

District Partner Communiqué  
Ambrose University Update for the District Leadership of  
The Christian and Missionary Alliance and The Church of the Nazarene Canada  
Office of the President; April, 2021

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As Ambrose University navigates the global pandemic, some of the “norms” look a little different than we are used to, but we continue to provide quality Christian post-secondary education for our students while taking every precaution to ensure, as much as we are able, the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff. This update, intended for use at district conferences and assemblies in the spring, will provide further information on a number of key aspects of university life.

1. Enrolment

Course delivery in the Winter semester has continued in the same model as the Fall: Some classes are completely in-person (laboratories; smaller, upper-level classes, etc.), some are hybrid (partly in-person, partly online), and some of our classes are completely online. Students are grateful for the opportunity for in-person learning where possible and, for those for whom in-person is not desirable, we are still able to accommodate their preference while providing sufficient course options for them to progress in the attainment of their degree. None of this would be possible without the flexibility, commitment and dedication of our faculty and staff, and in particular to our campus services team that provides all the appropriate cleaning protocols to permit the in-person learning.

Perhaps inevitably, the uncertainty created by the pandemic had an effect on enrolment in the Fall and that has perpetuated into the Winter semester. A variety of factors will have lead a student to decide not to return in the Winter – everything from lack of funds, to finding that online learning is not their preferred medium, and everything in between – but we are still somewhat encouraged by the numbers of students who have chosen to adapt and persevere.

Looking ahead to Fall 2021, we – like most institutions – are seeing a slower start to the recruitment season than in past years, but there are still encouraging signs in the seminary – particularly the Chinese language programs, business, and the human sciences. We have a number of virtual recruitment events planned over the coming months, and I commend the recruitment team for the ways in which they have found innovative ways to connect with prospective students over recent months. With still so much uncertainty about vaccine rollout and the “third wave” it is not yet possible to make a definitive decision about Fall course delivery, but we are hopeful that we will be able to provide an expanded level of in-person delivery, even if it is not quite back to pre-pandemic levels.

2. Personnel Transitions

The Winter is a busy recruitment season in academia and this year is no exception. We have successfully concluded two searches, appointing Dr. Alyssa Michaud to the music department as Assistant Professor with a focus in musicology and theory to begin in August, 2021; and Dr. Rodrigo Dal Ben de Souza as Assistant Professor of Psychology to begin in January, 2022. Dr. Michaud has taught for Ambrose as a Lecturer for the past couple of years, and Dr. de Souza is currently a

Postdoctoral Fellow at Concordia University in Montreal. Additionally, we have active faculty searches in the areas of business, New Testament, and for a new University Librarian.

We also have a searches underway for a member of faculty for the School of Business and for a Professor of Christian Theology or Biblical Studies to work primarily in the Theological Studies in Chinese program.

This spring we will say farewell to three long-term members of the Ambrose community: Colleen Charter who has served in the Ambrose library (and its predecessors) for almost 26 years; Edwin Gnanndt, Associate Professor of Music who joined the Nazarene school in Winnipeg in 1995 and has been a key member of the music department ever since; and Sandy Ayer, Director of Library Services who joined CBC/CTS in 1984 and retires after 37 years with us. It will be our pleasure to honour these long-term employees as they transition to the next phase of their lives.

Additionally, Rev. Dr. Terry Young, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology, will be moving into retirement mode after almost eight years with Ambrose University; and ill-health has resulted in the resignation of Dr. Irene Tran from her position as Chair of the Theological Studies in Chinese program.

### 3. Board Transitions

At the end of June, three governors will reach term limit on the Ambrose Board of Governors: Wayne Bernakevitch, Ken Stankievech, and Keith Taylor. All three have held leadership roles on the board over the last few years and their presence at the board table will be missed. All three are Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA) appointees. Additionally, Delrose Laxton, a Church of the Nazarene appointee, advised us in March that she would be stepping back from the board for personal reasons and, in October, 2020 Ruth Copeland-Holtz notified the board chair of her resignation from the board—in this case simply a conviction that she was no longer called to serve on the board.

However, the board nominating committee has identified a number of very competent candidates to fill these vacancies and the Ambrose board endorsed the appointment of the following individuals at its Spring meeting (C&MA appointments are recommended to the national Board of Directors of The Alliance Canada; Nazarene appointments are recommended to the national board of the Church of the Nazarene):

Rev. Scott Dickie, Lead Pastor of Peace Portal Alliance Church in the Lower Mainland. He is an alumnus of CBC (BRE, 1995). Scott is a C&MA appointee.

Wayne Regehr, Executive Pastor at Sherwood Park Alliance in Alberta. He is a graduate of the Seminary (MDiv, 2008) and prior to his move into full-time ministry had an extensive business career. Wayne is a C&MA appointee.

Ilse Li is an engineer by background, although she now focuses on teaching for Bible Study Fellowship in Edmonton, and serves on the Disciple-Making Team at Edmonton Chinese Alliance Church where she and her husband are members. Ilse is a C&MA appointee.

Srimal Ranasinghe is an independent urban planning consultant and a member of First Church of the Nazarene Calgary and served as youth pastor for a number of years. He and his wife have also served in a number of lay roles in the church in recent years. Srimal is a Church of the Nazarene appointee.

Teresa Davidson has had an extended career in healthcare and is currently an Executive Director with Alberta Health Services. Teresa is based in Calgary and is a member of Centre Street Church. Teresa is a board appointee.

The C&MA also appoints a District Superintendent to the Ambrose board for a four-year term. Errol Rempel has served in this capacity for the past four years and his term concludes on June 30, 2021. After discussions and due consideration with the C&MA National Office, and given a unique set of circumstances that sees a current Ambrose board member, Genghis Chan, being appointed as Assistant District Superintendent in the C&MA Pacific District, the C&MA President, David Hearn, has confirmed the appointment of Genghis Chan to the Ambrose Board as the District Superintendent representative for a four-year term from July 1, 2021.

#### 4. Financial Update

We are very encouraged that, despite the loss of significant revenue with the limitations imposed by the pandemic, we will finish the fiscal year with a modest surplus. Enrollment in the Fall was not impacted by the pandemic as much as we had feared; the federal wage subsidy helped make up for the losses from “supplemental” revenue – residences, rentals and parking – and our supporters so generously continued to provide their regular financial assistance to the university.

Looking ahead, there are many unknowns. But the Board of Governors approved a balanced budget for this coming fiscal year in what will no doubt be a challenging time. Having said that, if we are able to meet our enrollment projects for this Fall – reasonable and conservative projections – there should be no difficulty achieving budget.

#### 5. Events

In common with most of you, almost all of our events have been held virtually this year, beginning with our online graduation ceremonies last May and continuing on to our Deeper Life Conference (formerly Spiritual Emphasis Days), Downey Lectureship, Chapels, Concerts, and a delightful Lessons and Carols production from Ambrose Arts at Christmas. This Spring, we have two more institutional events that will be in an online format: Ambrose Research Conference in March, and, once again, our Commencement activities.

The Ambrose Research Conference (ARC) theme for this year was *Faithful Science: How the Sciences Impact Faith and Learning*. The event is an opportunity to spotlight student, faculty, staff, and alumni research and scholarly activity, through a series of conference presentations and poster

exhibits. As is the case each year, I am so impressed with the caliber of research conducted by our faculty and students, and their ability to present their research in a clear and engaging manner. This was the first year we held the event online – we postponed it last year – and, other than some technical difficulties to begin, the event was exceptionally well done.

Commencement will take place virtually on April 30 (Education) and May 8 (Seminary and Undergraduate). We expect about 185 students to graduate this year. New this year is that the ceremonies will take place over two weekends rather than all on the same day. We had, of course, hoped that we would have been able to hold an in-person graduation this year but, once again, we will need to be online. And, this year we had hoped to also be able to include a “walk the stage” element for those students who wished to participate. We know that this is an important part of Commencement for many and were pleased that we had found a way for this to happen that complied with all of the necessary safety precautions. But, unfortunately, with increased spread of the virus in Alberta in the days leading up to the walk the stage activities, we reluctantly determined that the responsible thing to do would be to cancel this event.

#### 6. Constituency Engagement

While most in-person events have either been postponed, or cancelled, a few have been moved online and I have been pleased to be able to preach via a pre-recorded message at a handful of churches over the past months.

Our alumni events moved online and have been very well attended. In the Fall we held a Seminary anniversary event celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the creation of the Seminary, and another, more general “Alumni & Friends” event for any and all who were interested in hearing more about Ambrose. This winter we have been focusing on public lectures delivered by our faculty and staff with topics ranging from how pluralism and choice are shaping Canadian youth, to the history of race and the Bible, to developmental aspects of poverty – and why that matters. Additionally, a series of events have been held as part of the Alliance History & Thought Symposium series.

As we look towards the 2021 District Conference and Assembly season, we are looking forward to being able to join with you as you gather – mainly online – as district cohorts later in the spring.

#### 7. Update on Ambrose and the Church of the Nazarene

As many of you know, we have come to a significant “re-set” with regard to our partnership with the Church of the Nazarene. Two of the four Nazarene districts decided to no longer invest in liberal arts education or in our theology/ministry programs and rather partner with schools in their regions. Thus now Ambrose is only in formal partnership with two of the four districts. This has had knock on implications for governance questions; at the Fall, 2020 Ambrose Board meeting, the board passed a resolution that significantly reduced the role of the Church of the Nazarene in board membership. At the Spring, 2021 meeting the board approved amendments to the Ambrose University Articles of Association (Bylaws) reflecting these changes.

Our vision: a dynamic liberal arts university and a leading faculty of theology. This reflects a vital way by way the Church is on mission – through education, in one of the larger cities here in Canada. And though while we are disappointed with the decision of our Canadian Nazarene colleagues, we will continue to work in partnership with Nazarene schools in the US towards the development of effective congregational leadership for the Church of the Nazarene. And, further, we will invite other church and denominational bodies to partner with us in this mission.

## 8. Inclusion & Diversity at Ambrose University

In June of 2020 – in recognition of Juneteenth and national Aboriginal People’s Day, and in response to shooting deaths of minority ethnic individuals in North America – Ambrose University made a commitment to be an agent of change, “...empowering faculty, staff, and students to think clearly and act courageously in celebrating diversity, affirming the dignity of each person, and working towards social systems that foster the social and racial justice that is consistent with our Christian faith. We will name anti-black racism and anti-indigenous racism for what it is, and in the process empower visible minorities to be full participants in the life of the church and our society. We will acknowledge where systems, including our own internal systems, reinforce white privilege. We ask for forgiveness, through grace and humility, for the actions of our ancestors and for our present-day failures. We commit ourselves to healing and reconciliation.”

The statement also included an undertaking to provide a further update following the president’s report to the Ambrose Board of Governors’ Fall, 2020 meeting. The board met on Thursday, November 12, 2020 and the following update was provided on the four commitments:

- I. The Faculty Open Forum – a moderated conversation by the Dean of the Faculty of Theology. To date, three forums have been held which are raising understanding and critical engagement with questions of racism in general, but with particular reference to the relationship between settlers and the Indigenous peoples of western Canada, critical race theory, and the practices of social and racial conflict resolution and peace-making.
- II. All faculty and staff have received formal training in inclusion and diversity with a view that this will be part of our regular and ongoing culture and our commitment to the professional development of our faculty and staff. These seminars were led by staff from the Jaffray Centre for Global Initiatives, an Institute of Ambrose University. Having this resource available to us right in-house allowed us to approach questions of cultural fluency and racism in a way that is deeply consistent with our denominational heritage and our experience.
- III. The chaplain has profiled the voices and stories of leaders within ethnic minorities – notably Black Canadians and Indigenous Canadians – and topics or themes that keep before the Ambrose community in awareness of what it means to foster cultural fluency, social justice, and reconciliation.
- IV. We have engaged an external consultant to conduct an audit of our hiring practices [in response to the question of whether there is a hiring bias at Ambrose University]. This audit is ongoing and will likely be completed in the first quarter of 2021. *[The final report of this audit has recently been received and has provided useful recommendations for ways in which we can strengthen our recruitment processes in light of inclusion and diversity going forward.]*

This is only, of course, an “interim report”. The resolve to respond wisely and courageously needs to remain a mark of our mission, identity, and values. We welcome further comment and input into this process of learning together and seeking together to be a community that is marked by a deep commitment to cultural fluency, diversity, and inclusion.

#### 9. Conclusion

As we reflect on a year that has been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and everything that has been halted or changed to accommodate the necessary health measures in place, it is still possible to see the hand of our loving God guiding and protecting us. We had one small outbreak in the Fall, but to this point have not seen any major illnesses. Our constituencies stepped up last summer and provided the necessary funding to upgrade our IT systems to facilitate the move to online learning. Churches and individuals have held us in their prayers as we navigate the uncertainties and the unknowns of a pandemic. And students have continued to attend Ambrose University despite the changes and restrictions. Thank you, our supporting denominations, for your prayer support, your financial support, and your encouragements along the way. For this, and so much more, we are grateful.

Respectfully submitted,

Gordon T Smith, PhD  
President