

# “Why Do We Look Up at the Heavens?”

Br. Guy Consolmagno

Director of the Vatican Observatory, Rome

**Where:** Georgia Tech TSRB Building Auditorium (Technology Square: 85 5<sup>th</sup> Street, NW @ Spring and 5<sup>th</sup>)

**When:** Thursday, April 12, 2018 at 7:00 pm

## Abstract:

Why did we go to the Moon? Why does the Vatican support an astronomical observatory? These questions mask a deeper question: why do individuals choose to spend their lives in pursuit of pure knowledge? The motivation behind our choices, both as individuals and as a society, controls the sorts of science that gets done. It determines the kinds of answers that are found to be satisfying. And ultimately, it affects the way in which we think of ourselves.

## Biography:

**Guy Consolmagno, SJ** is a brother in the Roman Catholic Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), working since 1993 as an astronomer and meteorite specialist at the *Specola Vaticana* (Vatican Observatory), located in the Papal summer gardens outside Rome. Since 2014 he has been president of the Vatican Observatory Foundation, which supports the work of the Observatory and especially its 1.8 meter Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope (VATT) in Arizona. In September of 2015 he was named Director of the Vatican Observatory by Pope Francis.

Consolmagno's research explores connections between meteorites, asteroids, and the evolution of small solar system bodies. Along with more than 200 scientific publications, he is the author of a number of popular books, including: *Turn Left at Orion* (with Dan Davis), and most recently, *Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?* (with Fr. Paul Mueller, S.J.). He also has hosted science programs for BBC Radio 4, has been interviewed in numerous documentary films, and writes a monthly science column for the British Catholic magazine, *The Tablet*.

A native of Detroit, MI, Consolmagno earned two degrees from MIT and a doctorate in planetary sciences from the University of Arizona, was a postdoctoral research fellow at Harvard and MIT, served in the US Peace Corps (Kenya), and taught university physics at Lafayette College before entering the Jesuits in 1989. He has served as chair of the American Astronomical Society's Division for Planetary Sciences (AAS/DPS) and on the planetary surfaces nomenclature committee of the International Astronomical Union (IAU). Asteroid “4597 Consolmagno” was named in recognition of his work. In 2014 he won the Carl Sagan Medal for public outreach by the AAS/DPS.

