



# St Patrick's College Maynooth

Summer 2020 Issue no. 7



Dr Neil Xavier O'Donoghue, delivers an online lecture in Systematic Theology from his study.

## Online teaching becomes college lifeline during COVID-19

**T**he President of St. Patrick's College Maynooth, Rev. Prof. Michael Mullaney has expressed his deep pride and gratitude to staff, students and seminarians for the positive manner in which they have collectively responded to the Coronavirus pandemic.

"On 12 March, when the Government announced the immediate closure of all schools and universities, the world we knew was turned upside down", explains Fr. Mullaney. "Our illusions of certainty and control were

shattered. We became fearful for the welfare of our loved ones. We were profoundly confronted with our collective and personal fragility and mortality," he says.

Yet within a fortnight, an effective alternative teaching regime had been put in place. "Although the cloisters were quiet and the campus empty of students, both the Pontifical University and the National Seminary had transitioned to teaching and learning online, with Faculty members and formators working remotely and

teaching their students virtually".

Thanks to the immediate availability of a hitherto under-utilised IT infrastructure which SPCM shares with its partner, Maynooth University, the Pontifical University and Seminary made a surprisingly smooth transition to being a virtual community of study, formation and prayer.

Working in this new virtual way is not without its challenges for teachers and students alike.

---

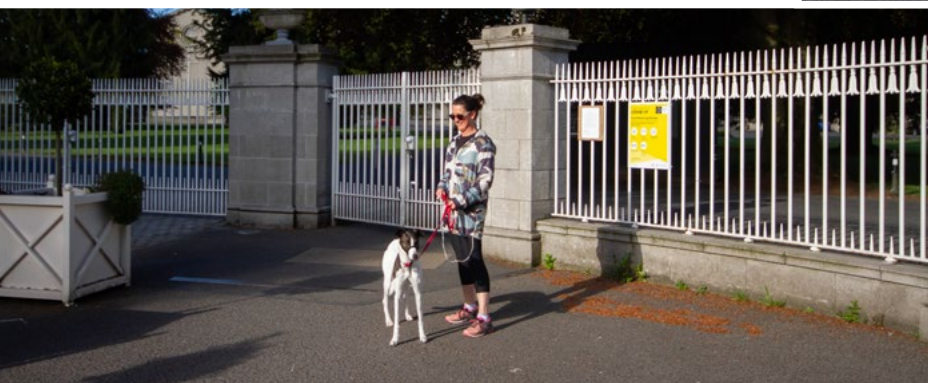
***"Teaching online is no substitute for one of our key attractions - being a small university community.***

---

We all miss the face to face interaction and engagement between staff and students, the banter and chat between colleagues and classmates. But despite the severe restrictions of COVID-19, the academic year could continue, so we are counting our blessings," concludes Prof. Mullaney.

# St. Patrick's a haven of serenity during lockdown

*The glorious 'pandemic' weather brought an unexpected bonus to the local community. To support the people of Maynooth, SPCM kept its pedestrian gates open. This meant that young families, joggers, dog-walkers and older neighbours came into St. Patrick's beautiful gardens and green open spaces in very large numbers every day.*





---

*"During our 225th Anniversary year, the lockdown provided St. Patrick's with an opportunity to strengthen our long-standing bonds with the local community, and especially with new residents and younger families, many of whom were visiting our grounds for the very first time," says College President Fr. Michael Mullaney.*

---



# Anglophone rectors gathered in Maynooth for 2020 conference

The National Seminary was honoured to host this year's *European Anglophone Rectors' (EAR) conference* from 17-21 February. Seminary Rectors from Ireland, England, Scotland and Malta spent time together reflecting on their experiences of implementing the insights of *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation (2016)* - the Vatican's latest guidance on priestly formation.

Of particular interest to the EAR were the insights provided by members of the Faculty of Theology (Drs Aoife McGrath, Declan Marmion, Kevin O'Gorman and Salvador Ryan) on new models of priestly formation. The Rectors were fulsome in their praise for Maynooth, in particular, for the quality of the liturgies, the warmth of the hospitality and the genuine collegiality they experienced during their time with us.

We look forward to the next EAR which is due to be hosted by the Maltese and Gozetan Rectors in February 2020, DV.

# Becoming a virtual Seminary Community

It felt like the end of the academic year and yet it was still only the middle of March. On a bright sunny day, seminarians returned to St. Patrick's College after their mid-term Reading Week to clear out their rooms in advance of the nationwide COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. A week later, the National Seminary had entered a new and previously uncharted online territory.

**N**otwithstanding the challenges presented to the seminary community as to every other community and family in Ireland, we've kept ourselves connected via Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, YouTube and of course mobile phones. For their part, seminarians have remained committed to and engaged with the four dimensions (Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral) of priestly formation.

As a community we've united in prayer every day but, in a special way, for Evening Prayer on Saturdays, thanks to the good offices of our Director of Sacred Music, Dr. John O'Keefe and his wife Gráinne, together with our MC, John Gerard Acton and the Director of Formation, Fr Michael Collins.

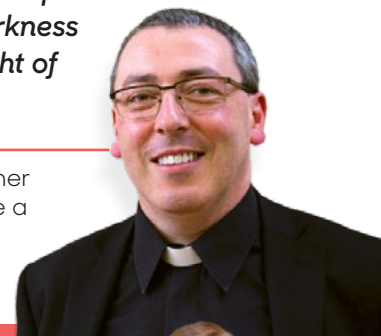
Even though we could not celebrate the Easter Triduum in our usual manner in the College Chapel, we were able to hold our Easter Retreat online. We prayed for one another, for the Church in Ireland and across the world and especially for all those who have been doing battle with the Coronavirus, in particular those on the frontline.

As Pope Francis reminded us during his extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi*, address at the beginning of April, Christians look forward in hope.

*"May Christ, who has already defeated death and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity and lead us into the light of his glorious day, a day that knows no end,"*

And so, we look towards the day when we will be together again, having learned in a new way what it means to be a community of faith and formation.

**Fr Tomás Surlis** - Rector of the National Seminary





Rev. Tom Small



Rev. Shane Costello

# Summer ordinations deferred

**A**fter seven years of study, Rev. Tom Small and Rev. Shane Costello were due to be ordained as priests this summer. COVID-19 has led to their ordination ceremonies being deferred for the moment. Here both men reflect on completing their formation during these extraordinary times.

## Rev. Tom Small

"Since departing St. Patrick's College on 13 March I've been wrestling with distance learning, long-distance friendships and home cooking. Luckily I hadn't forgotten all that my late mother taught me with regards to the use of the oven and a pressure cooker.

Naturally, with the lockdown, it's been impossible to make concrete plans for my ordination.

But our health is our wealth, and I can only think of all who have suffered with and those who have succumbed to the virus. Remember too all the health service and other frontline workers, who daily risk their lives to take care of the most vulnerable among us.

Living this kind of life, away from the hustle and bustle of the College, has been a call to go inwards. I'm constantly reminded of one of my favourite saints from the Russian tradition, St. Seraphim of Sarov. Seraphim lived for years in the forest with only a wild bear for company. While I haven't gone that far yet, the extraordinary times we're living through, remind me that God remains ever present even, and maybe especially, in the silence and stillness.

---

*Hopefully when all this is over, we will realise how solidarity and mutual care are the real life-blood of our parishes and communities. As I prepare to serve God and His people as a priest, I pray that I keep these values before me."*

---

## Rev. Shane Costello

The final few weeks of the academic year in Maynooth are always the most enjoyable. The celebration of the Easter Triduum, the seminary pilgrimage to Knock Shrine and the Diaconate Ordinations are joyous occasions that take place annually in the months leading up to June.

Sadly, this year, the Seminary Community has been unable to mark these events as we usually would have done. Face to face teaching and communal prayer have been replaced by virtual meetings and online gatherings.

Although so much has changed, a lot remains the same too. My

preparations for priestly ordination still continue. Despite the changed reality, the importance of prayer, learning, and pastoral ministry remains the same.

In the midst of this pandemic I've managed to maintain a daily routine. Now based in my home parish of Crossboyne/Taugheen near Claremorris, Co. Mayo - I assist and preach at Sunday Mass through the wonderful means of parish radio.

Although I cannot meet people in person, I still feel very supported by the prayers and good wishes of both the Seminary Community and my own parishioners.

---

*I remind myself regularly that this crisis will eventually end and the day will come when I'll be able to celebrate my ordination with family and friends. Until then, let's all stay safe, remain positive and trust in presence of the Risen Lord.*

---



# Weathering the storm together

**T**here was an article recently about the old saying: "We're all in the same boat". However the piece I read emphatically disagreed with that saying in relation to COVID-19. "We're not in the same boat" the writer contended, actually "We're in the same storm". I totally agree.

We need to keep this thought in mind when it comes to caring for students during this extraordinary Coronavirus pandemic. We're all weathering the COVID-19 storm from our different backgrounds and in very varied circumstances.

In my role as SPCM's Student Mentor, I contacted all undergraduate students recently to see how they were holding up during this storm. I reassured them there was no need to reply (no doubt many have been inundated with emails), but that if they wanted to reach out, to hear a friendly voice, I was available to provide support.

Among the students who replied, one was having a bad day and just needed to chat to someone. Another said she was coping better than expected. Others were struggling with essay submissions and deadlines. After a series of emails back and forth, all the students said that they felt better and were very grateful for the contact.

We never fully know the difference a few kind words can make to someone. While we don't know exactly what students are going through in front of their computer screens, behind their closed doors - Sean Blackwell's insights on the next page are a good barometer of the effects being felt by many of our students.

The article I referred to earlier ended with this reflection:

---

*"We're all on different ships during this storm, experiencing a very different journey. Realise that and be kind."*

---

**Sandra P. Norgrove** - Student Mentor



**MAYNOOTH COLLEGE ALUMNI OFFICE**

Keep up to date with Maynooth College News and Events by filling out the following questionnaire:  
<https://maynoothcollege.ie/alumni-questionnaire>

For more information please contact [alumni@spcm.ie](mailto:alumni@spcm.ie)

*Maynooth College Alumni || Our Pride, Our Joy*



Seán Blackwell studied Theology, Philosophy and History during the first year of his BTh. His younger sister, Áine finds refuge from the strains of COVID-19 by playing guitar in their orchard in Askeaton, Co. Limerick.

# A student's perspective from his COVID-19 bunker

**P**icture this: I'm sitting at the kitchen table, my mother is preparing lasagna, my father is checking the carrots are fully cooked, my sister is doing her English homework (reluctantly) and my other sister is in the orchard playing her guitar, like she usually does at this time of day.

I often forget how surreal it is - this moment of time - it's hard to not make it personal. It's like being in a bunker during a war: you're safe and you're protected, but the low ceilings and metal doors instil a sense of dread, that the unknown in the place known as 'out there' is prowling and waiting.

That feeling goes away with the buzz of a phone; a text from a friend I haven't heard from in a while or

the familiar ringtone of a WhatsApp group call, inviting me to socialise, to break the barriers that the unknown has installed, and to enter virtually into friends' homes, through the small window that is my smartphone.

---

*I am worried. I've become tired of the colour of my bedroom walls. I begin to vex over the work I must do for college, the essays that lay an unbearable weight on my shoulders, my chest tightening as each day passes and the submission date draws closer.*

---

The blink of the cursor as it waits for me to type on a topic I don't fully understand. I don't like the complications that have come with my unusual study environment - college was college and home was home, but now there's an amalgamation of both that just doesn't fit with my being.

I miss casually being able to go out for a hot chocolate with a friend, when the nights got dark or being able to laugh with classmates over how badly we did on certain assignments. I am stressed and in a way I feel lost.

However, through it all I remember what it's all in the name of, and I take a deep breath. It is in the name of life.

**Seán Blackwell**

First year Theology student



SPCM Alumna Julianna Crowley works as a healthcare chaplain at Cork University Hospital.



Shauna Sweeney, Chaplain at Tallaght University Hospital.



Fr David Vard prepares to celebrate a socially distanced Mass in Portlaoise.

# Pride and gratitude for SPCM alumni working on the Coronavirus frontline

**T**he mission of St. Patrick's College is to form rounded, compassionate and committed Catholic leaders - both priests and laity - to serve in parishes, communities and wider society. It is not surprising therefore that many SPCM alumni are now working on the frontline during the Coronavirus pandemic. They're providing much valued spiritual and pastoral support to patients of COVID-19 and their families.

Shauna Sweeney, who initially graduated with a BATH in Theology and Arts and subsequently studied for the Masters in Pastoral Theology, now works as a Chaplain at Tallaght University Hospital.

"It is my role to support patients and staff in the hospital and to help them to share their fears. It is extremely harrowing to see what patients and families are going through with this pandemic," says Shauna.

*"A man with a young family was dying recently. His wife and brother came to say their last goodbyes. They had 15 minutes to see him and say farewell as they would never see him again. They were surrounded by people with masks, goggles, hair nets, with no faces to be seen. They too were required to wear the full PPE. It was utterly heart-breaking."*

Staff and volunteers in the hospital had crocheted pairs of love hearts that fit in the palm of the hand. When she met the wife and brother of this patient, Shauna gave them one love heart to put into his hand, knowing

that he would have something of theirs. They held on to the matching heart, to show their son and to know that his Dad was not alone at the end.

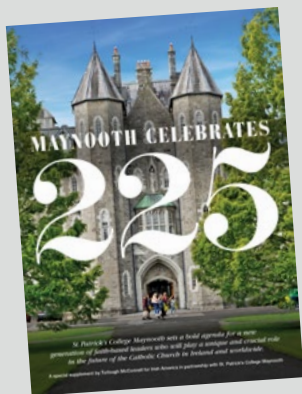
**To read Shauna Sweeney's story in full, log on to:** [maynoothcollege.ie/news-events/2020/covid-19-alumni-focus-shauna-sweeney-chaplain-tallaght-university-hospital-graduate-of-the-masters-in-pastoral-theology-programme](https://maynoothcollege.ie/news-events/2020/covid-19-alumni-focus-shauna-sweeney-chaplain-tallaght-university-hospital-graduate-of-the-masters-in-pastoral-theology-programme)

**Interviews with two other SPCM alumni:** Julianna Crowley, a healthcare chaplain at Cork University Hospital and Fr David Vard, whose parish of Portlaoise serves a hospital and two prisons are available online:

[maynoothcollege.ie/files/images/Maynooth-on-the-Frontline-4.pdf](https://maynoothcollege.ie/files/images/Maynooth-on-the-Frontline-4.pdf)

Their powerful testimonials describe the support being provided to patients, prisoners and their families during these extraordinarily difficult times.





# SPCM events in USA moved to 2021

Eagerly anticipated St. Patrick's Day celebrations to mark the college's 225th anniversary in both New York and Philadelphia were among the first casualties of the COVID-19 crisis. Planned visits to the US by SPCM President Fr. Michael Mullaney and National Seminary Rector Fr. Tomás Surlis, were cancelled at short notice as the gravity of the pandemic became apparent. Regrettably, it was decided that all US based events for the remainder of 2020 would have to be cancelled.

Notwithstanding the disappointment this brought, SPCM's 225th anniversary did lead to the publication of a ten-page feature article in the March/April edition of Irish America Magazine. This beautifully illustrated piece encapsulated the rich history of St. Patrick's College, as well as presenting the college's bold agenda for the formation of future generations of faith-based leaders, who will play a unique and crucial role in the Catholic Church worldwide.

In consultation with key supporters, plans to establish regional steering committees to chart cultivation strategies in New York, Philadelphia and Boston are still being pursued. Their goal will be to promote the college and attract new supporters during 2021 and beyond.

Meanwhile Jim O'Connor, SPCM's Executive Director in the US continues to pursue partnership opportunities with other educational and cultural organisations in the U.S. and Ireland to increase awareness of the college and its mission. Jim's contact details are: [jim.oconnor@spcm.ie](mailto:jim.oconnor@spcm.ie) / +1 (508) 212 8241

## News in Brief

### Maynooth Union 2021

The 2020 annual Maynooth Union has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Instead jubilarians from this year and next will be jointly honoured during the 2021 Maynooth Union which will be held next June. More details to follow in due course: [maynoothcollege.ie/news-events/2018/maynooth-union-2020](http://maynoothcollege.ie/news-events/2018/maynooth-union-2020)



### Enjoy music from SPCM on YouTube

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the cancellation of many concerts and other events, you can still enjoy recordings of exquisite music from the historic college chapel as well as several public lectures. Please visit the SPCM YouTube Channel: <http://bit.ly/2zlnECG>

### Scholarships Appeal reaches €37,500

Alumni and friends have already donated €37,500 towards the 2020 St. Patrick's Day Scholarships Appeal. Your generosity enables us to support the education of those who have a calling to undertake theological or philosophical studies at the College.

If you believe that students dedicated to strengthening the Catholic faith shouldn't be excluded due to a lack of funding, then please consider making a contribution by post or via our website: [maynoothcollege.ie/giving](http://maynoothcollege.ie/giving)

### National Seminary Come & See Weekend

The National Seminary's annual Come & See Weekend event has been postponed until the Autumn. More details to follow. See [www.vocations.ie](http://www.vocations.ie) for updates.

## Calendar

### September 2020

TBC College reopens for new academic year



### November 2020

7th Pontifical University Graduation Ceremony



TBC Undergraduate Open Days for prospective students



### December 2020

TBC Christmas Carol Services



Due to Government and HSE Guidelines relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exact dates of future events remain unclear. Please visit [maynoothcollege.ie](http://maynoothcollege.ie) for the latest updates on events including starting dates for lectures, conferences and much more.

**St. Patrick's College welcomes your support.**

For more information: [maynoothcollege.ie/giving](http://maynoothcollege.ie/giving)

Caroline Tennyson  
+353 (0)1 708 3964



Pontifical University  
St Patrick's College  
Maynooth

St Patrick's College Maynooth,  
Co Kildare, W23 TW77, Ireland  
+353 (0)1 708 3958  
[alumni@spcm.ie](mailto:alumni@spcm.ie)

[StPatricksCollegeMaynooth](https://www.facebook.com/StPatricksCollegeMaynooth)  
[StPatsMaynooth](https://twitter.com/StPatsMaynooth)  
[stpatrickscollegemaynooth](https://www.instagram.com/stpatrickscollegemaynooth)  
[maynoothcollege.ie](http://maynoothcollege.ie)