

# PERSPECTIVE

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

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ICS GIVEN MINISTERIAL CONSENT TO OFFER PhD AND MA (PHIL)

## Consent Granted!

**T**here were detours. There were delays. There were more twists and turns than the average adventure movie... but it finally happened.

In late December, ICS was informed by the Hon. Mary Ann Chambers, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities in the Province of Ontario, that she would consent to ICS's application to grant its own PhD and MA degrees in philosophy.

As a result, ICS has now become one of the first privately-funded independent academic institutions in Canada to be able to grant its own PhD.

An elated ICS President Harry Fernhout couldn't be more thrilled. "ICS has journeyed long and hard to get to this moment. ICS can now give degrees that are appropriate to our programs, and that are the same as those granted by other universities and graduate schools".

This was echoed by Mark Davies, Chair of ICS's Board of Trustees. "ICS has always sought to be of service in the academy by being able to use the most appropriate tools. With the Minister's consent to grant the PhD and MA in Philosophy we have the ability to grant academic degrees which are the most widely recognized in the academy."

It was a long journey to be sure.

Previously, under the terms of 1983 legislation known as *The ICS Act*, ICS was allowed to conduct a program that led to the granting of a doctoral degree by the Free University of Amsterdam, and grant a master's degree in Philosophical Foundations. Both were compromises between the government of the day and ICS.

For years it was thought this arrangement would never change. Then in 2000, the Ontario Provincial Government initiated major changes with regard to degree-granting by private academic institutions, including allowing privately-funded colleges and universities to apply for degree-granting



*Surrounded by students, staff and faculty, ICS President Harry Fernhout (centre) holds up the letter from the Ontario Provincial Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities granting her consent to ICS to confer PhD and MA degrees in Philosophy.*

authority appropriate for their programs.

In February 2003, with the encouragement of staff of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, ICS arranged for the introduction of a private bill in the Ontario Legislature to amend the 1983 *ICS Act*. The amendment would change the current "Master of Philosophical Foundations" degree to "Master of Philosophy," and would add the right to grant the PhD degree.

In May 2003, ICS was informed that, as a result of a policy shift, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities would support the proposed amendments only after an extensive quality assessment process with the Ministry. ICS then made an application to

the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). ICS made its 800-page application to PEQAB in early 2004. The PEQAB process included an organizational and program quality review. These were conducted by external peer review panels. ICS's program quality review was extremely favourable, with ICS meeting or exceeding standards on all counts.

"ICS offers some truly impressive programs in Philosophy," remarked Dr. Robert Gibbs, Professor and Associate Chair in the Department of Philosophy at U of T, and Chair of PEQAB's Quality Assessment Panel. "With a relatively small faculty, they offer a

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# Rejoice!

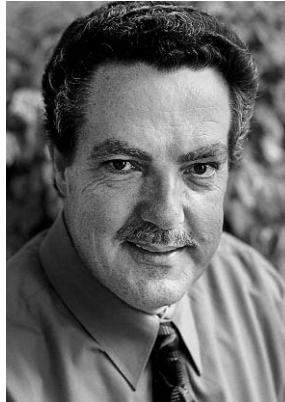
...we rejoice in adversity, knowing that adversity produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts...

Romans 5:3-5

This passage of Scripture springs to mind as I reflect on the arduous journey to December 16, 2004, when Ontario's Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities consented to our application for amended and expanded degree-granting authority.

This journey certainly had its fair share of *adversity*. In the early 1980's, adversity took the form of provincial legislation which would have made it impossible for ICS to grant degrees. Only the persistent interventions spokespersons such as Gerald Vandezande, Bob Vandervennen and Thomas McIntire won ICS the right to grant the Master of Philosophical Foundations degree – not a 'standard' degree, but a creative compromise that captured something of the nature of our programs. Later, adversity took the form of inertia – a complete lack of movement in government policy despite numerous well-documented submissions and well-argued proposals. And most recently adversity took the form of an incredibly detailed and demanding review process, and procedures that took twice as long as anticipated.

There is no question in my mind that the Institute's degree-granting journey has produced *endurance* and *character*. The *endurance*



Harry Fernhout  
PRESIDENT

part is obvious; what else do you call it when a small institution, with limited resources, persists in a difficult quest for more than 20 years? And *character* – I've seen it flourish as we measured our academic programs against the benchmarks of an external quality review process. The process tested our mettle, and ICS emerged with a deeper confidence that our programs meet very high standards of quality, as determined by our peers.

The Romans passage suggests *hope* stands at the end of the *adversity-endurance-character* continuum. But this is only part of the picture; hope must also be there at the beginning and in the middle. If we had not hoped for a favorable outcome, how could we have endured? This, it seems to me, reflects something that lies near the heart of Christian life: the hope of the gospel's promise of a good outcome helps us persist in our heeding God's call to be witnesses of his reign.

Romans 5 calls us to *rejoice* in adversity. How much more, then, should we rejoice in times of blessing! This is a moment for unbridled rejoicing in the life of ICS. Longstanding prayers have been answered. We've reached an amazing milestone. Rejoice and give thanks!

And now its time for me to wipe a bit of egg off my face. Seven years ago, as we discussed strategic directions for ICS, I said that Ontario's degree-granting policy would likely not change in my lifetime. Oops! A mere two years later the government did a 180-degree turn. I'm glad God did not hold me to my small vision, and my rash words about 'lifetime.' For that, too, I say: "Rejoice!" 🌟

## CONSENT

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rich, diverse, rigorous and intensive education for students in philosophy and have achieved the formation of a community of learning that is outstanding."

Response from around the ICS community to the news of the Ministerial Consent has been emphatic and enthusiastic.

ICS Senior Member Lambert Zuidervaart, who was actively involved in the PEQAB process during his year as Academic Dean, cherishes the historic significance of the Ministerial Consent. "When I began my graduate studies, ICS did not have an official PhD program and could not award a mainstream master's degree. Now, thirty-two years later, we have the right to grant our own PhD degree and a regular MA."

Lambert was quick to stress the opportunities offered by this. "The Ministerial Consent lays a foundation on which we can build for years to come. It means that our academic peers officially recognize and endorse our graduate programs in interdisciplinary philosophy. It allows new forms of cooperation with other universities in Ontario as well as the Free University in Amsterdam. And it creates new incentives and

opportunities to fund our students, who bring so much commitment and talent to the ICS community."

The MA in Philosophy is a change in nomenclature, which will benefit students at ICS who have been potentially handicapped by the unusual name of the Master of Philosophical Foundations degree when pursuing further studies or applying for jobs. Neal DeRoo, a second-year MPhilF student—now an MA (Phil) student—heartily concurs. "Having the change to the MA in Philosophy is helpful. When applying to other schools, an MA looks better on your resume than an MPhilF"

With Ministerial Consent now granted, work will begin to secure an amendment to ICS's enabling legislation, *The ICS Act (1983)* in the Ontario Provincial Legislature. The amendment will incorporate the changes granted by Ministerial Consent into the *Act* to make the changes permanent.

"We have a little ways to go still," Harry Fernhout

reminds supporters, "but we've now overcome the most important hurdle. We are extremely grateful for the work of so many, and for the extra financial support of some donors to help underwrite the substantial cost of the PEQAB process. And, of course, for the prayers of everyone that have brought us to where we are today. Thank God for this wonderful blessing.

"Now let the celebrations begin!" 🌟

## Upcoming Events

### ICS Convocation

Featuring the Inaugural Address of Doug Blomberg  
January 28, 2005 - Toronto, ON

### ICS Worldview Conference

Biblical Faith In The Shadow of Empire with Sylvia Keesmaat  
February 12, 2005 - Edmonton, AB  
March 19, 2005 - Calgary, AB

### Celebration and Farewell Dinner for ICS President Harry Fernhout

May 27, 2005 - Toronto, ON