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# RETIREES Association NEWSLETTER

Volume 17

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## JOIN THE ST. JOHN'S RETIREES ASSOCIATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

facebook.com/stjohnsretireesassociation  
or @StJohnsRetireesAssociation  
www.stjohns.edu/retirees

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**NEW**  
**Power Hour Series**  
[www.stjohns.edu/powerhour](http://www.stjohns.edu/powerhour)

**St. John's University Alumni Book Club**  
[www.stjohns.edu/bookclub](http://www.stjohns.edu/bookclub)

**Saturday, December 5, 2020**  
**Christmas at St. John's Lessons and Carols**  
[www.stjohns.edu/lessonsandcarols](http://www.stjohns.edu/lessonsandcarols)

**Tuesday, December 8, 2020**  
**Mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception**  
St. Thomas More Church, Queens Campus

**Wednesday, December 9, 2020**  
**Italian Christmas with Casa Belvedere**  
[www.stjohns.edu/italianchristmas](http://www.stjohns.edu/italianchristmas)

**Thursday, December 24, 2020**  
**Christmas Eve Mass**  
St. Thomas More Church, Queens Campus

**ADVENT PRAYERS**  
First Week of Advent:  
Sunday, November 29

Second Week of Advent:  
Friday, December 4

**Third Week of Advent:**  
**Friday, December 11**

**Fourth Week of Advent:**  
**Friday, December 18**  
[www.stjohns.edu/adventprayers](http://www.stjohns.edu/adventprayers)

## 2021 SAVE THE DATE

**Thursday, February 4**  
**Vincentian Chair of Social Justice 2020-21 Lecture Series**

**Thursday, February 4**  
**Who was St. John's?: Part 2**

**Saturday, February 13**  
**Blessing of the Couples**

**Saturday, February 27**  
**Three Things Talks Series**

**Wednesday, March 17**  
**St. Patrick's Day**

**Monday, April 19**  
**Who was St. John's?: Part 3**

**June 2021**  
**Grand Alumni Homecoming Weekend**

## 150TH ANNIVERSARY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

This year, St. John's University is celebrating its 150th anniversary. To celebrate this milestone, please consider supporting St. John's **150th Anniversary Scholarship Fund** today. Your gift to the Scholarship Fund ensures that the University can continue to provide the same opportunities to students, regardless of financial need. Thank you.

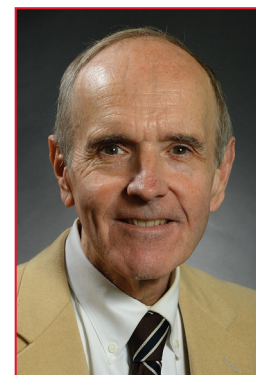
**For a limited time, donors of \$10 or more to the 150th Scholarship Fund receive a special edition St. John's face mask.**



## UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

### *We've Come A Long Way Since 1870 – And The Best Is Yet To Come*

By Thomas Burke



There is a wonderful sense of longevity that permeates every aspect of St. John's University. Currently celebrating its 150th anniversary, St. John's remains true to its mission of providing students with a superior academic education that includes highly regarded programs that challenge them to be the best that they can be by maximizing their individual talents.

As would be expected at a world class university, St. John's offers many unique programs that, under the guidance and tutelage of the University's most gifted professors, offer students the opportunity to combine a thirst for knowledge with critical thinking, creativity, and an openness to think in ways they may never have experienced before.

One shining example that has stood the test of time is the University Honors Program. The University Honors Program provides outstanding students the opportunity to maximize their intellectual growth and experience personal enrichment. Students meet regularly with the program's directors and faculty, creating a stimulating environment of thought, research, and scholarly discourse. The program features small classes; faculty mentoring; and academic and cultural opportunities that include performances at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, and New York Philharmonic, as well as museum visits and Manhattan walking tours.

Students are required to complete a minimum of 30 credits of course work within the University Honors Program. "The courses are structured to be interdisciplinary in nature, which really reflects the uniqueness of the material being studied," Dr. Forman said. "For example, students in a poetry class may also study mathematical theory, since the cadence and orderliness of numbers is found within all poetic expression. It is certainly a different way of looking at things—and one that broadens the learning process exponentially."

The program is offered to eligible incoming freshmen since it focuses primarily on core courses, those taken by all students at the University during their first two years. These gifted young men and women are considered for admission to the program as part of their overall St. John's admission process. If offered admission to the program, they have the option to accept or refuse the invitation; neither decision has any bearing on their acceptance into the University.

Students may complete the University Honors Program at St. John's in any of the University's undergraduate colleges and majors. They are expected to maintain an overall GPA of 3.3 or better. Students who complete 30 credits in honors courses receive an honors certificate as well as special honors designation on their final transcript and diploma.

"The program is about much more than the dissemination of academic knowledge," acknowledged Dr. Forman, who has a long history as one of the program's most gifted professors. He has taught in the program since 1997, serving as director since 2006. "I'm proud of our faculty – they're the very best at what they do. The interdisciplinary approach is designed to appeal to each student's own particular interests while at the same time exposing them to, and broadening their interest in, other disciplines. Regardless of the specific subject matter, our courses aim to encourage students to become good writers and critical thinkers."

Alumni by the thousands freely admit that they would not have become the person they are were it not for their beloved alma mater. After a century and a half, the University is proudly acknowledging the unprecedented achievements of its past while already contemplating the unlimited potential of its future.

Ad multos annos, St. John's!

For additional information regarding the University Honors Program, please contact Dr. Forman at **718-990-7552**; [honors@stjohns.edu](mailto:honors@stjohns.edu).



## OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

### ***Facing Challenges Together and Emerging as a Stronger Institution***

*By Simon G. Møller, Ph.D., Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs*



The Spring 2020 semester was challenging for all of us as we quickly transitioned to online learning and a remote workplace as the global health crisis unfolded. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to our students, faculty, administrators, and staff for their resilience and commitment as we navigated uncharted waters together to ensure that our students successfully completed the semester.

Although we wish life would return to normal, we continue to face challenges as the uncertainty of the pandemic remains. We worked tirelessly over the summer to allow our students, faculty, administrators, and staff to return to campus safely. Many of our students are now able to have an on-campus learning experience. As we continue to remain faithful to the mission and strengthen our commitment to student success, we have identified several focus areas for this academic year that I outline below.

Building on last year's successful student engagement initiatives, we continue to instill the importance of these efforts as we actively engage students in positive, meaningful ways. More now than ever, our students need our support, particularly as class formats continue to evolve—from synchronous and synchronous online classes, to rotating hybrid sections, and much more—that require us to connect with them in ways that may differ from anything we have done before. Student engagement remains paramount.

The pedagogical foundation for ensuring student success in online and hybrid modalities often looks very different from a traditional classroom setting, so we now have a renewed focus on faculty

development with an emphasis on technology. Not only is it a critical means of engaging students, but increasingly, technology plays a central role in the evolution of academic disciplines.

Although we continually redesign our courses and curricula to meet course format changes, we have the opportunity to do so according to universal design principles and other inclusive teaching practices. Designing a course is intentional, so we need to focus on teaching and learning practices that improve educational access for, and the academic success of, groups traditionally excluded from or underrepresented in higher education. Focusing on inclusive teaching helps us revisit the question, "What is mission-centered teaching at St. John's?" It challenges our traditional approaches and asks us to transform higher education into an approach that intentionally includes the histories and cultures of traditionally underrepresented or minoritized members of society.

On June 6, 2020, the University's senior leadership released an Antiracism Statement. The power of that statement does not lie in its words, but in the actions we take. Our collective charge is to adopt a culture of antiracism, focused on sustained action with the intent to change a system or an institutional policy, practice, or procedure that has racist effects. This is not a one-time charge, but an ongoing process that must inform everything we do, from designing curriculum, to hiring colleagues, to choosing and working through research projects. As individuals, departments, schools/colleges, and as a University, we are committed to becoming an antiracist institution.

As we move forward through this academic year, we continue to face challenges—but we will face them together and emerge as a stronger institution.

## MESSAGE FROM SUSAN M. DAMIANI '87CBA

*By Susan M. Damiani '87CBA, Director of Gift Planning and The McCallen Society*



Greetings, Retirees Association members!

Hopefully by April we can once again meet for our annual luncheon.

In the meantime, I hope you are all doing well and making the best of a difficult situation. The Office of Gift Planning constantly works on virtual programming, Power Hours, and an electronic newsletter to keep us all connected. If you are not receiving this

information, please email me at [damianis@stjohns.edu](mailto:damianis@stjohns.edu).

During the 2020–21 academic year, St. John's is celebrating its 150th anniversary! As retired employees, everyone at the University is grateful for your hard work and contribution. I encourage you to share your St. John's memories, post photos, and reminisce about the wonderful times spent at our beloved University on our Retirees Association Facebook page.

Even though you are retired, you are still a big part of what makes this institution so great. As we all know, membership in the St. John's family is forever! Please stay in touch, drop me a line, post on Facebook, and join us at a Power Hour.

May you and your family have a joyful, safe, and wonderful Christmas.

## COLLEGE OF PHARMACY AND HEALTH SCIENCES

### ***St. John's University Professor Fights to Stop the Rise of Coronavirus***

*By Thomas Burke*



As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the country and around the world, St. John's University is incredibly fortunate to have Cdr. (Ret.) Harlem J. Gunness, Ph.D., M.P.H. in its family. Currently Associate Professor/Industry Professional and Director of the University's Public Health program, Dr. Gunness formerly served as Senior Officer with the US Public Health Service at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where he conducted disease surveillance and epidemiological investigations on highly infectious communicable diseases, such as MERS-Covi, MDR-TB, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

Dr. Gunness is presently undertaking a comprehensive research study that explores the various demographic, educational, geographic, and socio-economic factors that contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in Far Rockaway and Corona, two disease hot spots in Queens County, NY.

"There is much that we already know about this disease," he said, "but there is still so much more to learn. And we do that every day. As new information is discovered, we are able to develop strategies that people can use to keep themselves as safe as possible from this terrible plague. And what we learn today will ultimately lead to the creation of a safe and effective vaccine that will, hopefully, put this illness behind us."

As an acknowledged expert on the spread of communicable diseases, he recognizes that some people have become weary of living with restrictions and are beginning to ignore the measures that so far have kept them and their loved ones free of infection.

"This is not the time to put our protective behaviors on hold," he stressed. "Everyone needs to continue to do the simple things, such as wearing a mask when around others, maintaining social distancing, avoiding crowds, washing our hands frequently, carrying hand sanitizer in our pocket or purse, and using our arms rather than our hands to open doors. These are common sense things—and we know that they work."

If you wish to make a gift to support Dr. Gunness' research, please contact Susan Damiani, Director, Office of Gift Planning, at [718-990-7562](tel:718-990-7562); [damianis@stjohns.edu](mailto:damianis@stjohns.edu).

## OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

### ***Open Enrollment for Retirees***

*By Mirian Cepeda, Senior Benefits Representative, Employee Benefits*

This year, the Open Enrollment period for retirees is November 9–30. As long as you are currently enrolled in medical, dental, and/or life insurance, you can make changes to your existing coverage or elect to enroll in new coverage. Elections made during the Open Enrollment period will be effective January 1, 2021.

The medical plan offered to all retirees is the Oxford Freedom Premier Plan. This is a robust plan which offers in- and out-of-network coverage, as well as prescription drug coverage. There are two dental plans to choose from: the Cigna Plan or the Aetna DMO Dental Plan. The cost will be provided to you in the Open Enrollment materials mailed to your home. Our retiree billing carrier will adjust your bill for any changes you make.

If you are enrolled in the medical plan, you will receive your new 2021 ID card prior to January. Be sure to begin using your new ID card on January 1, 2021. Use your new ID card with the **Group Number 1328530** as of 1/1/2021.

For more information about Open Enrollment or any of the plans offered to retirees, please contact me at [718-990-2077](tel:718-990-2077); [cepedam@stjohns.edu](mailto:cepedam@stjohns.edu).

## RETIREES AT THE 2019 LUNCHEON

