

# A Feast of Memory and Affirmation

“Catholics are not a dour crowd...not inattentive to the finer things that exalt the senses, and we are here for a feast—for a celebration.”

With these words, St. Jerome’s President Michael W. Higgins broke into the happy hubbub of two hundred guests gathered in the Douglas R. Letson Community Centre on Friday, September 23rd for the 5th Annual St. Jerome’s Feast for Catholic University Education. What ensued was indeed a feast: a feast of words, images and memories, as well as a superb gourmet dinner.

This year, the Chancellor John Sweeney Award was presented to an order of women closely connected with St. Jerome’s history and mission as a Catholic University. The School Sisters of Notre Dame—who arrived in Ontario in 1871 to administer the orphanage in St. Agatha at the invitation of Fr. Eugene Funcken, C.R.—aligned themselves with St. Jerome’s University in 1961 to found Notre Dame College and provide significant educational opportunities for women.

**Deborah Pecoskie** (BA ’72), Chair of St. Jerome’s Board of Governors and herself a graduate of Notre Dame College, gave a special tribute. “Where does one begin to honour an outstanding group of women who have impacted your life in such a profound manner?” she asked. “This is the gift which I and others received: the offering of a life, and the gift of a place. Tonight we honour and congratulate a group of women, many here, many gone, who truly know what it is to give unconditionally of themselves and truly to fulfill the role of sister.”

In accepting the Award, the Provincial Leader, **Sister Delia Calis**, SSND (BA ’64), who was among the first students at Notre Dame College, confirmed that the founding Sisters recognized a need and committed themselves to meeting it. “Urged by the love of Christ, we choose to express our mission through ministry directed towards education. For us, education means enabling persons to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God’s image and assisting them to direct their gifts towards building the earth.”

“Like Mother Teresa, we educate with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons, as our ministry demands a Christian vision of what the human person is called to be and what the world is

destined to become. We believe that education—learning—is a giving and a receiving, a mutual enrichment. Education is growing in communion with God and with one another, and in acceptance of responsibility for the earth and its people.”

Sr. Delia spoke approvingly of the ways in which St. Jerome’s continues to fulfill that vision of education, citing the recent partnership with Intercordia Canada to provide students with first-hand experience of the challenges faced by developing countries and the newly-launched Master in Catholic Thought (MCT) program as examples.

President Higgins provided the assembly with a progress report on the MCT, to which the



Deborah Pecoskie honours the SSNDs

Photo: Mike Christie

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proceeds of the annual Feast are directed. Over \$700,000 has been raised to launch the program, which received Ontario Council of Graduate Studies approval in 2005. The inaugural offering of classes in September attracted twenty registrants—triple the number expected—with more new students beginning in January.

“As a community,” Higgins concluded, “this came to fruition because we knew that we needed it. We also need to come together, to appreciate the things that are part of our sense and signature as a community. Communion is more than just simply language; it’s a way of being together sacramentally, corporeally and spiritually.”



Kay Sweeney and Sr. Delia Calis

Photo: Mike Christie