

North American College welcomes largest incoming class in 40 years

ROME - The Pontifical North American College welcomed its largest incoming class in 40 years Aug. 28 when 61 seminarians arrived.

While classes at the pontifical universities in Rome do not begin until mid-October, the new students at the seminary sponsored by the U.S. bishops arrived early for orientation, intensive Italian classes and a retreat.

But first, they sang for the pope.

Given a place of honor in the courtyard of the papal villa at Castel Gandolfo Aug. 31, they serenaded the pope in Latin after joining in the noontime recitation of the Angelus.

Monsignor Robert Gruss, vice rector for student life, said that when the new men are joined by the second-, third- and fourth-year students by mid-September, the college will have a booming community of 208 seminarians.

The college building on the Janiculum Hill overlooking the Vatican opened in 1954 with room for more than 200 students, but in recent years some of the student rooms had been put to different uses.

"Those rooms have been reclaimed," Monsignor Gruss said.

After a week with the new students he said, "They are good men, very focused, very excited to be here.

"They are quality men and there seems to be a good camaraderie," the monsignor said. "They will fit in well with the community."

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien served as rector of the Pontifical North American College from 1990-94.