AMU Faculty Join The Aquinas Institute at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford for Research Symposium

Campus Update

September 01, 2026

This summer, Ave Maria University and The Aquinas Institute at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford, co-sponsored a two-day research symposium on the theme “Action: Human and Divine, Civic and Ecclesiastical.” The symposium was organized by Dr. Janice Chik Breidenbach, professor of philosophy and chair of the Department of Philosophy at AMU, and Dr. Daniel De Haan, the Frederick Copleston Senior Research Fellow and lecturer in philosophy and theology at Blackfriars Hall and Campion Hall, Oxford. The two developed the idea after conversations at a conference on Aquinas in Prague in the summer of 2025. From AMU, Provost Roger Nutt, professor of theology; Michael Breidenbach, dean of the Honors College and professor of history; Gerald Boersma, chair of the theology department and professor of theology; and Jeff Walkey, associate professor of theology, attended as participants. Papers addressed subjects including St. Monica and the act of teaching, enslaved Catholics and sacramental participation in Early America, human flourishing from infancy to old age, divine action, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and a new translation of Aquinas on the form of sacramental absolution. “The quality of scholarship and discussion following each paper was outstanding,” one participant told Dr. Chik Breidenbach, “and in fact rarely witnessed at academic conferences.” Another left with dozens of pages of notes for his own research. A host at Blackfriars Hall praised “the talks, discussion, and spirit of the Conference.” For Dr. Chik Breidenbach, the collaboration is personal as well as institutional. “It is a collaboration emerging naturally from wisdom-seeking friendships, both among the participating faculty from AMU as well as with scholars at Oxford and beyond,” she said. Both The Aquinas Institute at Blackfriars Hall and AMU’s graduate programs in philosophy and theology are committed to the serious study of Aquinas and his place in the Catholic intellectual tradition. Dr. Chik Breidenbach described the two days as an occasion of “genuinely collaborative scholarship, to advance research ideas and arguments in an environment of intellectual humility and mutual charity.” That work, she said, “expresses the true heart and soul of being a professor.” Hosts at Blackfriars Hall expressed hope “that there can be many exchanges in the future.” Dr. Chik Breidenbach and Dr. De Haan are already planning AMU’s next events there, including summer study for students in the Honors College and the graduate programs. This first collaboration included Isaac Cordero (’26), a graduate student in philosophy—whom they hope will be the first of many AMU students to study as a visiting graduate research student at Blackfriars Hall. “We send our best students,” Dr. Chik Breidenbach said, “and renew each summer the great intellectual tradition of growing in wisdom through genuine friendship.” What began as a friendship among scholars is now a shared pursuit of wisdom between Ave Maria University and

The Aquinas Institute at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford, one already being carried forward by AMU’s own students.

Read online for photos and videos:

https://alumni.avemaria.edu/news/amu-faculty-join-the-aquinas-institute-at-blackfriars-hall-oxford-for-research-symposium