

## EUROPEAN DIVISION STUDY TOUR: ROME & THE VATICAN

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One of the many benefits of teaching for UMUC overseas was the opportunity to take Field Study Courses (also known as Study Tours) taught by other UMUC faculty there. Professors (who obviously didn't need the college credit) could sign up as paying auditors of the course if there was enough space available after regular students had signed up for it.

Although my wife, Sharon, and I had always been independent travelers, in the spring of 1983 we decided to take the European Division's study tour to Rome, titled "Popes and the Papacy." It was a ten-day tour during the two-week break between Terms III and IV, with round-trip travel by train between Heidelberg and Rome.

I'd been wanting to see Rome because I'd never been there before, but a big factor in deciding to sign up for that particular course was the reputation of the professor leading the tour, Chris Mooney. Chris was an erudite Irishman whom we'd met briefly at UMUC faculty meetings and who had a reputation around the military Education Centers as an excellent teacher. On the trip to Rome, we also discovered that he was fluent in several languages, had Ph.D.'s in History and Theology, and was a good storyteller, with the Irish "gift of the gab" and a bit of the blarney, too. The only thing I faulted him on was his lack of interest in food. He didn't know anything at all about food and couldn't tell the difference between a good meal and a bad one. He ate only to fuel up. Even in Italy!

We also learned that he had once been a Catholic priest. (Later I looked up more about that and found out he had been a member of the Servite Order from 1954 to 1966—a monastic order of friars and nuns, established in 1233, many of whom served as Catholic missionaries and teachers in higher education.) He'd also earned his Ph.D. in Theology at the Marianum Pontifical Faculty in Rome. It turned out that he had a lot of contacts at the Vatican, as well as his own "insider's" knowledge of the place.

Chris had arranged for our tour group to stay at a modest little pension in the Borgo district, a section of Rome directly adjacent to Vatican City and within easy walking distance to St. Peter's Basilica and other important sites in that area. When we arrived in the Borgo and were carrying our bags down the narrow street to the pension, I suddenly heard women's voices yelling, "Professor Hudgins! Professor Hudgins!" I looked around in surprise to see where that noise was coming from and saw three young women hanging out of the second-story windows of an old building (which turned out to be our pension). They were all Greeks who'd been students in my Economics courses at Hellenikon Air Base in Athens during Term II that year, and had

traveled from Greece to join our study tour in Rome. (Sharon was amused that on my first day in Rome, I was greeted upon arrival by three pretty girls shouting my name out the windows.)

On most days, the schedule for the group was to meet for two or three hours in the morning, in a small room at the pension where Chris gave a lecture on the history of the papacy or gave the students a written quiz on the material covered the previous day. Sharon attended all the classes, but I sometimes played hooky and went off on my own to see the Appian Way, the Colosseum, the Caracalla Baths, and the Catacombs. Then after lunch I'd join the group for that day's field trip to important sites related to the history of the papacy in Rome: the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the cathedral church of the Rome Diocese (which makes it the actual seat of the pope), located outside of Vatican City; the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, one of Rome's four major ancient basilicas; and of course St. Peter's Basilica itself, the landmark church within Vatican City.

All of those field trips were interesting, but especially so with Chris as a guide, pointing out artistic, architectural, and historical details that a less knowledgeable guide might not even have known. But it was his intimate knowledge of the Vatican itself, and his connections there, that really made the trip memorable.

I don't know whether he pulled strings or called in a favor due to him, but he managed to get our group access to the archeological excavations of the Vatican Necropolis, the ancient burial ground literally buried beneath St. Peter's Basilica and Vatican City. In 1983, those excavations weren't open to the public as they are now, so it took considerable "pull" for our group to be allowed into them. We all felt especially privileged to be taken through the narrow pathways between those now-underground mausoleums by a church archeologist who explained what the digs had uncovered, including the supposed burial place of St. Peter himself.

Another memorable highlight was our visit to the Sistine Chapel. We all had to get up earlier than usual that morning, rush through breakfast, and try to keep pace with Chris as he hurried us on foot from the pension to the Vatican Museum where the chapel is located. He wanted us to be first in line when it opened. He'd already bought the tickets in advance, and when the entrance opened at 9 a.m., he thrust the tickets into the hands of the guard and hustled us inside. Then he told us to follow him quickly, as he took us along a back route to the famous chapel, practically running up sets of stairs and through a labyrinth of narrow corridors. We were all panting when we finally got there. But it was worth the effort. For nearly half an hour our group had the Sistine Chapel all to ourselves, before any other tourists arrived. Chris even had us lie down on the floor so we could better see Michelangelo's masterpiece, the beautifully frescoed ceiling. What an experience—especially when the Sistine Chapel is normally packed with people like sardines in a can!

Nights were free time for those of us who were just auditing the course. So, while the serious students were doing their assigned reading or preparing for the next day's quiz, Sharon and I enjoyed wandering around Rome on our own, eating at fine restaurants and little family-run trattorias, and attending musical events, including Rossini's opera, "The Turk in Italy," and an excellent performance of one of Shostakovich's works, which was under-appreciated by the Italian audience.

On the next-to-last day of the study tour, Chris rushed us back to the Vatican at an even earlier hour of the morning to attend Pope John Paul II's "Wednesday Audience," an hour-long public event held every week whenever the pope is in Rome. Even though it started at 10 a.m., Chris insisted that we arrive by 7 a.m. to get good seats, which caused some grumbling among our group. But as usual, Chris knew exactly what he was doing.

He showed some of us where to stand in the front row of people lining the corridor leading to the Audience Hall, an auditorium that holds 6,000 people for that weekly event. He took other members of our group directly to front-row seats inside. Sharon and I were in the group who had to stand for three hours with other people in the entry corridor, in hope of shaking hands with the pope as he passed through it on his way into the Audience Hall. Then we all scrambled for seats in the back of the auditorium, where we listened to the pope address the crowd in several languages, read a long homily about peace, say a prayer, and then give his blessing to the assembly, as well as blessing babies carried up front by their parents and even blessing religious objects that many people had brought to the event. (The day before, Chris had shown our group where to buy them at the souvenir stalls lining side streets near the Vatican. Our little pewter Celtic cross, "blessed by the pope," hangs every year on our ecumenical Christmas tree, along with other Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and shamanic ornaments, too.)

For us, that event was a fitting finale to Chris's very informative study tour about "Popes and the Papacy." The next day we slept late while the students taking the course completed their final exam in the classroom at the pension. (I think they also had to write a research paper after the tour, too.) On that last afternoon in Rome, Chris took us back to the Vatican again, to purchase photos of ourselves "meeting the pope," which Vatican photographers always take at those Wednesday papal audiences, to sell as money-makers for the Vatican. Sharon sent her photo back to her parents in the U.S., where her father enjoyed displaying it on the wall of his office, to the amusement of all the family's Lutheran relatives and friends. [Photo to be included later, when I can find it.]

After we returned to Germany, Sharon audited Chris Mooney's course on "Luther and the Protestant Reformation," at Bitburg Air Base during Term IV that spring. She joked that taking a course on the Protestant Reformation was "the perfect antidote to 'Popes and the Papacy.'" But while it met the same high academic standards of Mooney's course about the popes, that military classroom at the Bitburg Education Center couldn't compete with the historical ambience of his outstanding study tour to Rome.

#### Dates and divisions of overseas service with UMUC:

European Division (1975-1978; 1981-1993)

Asian Division (1978-1979)

Munich Campus (1983-1992)

Augsburg Campus (1992-1993)

Russia Program (1993-1995)