

Portsmouth Institute's 2015 Summer Conference Prepares Catholics for Pope's Visit to America



Image: His Eminence Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley addresses the audience gathered for the Portsmouth Institute's 2015 Summer Conference. O'Malley is one of Pope Francis's closest advisers.

More than two years into his papacy, Pope Francis continues to draw headlines for his provocative statements and populist appeal. This past June, guests from across America convened at the Abbey to discuss the Francis Papacy as part of the 2015 Summer Conference of the Portsmouth Institute for Faith and Culture, a Catholic scholarly foundation that operates as an apostolate of Portsmouth Abbey and Saint Louis Abbey. The conference — titled “Like a Shepherd He Will Tend His Flock: Understanding the Francis Papacy” - offered attendees a three-day exploration of the Pope’s intellectual and cultural heritage, his priorities as Pontiff, his theological convictions - and his frequent habit of grabbing headlines for his off-the-cuff remarks.

Over 200 attendees from across the country gathered at Portsmouth Abbey to hear from some of America’s most influential leaders and commentators both inside and outside of the Church. Central to the purpose of the conference was to contribute to American public discourse a greater understanding of Pope Francis in preparation for his visit to America later this fall, when he will speak at the United Nations, celebrate Mass in Philadelphia and address a joint session of Congress—an historic moment both for the Church and for America.

By all accounts, the weekend was a spectacular success. After joining conference guests and the Portsmouth Abbey monastic community at Vespers on Friday evening, Archbishop of Boston Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley, dubbed by *National Journal* the Pope's "BFF" (best friend forever), delivered an intimate and at times moving keynote address to a packed Stillman Dining Hall. O'Malley is one of eight Cardinals in the Pope's Cabinet of close advisers and is the only from North America, giving him unparalleled access to the inner-workings of the Francis Papacy. O'Malley himself was considered a leading contender for pope in the same papal conclave that elected Francis.

Additional speakers included Ross Douthat, the youngest-ever columnist for the *New York Times*, who presented a sharp critical analysis of the Pope and the factions forming within the Catholic Church in the lead-up to the October 2015 Synod of Bishops on the family; Anna Bonta Moreland, a fellow Argentinian (the native country of Pope Francis) and Catholic theologian, who contributed to the conference a deep understanding of how Argentine culture, politics, and theology motivates Pope Francis; and John Carr, the Director of Georgetown University's Initiative on Catholic Thought and Public Policy, who previewed the Pope's visit to America and explained what his message of mercy, charity, and love will mean for all Americans. Other prominent speakers included R. R. Reno (*First Things*), Fr. Roger Landry (Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations), "Millennial" Catholic and author Christopher White, popular author and priest Fr. Dwight Longenecker, and many more.

"The 24-hour news cycle rarely allows a measured, in-depth conversation about Pope Francis and his teachings," says Christopher Fisher, Executive Director of the Portsmouth Institute, who also serves as a Humanities teacher at Portsmouth Abbey. "Instead we get soundbites and Twitter wars. The Summer Conference helped us take a step back and learn about the Francis Papacy from the people who know it best."

The Portsmouth Institute's 2016 Summer Conference will be held on the weekend of June 10, 2016. Get the latest on news and events from the Portsmouth Institute at www.portsmouthinstitute.org.