

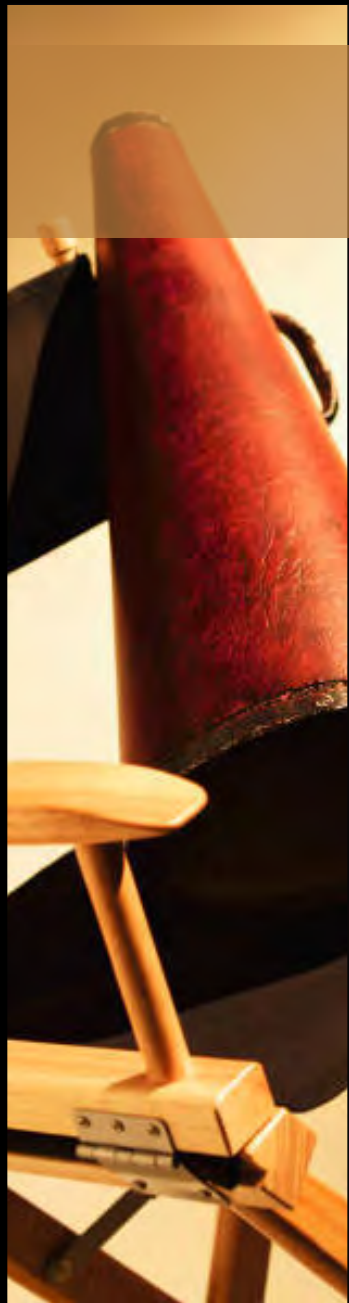


THE CURRENT

LIVING WATER COLLEGE OF THE ARTS NEWSLETTER - PROMOTION OF ART, FAITH AND REASON

By Dcn. Kenneth Noster, President

ANNOUNCING FILM 2014



Throughout history, many forms of art have found great prominence, but none has commanded the universal popularity and influence enjoyed by film. Each film communicates ideas on many levels: subliminally, sometimes graphically, perhaps with poignancy and often by using images that are abrupt or harsh. No matter the method, there always is a message, and film always has an effect on the viewer.

Because of its effectiveness, film is highly influential. It has the capacity to direct cultural choices, fashion, values, and even life decisions. It is capable of promoting great good and great evil: great good by elevating the thoughts of people to those things that are true and good, and great evil by making attractive the most base of human passions, often promoted by images and ideas that are untrue. Although dark and false material may appeal to our passions, our most vital attraction is to that which is beautiful and true. Yet, rewarding though goodness, truth and beauty may be, they are of little impact if the majority of the population rarely, or never, experiences them. When the vulgar and base predominates, it becomes the norm, and few people even know they can strive towards something more. It is possible to break out of this cycle, but the content of what the public ultimately sees in films depends upon a very small pool of individu-

als within the midst of a huge undertaking.

Filmmaking is a wholly collaborative art form, requiring the cooperation of numerous disciplines, both technical and creative. In the same way as it requires a vast construction crew to build a cathedral, making a movie is an expensive and time-consuming endeavor. But, like a good cathedral, a good movie begins with an architect who is not only well-versed in mathematics and physics, but who also understands why men choose evil over good and designs to direct their senses toward the source of goodness. In filmmaking, that architect is the writer and the director, and it makes sense that their training would be very important. Unfortunately, film schools pay attention to all except the formation of these most pivotal artists.

As motion pictures have become the visual language of the twenty-first century, film schools have become increasingly popular. In Western Canada alone there are more than ten well-established institutions offering training in film and media production. Some provide hands-on training in the film, television and radio broadcast industries, with access to production equipment and facilities as well as mentorship opportunities with local production companies. The

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Alberta Film Commission provides a listing of active productions where students can seek employment, and the Directors Guild of Canada and Motion Picture technicians unions provide opportunities for employment on productions.

So it is very possible to acquire skills in filmmaking, but the immediate challenge facing film students in Canada is the over-saturation of the work force. There are far fewer films and television series' being produced than there are graduates. The more persistent of graduates might break in as a trainee and, in the course of 10 or more years if they have passion and skill, work their way up to department heads. Meanwhile, due to the relatively few productions being shot, technicians who desire continuous work in their field are compelled work on every film possible, regardless of the film's moral content.

One might ask: "If there are already many more grads than positions, why should Living Water College of the Arts offer a motion picture program?" The answer lies entirely in the content of the program. While there exist many technical training opportunities in almost all aspects of filmmaking,

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there remain two key skills that receive very little training. Ironically, they are the very architects of films: screenwriters and directors. Unfortunately, where courses in film studies and writing workshops do exist, they typically teach about story structure and aesthetics from a subjective point of view. They remain limited by the experience and values of the individual teacher, writer or director, and in the all too rare situations where graduates of such programs happen to fashion their work on objective truths, it is certainly the consequence of education obtained outside of the institution. Such exceptional individuals find themselves continually swimming against the tide, and too few are able to sustain their balance and learn

to be excellent writers or directors while forging forward on their own.

The near impossibility of the task, individual by individual, demands a strategic effort by a community of professionals and students. Living Water College of the Arts is that strategic effort, seeking to reunite the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of visual storytelling with the technical. This can only be achieved through sound spiritual and intellectual formation, focussed on producing the scripts and films that will vitally engage audiences by expressing truth in creative and compelling ways. It would be naive to suggest that it would be nice to have such screenwriters and directors, people who take very seriously their responsibility to produce films with integrity. We are long past the point of nice. Even a cursory glance at the impact of film on our society makes it abundantly clear how important it is to curb the tide. Each person, bombarded by opinions, agendas, and manipulations, hungers, perhaps unknowingly, to become influenced in an entirely new direction. The strongest medium, film, has incredible potential of drawing us to the good, the true, and the beautiful. ☐

THE
LATEST



The Living Water YouTube Channel features a new video describing the beginning elements of the Film Program 2014. Ken Fast, Film Maker at Northern Rain Studio, speaks of the need for producing great stories with the ability to change lives. Training must emphasize the development of story as well as nourish the integration of the entire person in their creation of the product.



A CHANGING PROFESSION

By Nicole Dunn, Assistant Director of Development

Who would have thought laundry could lead to film-making? Among the many colorful and unique journeys into the film industry, Eric Spoeth's began with his weekly trip to the laundromat. This particular laundromat seemed determined to influence its patrons artistically, for it offered free tickets to the small local theatre while the lights and darks finished cycling. Eric frequented the Saturday matinees of old Disney classics. "I loved entering the dark theatre and coming out two hours later feeling like a changed person," Eric recalls, "I began to realize that great films had that power to make people happier, more appreciative, more conscious; and I wanted to be part of it."

His family had everything to do with Eric's choice of vocation. Eric recounts, "When I was a teenager, my parents would occasionally rent a VHS camcorder, and I began filming short sketches with my brother. It was this that piqued my interest in the craft and gave me the thirst to develop it further." These opportunities to learn the craft of filming were quite formative, but Eric found the most invaluable thing he learned was how to develop and understand story. "I engaged in a lot of debate at the kitchen table, and we often watched and dissected films as a family. This was my real educational formation. It made me scrutinize what I watched. It gave me a vocabulary with which to discriminate between what is great art versus cheap entertainment and a sense of responsibility or stewardship with the skills I had been given."

Eric continued to refine his craft at the

University of Technology in Sydney, Australia, and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Edmonton. He also trained in drawing, painting, iconography and mosaic. His time in Sydney was primarily technical, and it was there that Eric "learned that filmmaking required not just artistic vision, but also interpersonal, organizational and business skills." He has had to continue to hone these elements while pursuing his career as an independent film producer and assistant director.

Film-making is a challenging profession. The contemporary film-maker will face not only the strain and uncertainty that comes with having to sell himself and his product, but he will also be challenged in his moral principles and beliefs. "There are numerous qualities a good film-maker needs," Eric affirms: "honesty, humility and persistence come to mind. You meet continual rejection and obstacles in the process of film-making, so maintaining an eye on the goal is essential." Eric sees a career in film-making as having great potential. "I see my occupation not principally as a means of changing the world, but of changing myself. Any difficult endeavor – and making a film is certainly difficult – can be an act of contrition. In that sense, the process of making a film can be as transformative as the film itself. If your work becomes a humble act of faith and trustful surrender rather than an outward effort to evangelize, audiences will sense it. It reminds me of an interview I once heard of Mel Gibson on the film, *The Passion of the Christ*. The interviewer asked Mel, 'What relationship do you have with God?' Mel

responded with a shrug: 'Well, He made me.'" The language of film can be powerful, so too is the film-maker's responsibility to craft a message that is worthwhile.

The landscape of film is vast, but the responsibility for creating what we see in this landscape is seemingly limited to a small group of individuals. Eric affirms: "The entertainment industry, and the film industry in particular, is made up of many highly specialized technicians and artists serving the goals of comparatively few producers, directors and writers. Those few people who call the shots aren't necessarily there because they ought to be. Quite often, their vision is distorted by the lure of money or fame. I believe strongly in the correct formation of writers and directors: spiritually, intellectually as well as technically. With this formation they can transform the industry."

Great films don't have to be rare; those who can create great films just need the proper education and support to produce them. In order to accomplish this very thing, Eric is playing a key role in developing the Living Water Film program.

Spoeth Creations is based out of St. Paul, Alberta. A board member of Living Water Arts Foundation, Eric has been the Chair of the Foundation since 2008. In addition to his profession, he enjoys working with stained glass and mosaic, and he spends as much time as possible with his wife, Prithi, and their two children, Dominic and Anna. ☐

Further details on the Film Program 2014 will be posted on the Living Water website throughout the coming months.

KEY ELEMENTS

- › Script Development
- › Story-Boarding
- › Filming
- › Performance Skills

- › The Art of Editing
- › Work with Professionals
- › Produce a Film



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DISCOVERING BEAUTY

By Dcn. Kenneth Noster, President

Considering all the media and the multiplicity of creative means of expressing yourself artistically, why would someone study Iconography? Whereas most art-forms encourage the artist to be creative, iconography does just the opposite. The iconographer strives to reproduce with exactness the icon he is copying. Just as ancient scribes painstakingly strove to copy the Sacred Scriptures without any variation from the original, so also does the iconographer. Why then do people find this work compelling? Is it attractive simply because it has stood the test of time, or has it stood the test of time because it is attractive? In other words, is this just another form of folk art, or is there a greater attraction here?

This year, in the Living Water College Iconography Program, Made in His Likeness, not only did students learn how to paint an icon of the glorious St. Michael the Archangel, but, through daily readings and seminars, the students entered into a discussion of beauty itself and what it is that makes the icon so attractive. In spite of an initial impression that icons seem stark and unrealistic, all came to see the profound beauty revealed in the symbolism of these classic images. After the

first seminar session the students were hooked. They began to eagerly look forward to pausing for 2 hours each day and discussing profound ideas central to our humanity.

They wrestled with whether or not beauty is simply something nice or if it is much greater; something we cannot live without. They examined the relationship between beauty and worship, reflecting on the differences they have experienced praying in a sparse modern church as compared to one with beautiful ancient architecture, images and statues. They pondered the daily struggle we all face being attracted to the beauty of the created thing or person we behold more than to the beauty of the One who created it. They read the thoughts of St. Augustine, who spoke of the potential distraction caused by beauty, especially when we desire to have "fair forms" satisfy us completely. This caution led to a discussion on the sincere motivation of ancient iconoclasts, who endeavoured to clear the early church of images, and the iconoclasts of post-Vatican II, bent on simplifying and modernizing the decoration of Catholic churches. Study of the works of St. John Damascene, who eloquently challenged the icono-

clasm of the 8th century, provided brilliant perspective on the need for beauty in our churches today. The students shared some of the insights they had gleaned from St. John: "Through beauty, the invisible is made visible;" "The sensible points to the insensible;" "An image is always an imperfect representation."

Day after day, the students posed rich ideas and grew closer to an understanding of the place of the icon in the worship of God. Discussions and readings likely provided more questions than answers, but the answers they did arrive at were very rewarding. Ultimately, their ideas were borne out in their practise, painstakingly copying Holy Scripture as it is represented by the image, daily more clearly gazing back at them. They thought deeply and seriously, they carefully fashioned a true representation of the classic icon of St. Michael, and they bent their will to God through the whole process, daily taking their work and their thoughts to their community and private prayer and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and daily bringing back to class the rich fruit of the growth in faith these 2 weeks provided. ☐

More photos of the Iconography Program can be found on the Living Water Facebook Page.

