



NEWS

FROM **WATERLOO LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY**

WATERLOO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE — WATERLOO LUTHERAN SEMINARY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Council on the Study of Religion

Establishes Headquarters on Canadian Campus

The growth of interest in religion in general and its academic study has led eight learned societies in the field to strengthen the effectiveness of the Council on the Study of Religion, a recently established coordinating body.

It has named its first executive director, Dr. Norman Wagner, director of Graduate Studies at Waterloo Lutheran University, now on sabbatical but who returns to his post this fall.

The council includes the American Society of Christian Ethics, the American Academy of Religion, Catholic Biblical Association of America, Catholic Theological Society of America, College Theology Society, Society of Biblical Literature, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the American Society of Church History.

Until now, these eight groups of leading academics in the field have operated separately but now will be represented by the new council, which will improve business operations and attempt to coordinate all research needs.

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Waterloo Lutheran University has allocated an entire floor of its Centre Hall for the offices and Dr. Wagner is now recruiting a small staff to assist him with the many duties of the society. They include the planning of seminars, general meetings, exchange of scholarly information and the publication of official journals.

The new council also has a keen concern for the teaching and study of religion at both undergraduate and graduate levels across the continent. Waterloo Lutheran, for example, offers both B.A. and M.A. courses through its School of Religion and Culture, whose first chairman was Dr. Wagner.

One of the first publications of the new council was a report by Dr. Claude Welch on Graduate Education in Religion, a report which caused considerable controversy due to its unfavorable ranking of some of the older colleges in the United States.

Dr. Welch, dean of the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, Calif., and now chairman of the Council on the Study of Religion, had these comments about the appointment of Dr. Wagner as first executive director:

"Since the study of religion is one of the most volatile and exciting dimensions in North American academic life today, we felt it was essential that the Council on the Study of Religion have strong executive leadership.

"It was the unanimous decision of the council delegates that Norman Wagner could provide such leadership as an individual with recognized scholarly attainment, a wide appreciation for the field of religious studies, and proven competence as an administrator. Waterloo Lutheran University has made a most generous offer to house the council executive office. We are delighted to have found this combination."

Dr. Wagner is now at work in his new office working with delegates from across North America for major presentations at the International Congress of Learned Societies in the Field of Religion to be held in September at Los Angeles.

Dr. Wagner said his appointment came as a challenge.

"The Council on the Study of Religion has some 12,000 members in Canada, the United States and overseas and several thousand institutional subscribers through its member societies," he said. "The journals of the member societies and their other publications reflect the scholarly tone of today's work in this field.

"Quite apart from theological schools, there are now some 70 institutions with doctoral programs in religion and approximately 850 with undergraduate programs. The study of religion is certainly alive and flourishing."

He added that the tremendous success of Jesus Christ Superstar ought to convince any doubters that the rapid increase in studies in religion which is sweeping university campuses is part of a general rising interest prevalent in society.

Dr. Wagner received his Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Toronto and came to Waterloo Lutheran University in 1962 to organize the only similar department in Canada outside Toronto.

In 1969 the department was renamed the School of Religion and Culture, with Dr. Wagner as chairman, and broadened its offerings to include archaeological field trips both to the Near East and in Canada. It offers course instruction in various areas, including western culture and civilization and religion in contemporary culture.

Dr. Wagner has been active in Learned Society executive positions in Canada, including publication of the Canadian Journal of Theology and its successor, Studies in Religion. He was named executive secretary-elect of the Society of Biblical Literature this past fall.

In addition to his position at WLU in the field of Religion, Dr. Wagner was named Coordinator of Research for the university and in 1970 was made director of graduate studies and research.

In commenting on the appointment, Dr. Frank C. Peters, president of Waterloo Lutheran University, said he was delighted with the decision of the council to select Dr. Wagner and establish its office in Canada.

"I think this decision reflects well on our faculty members, whose teaching and research has been widely recognized in this country, the United States and abroad.