

School's not out for Catholic students setting up classes in London and Rome

Two of the world's oldest cities will become classrooms for twenty-five Australian students participating in a once-in-a-lifetime immersion program next week with Australian Catholic University.

The small group of high school leaders and leavers from Catholic schools across Sydney and Melbourne will travel to Rome and London from November 17 for a three-week immersive learning program. While in Europe the 25 students will explore the Catholic tradition and the story of Western civilisation, to deepen their understanding of the ideas that have shaped society, culture and politics in the West.

The program is being taught by Dr Michael Casey, Director of ACU's PM Glynn Institute, Associate Professor Dr Patrick Quirk from ACU's Thomas More Law School, Melbourne-based English Literature and History teacher Anne McIlroy, and former Australian Catholic high school teacher Daniela Bortolin, now based in Italy. Four teachers from Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra-Goulburn archdioceses will also be joining the experience.

Dr Casey said the immersion program gave school leaders and leavers a rare opportunity to retrace the story of Western civilisation and learn how it applies to them.

"An important foundation of leadership and service is knowing the story that belongs to you," Dr Casey said. "For all Australians, a big part of our heritage and identity is the Western tradition.

"The idea behind this program is to strengthen the faith of these young leaders as they prepare to leave school by opening up for them the tradition to which they belong. The program helps them to connect some of the dots to better understand the world they live in and how to navigate it when they leave school.

"For a Catholic university, it's crucial that we offer young people a path to wisdom and a source of experiences and ideas which they can draw from once they leave school."

Now in its third year, the program is open to committed young Catholics who have a record of leadership and service to their school, parish or local community. This is the first year school leaders from the Archdiocese of Melbourne are participating in the impressive program.

During their international immersion, students will delve into the history of religion, politics, and society in the West, analyse recent papal teachings and writings on democracy and the complexities of the modern world, and gain an understanding of the Catholic response to political and societal challenges facing the Church and the West.

They will also visit key religious, historical, and cultural sites including the Vatican, the Catacombs of San Callisto, the birthplace of St Francis and St Clare, the oldest university in the English-speaking world, and the Palace of Westminster.

Dr Casey hoped the program would eventually be offered to students in all Australian cities where an ACU campus is located.

ACU Vice-President Fr Anthony Casamento csma said the university was delighted to resume the immersion program for school leavers after being forced to postpone the program in 2020 and 2021 due to international travel restrictions.

"As a Catholic university immersed in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we believe faith and reason are fully compatible and that there is a role for both in scholarly pursuits," Fr Casamento said.

"Our school leaver immersion program provides young people with the chance to stretch their minds intellectually, while also seeing and experiencing first-hand the development of Western civilisation through the lens of our Catholic faith, so that they may be better equipped in leadership roles for the Church and society."

Media Contact:

Emilie Ng, 0475 963 606 or emilie.ng@acu.edu.au