

Doug steps down

After ten years as president of St. Jerome's, you'd think Doug Letson would be ready for a rest. Think again.

Doug Letson won't really appreciate the things he's accomplished as president of St. Jerome's University until after he steps down on July 1. "I don't take a lot of time to smell the roses," he says. "I'm usually too busy trying to plant them." He will admit to feeling good about handing on "an institution which is well respected, with a group of scholars who are first-rate teachers and actively publishing, and administrative staff who really care about the students."

He feels good about the physical campus, too: the upgraded women's residence, Sweeney Hall, the expanded and renovated Community Centre, and Notre Dame Chapel's beautiful new stained glass windows. "You'd have to have seen this place ten years ago to appreciate the difference between then and now."

But between then and now lie ten difficult years. His appointment in 1989 was a milestone. He was the first St. Jerome's alumnus (BA '62) to become president, a winner of the University of Waterloo's Distinguished Teacher Award, and a productive scholar, and he had held almost every other post at St. Jerome's, including (twice) the deanship. But what really set him apart was not that he was so well qualified, but that he was the first layman to be president (he had also been the first lay dean).

Many in the Congregation of the Resurrection, including Letson's predecessors as dean (Fr. Jim Wahl) and as president (Fr. Norm Choate), recognized that lay people needed to take on more of the leadership at St. Jerome's, and not just because there were fewer priests available. The church colleges were changing, along with the more open and inclusive church that emerged from Vatican II. "It's not a clericalized church," Letson points out. "It's a church that involves all kinds of people, active in different ways."

Ownership of St. Jerome's passed from the Congregation to a board of governors in the mid-eighties, but some Resurrectionists did not want to let go, and many people in the community equated the Catholic identity of the college with the Resurrectionists. They put Letson under the microscope. "They were applying a more

stringent standard to what I was saying and what I was doing than they would have to a priest. There's no question about that."

The scrutiny extended to faculty members who took intellectual positions which some community members considered betrayals of Catholic tradition. Letson argued "that being faithful to your heritage is being intellectually open to possibilities, respecting where you came from and being able to look at it honestly and openly.... That's a position that you will find articulated in Roman Catholic documents on education, but it's not one that's wholly embraced by the community at large." And it didn't help when the media distorted what Letson and other faculty members had to say.

He made a point of meeting local Catholics and "trying to ferret out issues that people might have, so I could address them openly... Early in the game I met with groups of priests because I knew there were misperceptions out there, and the critics were more likely to talk to them than to me."

Nationally, he promoted alliances between Catholic universities and colleges. At home he added more academically excellent lay Catholics to the faculty, winning the respect of the university community at large for St. Jerome's while keeping the respect of the Catholic community.

"It was more than a balancing act: it was like juggling," Wahl says. "And by and large, he's done it."

While under the microscope, Letson had to face the greatest challenge of the 1990s: tight funding. In some ways St. Jerome's was well prepared for lean times,

because the last time any denominational university or college received capital funding from government was in 1869. They were used to tight belts. But this also meant that when the School Sisters of Notre Dame left in 1996, St. Jerome's couldn't expect

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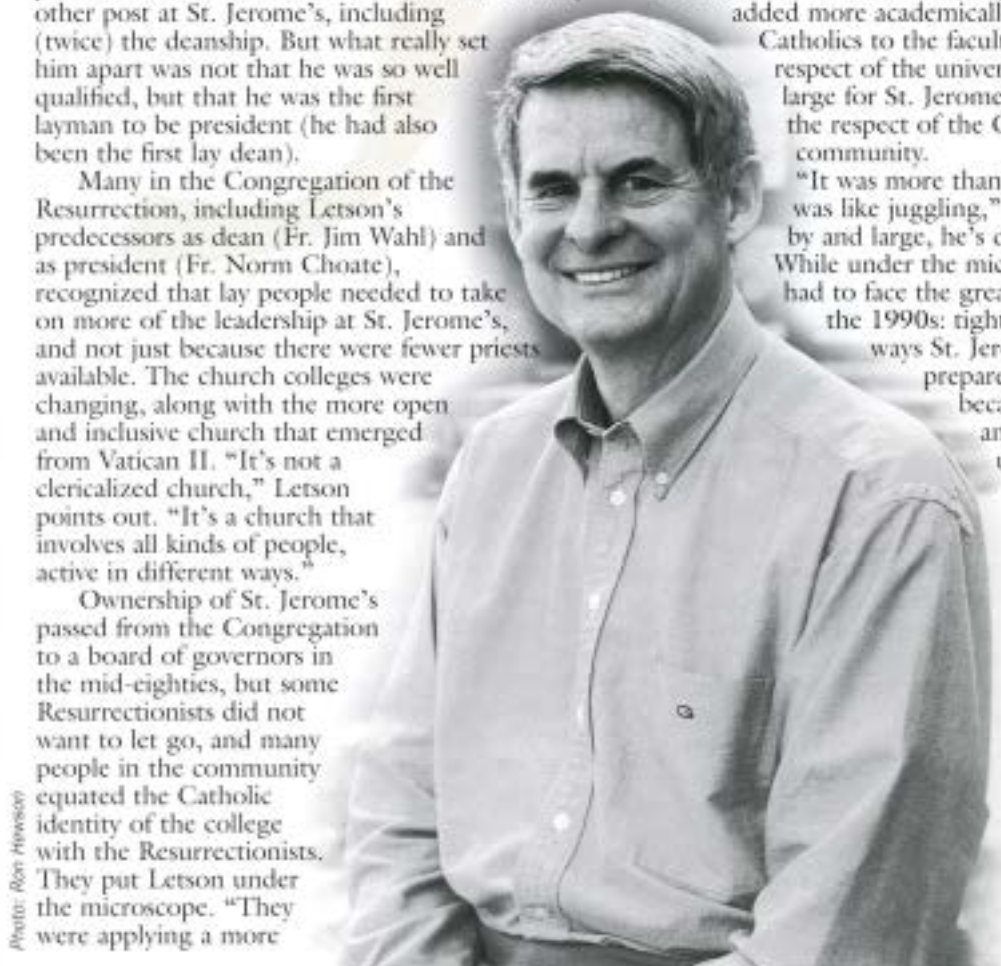


Photo: Ron Hirsman

Doug Letson leaves the president's office on July 1

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Message from the President

One last look around

All you need do is look around. It's built into the very fabric of the place. From the barbecue pits to the benches along the walkway. From the cloister to the Community Centre. From the classroom to the administrative office. From the chaplaincy to the library. From the donor wall to our architectural footprint. The Catholic identity of St. Jerome's is not only writ large, but the very bricks utter the message. It's a human face with a collegial embrace.

books on personhood, the abortion debate, Cardinal Carter, the Jesuit order, the writings of Father Louis Funken, the history of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Ontario, biotechnology, Catholic education, prominent Canadian Catholics.... This, of course, is a narrow view of Catholic scholarship, though it does catalogue the kinds of books which probably would not have been written had there been no St. Jerome's University to foster their authors.

Our teaching and our scholarship are most appropriately seen in their traditional Catholic context: an honest exploration of the human condition as part of the effort to understand who we are, why we are here, and how we might make "here" a better place. Such is our Roman Catholic intellectual heritage. It is a heritage clearly articulated across the curriculum and throughout our various academic disciplines both in our approach to our subject matter and in our attitudes towards our students.

St. Jerome's Catholicity is manifest in a host of other ways, all of them equally important. It is to be found in students like Scott Campbell who is using his expertise in computer studies to assist in the development of web sites for local charitable organizations and to organize other St. Jerome's students to do the same. It is clear in students like Stephanie and Megan Shore, the winners of our Community Service and Ralston Awards for 1998-99. It is expressed, too, in the dedication of our residence dons who spend countless hours (often into the small hours of the morning) talking through the problems and easing the tensions experienced by today's young academics. It is articulated in our growing list of distinguished graduates, some of whom have been formally honoured as recipients of the Father Norm Choate Distinguished Graduate Award, as Judy Nairn was in '99. It is echoed in the dedication of the many community volunteers – epitomized in Pat and David Graham – who have thrown themselves selflessly into our fund-raising efforts.

This sense of who we are and how well we do is reflected in the camaraderie and atmosphere of good championship always present in our Community Centre and especially noteworthy at community dinners. To be Catholic is to care about others. It is also to be a builder of a better society.

It is a rare week that we do not get an observation from a student, a reflection from a graduate, or a letter or phone call from a parent to thank some member of the St. Jerome's community – the registrar, liaison team, don, director of residences, a faculty member, student, or member of the staff – for some act of kindness and understanding which was personally helpful and much appreciated.

So, is St. Jerome's a Catholic University? To the heart. Because who we are is built into the very fabric of the place. ☪

The question of St. Jerome's Catholic identity is one that I've been asked to address in countless contexts to varied groups and individuals over the ten years of my presidency. That presence is certainly to be found in vibrant liturgies and a sensitive chaplaincy, a dynamic University Catholic Community and its related Student Catholic Community. But it is also present in the courses we teach, some of which would only be taught in a Catholic educational setting: The Thomistic Tradition, Roman Catholicism, Shapers of the Roman Catholic Tradition, The Catholic Church in Canada Since Confederation....

It is present in our approach to students, an approach reflected in the fact that the Senate of the University of Waterloo has formally honoured six of our faculty members as distinguished teachers: on a percentage basis, it is an achievement matched nowhere else on campus. Our Catholic identity is clear too in numerous of the books and articles published by our faculty:



Photo: Pam Henson

Doug Letson and Bishop Anthony Tonnos enjoy a quiet moment before a gala farewell dinner for Doug held in May.

A fine and fitting tribute

Friends and colleagues of Doug Letson gathered at St. Jerome's in May for a gala farewell dinner in the new Community Centre, one of Letson's most visible accomplishments during his 10-year tenure as president.

President-elect Michael Higgins, host for the evening, set the tone by sketching a portrait of Doug Letson, able administrator.

While the two men were walking the streets of Rome recently, Higgins recounted, Letson "found himself the hapless victim of some bird's precision bombing exercise. What followed were his muted imprecations against the entire bird kingdom, the stoical sigh – why me, O Lord – and then a strategic realignment with me now as the target of choice. I am used to it. It was a metaphor of our working relationship."

Between courses, others offered portraits of Letson, among them, former student Pat Zettel. Thirty years ago, when Letson was just at the beginning of his teaching career, Zettel took an Old English course with him.

"I still remember the first time I opened the prescribed text for the first part of the course, Sweet's Anglo Saxon Primer," he said, holding up the book. "If ever a book was euphemistically named, it was this. On the surface, it looks like a harmless little volume: in reality it's a finely tuned instrument of torture. Notice that its cover is the colour of congealed blood. Mine."

"What I remember most about Doug's teaching style was his enthusiasm for the subject, a genuine enthusiasm and passion which could not help but touch even the most recalcitrant and cynical undergraduate soul. It came as no surprise to me at all that when the university instituted the Distinguished Teaching Award in the 1980s, Doug was one of its first recipients."

Perhaps the most touching portrait of the



Photo: Ron Hinshaw

evening was offered by Letson's daughter Nadine, who began university around the same time Letson moved into the president's office at St. Jerome's. "Despite his increased responsibilities and workload, he was always there for me," she remembered. "There were nights before a term paper was due or before a big exam when he would take a teary phone call at 2 a.m. without complaining. Now some of you may argue that if it was 2 a.m., he wasn't sleeping anyway, but nevertheless."

"I have come to realize what a special place St. Jerome's is and how proud I am of my father's role in making this place what it is today. I have seen buildings change and new buildings added. I have seen the addition of staff and faculty. And if there is one thing that I see common to all of these changes, it is that each of them has, in some way, made life better for the people who study and work here and for the people who will be a part of St. Jerome's in the future." ☺

Pat Zettel, one of Doug's former students, holds up an Old English textbook with a "cover the colour of congealed blood: Mine."

Doug steps down

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the government's help to buy and renovate the women's residence and create the new Community Centre. So it launched its first capital campaign.

Letson didn't have much fundraising experience, and he wasn't looking forward to it. ("I've never liked asking for anything from anybody.") The surprise was, he enjoyed it. "It's one of the most affirming things that's happened, that I've had to go out and talk to people in the community and look for support, because that's what I found: support of all kinds and growing appreciation for what we do here, that made you feel good."

He seems cheerful as he contemplates leaving, but even so, he admits stepping down won't be easy. "A lot of people think I won't be able to disengage." But now there will be more time for the outdoors—he's on the board of the Walter Bean Grand River Community Trail—and family. He and his wife Donna are planning a

Scandinavian trip along the route that Beowulf travelled.

There will be more time for teaching, too: something he's missed. But first he'll take a two-year sabbatical to work with Michael Higgins on a book about the church in the 21st century, *The Rebuilding of Rome*, and to prepare courses in Old and Middle English, and perhaps a literature course for the Sexuality, Marriage and the Family program.

Letson says he has no regrets about his presidency. "I faced some difficult challenges, hit them head-on, and I think I've done an honest job. I've never said anything that wasn't true... I'd stand by all the decisions I've made."

And did he perform well under the microscope? "I think St. Jerome's has come out the better for it. I don't know what it's done to my blood pressure," he says with a laugh, "but I think the institution is very healthy." ☺

Sweeney reappointed

John R. Sweeney has accepted a third four-year term as chancellor of St. Jerome's University starting July 1. His decision to accept reappointment was announced at a meeting of the board of governors on February 4. It was not a

he gained a reputation as a skilled, compassionate, and informed minister.

After retiring from the legislature in 1990 and becoming chancellor of St. Jerome's in 1991, he chaired the Waterloo Regional Government Review and the Ontario School Board Restructuring Task Force. Now, besides acting as chancellor, he serves on the board of St. Mary's Hospital and works with a group concerned with housing for the homeless in Toronto.

"It's all part of being involved in education, health care, housing—and helping people along the way," Sweeney says.

He's pleased with the achievements of St. Jerome's over the last few years. These include developing a closer relationship with the local school board, by providing courses for teachers, and a reorganization of the board to include more people in the community, "giving the board a better sense of what the community thinks of St. Jerome's and the community a better sense of what they can expect from the university."

Among the challenges he sees ahead, an important one is battling the public perception of the humanities as less valuable to society than the sciences or engineering. Tight funding presents another challenge, related to the perception problem. "I don't think there's enough money for the universities to do a good job of educating. It's a problem for all public institutions, but if the public don't think the institution is worthwhile, the issue won't get the attention of the political people."

Sweeney believes universities should be speaking up for human values more than they do. "The global economy was supposed to make life better for everyone, but instead it's left many people in its wake: the homeless, the poor, the unemployed. An institution like a university can stand up and say this is wrong: that profit is not the whole answer, and that the profit motive is destroying us. We have people with the knowledge, the expertise, the intellect to try and find a better way." ☺



Photo: Ron Newson

"Chancellor Sweeney has been a fabulous ambassador for St. Jerome's University," says former board chair Brian Eby (centre), seen here with the new chair, Margaret Voll, and John Sweeney.

difficult decision to make, he says. "I think the work of a university like St. Jerome's is important. And I thoroughly enjoy the responsibility and the work. I enjoy working with the kinds of people I meet at St. Jerome's and the University of Waterloo."

Board chair Brian Eby describes Sweeney as an exceptional ambassador for St. Jerome's. "He has continuously gone far above and beyond the call of his office," Eby says. "He has spoken well at numerous events and on many occasions, advancing the interests of St. Jerome's University and thrusting it into the limelight of the higher education scene."

Sweeney began his career as a teacher and principal in Toronto and later became the first director of education for the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. He represented the riding of Kitchener-Wilmot in the Ontario legislature from 1975, entering the provincial Liberal cabinet in 1980. While leading the ministries of community and social services, municipal affairs, and housing,

Gary Draper starts a new chapter

Gary Draper is in the thick of things, "catching up on critical theory, ordering books, renewing acquaintance with lots of books I love." He isn't talking about his old job as St. Jerome's librarian, but his new one as associate professor of English, starting in July.

In a way, it's a return to his roots: he has a PhD in 19th-century Canadian literature and taught at Western in the late '70s. But really it's a whole new side of himself that matured during his ten years as librarian. He has been an editor for Brick Books, poetry editor for the *New Quarterly*, columnist for *Books in Canada*, and co-publisher of Trout Lily Press.

All these things came together to inspire the new course on arts writing, covering everything from reviewing and criticism to grantsmanship and liner notes, which he will begin teaching next



January. He will also teach Modern Literature in English, English Canadian Literature to 1920, and Fantasy and Science Fiction.

The new librarian will be Carolyn Dirks, MA, MLIS. "She's an extraordinary colleague," Draper says. "Her role as assistant librarian has enormous scope. I'm sure the library will benefit from her fresh approach." ☺

The next installment of Gary Draper appears July 1, when he takes a post as associate professor of English.

Introducing Kieran Bonner

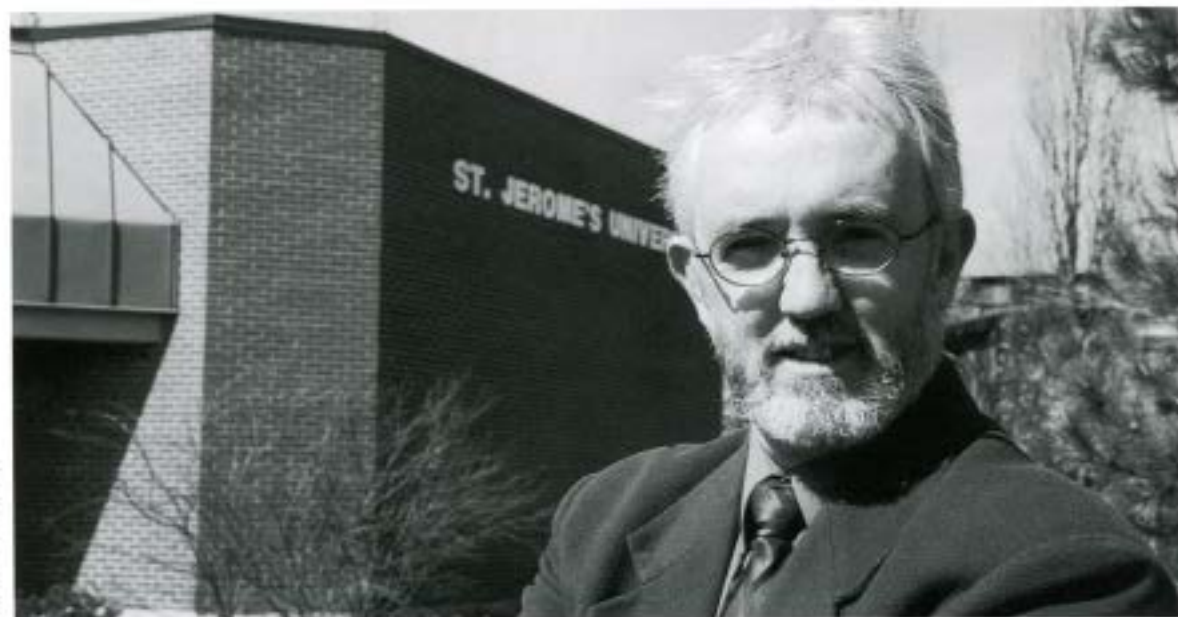


Photo: Ron Hewison

Kieran Bonner begins a four-year term as vice-president and academic dean of St. Jerome's on July 1.

The next vice-president and academic dean of St. Jerome's, and the first ever to be chosen from outside the university, will be Dr. Kieran Bonner, an Irish-born sociologist with a genial manner and a reputation as a creative force in administration. He begins a four-year term on July 1.

"St. Jerome's is a place that values teaching and has a reputation for providing a good liberal arts education: that's very important to me," Bonner says. "And I was impressed by the strong esprit de corps I found here."

His duties will include overseeing academic operations, standing in for the president on occasion, and chairing the supervisory committees that oversee the work of senior staff.

A graduate of Trinity College in Dublin, Bonner went to York University for his MA and PhD in sociology. For the last 12 years he has been a professor and administrator at Augustana University College, a Lutheran liberal arts college in Camrose, Alberta—the first Catholic to be appointed to a tenure-stream position on the faculty. He received Augustana's Merit Award for teaching, research, and contributions to the

college four times in ten years.

While there, he developed a new division of interdisciplinary studies and new international study programs, including the only Canadian full-semester program in Cuba. President Doug Letson says Bonner is nicely positioned to help St. Jerome's develop its own international programs.

His expertise in sociology (his special areas are parent-child relations and contemporary social theory) will strengthen this area of the curriculum at St. Jerome's. The interpretive sociology he does meshes well with the liberal arts, he says, "because there's a strong philosophical component to it. I work well with philosophers and people from religious studies and English." He has published two books, *A Great Place to Raise Kids: Interpretation, Science and the Urban-Rural Debate* (1997) and *Power and Parenting: A Hermeneutic of the Human Condition* (1998), and scores of articles.

Bonner has extra qualifications in parent-child relations: he's the oldest of 13 children and he and his wife Margaret have two daughters, aged 19, 16, and a son, 14. ☺

St. Jerome's professors win local awards

Two St. Jerome's professors, Carmeta Abbott and Eric McCormack, were honoured by the community in the past year.

Abbott is an associate professor of French and chair of the department of Italian and French Studies. Last November she received a City of Waterloo Award for making a "significant contribution to the Waterloo community" and enhancing the quality of life in the city. She was one of the key promoters of the rehabilitation of Silver Lake, and she chairs the Waterloo Park Master Plan implementation strategy committee

and co-chairs the Silver Lake implementation committee.

McCormack, internationally acclaimed author and associate professor of English, won the Literary Award at the 11th annual Kitchener-Waterloo Arts Awards ceremony in April. The citation described his work as "erie, funny, and often horrific fiction." His latest book, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1997), was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award. ☺



Photo: Ron Hewison

Award-winning poet and artist Heather Spears read at St. Jerome's on March 31 from her 1988 book of poems, *The Word for Sand*. She also read from her latest work, *Poems Selected and New*. Spears was one of 11 Canadian writers who took part in the Canada Council-supported St. Jerome's Reading Series in 1998-99. Series director Charlene Diehl-Jones says each reading drew about 40 people from on and off campus.

Shore sisters share honours



Megan (left) and Stephanie Shore carry off St. Jerome's top awards.

Twin sisters Stephanie and Megan Shore shared top honours at the St. Jerome's Awards Night on March 27.

Stephanie (BA '99, Psychology and Speech Communication) won the 1999 Dr. Douglas Letson Volunteer Service Award, formerly the Community Service Award, for her work as a volunteer. She tutored immigrants in ESL, helped plan and build with Habitat for Humanity, and worked with special needs children in local elementary schools. She's heading to teachers' college in the fall.

Megan (BA '99, Religious Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies) received the Zach Ralston Award for all-around achievement. She spent four months in Guatemala as a Peace and Conflict Studies intern, helped resettle Central American refugees through Romero House in Toronto, and talked to youth groups about social justice issues. On campus she was involved with the University Catholic Community. Her next objective: the Toronto School of Theology. ☪

Compassion and Solidarity

The World We Want

The 1999-2000 season of the St. Jerome's Centre for Catholic Experience offers "a look at the sort of world we'd like to live in during the next millennium," says David Seljak, director of the centre. He borrowed his title from the 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, in which Pope John Paul II, writing about finding an antidote to the will to power and greed that dominate values at the end of the century, called peace "the fruit of solidarity." Seljak presents this line-up of speakers:

September 17, 1999

Mark Kingwell, author of *Dreams of Millennium*, will talk about our fascination with the year 2000.

October 15, 1999

Fr. Philip Shano, SJ, superior and director of the Guelph Centre for Spirituality, will give the 1999-2000 Ignatian Lecture on Ignatian Spirituality and the Ecological Crisis: The Spirituality of Simple Living. A workshop, *Intimacy With the World: Simple Living and the Ecological Crisis*, follows on October 16.

November 16, 1999

Mgr. Paul-André Durocher, auxiliary bishop of Sault Ste. Marie, will speak on Education in the Spirit at the St. Jerome's-Waterloo Catholic District School Board Education Workshop.

November 19, 1999

Howard Dyck, conductor and choral director, will speak (with musical excerpts) on *Music That Makes a Difference: The Consort Caritatis*. This musical group donates the profits from its performances to charity.

January 21, 2000

Nancy Nason-Clark, a professor of sociology from the University of New Brunswick, will speak on Christian women's reactions to abuse by spouses and clergy.

Other speakers in the winter term will be Kieran Bonner, the new academic dean and vice-president of St. Jerome's, who will give the 1999-2000 School Board Lecture on Catholic Education in the Year 2000; John Wilkins, editor of *The Tablet*, England's most important Catholic journal, who will deliver the Devlin Lecture on Catholicism and Journalism in England; and Sr. Eileen Schuller, professor of religious studies at McMaster University, who will speak on Women in the Biblical Tradition at the St. Jerome's-Waterloo Catholic District School Board Education Workshop.

All lectures and workshops are free, and everyone is welcome. Lectures are held in Siegfried Hall at 7:30 p.m.; workshop times will be announced. For more information contact David Seljak, (519) 884-8111, ext. 232. ☪



Fr. William F. Ryan, SJ, economist and advisor to the International Development Research Council, delivered the 1998-99 Ignatian Lecture on March 5 at Siegfried Hall. He spoke on how the success of international development in the Third World depends on taking the spiritual and cultural needs of the local people into account.

St. Jerome's students volunteer their skills

Last fall, during the St. Jerome's Charity Run, Scott Campbell was browsing through a Volunteer Action Centre display. He was struck by what many of the charitable organizations had in common—something missing.

"I walked along and looked at them, and noticed a lot of them had no web sites," Scott says.

More organizations are using the Web these days to reach out to supporters and clients. Scott was aware of this; he also knew that few non-profit agencies can afford the fees charged by professional web site designers. "This is \$1,000-a-day work," he explains.

So why not volunteer his own skills? Scott was then a fourth-year computer science student (he had also taken courses in the Science, Technology and Values option). He had always been interested in the Internet and had done some web site designing on his own. As a student he had designed web sites during co-op work terms. One was for the medical school at the University of Western Ontario; another was for a not-for-profit hospital in Los Angeles, a means for the hospital to make contact with people and groups in the community.


The idea took root and grew. As the only residence don enrolled in mathematics, Scott knows all the math students living in residence. It wasn't hard to find half a dozen with

the skills and the willingness to join him. The opportunity to gain experience and hone professional skills held obvious appeal, but most of the others, like Scott, simply liked the idea of making a contribution.

"Students want to get involved. That's why many of them come to St. Jerome's: they like the community spirit," Scott says. The main stumbling block, especially for computer science students, is lack of time, at least during the daylight hours when most agencies are in operation. "But they can find time at night, because that's what computer science students do—they're on the Internet at 3 a.m."

After talking it over with residence director Darren Becks, Scott took the idea to President Doug Letson. The president floated it at a meeting of the Alliance of Organizations with Catholic Values and Traditions, a group that includes hospitals, social service agencies, school boards, and St. Jerome's. Their response was immediate and positive.

Two web sites are already in progress: one for the Catholic Family Counselling Centre and one for the Walter Bean Grand River Community Trail (not an Alliance member, but a local non-profit organization). Plans are in the works to create a revamped web site for St. Jerome's and a new one for Notre Dame of St. Agatha.

This summer the project is picking up steam, with many of the original volunteers returning to the campus following work terms. By the time Scott leaves for graduate studies at the University of Toronto this fall, he expects to leave a going concern in capable hands. 

Havana Day and Night

English professor Stan Fogel, who spends part of each year in Cuba, has launched Havana Day and Night, an English-language newsletter aimed at making Havana more accessible.

"Havana, with one phone book published in the nineties and one slim island-based newspaper, has remained a mystery to foreigners," Fogel writes in his editorial in the first (January 1999) issue. "To know it, you need to read us."

The eight-page issue carried short features on Cuba's university for the performing and visual arts, private Cuban restaurants, Havana's drag scene, taxis, and other stories.

Six issues a year will cost \$20. For more information write 25 Givins Street, Toronto, Ontario M6J 2X5, phone (416) 280-6088 or toll-free 1-877-4havana, fax (416) 531-1071, or send e-mail to cubamag@direct.ca.



Scott Campbell, residence don, heads a team of computer science students who are volunteering as web site designers for non-profit agencies.

Bluegrass gospel

A call to live differently

by A. James Reimer

This lecture on the theology of bluegrass gospel music by Jim Reimer, a professor of theology at Conrad Grebel College and member of the bluegrass gospel group Five on the Floor, was prepared for, but not presented at, a lively concert by the group at St. Jerome's on January 29, 1999. Reimer judged – rightly – that the audience was enjoying the music too much to sit still and listen to a lecture.

After one of our recent concerts, I was asked by an elderly Mennonite woman: Do you really believe what you're singing? Without hesitation I said: "Yes, I do." The following remarks are my attempt at justifying that answer.

I have always loved the great music of the Christian church, and have directed and sung in choirs devoted to classical choral music. Without a doubt, my most memorable musical experience was singing Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* under the baton of Robert Shaw, North America's most distinguished choral conductor of this century, at Toronto's Roy Thompson Hall. Shaw's rehearsals were, each of them, a religious experience. His ability to combine profound theological insight and inspiration with musical excellence made tears come to one's eyes: he had an incomparable way of bringing together emotion and the intellect – the litmus test for all great music and musicianship. My second most memorable musical event was singing Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, again in a Mennonite choir at Roy Thompson Hall, this time under the direction of Bramwell Tovey.

In both pieces of music there is an authentic struggle with doubt, suffering, and death that is quite different from the way human pain is dealt with in gospel music. In Beethoven's mass, the Credo in particular reflects the composer's own heroic affirmation of faith in the face of severe doubt raised by the Enlightenment movement. Britten's *War Requiem* is the 20th-century version of such religious anguish and affirmation in the face of global despair over war's destructiveness. I accept Paul Tillich's definition of great art as that which penetrates beneath the surface to unmask the human condition in its depth. Shallow art and music remains on the surface and merely draws attention to itself.

There is another musical genre in North American culture and the Christian church which I have loved almost as much as the classical tradition – the low-brow gospel song. It has its own form of dignity, and I grew up loving it both in its popular "radio" form and its more churchly version.

I inherited this "weakness" for gospel from the lower-middle-class, evangelical side of my background. Its toe-tapping rhythms, repetitive musical lines, and simple-to-remember lyrics all lent themselves to a personal, experiential religion. Families could sing these songs in the car on trips to British Columbia, and ordinary churchgoers in the pew with little musical education (let alone good intonation) could "get into" them enthusiastically.

The American gospel song emerged in 19th-century revivalism, sometimes referred to as the

"Great Awakening." The songs suited well the hardships and down-to-earth character of frontier life: they were simple, popular, repetitious, and easy to memorize, with emotional appeal for masses of people. They were a threat to the lovers of traditional music in the churches. As one rather biased commentator puts it: the "texts...are light and lacking in lyrical beauty or doctrinal strength" and the "tunes...are melodically trite and harmoniously dull..." (William Jensen Reynolds). While some of us might quibble with him they were, it must be admitted, rather short on intellectual content.

In my home church in southern Manitoba, the Altona Berghaler Mennonite Church where I was baptized, there were always two factions: those who opposed gospel music because it excited the emotions too much and those who favoured it (for the same reason). This division into the two camps was characteristic of many Mennonite churches at the time (it probably still is) and found expression in the fact that we had a German hymnal which could be purchased either with a gospel appendix or without one. The gospel tunes in this appendix were very carefully chosen not to offend the general spirit of the hymnal.

The 1940 English Mennonite Hymnal continued the trend of having a special section entitled "Gospel Songs," added reluctantly because of popular demand. The suspicion of the official musicologists editing the newer English Mennonite hymnal is reflected in the explanation in the accompanying Handbook:

Since the standard of music and words in the Gospel Songs is considerably below that which prevails in our best hymnals as well as in secular music and literature taught in the public schools, churches should seriously consider the ultimate effect of their too frequent use. It is a fallacy to assert that the people will respond to nothing better. Gospel Songs have a legitimate place, particularly in special services and revivals, but they leave much to be desired in the total work and worship of the church. Neither the music nor the words possess the strength and dignity entirely adequate for the worshipful praise of the Eternal.

So there you have the official judgment. What is so remarkable is that, despite all of this, the most sophisticated musical aesthete finds something irresistible about the gospel musical genre. Often over the years I have seen the Mennonite musical elite let fly with a few good old gospel tunes – tears running, laughter mixed with genuine religious emotion, as though

longing for a lost, experiential spirituality.

The strength and weakness of the gospel song is its subjectivity. In both the music and the lyrics, personal experience and emotion dominate over the intellect and the moral will. These songs, like the 19th-century revival movements with which they are associated, are a search for personal religiosity in the face of increasing industrialization and urbanization. The American spirituals and blues have some similar roots, intensified by the suffering of racial oppression and slavery.

Bluegrass gospel, the music our group specializes in, is part of this larger gospel phenomenon of the 19th century. It reflects the resurgence of Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century and the movement from rural country life to urban existence, especially for the Mountain people of the Appalachians.

Where it differs from the gospel songs that we used to sing in our Mennonite church is in its particular use of acoustical instrumentation, its tight harmonies and its frequent ironic twist: "I want to go to heaven but I don't want to die," for example, or "Twenty-twenty vision and walking 'round blind."

Back to the Mennonite woman's question: Do you really believe what you are singing? It's not so much a matter of believing in what we are singing (there is not enough substantive content there to either believe or not believe cognitively). It is really much more a matter of identifying with the general sentiments in the music. What are these sentiments?

There are a number of recurrent, archetypal themes in the music: a lot of walking, talking, on-the-road, and journey language; Jesus as a close and intimate friend, with whom a little talk will solve all our problems; pleas with God to let us stay a little longer on this earth, not for selfish reasons but to gather in the wayward and the lost.

But there is one underlying theme that far outweighs all the rest: the desire to leave this world of trouble and sorrow, to fly and sail away to a better home on high — away from the temptations of earthly joys, wealth, and pleasures. The good life on earth, the good deeds we do, the love we show our neighbours are but the stepping

stones and necessary conditions for the afterlife.

Good theology? Not exactly — if taken literally.

But it is the spirit in which bluegrass gospel is sung — quite different from ordinary gospel — that I find so appealing. It is a spirit of humour and irony, a kind of "second naiveté," in which the authors and singers have a certain distance from themselves and the lyrics. They don't take themselves and the music with ultimate



Photo: Ron Hewson

seriousness. And yet there is just enough truth in all of this to allow me to sing it with integrity.

I teach theology at Conrad Grebel College. For a good part of my time I live in the world of the intellect — thinking, teaching, and writing. But I am not only an academic; I'm a Christian and an active member of the Mennonite church. Theology for me is much more than the mind or the will; it is also the intuitive and emotive. It has to do with real life — the search for meaning in the face of sickness, depression, fear, desire, lust, broken promises, lost love, mid-life crises, financial ruin.

The music we sing addresses the basic emotions of human existence: hate, love, pain, death, joy and faith. Many of these songs are ballad-like retellings of simple biblical stories or, like David's psalms, a cry to the maker of the universe to get us out of this mess. If one looks hard enough, one also finds an alternate vision here, calling people to live differently in this world: "There's a God almighty and we've got to love Him / If we want salvation and a home on high / If we say we love Him but we don't show mercy / Then we don't have religion, we've just told a lie." ☺

Five on the Floor, a Kitchener-Waterloo based bluegrass gospel group, drew a capacity crowd to Siegfried Hall in late January for a toe-tapping concert. The five are, from left to right, Lyle Friesen, Jim Reimer, Henry Schmidt, Ron Harder, and Bob Janzen.

Ted McGee: Between acts

If Ted McGee's life were a play, he'd be enjoying a brief pause between acts right now, a moment when some plot lines are winding down, new ones emerging.

He was in England on April 14 to witness the end of one act. An associate professor of English at St. Jerome's University, he was taking bows at a Canada House reception to launch the newly published Volume 18 of the *Records of Early English Drama* (REED).

The objective of this monumental project, coordinated by the University of Toronto, is to collect all documentary evidence of dramatic and musical performances and other ceremonies in England up to 1642, when the Puritans closed the theatres. Each of the heavy red volumes is devoted to one or two counties: Volume 18, which McGee and his three co-editors began in 1981, documents Dorset and Cornwall.

"I feel very good about having produced something that other scholars will find useful in their own research, something that will become a benchmark," McGee says.

His job was to search town accounts, court records, diaries, Star Chamber cases—all possible sources—to find accounts of wandering minstrels and bear-baitings, maypole-dancing and annual village church processions. As a byproduct of the REED research, McGee says he would like to edit a book of libellous verse and songs of early modern Dorset. "There are

protests about land enclosure, there are bawdy attacks on the Puritans, there are verses about religious and political disputes. They give a fascinating glimpse of social history."

With the REED volume done, he's getting ready for his next cue. "I've been asked to co-edit the volume on Wiltshire, but I haven't said yes... yet." He has said yes to co-editing the Variorum *Othello*, an edition that would provide an exhaustive critical history and bibliography along with all versions of the play's text.

Research consumes about 15 per cent of his working time. He'd like it to be more: it's his second-favourite professional activity. "Teaching is number one."

Administration ranks third, but recently he's had to devote a lot of time to

it. He stepped down as chair of the St. Jerome's English department on May 1, to be succeeded by Charlene Diehl-Jones. This does not, however, mean more time for teaching and research, because beginning this summer he will spend two years as undergraduate officer of the English department on the main campus. His duties will include academic planning and scheduling, and—the part he is really looking forward to—academic counselling of undergrads.

The downside is that his teaching will be cut from six courses to three. He'll still be teaching Shakespeare and alternating terms of Canadian Children's Literature and Canadian Drama.

After 21 years, he still loves teaching. "What sustains me is the excitement of finding new ways to communicate with my students," McGee says. "These days, I find there's more of a performance element in my teaching." In fact, he's always been a performer: he's locally famous for wearing a Falstaff costume to class. He still wears it occasionally, but he's added stage armour, hats, disembodied hands, and other props bought at Stratford Festival auctions.

After seven years on the Stratford Festival board of governors, that role is ending. McGee's new role as festival senator means more committee work as well as more galas and openings. He'll continue getting other scholars from a wider range of universities involved in lecturing and writing at Stratford, as he himself has done for years. This year he's writing the program notes for *The Tempest*, and he'll be giving a Table Talk on the play on August 4, at 5:30 p.m. in the festival marquee.

He's also heavily involved in developing the festival's first courses for university credit, and that, too, will continue. With the collaboration of St. Jerome's, Waterloo, Windsor, and Guelph universities, the festival will offer three courses this summer: Teaching Shakespeare, Voice and Movement in the Theatre, and Shakespeare in Performance—the one McGee will teach, alternating with other lecturers.

His other volunteer commitment is as a member of the board of K-W Counselling. "It's very different from the festival board, but in a way more satisfying. I appreciate the chance to help people in my own community."

It's a busy life: "busier than I'd like it to be." He finds hockey a great stress-reliever: he once belonged to an old-timers' team called the Waterloo Worriers, and still plays every week. Best of all is the rare winter day when he can take his children to the country to skate, with a frozen lake all to themselves.

Family is one of the sustained themes in Ted McGee's life. The work on the REED volume bracketed major changes, beginning with his brother's death in 1981 and including the birth and growth of his two children, now 13 and 10. And this year his wife Donna is "closing in on her PhD in biology."

There's a bell chiming in the lobby. The next act is about to begin. 



The classroom's a stage for Ted McGee, who often uses Shakespearean costumes and props to enliven lectures on the Bard.

Photo: Bryn Gladding

CLASS notes

'72 Anne Fioravanti (née Runstedler, BA '72, English) and her husband John Fioravanti (BA '72, History) recently celebrated a milestone in their lives—they've completed 25 years in their respective professions. Anne is a personal lines underwriter with Economical Insurance and John teaches at St. David's Secondary School, both in Waterloo.

'75 For the last six years Kevin Droughan (BA '75, History) has been working as the production planning and scheduling manager for the neurology and animal health division of the pharmaceutical company Draxis Health Inc. He indulges his love of music by performing part-time with a Toronto R&B band called Rocket 88. And as if that doesn't keep him busy enough, he also has a small business in wedding photography.

She's one of the "Top 40 under 40"



A recent issue of *Report on Business Magazine* featured Michelle DiEmanuele (BA '87, Political Science) as one of Canada's "top 40 under 40"—innovative overachievers who believe in hard work and the axiom that possibilities are endless.

Michelle is the assistant deputy minister, organizational development, for the Ontario Ministry of Health. She's been in the position since late 1998.

"My role is unique," Michelle says. "I'm the only ADM for organizational development in the Ontario government." She's taken on the job of overhauling the ministry's business operations and structure so it can deliver its programs more effectively than it has in the past. Included in her current role is a plan to decentralize decision-making processes by creating seven new regional offices in London, Sudbury, Hamilton, Mississauga, Toronto, Ottawa, and Newmarket, starting this fall.

Michelle got her start as a co-op student working at the Legislative Assembly on work terms. After graduation she was hired full-time and moved through the ministries of community and social services, labour, and the attorney-general, where she helped revamp the management and service structure.

The public service is so large that Michelle says there is no chance she will run out of challenges. "Since graduating I feel I've had six or seven different jobs. It's been very fulfilling, very rich and diversified."

It's not easy, but she tries to maintain a balance between career, family, and community involvement. "With two children, I don't have as much time as I used to for volunteer work, but I do try to stay involved," Michelle says.

Tim McKenna (BA '75) is now the deputy photo editor at the *National Post*. News is a theme in his life: he's been married for nearly 14 years to Sue Prestedge, who is coordinator of broadcast journalism at Mohawk College. Tim and Sue have been living in Oakville since 1991 and have "three wonderful, gorgeous and very funny daughters," Tim says. "My current home endeavour is preparing my back shed for single occupancy as the inevitable march towards the mania of three into puberty at the same time looms."

'88 After eight years of commuting from Brantford to the Woodstock office of Nu-Gro Corporation, where she works as controller, Laurie Ault (BA '88) is happy that Nu-Gro's head office is moving to Brantford this July. Laurie is settling down in more ways than one: she was married on October 10, 1998, and she and her husband, Boyd Leeson, moved into a 110-year-old house in Brantford.

'91 Becky R. Lee (BA '91, Religious Studies; MA '93, Wilfrid Laurier) received her PhD in religious studies from the University of Toronto last November. She is now a fellow at the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at Victoria University (Toronto) and a sessional lecturer in Wilfrid Laurier's department of religion and culture.

Jane Snyder (BA '91, English) and her husband Kark Kessler have teamed up to create Photographic Memory. The Waterloo-based company specializes in creating historic and retrospective displays for companies and other organizations, one of which was part of the 1998 Business Heritage Day event at Kitchener City Hall.

'92 Life is triply busy these days for Sheila Arnold (BA '92, English; BEd '94, Queen's) and her husband Rob Schnurr. Their three sons, Jordan Spencer, Brett Dakota, and Caleb Jarrett, were born on May 5, 1998. Sheila has been working as a supply teacher and court reporter and living in Mildmay, Ontario.

Julie Roberts (née Johnson, BA '92, English) sends word that she was married to Clint Roberts on October 24, 1998, and that she and Clint have just bought a new house in Ayr, Ontario. She adds, "lost friends can get in touch with me at jroberts@kpl.org."



'93 "There's something magical living in a place where you have a view of the Alps from your breakfast table," says Debbie Schlums (née Ebanks, BA '93, Philosophy/Political Science). She sends news from her home near Zurich, Switzerland, where she lives with husband Dirk and children Alessandra, 2 1/2, and Lukas, six months. Debbie has completed a Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures (equivalent to an MA) in Geneva, and Dirk is

Hey SJU grads!

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CLASS notes

working on a PhD in mechanical engineering at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. "After he completes his degree we will be going where the wind blows, but hopefully we'll stay in Switzerland," Debbie writes. She would love to hear from former classmates: contact her at schlums@ifm.mavt.ethz.ch.

Lorrie Temple (née Matthews, BA '93, Sociology) and **Mark Temple (BA '93, Sociology)** announce the birth of their first child, Justin Matthew Temple, on November 13, 1998. Mark writes, "everyone says he looks like Lorrie—I suppose that's good, seeing the only other option was me." Lorrie teaches Grade 5 at St. Vincent School in Oakville and Mark is the air miles program manager for United Van Lines, based in Mississauga, Ontario. Their home e-mail is lormark@ican.net.

'94 Since March 1998, **Shari Chantler (née Biggar, BA '94)** has been working full time as a rehabilitation therapist with Peel and Halton Acquired Brain Injury

Services in Mississauga. She works with adults who have head injuries, doing speech pathology and physiotherapy, teaching crafts and creative writing, and organizing a summer baseball program. She and husband **Scott Chantler (UW BA '95)** moved into a new house in Waterloo in January. "Even though I am now a commuter, I love the job and that makes the commute a little easier," Shari writes. You can contact them by e-mail at s_chantler@hotmail.com.

"My career has taken yet another turn!" writes **Adam Lee (BA '94, English)**. After resigning from Necho/Just Vacations to take a short-term contract job in Budapest, he received a "phenomenal job offer" from Gametronics Gaming Equipment, a Toronto company that makes interactive slot machines-and is located in an old church in Yorkville. Adam is now the director of documentation for Gametronics. But his travels are far from over. When last heard from he was hoping to fly to the south of France and planning to visit England in March to explore his family history.



Judy Nairn wins Norm Choate Award

The winner of the 1998 Father Norm Choate Distinguished Graduate Award is Judy Nairn (BA '74, English). Judy, co-owner and vice-president of the Canadian

Automotive Training School, became a Waterloo District Catholic School Board trustee in 1994 and was chosen vice-chair in 1998. Among other achievements, she chaired the design committee for the new St. Benedict's Secondary School under tight financial constraints.

"To work with her," comments Dianne Moser, chair of the board, "is to experience her wisdom in decision making, deep caring for our people, and her passion for Catholic education.... I am confident that her exceptional leadership will be a gift to the chair's position in the near future."

He's outta here

Dave Augustyn, who was acting Director of Development and Graduate Affairs, left St. Jerome's in April to accept a position as fund-raising coordinator for the Alzheimer's Society of Niagara Region.

"It's a really great organization and a good cause—and one that's going to affect a lot more people as time goes on," Dave says. The position lets him continue his career path in fund-raising, and it also allows him to end a weekly commute to join his wife, Carol Berkhout, who teaches high school in Niagara. "Our long-term goal has always been to live in Niagara: we both have family there."



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