

New graduate program at St. Jerome's will prepare Catholic leaders

“Great and momentous things are happening in the Church, and lay people have to be theologically literate to be ready for them,” says Michael W. Higgins, President of St. Jerome's. Priests are aging and retiring; new vocations are not keeping pace with attrition, while parish populations are growing. As a result, responsibilities are falling more and more on lay people in hospitals, on school boards, in counselling services.

“There are many lay people filling these roles and they are wonderful, well-educated people. But most are not educated to a level in theology that makes them competent to provide leadership in the Catholic community. At St. Jerome's we have a vital role to play in this time of change. Our job is to educate the leaders and potential leaders and to provide an enlightened direction for Catholic education in Ontario and perhaps beyond.”

To this end, St. Jerome's is proposing to offer a graduate-level program in the Roman Catholic tradition. St. Jerome's University will activate its degree-granting rights to establish the new program. (St. Jerome's waived its degree-

granting rights at the time of federation so that its students would graduate with a University of Waterloo BA or BMath. The activation will not affect undergraduate degrees.)

An endowment of \$600,000 is required to launch the proposed program and a total of \$2.5 to \$3 million will be needed to realize it fully. With founding pledges of \$250,000 from the Congregation of the Resurrection and \$100,000 from the Diocese of Hamilton, the private phase has gone very well. Now the public phase begins.

“Because of the generosity of the Resurrectionists and of the Bishop, one prominent Roman Catholic philanthropist has pledged several thousands of dollars to our graduate program, though he has requested anonymity in the matter of his gift,” says Higgins. “We also have several other individuals and communities who are currently reflecting upon our request for support.

“It is my sincere hope that the entire Catholic community in the Diocese of Hamilton will rise to this most exciting venture of collaboration, learning, and service in our history as an academy.”

A night of feasting and firsts

September 28 was a night for announcing new and exciting initiatives, including what St. Jerome's President Michael W. Higgins describes as “the most dramatic change for St. Jerome's since federation with the University of Waterloo in 1960.”

The first St. Jerome's Feast for Catholic University Education, part of the celebrations for the feast day of St. Jerome on September 30, was held to celebrate post-secondary Catholic education, not just at St. Jerome's but across the province and the country. Higgins took the opportunity to announce the launch of the public phase of a fundraising campaign to endow a proposed St. Jerome's graduate program in Catholic theology. It was also the first formal announcement of the program, which is intended to develop informed lay leadership for Catholic institutions. It will be the first graduate degree program ever at St. Jerome's.

Underscoring the theme of the feast, the first annual Chancellor John Sweeney Award for Leadership in Catholic University Education was presented during the evening to the order that founded St. Jerome's in 1865: the Congregation

of the Resurrection. The award recognizes the person or group that has made an outstanding contribution to Catholic post-secondary education,



Fr. Lorford Keasey, Provincial Superior of the Congregation of the Resurrection, accepts the first Chancellor John Sweeney Award for Leadership in Catholic University Education from St. Jerome's graduates Deborah Pecoskie, Chair of the Board of Governors, and Ken Lavigne, former registrar of St. Jerome's.

Photo: Ron Hewson

“so it makes perfect sense that the first recipient should be the Congregation of the Resurrection,” Higgins says. The 260 people who attended rose in a standing ovation to honour the CRs as they accepted the award. The name of the award, a tribute to John Sweeney's long and distinguished record of service to St. Jerome's as its first lay chancellor, was decided while he was still in good health, Higgins noted. Since his death it has become a memorial to him.

Special guests at what will be an annual event included Bishop Anthony Tonno of the Diocese of Hamilton; Elizabeth Witmer, Environment Minister; Karen Redman, MP for Kitchener Centre; Kay Sweeney and members of her family; and representatives of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Sisters of St. Joseph (Hamilton), and school boards and hospitals across the province. Although the scope of the Feast for Catholic University Education this year was diocese-wide, Higgins says, in future the feast could become a national event.

To be continued

Peter Sweeney, son of former Chancellor John Sweeney, delivered the eulogy at his father's funeral on July 11, 2001 at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Kitchener. The following is an excerpt from that eulogy.

It was a sunny spring day, the anniversary of Nanny Sweeney's death, and Dad and I made a trip to the cemetery to say hello. We reminisced about the great lady who had given everything to the son she adored. And then Dad asked me to keep a promise. He had his epitaph chosen and asked me to relay it to the rest of the family and have it engraved on his tombstone after he was gone.

I remember thinking, here's a man who has accomplished so much, touched the lives of so many; his wisdom is legendary. Would it be advice, like “Measure twice, cut once”? Would it be an order: “Never pack up without whisking the tent”? Or would it be his patented suggestion, his way of telling you that you weren't quite on the right track: “You know what you could do”?

No, it was nothing like that. In typical selfless, thoughtful fashion, Dad wants his epitaph to simply read: “To be continued.” Imagine that. With all of the boasting he could have done, he chose instead to remind us all that life is a journey and family is a constantly evolving story.