishops in their historically unique ministry as Council Fathers. Taking advantage of the proximity of the College, the American bishops quickly made friends and entered into theological circles that enabled them to debate and to become a formidable influence in later sessions of the Council.



*Pope Pius XII blessing the assembly at the conclusion of the dedication, October 14, 1953.*

The North American College and its 144 year history, marking its fifty years on the Janiculum, is not only the mold for God to educate seminarians, but is also one of the molders of the life and ministry of the Church in the United States. On this anniversary, it unites its story with the story of the Church, and rejoices at God's providence over the Church in the United States and His gracious love for humanity.

*by Jeffrey Kirby  
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Class of 2006*

