

## This issue

As we approach the end of the Winter semester and welcome the Spring season, we reflect on the truly remarkable year that our community has navigated through. Over two years have passed since the pandemic altered our lives, however, we are slowly starting to see our campus come back to life.

This Spring edition focuses on the dedication and commitment our students, staff and faculty have demonstrated to continue pursuing their dreams. In this issue we highlight some of the amazing stories and initiatives that have defined the past several months, and the integral role that our community has played in helping our students thrive amidst ever-changing situations.

From St. Mary's alumni continuing to make an impact and our athletes having record setting seasons, to the opportunity of a lifetime for one of our students to participate in a virtual meeting with Pope Francis, St. Mary's students have continued to pursue curiosity, expand their knowledge and make a lasting impact in the community.

Your support and belief in our vision to provide our liberal arts, science, and education programs to our students has helped ensure that we are able to meet any challenge head on and continue to shape the leaders of tomorrow.



St. Mary's University alumna and PhD student Jenna LeBlanc pictured here in Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

## Restoring Prairie Grasslands

StMU grad Jenna LeBlanc's research aiming to restore and protect grasslands

Native prairie grasslands once covered vast amounts of Western Canada though today roughly 1.25 per cent of Alberta's native grasslands are protected with the rest having been altered by agriculture, ranching and urban development.

Growing up in Alberta, Jenna LeBlanc developed a love for exploring the natural foothills and exploring Alberta's various provincial parks. This passion for Alberta's plants and flowers led her to St. Mary's University where she received her undergraduate degree in Biology and then to the University of Toronto where she earned a Masters of Environmental Science.



"From 2017 to 2018, I worked with Alberta Parks and the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation managing the vegetation. I learned a lot about Alberta's native plants. I also learned about native prairie habitats, and how to manage and restore them," said LeBlanc.

Now pursuing her PhD, LeBlanc's research is focused on Rough Fescue grasses, prairie species that strongly influence how the ecosystem functions. These slow-growing grasses can live for hundreds of years and are very difficult to restore once they are lost from the landscape.

"My PhD research investigates the ecology of Rough Fescue grasslands to find ways of improving seed germination and seedling survival. My research [also] explores the role that microscopic fungi living entirely within these grasses may be playing in helping to restore Rough Fescue grasslands."

With the rise of the pandemic LeBlanc was forced to adapt her research and create innovative ways to continue her scientific exploration.

"I cancelled my 2020 field season due to the pandemic lockdown. Instead, I grew hundreds of Rough Fescue plants, studied them up-close, and developed new research questions to ask in the field, all from the

comfort of my own kitchen."

"Glenbow Ranch Park has patches of surviving Rough Fescue grass that I am studying to discover if they contain microscopic organisms called fungal endophytes. Studying these fungi will improve our understanding of when and how Rough Fescue thrives. My research will help to protect and restore fescue grasslands for years to come."

# President's Message

As we enter into the Spring season we are lifted by the sense of renewal in the air as we slowly start embracing some of the 'normal' that seemed so far removed only a few short months ago.

Words cannot describe the feeling I have seeing our campus come to life once again. The sounds of friendly chatter and students and faculty interacting in our classrooms and hallways are heartening to see and to hear. Together we have lifted each other up and carried each other through a difficult period in our lives and while we all must remain vigilant, we move forward together, lifted by our sense of community.

The spirit, compassion, and commitment to social justice — and to each other — demonstrated by our community has never been stronger. I could not be more proud of our students, staff, and faculty who have overcome challenges while continuing to demonstrate the values and strength of character that have come to symbolize St. Mary's University.



When students attend St. Mary's they do so with the knowledge that our programs will provide them with the skills necessary to be critical thinking, compassionate leaders who are ready to make an impact in their communities.

May the stories you read here help you discover how your gifts and generosity support, encourage and inspire all members of the St. Mary's community. It is my hope that these stories motivate you to continue your support for St. Mary's University in a way that is most meaningful to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gerry Turcotte'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

**Gerry Turcotte, PhD**  
*President*

## Lightning Women Capture Bronze

The Lightning Women were in ACAC final-four action March 10th - 12th, the culmination of one of the best seasons in Lightning history. Finishing regular season action in first place in the South, the best regular season finish in program history while also finishing the season ranked sixth in the CCAA National rankings.

The Bronze medal game saw the Lightning up against the SAIT Trojans, the #2 qualifier in the South. With something to prove after the disappointing loss the night before the Lightning came out firing winning the first quarter 24-10. The women left it all on the floor in their final game of the 21-22 season leading in every statistical category in the game, and capturing the Bronze medal with a final score of 95-66.

The Bronze medal is the 5th medal in program history in the past seven years of play. The women's team has consecutively been in playoffs for the previous seven seasons with a medal total of 1 gold, 2 silvers and now 2 bronze medals. The Lightning were also awarded 3 all conference awards this year. Macyn Morning Bull – 1st team all-conference, Hannah Helton – 1st team all-conference and Andria Stitt – 1st team all-conference.

"I couldn't be more proud of this team," said Athletic Director Nathan Ruff. "Though the result may not be the one we had envisioned heading into the tournament, the way this team was able to overcome adversity and come together to capture the bronze was really something special."



# An Opportunity of a Lifetime

*Social Justice and Catholic Studies student attends virtual meeting with Pope Francis*

For Social Justice and Catholic Studies student John Doromal an unexpected email from Associate Professor of History and Religious Studies Dr. Peter Baltutis presented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: an invitation to virtually meet with Pope Francis.

Doromal was selected to take part in a virtual meeting with the Pope on February 24. The event, entitled *Building Bridges North-South: A Synodal Encounter Between Pope Francis and University Students*, was hosted by Loyola University Chicago in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute for South America as part of the Pope's Synod on Synodality, a process of consulting Church members around the world to gather their thoughts on the issues of the day.

"When I first received the email from Dr. Baltutis, I was quite surprised and astonished. My initial reaction was one of disbelief—especially when I saw Pope Francis' name and my nomination for this opportunity," explained Doromal. "I definitely felt a sense of impostor syndrome because I kept asking 'why me? There are so many other students that are more academically/spiritually sound.' Nonetheless, in the midst of all of this, I was affirmed by my friends, family, and professors that I was more than capable of engaging in this opportunity and that there was no sense in comparing myself to other people. In fact, I remember a close friend sharing with me, 'you are where you are meant to be.'" These words have always resonated with me and reminded me that nothing is ever random in life—each moment and opportunity has a purpose and a meaning far greater than anything I could imagine for myself. So I said 'yes.'"

With an emphasis on creating concrete educational projects to effect environmental and economic change, the February 24 meeting primarily focused on issues relating to migration. Students from seven regions in North, Central, and South America met online in advance of the virtual gathering to develop ideas on how to respond to migration challenges,

the various causes behind them and how the Church should respond.



"I feel immensely blessed and grateful to have encountered the Pope and University students from North, Central, and South America to address salient challenges of our times. I find it very appropriate that we centered our conversations around migration as today's displacement rates are horrible—dehumanizing experiences constitute a humanitarian crisis. I find

that migration/displacement is also an issue that points away from itself, leaving room for reflection on its root causes. Dialoguing with these other University students has allowed me to recognize the importance of engaging in conversation in terms of our frustrations, dreams, hopes, and aspirations for the Church in the hopes of not only addressing the signs of the times, but also striving towards justice, the coming good, and highlighting the indispensable dignity of each human person."



*St. Mary's University student John Doromal*

"There is a need to broaden the discourse on migration and migrants, to counter negative

stereotypes and shine the light of truth on the reality of human migration and displacement. There is also a need to nurture the imagination of migrants, to ensure that people who migrate, especially children, have a realistic and hope-filled vision of their present circumstances, the future possibilities, and their place in it."

Doromal credits his studies in the Social Justice and Catholic Studies degree program at St. Mary's for preparing him for an opportunity such as this.

"The Social Justice and Catholic Studies degree has facilitated my growth in critical, analytical, and ethical skills, which have been helpful in engaging in the injustices in the world through a Catholic intellectual lens. In essence, this program has allowed me to engage with the world critically and has fostered a fervent desire in me to create real change."

# Drama Students Return to the Stage

*St. Mary's University drama students shine with two new dramatic productions*

After two long years the St. Mary's University Drama program returned with two dramatic plays, *Off a Broken Road* and the first-year collective play *Community Affair*.

Presented by the senior drama students, *Off a Broken Road* is a moving, compelling, fast-paced episodic play that takes place in the aftermath of a war where the victors and the losers must work through their resentments to find unity.

*Community Affair*, written and performed by first-year St. Mary's drama students is a funny and moving story set in a community centre highlighting how the denizens of the centre deal with both personal and professional relationship issues.

For St. Mary's University drama director Joe-Norman Shaw, seeing the hard work of everyone come together for these productions is truly rewarding.

"These productions are the culmination of our year's work and I'm always proud of the passion, dedication and execution of our drama students. Mounting any production takes a lot of hard work, but the hard work pays off when we are able to move an audience or make them laugh. It's a feeling of shared accomplishment and a job well done."

In fall classes Shaw works with his first-year students on acting technique and delivering an authentic performance while fostering a creative and collaborative environment to encourage creativity.

"With the collaborative production, it gives [the students] a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings about the world around them. To touch on issues important to them," said Shaw. "I want them to learn to work

together as creative collaborators and give voice to their deeper thoughts and feelings."

"Ultimately we are teaching them to think creatively and find the individual and collective creative voices."

Shaw has forged a close relationship with his senior drama students and

is excited about the students finally getting a chance to perform live.

"Many of these students I've spent a long time getting to know and working together, they are such a talented group," said Shaw. "It's been a long time since these actors have been able to perform live. There's some powerful and accomplished performances and it's so rewarding to see their learning and experience put to the test in a full production – and succeed. Their hard work and dedication is inspiring!"



## Upcoming Events

1

### **President's Farewell Gala**

Thursday, June 23, 2022  
Palamino Room - BMO Events Centre, Calgary, AB  
[stmu.ca/events/farewellgala2022](http://stmu.ca/events/farewellgala2022)

2

### **Stampede Breakfast**

Thursday, July 14, 2022  
7:00 a.m. — 9:00 a.m.  
St. Mary's University Campus - 14500 Bannister Road SE

3

### **11th Annual St. Mary's University Golf Tournament**

Thursday, August 25, 2022  
Silvertip Resort - Canmore, AB



The *Marian Update* is published by St. Mary's University and distributed to alumni, friends and supporters to celebrate University accomplishments and share news and information throughout the St. Mary's community.

#### **Managing Editors:**

Thérèse Takacs, Vice-President, Advancement Tel. 403.254.3139 [therese.takacs@stmu.ca](mailto:therese.takacs@stmu.ca)  
Adam Bowen, Team Lead, Communications, Marketing, Media Tel. 403.254.3706 [adam.bowen@stmu.ca](mailto:adam.bowen@stmu.ca)

[stmu.ca](http://stmu.ca)