



# The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



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SAINT PHILIP WAS KNOWN THROUGHOUT Rome as a great ascetic, a sort of modern desert father, often living on bread, water, some olives, and a few herbs. He was convinced that, in order to reform the Church from the inside out, truly detached people were needed. But, good Italian that he was, he also acknowledged the central role that food plays in our lives—celebrating our joys and uniting us to one another and to God. In founding his community, the Oratory, he designed it to be more than a common residence for a group of dedicated priests. He wanted it to be a true home, a joyful place. How to balance the need for true Christian detachment with the desire to construct a humanly healthy and joyful life for his followers?

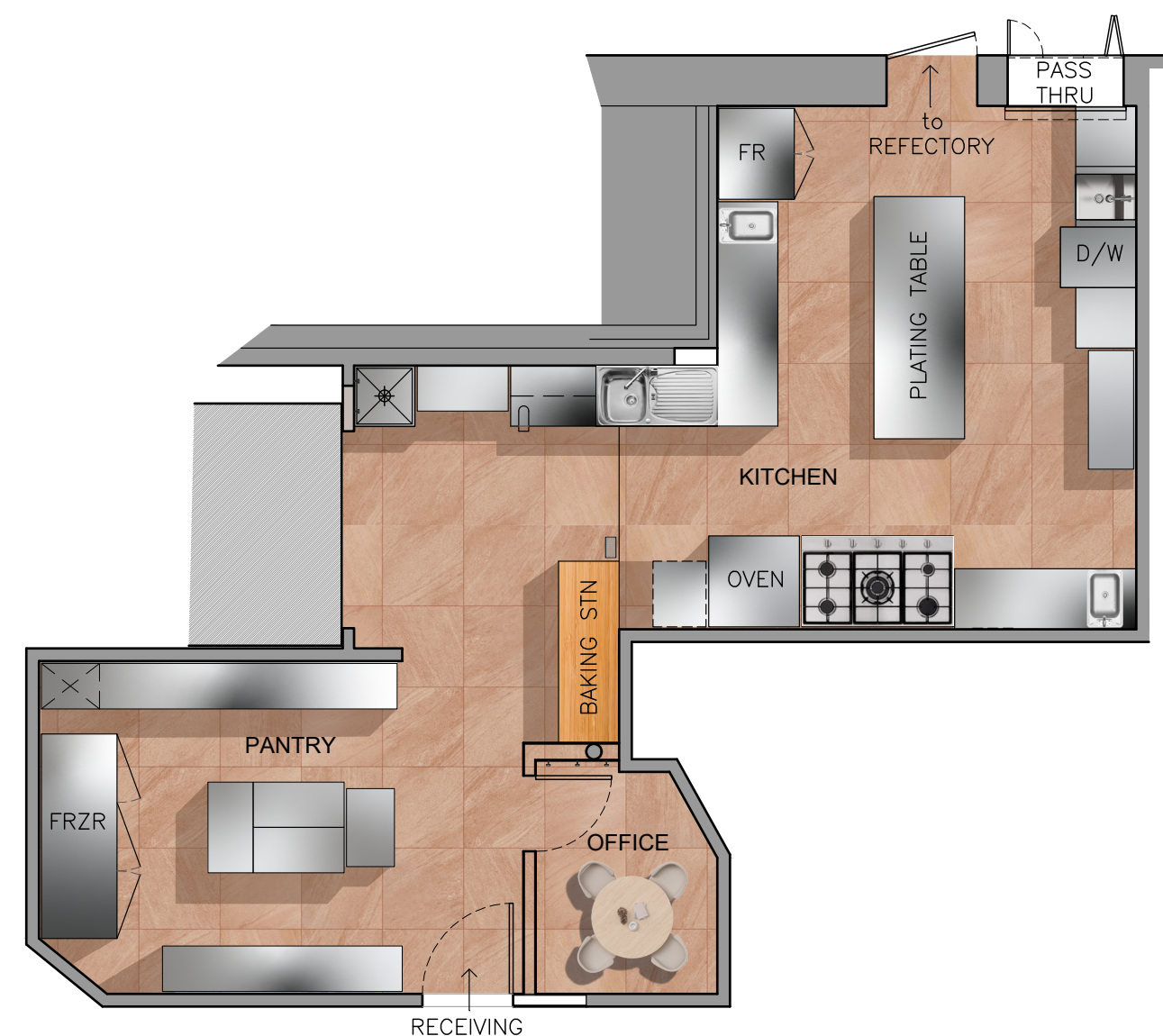
Saint Philip's solution to this dilemma can be summed up in one of his maxims: **Community life has many mortifications—the food should not be one of them.** We have always tried to maintain that same sort of balance. Our kitchen has always been a place of importance for the community, whether we were cooking for ourselves (as in the early days) or now when we are feeding a

large community of priests and brothers as well as a number of seminarians.

In 1988, when we started taking seminarians into residence with us, we needed a larger kitchen and refectory (our Oratorian word for our dining room). The refectory is now quite full, but joyfully full. The thirty-six-year-old kitchen, however, is in urgent need of renovation. It was originally designed as a spacious domestic kitchen, but not for the 35-40 people we now regularly serve. The volume of food produced has more than doubled since 1988. Our kitchen

also caters for the many events we host, including dinners for Holy Family parish. In addition, because of the official status of Saint Philip's Seminary as a degree-granting institution issuing student visas, our facilities are now subject to regular inspection. The standards to which we are expected to conform are those of a commercial kitchen.

Beyond the work in the kitchen itself, some minor upgrades are needed in the refectory. Our evening meals follow a monastic pattern. Several of us wait on tables and one person reads







aloud to those eating. With the growth of the community and the seminary, the refectory has become a louder place (a good problem to have), which calls for a microphone for the reader in order to help make the readings intelligible.

The Oratory and Saint Philip's Seminary are intended to be messengers of the Christian joy that so marked the life of Saint Philip Neri, and the kitchen is an essential instrument in setting that joyful tone. You can help provide something that will be a support and a joy to generations of priests and seminarians.



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