A New Chapter at Mount Melleray Abbey: Generations of Gyrenes Gather in Ireland

Campus Update

September 21, 2026

MOUNT MELLERAY, COUNTY WATERFORD, IRELAND — September 20, 2026 — A historic new chapter for Ave Maria University and Mount Melleray Abbey began Sunday as the restored Abbey Church officially reopened and welcomed the local town of Cappoquin, Ave Maria University leadership, alumni, supporters, and the first class of students studying at the University's new Ireland campus.

The September 20 reopening was marked by a special Mass celebrated at Mount Melleray, bringing together the Abbey's long Catholic history with the beginning of its new role as an international instructional campus for Ave Maria University.

Among those gathered for the historic occasion were Ave Maria University Chancellor Tom Monaghan and President Mark Middendorf, along with members of the University's community who traveled to Ireland to witness the reopening.

The celebration also provided a remarkable opportunity for generations of the AMU family to come together.

AvMU alumni attending the weekend were joined by the first class of students now living and studying at Mount Melleray. Among the students is the daughter of AvMU alumni Jon and Marie Fidero, creating a special connection between the University's early alumni and its newest generation of students.

Also in attendance was Fr. Shawn Conoboy, a member of Ave Maria University's earliest graduating class, the Class of 2002. More than two decades after his time as a student, Fr. Conoboy returned to celebrate the opening of a new chapter for the University and to witness the next generation of Gyrenes beginning their own experience abroad.

The gathering offered a visible reminder that while Ave Maria University continues to grow and expand, its community remains connected across generations.

Mount Melleray Abbey, founded in 1832, has been a place of prayer, study, work, hospitality, and Catholic life for nearly two centuries. Ave Maria University's partnership with the Cistercian Order now begins a new chapter in that history, bringing students to the Abbey for a semester of integrated academic, spiritual, and community life.

The first students arrived at Mount Melleray in September for the inaugural semester of the Ireland Study Abroad Program. The program is designed as a fully integrated Ave Maria University academic experience, with students living and learning within the historic monastery while participating in a rhythm of prayer, study, community, and work.

The reopening weekend had been planned as an opportunity for alumni and supporters to experience this historic transition firsthand. Alumni were invited to participate in private events, tours of the Abbey and restoration project, meals and receptions, and opportunities to spend time with University leadership, clergy, students, locals and fellow members of the AMU community.

For those who gathered on September 20, the significance of the day extended beyond the reopening of a historic church. It was a celebration of continuity: the Cistercian tradition that has shaped Mount Melleray for nearly 200 years, the vision that brought Ave Maria University to Ireland, and the generations of Gyrenes who continue to carry the University's mission forward.

From the Class of 2002 to the first students of the Mount Melleray campus, the weekend offered a beautiful picture of the Ave Maria family across generations.

The story of Ave Maria in Ireland is just beginning.

Read online for photos and videos:

https://alumni.avemaria.edu/news/a-new-chapter-at-mount-melleray-abbey-generations-of-gyrenes-gather-in-ireland