

THE ORATORIAN HOUSE

Oratorians have a relationship with the place where they reside that is more similar to that of monastic orders than diocesan priests or members of apostolic religious orders. The nature of this relationship is shaped by the fact that an Oratorian community, like a monastery, puts down permanent roots in a particular place. Since Oratories do not transfer members among houses, they develop a lifelong connection to the local community and to the house in which they live. The house becomes, in fact, a multi-generational family home. One great benefit of this is that they can take a long-term view of both the spiritual and social health of the local community, as well as the ongoing care of the physical plant.

The sense of attachment Oratorians have to their home can be traced right to their founder, St. Philip Neri. In Italian, there is no word for “home”; casa means “house”. But St. Philip referred to the place where he lived as his nido, or “nest”. He loved his room at San Girolamo so much that his community had to procure an order from the pope to compel him to move to the Chiesa Nuova, six years after the rest of them had gone there. Philip continued visiting his old room until the end of his life. An Oratorian’s room is truly his nido, a place of simple comfort, neither luxurious nor overly austere. It is a base of operations and a place of rest.

In 1852, the Oratorian community in Birmingham, England moved into their current home. Two years later, their Provost, Bl. John Henry Newman, C.O., gave a beautiful address on the importance of the house for their life, as though it were itself a member of the community. He admonished them, “Do all of you your best to provide it with good tenants, and to adorn it with a visible attractiveness and a moral beauty.”