

NEWS RELEASE

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USM Theology Professor Awarded University's Top Teaching Honor

Sister Kathleen Wood Award USM's Top Teaching Honor



**Sister Kathleen Wood,
SCL is the 2005 USM
Sullivan Award winner.**

(Leavenworth, Kan.)—The University of Saint Mary awarded the Sullivan Award for Teaching Excellence, the top faculty teaching honor, to theology and pastoral ministry chair Sister Kathleen Wood, SCL. Wood, associate theology and pastoral ministry professor at Saint Mary for 17-years, has been the department chair since 1999. She is a student-favorite, a community leader and respected professor.

The Sullivan Award was created in the spring 1990 to recognize supreme teacher achievement at Saint Mary. Nominated by students, faculty and staff, the Sullivan Award is presented to full-time faculty who have made a distinct difference in the teaching climate at Saint Mary. Named in honor of the late Sister Mary Louis Sullivan, who served as academic dean for years at Saint Mary, \$1,000 is awarded annually to winner.

A normally mild-mannered person, Wood said she was shocked when Sister Diane Steele, USM president, made the official announcement. In fact, when the official announcement was read in front of hundreds of Saint Mary community members, Wood said she barely heard her name because she was too busy contemplating whom else among her peers were worthy for the honor.

“I really am grateful for those that recommended me, but I suppose just for the opportunity to teach,” Wood said. “I love teaching. I appreciate the kind of students and the colleagues that we work with here. I just really enjoy being here in this capacity, this environment.”

In addition to her love of teaching, Wood also works very closely with campus minister Kate Faggella-Luby organizing mission trips, prayer sessions and helps with Campus Ministry, the university's faith-sharing worship group for students. She is also known for volunteering to serve on various committees and fundraising activities for the university. In fact, she recently planned an outdoor prayer service to honor the late Pope John Paul II, parts of which were aired on two separate local network television news stations.

The road to the pinnacle of her teaching career didn't exactly start with the intention of teaching at the collegiate level. Originally from Kremmling, Col., Wood joined the Sisters of Charity after graduating from high school. She received a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Saint Mary in 1970, and immediately became a first-grade teacher in area schools. She later earned a master's degree from Boston College. Content with teaching first grade, Wood's career path changed dramatically when she was asked to become a formation director for the Sisters of Charity, helping to train the younger sisters. It was during this time that Wood realized helping people at the collegiate age was her true calling.

“I had a sense of really enjoying working with young people and feeling like it was a special thing helping college-age people get a chance to find God in their lives and to satisfy that hunger for the spiritual element,” she said.

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“I probably wouldn’t have even thought of being a professor at this level had I not been asked to train the young sisters. I loved teaching little kids. I probably would have stayed their, too.”

From 1982 – 1992, Wood was associate professor of theology at Saint Mary, taking over as chair in 1986. Things changed, in 1992 when her parents became ill, forcing Wood to return home to Colorado to care for them. In 1998, she was welcomed back with open arms to Saint Mary. In the spring of 1999, she was again named chair of the theology and pastoral ministry department.

“I missed the college very much, the whole atmosphere of Saint Mary. Once my folks passed away, I was very happy there was a place here to come back to,” Wood said.

Even weeks after the fact, it’s still difficult for Wood to fathom the reality of winning the university’s greatest honor. Despite nearly two decades of service to students, she always felt that other professors were more worthy than she. While she said she is usually the one that rejoices the accomplishments of others, seeing people excited and overwhelmed for her accomplishments, has been a completely different experience.

“For me, the joy has been to see other people just being happy,” she said. “It’s fun to see people rejoicing at something good that happens to you. It’s a new feeling to let others rejoice for me.”

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