

It is rare to remember the exact date, time, and place one first meets someone, but I vividly recall the morning of Saturday, January 6, 2001.

Massimo met me at Porta Sant'Anna and guided me through the Vatican. It was the official conclusion of the Great Jubilee, and I was preparing to return to the United States the following day after our pilgrimage.

That visit ended in Massimo's office, where he placed a call to Lorenzo Rossi. During that conversation, Lorenzo invited me to establish a United States chapter of the Fondazione. After prayerful consideration, I accepted—and from that providential morning began a lifelong partnership and a treasured friendship with Massimo.

For more than fifteen years, Massimo and I worked closely together in Rome and the United States. During those early and formative years, he was our essential anchor at the Vatican. He honored us with his presence at countless events and served quietly behind the scenes as a wise and trusted guide. His encouragement and unwavering support were especially important to me when, in 2004, I became the first non-Italian member of the Fondazione's board.

Massimo understood that institutions are built not only through formal decisions, but through trust, patience, fidelity, and friendship. He possessed a remarkable ability to bring people together, to navigate difficult moments with diplomatic grace, and to offer counsel without ever seeking recognition for himself. Much of what he accomplished was done quietly, but its effects were lasting.

Beyond our shared work, I cherished the personal bond we formed through long conversations, shared meals, travel, laughter, and the many ordinary moments from which friendship grows. Massimo was a devoted family man who spoke of his children with immense affection and pride. It was a privilege not only to share in his professional life, but also to know his wife, Mariella, and to have the opportunity to work with his daughter, Marta, in both Rome and the United States.

Massimo possessed a rare combination of diplomatic grace, deep faith, quiet strength, and genuine warmth. He was unfailingly gracious and generous, and he made those around him feel welcomed and valued. His leadership left an indelible mark on the Fondazione, but his deeper legacy lives in the people he encouraged, the relationships he nurtured, and the mission he served so faithfully.

I will always be grateful for that Saturday morning at Porta Sant'Anna—a morning that opened the door to years of shared mission, wise counsel, and cherished friendship. What began as an unexpected meeting became one of the great blessings of my life.

Massimo will be deeply missed. I mourn his passing, but I remain profoundly grateful for his friendship, his example, and the many years we were privileged to share.

May he rest in the peace of Christ, and may his family be comforted by the knowledge that his life touched so many and bore such lasting fruit.

Robert A. Nalewajek