

A photograph of St. Patrick's College Maynooth, a large stone Gothic-style building with two prominent towers and a central entrance. The building is surrounded by lush green trees. A large, white, stylized graphic of the year '2025' is overlaid on the center of the image. The text 'MAYNOOTH CELEBRATES' is written in white, all-caps, serif font above the '2025' graphic.

MAYNOOTH CELEBRATES

2025

*St. Patrick's College Maynooth sets a bold agenda for a new generation of faith-based leaders who will play a unique and crucial role in the future of the Catholic Church in Ireland and worldwide.*



*Saint Patrick's College  
Maynooth at the  
intersection of past,  
present and future.*

**By Turlough McConnell**

**Above:** *St. Patrick's House from St. Joseph's Square. A.W.N. Pugin (1812-52), one of Britain's most influential architects, designed the extension to St. Patrick's College Maynooth, commissioned one year after he completed work on the interior of London's Palace of Westminster (Houses of Parliament.)*

**Cover:** *Main entrance to St. Patrick's House called The President's Arch.*

**S**aint Patrick's College Maynooth was founded on June 5, 1795, as the Royal College of Saint Patrick. The date was established by an Act of Parliament signed by George III (1738-1820), who reluctantly assented to the "Act for the Better Education of persons professing the Popish or Roman Catholic religion." George was reputed to have said, "Giving this education to Catholic papists pains me more than the loss of the American colonies."

This landmark decision was the result of the shifting geopolitical landscape across Europe and North America in the late 18th century. The population of Ireland was increasing, and the growing number of Catholics faced a shortage of priests, but the Penal Laws forbade the education and training of priests in Ireland. Irishmen wishing to enter the priesthood were sent to seminaries on the continent, mostly in France; by the late 1700s, nearly 500 men were in these institutions. But these colleges shut down due to political unrest in France that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. By 1793, the remaining schools were shuttered because of religious suppression.

**The Penal Laws** The gradual relaxation of the Penal Laws made it possible for a Catholic college to be built in Ireland. Irish bishops made an urgent appeal to the government, warning that students sent to France might be infected with revolutionary zeal. The British government was amenable to the Irish bishops' request, allowing for the establishment of a Catholic college in Ireland under the watchful eye of the authorities. The Trustees bought Stoyte House in Maynooth, 17 miles west from Dublin, on the property of the Duke of Leinster's land steward. St. Patrick's College was born.

In 1845, both to accommodate the growing number of students and to improve relations with the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland, a grant to expand the college was provided by Parliament under Prime Minister Robert Peel. Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-1852), a pioneering Brit-



**Above:** President Rev. Michael Mullaney with Dr. Philip Gonzales and Dr. Gaven Kerr, of the Faculty of Philosophy and Dr. Aoife McGrath, Director of Pastoral Studies.

**Top:** Class of 2019. Rosemary O'Brien, Samantha Finn, Michelle Wall and Adam Barnes were among the first students to receive Baccalaureate of Theology & Arts degrees, awarded by St. Patrick's College Pontifical University in conjunction with Maynooth University.

ish architect and leading exponent of the Gothic revival, designed a large extension, including a library, refectory for over 500 seminarians, accommodations for staff and students, spacious cloisters, and a college chapel. The chapel took another 30 years to be completed by J.J. McCarthy in 1875.

The latter decades of the 1800s and early 1900s were the halcyon days of Catholic studies in Ireland. Over 11,000 men prepared at St. Patrick's for ordination to the priesthood; they went on to serve in parishes and missionaries worldwide. St. Patrick's continued to grant degrees in theology up to and following its charter as a Pontifical University in 1896. Thousands of lay students have gone from Maynooth to work as religious educators, catechists, pastoral assistants, philosophers and theologians, making a lasting contribution to the work of the Church across the globe.

**A New Century** The complexion of the college changed in 1966, when the Trustees decided to develop the College as an open center of higher studies and admit lay students. With the passing of the Universities Act of 1997, the Irish Government created an independent Maynooth University on St. Patrick's 180-acre campus. Since then, Ireland's unique university town has been home to a trio of learning centers: St. Patrick's College National Seminary, St. Patrick's Pontifical University, and the public Maynooth University.

Maynooth University is Ireland's fastest-growing university. The modern campus, occupying about 100 acres, serves over 13,000 enrolled students. A public road from the older southern campus, with Pugin's 19th century buildings, which houses the seminary and the Pontifical University, separates it.

Recent years have witnessed a steep decline in the number of men entering the priesthood – not surprising, in light of the global abuse scandals. This situation begs the question of just what role a National Seminary and a Pontifical University play in today's complex world.



“I can see the strength that St. Patrick’s College Maynooth has given me in my role as a healthcare chaplain. It’s more than academic teaching – Maynooth instills in you a way of thinking, a way of seeing the world with a wider lens. You gain a greater perspective.”

**Julianna Crowley**  
Healthcare Chaplain  
Cork University Hospital



“Formation to be a priest involves four key areas – academic study, human development, spiritual growth and pastoral experience. These “pillars” help a seminarian best respond to his vocation in a wholesome and holistic manner. The formation I received at Maynooth has enhanced and strengthened me. I will be ordained a priest in June 2020.”

**Deacon Shane Costello**  
Final Year Seminarian



*Maynooth, a center of church music, offers famed Christmas carol services and annual choral performances to the public.*

The crisis that the Catholic Church faces cannot be underestimated. Timothy Egan, in *Pilgrimage to Eternity*, describes it as a body blow to “a church struggling to hold together the world’s 1.3 billion Roman Catholics through the worst crisis in half a millennium.” There is reason for hope – but only by confronting the challenges head-on and enlisting support from the secular world, especially women.

**Pope Francis** Before his visit to Ireland in August 2018, as part of the World Meeting of Families, Pope Francis condemned the secrecy, ambition and self-preservation of the culture of clericalism that he claimed led to the crisis. Francis has long railed against elitist priests who put themselves above their parishioners and invest themselves with an unreachable authority. “To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism,” Francis wrote in his letter of apology to all Catholics at the time of his visit.

His message has not gone unheard in Ireland. Archbishop Eamon Martin, the Primate of All Ireland and Chancellor of the Pontifical University at Saint Patrick’s, echoes Francis’s commitment. In his unsparing address to 230 lay women and men at the Annual Graduation Ceremony last November, Dr. Martin conferred the first group of students with dual Baccalaureate in Theology and Arts degrees at Maynooth University. “As lay women and men, clerics and religious, you, and your contemporaries from every third-level institution in this country, are going out into a society which is struggling with complex issues and questions – from human trafficking and homelessness, to migration and direct provision; from gangland violence and economic uncertainty, to finding a shared vision for lasting peace and reconciliation on this island; and that’s not to mention the complex challenges presented by climate change and caring for the future of planet earth, our common home.”

**A Public University** The measure of the Church’s success will be in the local efforts as well as the national. At the commencement, Archbishop Martin shared his vision for St Patrick’s as “a vibrant Pontifical University alongside a dynamic National Seminary and a Center for Ongoing Formation, both linking ever more closely with Maynooth University.” The



“As a television correspondent for RTE it is my job to tell the stories of the people who live in my region; tragic road accidents and ongoing feuds. I have to get to the heart and the facts and the real stories out there for people, and the course in St. Patrick’s has helped me to do that.”

**Sinéad Hussey**  
Graduate; RTE  
North East Correspondent



“I can draw so many comparisons between my life in the GAA and my time in St. Patrick’s – both institutions are seeking to provide an environment where people belong, where people are loved, where they’re given an opportunity to grow and develop, and nobody is turned away regardless of their faith or where they’re from.”

**Ger Brennan**  
Alumnus; Former Dublin Footballer  
Head of Gaelic Games at UCD



*The cloisters provide ample space for students gathering in all seasons.*

presence of a public university beside St. Patrick’s may prove key to the success of the college going forward—and help to advance its mission.

Reverend Professor Michael Mullaney, President of St. Patrick’s, approaches the current state of affairs with a forward-looking attitude. He understands the need for reaching beyond the Church as a step toward healing. “In Ireland and across the globe, there is a deep human hunger for spirituality and faith renewal, and our students will be central to this transformation. Today an increasing number of lay undergraduates and post-graduate students, along with our seminarians, will go on to assume key pastoral roles in parishes, schools and communities across Ireland and further afield.”

**A Forward-thinking Church** The 2018 appointment of Fr. Tomás Surlis as Rector of the National Seminary sent an optimistic signal. Surlis is excited by the challenges and opportunities of his position: “As our Church responds to some of the most significant changes in its lifetime, the responsibility of St. Patrick’s remains unaltered. To form rounded, compassionate and committed Catholic leaders – both priests and laity – to serve in our parishes and our communities and society.” President Mullaney and Rector Surlis are strongly committed to collaboration. With Surlis in place at the seminary, Mullaney can exercise leadership by conveying the clear, overarching vision for St. Patrick’s, which “will remain at the heart of ensuring a vibrant and forward-thinking Church.”

Professor Declan Marmion, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, recognizes the need for outreach from the Pontifical University. “Today, more than ever, the Church needs confident, articulate voices who can communicate their faith in a credible and coherent way.” Marmion is committed to re-affirming the Pontifical University as an ecclesiastical center of excellence in teaching, learning and research.

“At St. Patrick’s, our aim is to produce graduates – lay and cleric, male and female – who are fluent in the Catholic intellectual tradition, open, integrated and socially engaged. We need to present the beauty of Christianity and its wisdom to a society in need of such a vision.” He continues: “We are preparing the next generation of Christian leaders. Our students will work as teachers in schools, as parish pastoral workers, chaplains and elsewhere in the public ser-



“Six precious years in Maynooth led me to a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. The multi-cultural atmosphere of the college fostered in me an open mind that enables dialogue with different traditions and cultures. Now, working as a priest in Misiones, Argentina, the experiences of studying in Maynooth, have become inestimable treasures for me.”

**Fr. Yang Shuai**  
*Divine World Missionary*



“The receipt of the Eriugena Scholarship has helped in a multitude of ways for my academic career. It has allowed a genuine sense of focus, and enabled me to become truly invested in my studies, without which I would not have progressed to the point that I am now going forward to get my PhD.”

**Nicole O'Riordan**  
*Scholarship Awardee  
2016 – 2019*



*National Seminary Rector Fr. Tomás Surlis welcomes 13 new seminarians in 2019.*

vice, while ordained ministers serve as pastors in Ireland and abroad. We help our graduates to develop a love of the Church while at the same time being aware of its faults and limitations. Their job is to bring about a new kind of Church: more inclusive, evangelizing, and engaged with today's world.”

**A Future Direction** What is the future of priestly formation in a world where the Church needs to reset? A 2017 conference at St. Patrick's Pontifical University brought together theologians, psychologists, and seminary rectors and teachers to discuss future directions. Reporting in the Catholic newspaper, *The Tablet*, Dean Marmion and Salvador Ryan, Professor of Ecclesiastical History, outlined the consensus view of the conference that, by ordination the priest should have reached a stage of “affective maturity”: comfortable with his celibacy and able to relate easily with women and men. Gone are the days of seminaries as exclusively male bastions cut off from the world where “lone ranger” priests predominate. Today's seminary is more likely to be at the centre of a vibrant university campus where seminarians study alongside lay students, and where pastoral placements in parishes, hospitals, schools and prisons are a regular feature of their training.

In addition, the Church must adapt to the changing demographics of those entering priestly training, who are now more likely to have worked for several years. Many have experienced long-standing, stable, intimate relationships, while others have “returned” to the faith, perhaps after a significant “conversion experience.” Both pathways present challenges. The zeal of converts (or, indeed, “reverts”) needs time to mature.

The corrective is a return to the experience of Church as community. Two speakers at the conference, Brenda Dolphin RSM and John Kartje of the Mundelein Seminary in Illinois, highlighted the importance of laypeople, especially women, in the discernment process. When seminarians interact with women (single, married and religious), as person to person in a friendly and mature manner, they are more likely as priests to appreciate the role and leadership of laywomen and men in ministry.

Ultimately, Marmion and Ryan conclude that there is no one solution to seminary reform. The best practice is to encourage creativity and empower episcopal conferences to draw up guidelines for priestly formation to suit



“Stationed in a community that was one of the worst affected during the troubles, I have learnt that the priest is that person who can bridge divides. My time in St. Patrick’s has given me an understanding of a Church that is more than just a building; it’s given me a foundation in theology that I can develop day to day.”

**Fr. Tony McAleese**  
Ordained in 2018,  
Curate North Belfast



“God willing, I will be ordained to the Priesthood in 2021. My pastoral experiences in various parishes, hospitals, and schools and in youth ministry initiatives have demonstrated that we are going through an exciting period in the Church’s history. There’s an abundance of potential in today’s secularized culture.

**John Gerard Acton**  
5th year Seminarian



*The Pope John Paul II Library jointly accommodates students from St Patrick’s College, Maynooth and Maynooth University. The library opened in 1984.*

local circumstances. To implement Pope Francis’s vision, seminaries will need to replace the clericalist model with an approach based on discipleship, service, mercy and forgiveness.

**Monumental Challenges** The challenges of the future for the Church are monumental. However, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth occupies a unique position in the effort toward renewal. That transformation has come through a synthesis of academic, ecclesiastical and lay missions that remain deeply integrated in the modern world – while honoring traditions of the past. Today, the visitor to Saint Patrick’s College will encounter a sacred place where knowledge has flourished for more than two centuries. Here, thousands of priests have been ordained, and as many lay students have received training. Here, poetry was written, and the Irish language was spoken. Music was composed by those housed within some of the world’s finest architecture.

The eclectic history of St. Patrick’s can be re-affirmed for the present and future, as Maynooth University president Fr Mullaney conveyed in his 2019 address to 200 delegates of the National Convention of St. Joseph’s Young Priests Society. He invoked Pope Francis’s 2013 document, *The Joy of the Gospel*:

“Christianity was born on the road; and roads are open to everyone. We are journeying together on that road with believer and non-believer alike. We are not on a special segregated street, but humbly walk with everyone else asking the same questions, facing the same struggles.

“Pope Francis calls for a Church that is not self-referential, that goes out of itself... This will mean a realignment of all our church institutions, hospitals, and schools, which were established and flourished in a different time.”

Today, President Mullaney, his faculty and staff, and the students, are inspired both by the golden days of St. Patrick’s College and by the promise of the present and the future of Maynooth. For them, the real work lies ahead.

**Turlough McConnell gratefully acknowledges the contributions of:**

Caroline Tennyson, Jim O’Connor, John Egan, Mary O’Kennedy, Barbara McCormack and James Murphy. Designer: Andrew Patapis Design. Editor: Judith Rodgers. Photography by Tony G. Murray, courtesy of SPCM.



# Alive in Hope: Transforming Tomorrow

Join St. Patrick's College Maynooth in preparing future generations of faith-based leaders for service in communities around the world.

In these challenging times of social renewal and transformation, the new, innovative initiatives of St. Patrick's College Maynooth stay current by emphasizing ministerial needs, world religions and ecumenical perspectives. Our post-graduate programs grant diplomas and certifications to those currently in full-time religious service who wish to enhance their ministerial skills and deepen their knowledge of today's society and Church.

St. Patrick's College is uniquely positioned to create the change called for in our parishes and communities. To fulfill our mission, we need to provide:

- Gospel value-based faith formation for our seminarians;
- World-class tuition for our increasing number of lay students; and
- An environment that requires and promotes excellence.

Thank you for your continued interest and support. We look forward to sharing our progress with you over the months and years ahead.



Please join us in advancing our goals by supporting our *Alive in Hope: Transforming Tomorrow* campaign for Saint Patrick's College Maynooth. For more information please contact:

Reverend Professor, Fr. Michael Mullaney, *President* | Fr. Tomás Surlis, *Rector of the National Seminary*

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