

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2019

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The Presbyterian College is a partner within the Montreal School of Theology, and is affiliated with the School of Religious Studies, McGill University.

Reaching Out in French

A new program launches

For much of its history, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has had a rather arms-length relationship with Frenchspeaking populations in Canada—and particularly with the Francophone majority in Quebec. This wasn't always the case. Shortly after its founding in 1865, for example, The Presbyterian College (PC) was able to establish a French department for theological instruction and, to this end, engaged the Reverend Professor Adrien Coussirat to teach theology. Coussirat had been born into a Huguenot family in France and eventually moved to North America to pastor and to teach. He went from part-time lecturer at the College in 1868 to fulltime professor in the French department in 1870.

Unfortunately, in the early decades of the twentieth century this focus on theological education in French waned considerably, and much of the Presbyterian Church's investment with Francophone communities was lost.

Fast forward to the Summer of 2019, when The Presbyterian College was able to sign an agreement with the Institut de Théologie pour la Francophonie (ITF), to launch a Master of Theological Studies in French. The Institut is an evangelical theological school in Montreal affiliated with L'Université Laval. The new master's program began in September of this year as a pilot project and has four students enrolled—its curriculum focuses on the formation of missional leaders for diverse, Francophone congregations.

The goal of the program is to help church leaders bring the good news of Christ into various contexts with confidence and with theological care. Further, the hope of both ITF and PC is to enroll an increasing number of women and



Students in the new Master of Theological Studies program, with Dr. De Vries and Dr. Smith.

men in the program, and to eventually offer it on a bilingual basis, also.

Glenn Smith, formerly of Direction Chrétienne (Montréal) and a longtime friend of The Presbyterian College, is Academic Dean at ITF and has been named Director of the Master of Theological Studies program. It can be said that Dr. Smith and the Faculty of PC approach this program in the same spirit that the Reverend Coussirat approached theological education more than a hundred years ago: "Coussirat aimed to have both an evangelical and a wide theological perspective in his teaching" (Richard Lougheed in the book *Still Voices, Still Heard*).

Among the students in the pilot project, Warren Beaubrun describes his approach to studies in this way: "I've been wanting to study at the graduate level for many different reasons, mostly because I seek to do more *for* the church, and to learn more from the church. I feel that graduate studies has a way of working your mind more, so to speak. I feel that what I will learn throughout this journey will contribute to the advancement of the Kingdom and will be of service to the congregation. I also want to be able to train the next generation of men and women that have the calling to serve Jesus."

The church across the country is imagining new possibilities for its life and ministry. That is no less true in Quebec, and no less true in theological education. These are exciting days!

Praying as a Community



Our life together as a worshipping and learning community is rooted in Jesus Christ, who is our life and who calls us into service with him. We are grateful that our Lord invites us into a shared life, and for the privilege we have of praying for one another.

The College invites you to pray for...

Enoch Lee (student) and his wife Pamela, who gave birth to their second child (James, a brother for Noah) in September. We celebrate with them, and pray they will know health, joy, and rest!!

International students who are far from their family (spouses, children, and parents), that they would have meaningful connections with family over a distance and would experience meaningful and faithful community life here in Montreal.

Principal Dale Woods, on sabbatical until January 1, 2020. Pray that this would be a time of refreshment for him, and a time to make meaningful discoveries as he explores questions of online education.

Recent graduates of the college, who are either searching for a Call or taking first steps in ministry in a new context – that

they will be equipped by the Spirit that Christ breathes on His people.

Emily Simunic in her new role as Administrative Coordinator at the College, that she will find joy in her work and a meaningful place as a new member of the college community.

The Mentoring Program of the Leadership Centre, as we seek to strengthen and build this vital program.

For core teaching faculty in the School of Religious Studies, that they will know joy and fulfillment as they teach students in preparation for ministry. Professors Gerbern Oegema, Patricia Kirkpatrick, Heidi Wendt, Ian Henderson, Douglas Farrow, and Torrance Kirby.

Supervisors of this year's IMY students—Sarina Meyer, Ian MacMillan, and Elia Martorella—that they would be a source of encouragement and wisdom for the students they supervise.

Our partner colleges within the Montreal School of Theology, that our shared commitment to theological education will bear fruit in the church and in the world.

The recruitment and fundraising efforts of the college, as we continue to build a College that serves Christ and the world in imaginative and hopeful ways.

"A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another..." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A Prayer for the College

By Katherine Burgess (Alumnus and Member, Board of Governors)

God, our creator, as the new
school year continues,
I ask your blessing on
The Presbyterian College,
on those who are here as students

on those who are here as students, on those who are here as teachers, and on the support staff.

I also ask you to bless those people who support the college through prayer through donations through giving their time.

I pray that this year may be fruitful for all those connected with the college so that they will sense that you are watching over them

I pray that the students whether they are preparing for ministry or other work within the church will be successful

I pray that the teachers
will be able to inspire
those who are studying
so that they will carry your word
even to the farthest reaches of the earth

I pray that those in their

In-Ministry Year

will have supportive mentors so that they will be prepared for what will be coming next wherever they may go

I ask that you keep the college in the shadow of your wings this day and forever in your most precious name Amen

A Pilgrim People

Being and Building Authentic Christian Community

By the Rev. Dr. Lucille Marr, with students

Each September we begin the college year by taking time to re-connect and rebuild community life, and do so through our annual retreat in the Laurentians. Our students bring with them experiences gained in their respective pilgrim journeys to points across Canada, and to locations around the globe, during the summer. Coming back to Montreal, then traveling out to the Laurentians for a retreat, is also, itself, an act of pilgrimage that we take as a community. We take time to "step out of the traffic," as Eugene Peterson has translated Psalm 46: 9; we reconnect after a summer that has taken us in many directions, and we regroup as we share our experiences and worship the God whom we serve.

The college community is made up of a pilgrim people, individuals transformed by their varied experiences. At this year's retreat, Tim Keener, then Director of the Leadership Centre (who has since moved on to become full-time Executive Director of Christian Direction, Montreal), spoke of the potential of short-term mission for personal transformation. He did so using a framework developed by the travel-writer Pico Iyer: As we travel we first lose ourselves, and then we are transformed in our selfunderstanding as we accept hospitality from others in new environments. This framework is a helpful way of thinking about our respective summer experiences. The stories shared here, below,



The college community gathered at a camp on the shores of Lake MacDonald, in the Laurentians.

illustrate how summer pilgrimages provided some of our students with a clearer image of God and themselves through encounter with others. Hearing these stories we are ourselves transformed and drawn more deeply into the community of the college.

Oliver Kondeh Ndula reflects on his trip home to Cameroon after a two-year absence: While it was a homecoming, it was also a kind of pilgrimage. I returned to my country to embrace the sad reality that it was no longer safe to be home. I could not travel to my region of origin because of the current socio-political and security instability that has taken hold of the North West and South West regions of Cameroon since just after I left in 2017. This meant that my pilgrimage was not as fulfilling as I would have loved it to have been. Family in Cameroon extends far beyond the nuclear family; my inability to travel to my home village meant that I was unable to see some family members. My time was spent between Yaounde (the capital city of Cameroon where my elder brother lives) and Nkongsamba (another French speaking town, to which I moved my family from the anglophone region).

In a sense, both my family and I were pilgrims to Nkongsamba when I visited, since all of us were "strangers" in the town. This did mean, however, that we had close family time. As you can imagine, I had many stories to share about my experiences in Canada. My family had much to share on their experiences living on "Ground Zero" (a cliché now used to describe the conflict between North West and South West Regions of Cameroon). I also had the opportunity to worship Cameroonian style again in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, and the privilege of preaching twice. It was a wonderful time, though so short. Before very long I was in the skies again heading back to Montreal.

Kathy Parks shares a significant moment en route from her home in New Brunswick to her summer student ministry on Prince Edward Island: Having left my home on April 8th with a good four feet of snow still on the ground, I was astonished to find no snow as I approached Prince Edward Island. As I drove closer to my destination, I scanned the tree line; the ground was bare. This revelation foreshadowed an ease in returning to familiar roads, churches, people and a manse with a sense of 'old news'; I have been here before. As I entered the pulpit that first Sunday morning I experienced some butterflies, as might be expected – as I had experienced them the first time I was there. But I quickly felt re-assured by the warmth of hospitality, of being among people who knew me, and I them. The hardship of winter faded as I found the joy of spring, in my coming back to a place of love.

Guy Laberge shares out of his experiences in the four summer placements in rural Canada that have taken him from his native Quebec to northern Ontario and Saskatchewan: Summer Ministry has offered me so many growth opportunities as I have been welcomed into ministry by people of faith. My experiences have been varied, and my formation has been strengthened through worshiping in a variety of congregations. I value the opportunities to preach and lead in



Cottages on beautiful Lake MacDonald in the Laurentians.

worship, as well as the pastoral care and home visitation that I was privileged to do. I am so grateful for the hospitality that was so warmly offered in these communities, including the tea, which was perfect every time!

Theresia Binui Ndofor reflects on her summer spent in remote Iqaluit, far from her homeland of Cameroon: Experiencing the Tundra, almost twenty-four hours daylight in summer, living on this beautiful island with so many lakes around town, climbing up the hills just to savor the beauty of nature were some of the few experiences of the wonders of God in creation. This beautiful island with wonderful people, a strong bond of community life and sharing are worth living in, truly a "Land of Hospitality." Worship at the local Pentecostal and Roman Catholic churches provided opportunities to appreciate ecumenicity. Ministering at a wake in honour of my friend's brother was a time of sharing the Word with them, and experiencing firsthand the love these people share. Did I forget to mention the Arctic Char and the Caribou? Mmmm... the aroma is still too fresh to be forgotten. Iqaluit, the 'Land of Fish,' I hope to visit you again.



Photo by Kirsty Dickson-Maret, a first year MDiv student, during our retreat on Lake MacDonald.

How do I respond to people who think God is irrelevant?

By the Rev. Todd Statham, Class of 2003



A few years ago I was teaching part time in the theology department of a small German university. Germany is a deeply secular nation in many ways; the students I taught—all of whom were baptized Lutheran or Reformed members of the Landeskirche (state church)—were often patronizing toward Christianity. Most were studying theology as a purely academic interest and were sure that neither God nor the church were of much relevance today. "God has let himself be pushed out of the world," remarked

a student during a seminar, paraphrasing Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous (and elusive) remark made from prison.

As a practical assignment, I had students visit one of the hundred immigrant congregations that have popped up in the bustling city of Hamburg over the past decade. These congregations are often African, thoroughly charismatic, and definitely not part of the Landeskirche. I was fascinated by the students' impressions. It wasn't just the energetic drumming and the evangelistic zeal of the sermons that struck them; it was that the worshipers were so obviously convinced of God's reality and God's relevance to their lives. One student in particular, I recall, was visibly shaken. She had never before encountered people for whom daily life was unthinkable apart from God.

How do we respond to people who think God is irrelevant to life?

In the United States and Canada, church attendance is declining and Christian cultural influence waning. But this isn't the case globally, where religion is alive and well and Christianity in particular is vibrant and vital. People from every culture and nation on earth are experiencing God as real and relevant, the power that helps us face life's challenges and the truth that calls us to live with integrity and love. I respond to the person who thinks God is irrelevant by insisting on God's genuine relevance to everyone else in the world apart from that person. Obviously, this isn't meant to mock them; it's a tongue-in-cheek challenge to their assumption that feeling God's absence is "normal." It's not! Perhaps it gets the person thinking along the lines

of the student in my class: "If so many others find God relevant, why don't I?"

True, to admit that God is relevant for others doesn't necessarily show God is relevant to my life. How could we respond at this point?

As Christians, our experience of life is inconceivable without God. What older Reformed theology called a life *coram deo* (before God's face) is winsomely described in the contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God*: "God is with us in our world, holding all things in tender embrace and bending them to his purpose. The confidence that the Lord is faithful gives meaning to our days and hope to our years. The future is secure, for our world belongs to God" (12).

We know further that even people who don't acknowledge God still live and move and have their being in God (Acts 17:28). So, the problem is not that God isn't relevant to these people; it's that God doesn't feel relevant. This is typical of our secular age: It's easy to think God is irrelevant because it often feels like God is irrelevant.

"The confidence that the Lord is faithful gives meaning to our days and hope to our years."

Perhaps the best way to respond to people who feel this way is not with an apology or argument but with a testimony of how we've personally experienced God as relevant. When have you sensed God's goodness in your life or felt God's guiding hand at a critical moment? Where have you been stirred by God's love or troubled by God's justice? The Psalms set a great example for us in declaring God's everyday relevance: in

the experience of the beauty of creation (Ps. 104), a purposeful life (Ps. 1), or deliverance in times of trouble—"If the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive" (Ps. 124:2-3).

By sharing our personal experience of God's relevance, we can challenge others' attitudes and stimulate their imaginations to see and feel what life is like when it's experienced *coram deo* as it is for millions and millions of people in our world. Perhaps then they will even consider some reasons we might offer for why belief in God matters.

"How do I respond to people who think God is irrelevant?" June-2019 Copyright © 2019 The Banner, Christian Reformed Church in NA. All rights reserved. Used by permission. // TheBanner.org

Flourishing Congregations

By Tim Keener



When you think of a flourishing congregation what comes to mind? Perhaps you think of members of all ages growing and serving, vibrant worship, and community outreach. Or maybe you think of the absence of the dangers and threats we know so well—congregational conflict, financial deficits, or a lack of a common vision. Simply naming and describing aspects of a flourishing congregation is an important step in moving towards healthy and missional communities of faith.

This past June, forty-five congregational leaders gathered at The Presbyterian College with just that question in mind: what contributes to a flourishing congregation? For this important workshop we welcomed Dr. Arch Wong of the Flourishing Congregation Institute at Ambrose University. Dr. Wong is associate director of the institute as well as professor of practical theology & religious education. In addition to his studies and

research, Dr. Wong draws from 10 years of pastoral ministry experience in Canada.

The Flourishing Congregations project has been an important benchmark for social scientific research concerning the state of the church in Canada. This workshop was a rich morning for pastors, church leaders, and theology students to learn together and form an image of healthy ministry practice. Their research included responses from denominational leaders, pastors, and congregants from Catholic, mainline, and conservative Protestant settings from Vancouver to Halifax.

Their research found that flourishing congregations have an *organizational ethos* that includes: clear self-identity, strong leadership, innovation, and helpful organizational structures. In additions, these congregations had the following *internal*

strengths: diversity, hospitable community, engaged laity, and established discipleship pathways. Finally, they found that *external markers* of flourishing congregations were: evangelism, neighbourhood involvement, and strong partnerships.

It is impossible to set goals and move towards them without a clear vision of what we are aiming for. These 11 characteristics consistently appeared throughout their interviews and provide a critical framework for Canadian churches today. With this clear vision of what flourishing congregations look like, church leaders can move towards better praxis and ensure that the church continues to flourish in our neighbourhoods, cities, and rural areas.

Worship notes



We have been delighted, this Fall, to welcome Jessica Gauthier as Worship Leader at The Presbyterian College. Music has been an integral part of Jessica's faith journey since childhood, and for over twenty years she has helped to lead worship in a variety of denominational settings. She values the role of music in shaping corporate worship, celebrating both the diversity and unity to be found in the church universal. Jessica is also presently pursuing a BTh degree in the School of Religious Studies (McGill) and brings a deeply thoughtful, theological approach to worship.

As background to this appointment of a Worship Leader, it is worth pointing out that worship in the wide church, as well as

within Presbyterian congregations, has developed and changed in significant ways over past decades—and worth acknowledging that the chapel services of the college have not always kept pace with those changes. Some will of course think this is a good thing, while others will bemoan the lack of progress!!

Over the past several years, the college has taken small but significant steps forward in its worship life—we have introduced contemporary worship songs, global music, and the rhythms of the djembe. With the introduction of the position of Worship Leader, we take an additional step by inviting Jessica to lead us into worship with prayer and reflection, while also leading us in song and from the keyboard (usually the piano keyboard, though occasionally the organ keyboard, also!).

Our intention is not to introduce change into worship just for the sake of change. Rather, we want to enrich our worship life—for the blessing and upbuilding of students—even as we hold to core Reformed convictions. We remained centred on the scriptures, centred on the grace of God embodied in Jesus Christ, and preoccupied with the providential care of God for his people and the world. Our worship is, we pray, *soli deo Gloria*. We thank Jessica for the wonderful contributions she has already made and look forward to her continuing leadership among us in the months ahead.

Opinion on Bill 21

By Professor Ian Henderson, School of Religious Studies, McGill University



Why would an Anglican evangelical New Testament scholar agree to write to Presbyterian readers, about a Quebec law adopted last summer? Partly because the law, which specifically mentions face-coverings, seems especially to target otherwise highly-qualified, religiously observant Muslim women. But partly also because I think Quebec's recent "Loi sur la laïcité de l'État" ("Law respecting the laicity of the State") is a useful tool for Reformed Christians to practice our skills at biblical and reformational thinking, in order to realize the beauty of Christ's mind living in us.

"My intention, by contrast, is to let Jesus be as visible as possible in every aspect of my world."

A feature of the "Law respecting the laicity of the State" as actually adopted

is that it is *less bad* than the earlier Charte de la laïcité or Charte des valeurs québécoises proposed in 2013. As far as I can tell (I'm not a lawyer), under the new law, I, as an employee of a publiclyfunded university, will only be prevented from working with my face covered. The legislation proposed back then by Bernard Drainville was going to be far more invasive of my academic and religious freedom. Now, because I work in a university, I won't be prohibited from dressing and teaching as I choose, but Jewish and Muslim neighbours hoping to work in public sectors less autonomous than the university will indeed have their religious identities made legally invisible.

Yet the "much less bad" law that has actually passed is based on exactly the same principles as the earlier less cautious version. Successive Quebec governments still mean to push religion(s), as much as possible, out of visible public life. My intention, by contrast, is to let Jesus be as visible as possible in every aspect of my world. The conflict may be managed, but it will never go away.

Key principles behind the law are a particular notion of "laicity" and a particular belief in the possibility of

"religious neutrality." In English we usually describe an institution that is not concerned with or subject to religious authority as "secular." "Laicity" and "secularity" are not quite the same - and there are different versions of each, but both are religious, indeed, Christian in origin. Laicity evokes initially the distinction between lay and clergy inside the Church. Quebecois(es) of my age or older remember when the Quebec "State" was very heavily influenced by clergy and members of religious orders (many of whom wore distinctive clothing indicative of their vocation). My friend Pierre Lebel speaks of an enduring "religious wound' in the hearts of many raised in Quebec in those days. The Quiet Revolution was an only partial redefinition of "the people" from being imagined as a covenant "lay" community, to being an essentially ethniclinguistic-geographical community. A State that thinks of itself as "laicized" and which fears people in religious clothes is not a religiously neutral State, it is a specifically post-Catholic State with an inner need to perpetuate that identity.

The notion of "secularity" has slightly different undertones, especially of time: a "saeculum" is a long, but finite period

Giving Monthly—A Significant Way to Donate

By Tahra De Lallo

The Presbyterian College is deeply grateful to donors who give monthly to the College. Some donors sign up through their credit cards, others by

sending a personal cheque each month, and still others through the Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR) monthly payment program.

As there were twelve apostles (!) we currently have 12 individuals who give regularly in this way, and their gifts range from \$20 to \$600 per month. The



of time, a unit of social memory, eventually a century, *un siècle*. In that sense, a "secular State" is a State that knows and accepts that it is not eternal, that there are institutions (notably religious ones) which are older than the State and which will be there after any particular State is gone. The symbol of the burning bush is a picture of an institution which is not merely secular, but rather eschatological. The Church will outlive the State. A wisely secular State is one which senses its own mortality.

Lately, a debate has begun about when (not so much whether) to require

would-be immigrants to Quebec to complete a catechism in normative Quebec values («apprentissage des valeurs démocratiques et des valeurs québécoises» [Simon Jolin-Barrette]). It seems that would-be migrants to Quebec will be required not only to know what the government thinks Quebec values are, but actually to express agreement with them: These will be values Quebecois(es) ought to hold, not necessarily values Quebecois(es) do in fact hold. And Quebec is not the only State to behave often as a sort of secular Church, or New Israel. Canada's motto has long been "a Mari usque ad Mare"

from Psalm 72:8, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea..." More recently the motto of the Order of Canada was added to the Canadian State's coat of arms: "Desiderantes meliorem patriam," from Hebrews 11:16. A quick read of Psalm 72 and Hebrews 11 will tell you that they are not about Canada. Are they applied to Canada by an act of post-biblical cynicism or by a rather naïve leap of faith, that Canada can approximate God's dominion, the patria of God's faithful ones?

A central feature of Jesus' work in the world is his proclamation and embodiment of the "Kingdom of God" ("Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew), which we might better translate as the "Kingship of God" or the "Sovereignty of God." Many in the world believe that the State acquires sovereignty from something called "the People." Biblically, peoples, families, nations, all human communities, are called into being by God, in complex, changing and rather secular, temporary ways. The relationship between God's sovereignty and the derivative, relative sovereignty of any mortal, secular community is always properly tense, sometimes downright hostile. Quebec can pass laws "respecting the laicity of the State" but Christians and Jews are bound first by a Law respecting the temporariness and relativity of every human constitution, even the best, and the absolute sovereignty of King Jesus.

average gift is approximately \$128. No matter how big or how small the gift, we are truly grateful for those who have chosen to give monthly as a means to remember and support the College.

As little as \$30 per month adds up quickly and at the end of the year totals

\$360 when year-end tax receipts are sent for income tax deductions.

Monthly giving is an easy and efficient way to contribute to the work of the College and we thank those sincerely who have chosen monthly giving as a way to support our work of educating

young men and woman for ministry here in Canada and around the world.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact The Presbyterian College by phone or email and we will be delighted to share with you how easy it is! reception@pcmtl.ca

From the Archive: College Crest



It is always fun to sort through old photographs and memorabilia of the College—to get our hands a bit dirty going through older boxes of college materials. This crest (we aren't sure of the date of its creation) is one of the more colourful of our recent retrievals. It is full of symbolism. At the centre are images of the Spirit and the Word (Dove and Bible), which are also part of our current logo. And, of course, at the top is the classic burning bush—could hardly be a

Presbyterian crest without it! Two Latin phrases are also featured here, the first referencing Psalm 72:8 (from sea to sea) and the other referencing Philippians 2:16, which contains the college motto: "Holding forth the word of life." Sermonem vitae praetendentes. (Some translations render this text in English as "holding fast the word of life.") All of these elements are set against a background of good, Presbyterian blue!

It's Time for Renewal—Courtyard Update

Thank you to all who have responded to recent appeals for financial support to upgrade the courtyard at the Presbyterian College—through generous gifts we have now raised \$22,545 toward this project!

The courtyard was built in 1963, which is to say that for more than half a century it has served as a place of conversation, prayer, and quiet reflection. It has been used by our own students as well as members of the wider community. It is one of the few green spaces on University Street outside of McGill University.

But now it needs to be refreshed. The pavement blocks are worn and broken in places. They are uneven due to the Montreal winters over many years. The garden is worn and needs redevelopment. We believe the courtyard is one of the

key and beautiful features of The Presbyterian College. We would like to rebuild it with a new garden area, with seating around it, new planters around the outside edges, and with bistro tables and chairs for residents and others to enjoy a coffee and conversation.

The cost to renew the courtyard will be approximately \$65,000 with an additional \$12,000 for foundation repairs to the library side of the building. For those who may not yet have contributed, we are grateful for your consideration of this project.





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recognize the gift of others and will be recognized not only here, but also in our newsletter bi-annually. Our *In Memory* and *In Honour* Program has now been up and running for a little over a year

now but sometimes we can make errors or omissions. Please contact our Development and Stewardship Officer, Tahra De Lallo at tdelallo@pcmtl.ca for further information.



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Comments are welcome; we might even publish them!
Please send them by mail or e-mail.



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