

Dear fellow students,

I had the privilege this weekend of corresponding with our newly appointed professor, Greg Walters. I have included below some of the questions I asked as well as his responses. I hope you enjoy reading them and learning about him and are as excited to meet him when he comes as I am.

Richard Bishop

1) What would you consider your topical emphasis in religious studies?

In Christian theology, I work on Christology, Trinitarian theology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Each of these is a large topic; in each I draw from exegetical, historical, and philosophical work to treat responsibly each topic.

2) What would be your ideal classroom environment?

For me, an ideal classroom is a freeing place to surprise and challenge each other. Classroom time is an important part of learning, reflection, and good old fun where all involved in the class (including the teacher) can try out ideas, see new perspectives in readings, and gain new inspiration for further work.

3) As a professor, what do you hope to do for St. Olaf students and the surrounding community?

I hope to challenge and support students in their learning. I am very interested in developing relationships and exploring the possibilities of mutual work in the Religion department and beyond among the many disciplines. Religion appears to be an even more important public question in this new century and I hope that I may aid interdisciplinary conversation from the perspective of Christian theology.

4) Is there anything about teaching at St. Olaf that scares or worries you?

The superb quality of teaching at St. Olaf creates an enormous responsibility for a new teacher. I look forward to the challenge and growth that lies ahead as I begin to teach here. Also, I'm afraid that since I majored in mathematics, the math department will seek revenge by posing a pop-quiz for me to work on rings or topology. Just kidding.

5) What do you think makes a professor great?

The greatness of a professor consists in the professor's ability to spark imagination, to create space and passion for the subject matter, and most of all, to introduce students to the community of reflection and mutual deliberation that is the liberal arts.

6) Why did you decide to become a professor?

I have been driven by a deep need to make sense of the Christian faith and the church's traditions in relation to a variety of religious and philosophical contexts. After others have introduced me to the community of reflection on the Church's gospel, to examine its blind-alleys, its essential aspects, and to criticize its formulations, I decided to pursue graduate work. Teaching and researching theology enables me to continue, reformulate, and deepen aspects of this conversation. It also permits me to introduce others into the conversation and be challenged by all that they bring with them.

7) Who (not counting Buddha, Mohammed, Moses, or Jesus) do you most admire?

This is a hard one to answer. Inside the business, I deeply respect and admire Friedrich Schleiermacher. Though in most ways I follow other theologians more, Schleiermacher's many accomplishments in hermeneutics, aesthetics, philosophy, and Christian theology greatly inspire me. There are few questions I have explored thus far in which he does not play a part. I consider achieving understanding, agreement or disagreement with him to be a great accomplishment.

8) What do you enjoy doing outside of an academic setting?

I have many avocations. I love jazz, something which, remarkably, I enjoyed more when attending Luther Seminary in St. Paul than in New York/Philly! We've gone to some concerts but the billings I have seen advertised here are just not always as good. But then I have peculiar jazz tastes. I collect records of 1960s jazz most of all (Andrew Hill, Bobby Hutcherson, Eric Dolphy). I also enjoy modern art, especially painting, though only at an amateur level. I bicycle more and run/walk less and look forward to the routes in Southeastern Minnesota. I follow Baseball closely. Despite its economics and other failings (Pete Rose, Yankees, steroids) I always come back to it. I follow the Cubs and secondarily the Twins. I very much appreciate a good flower garden. I am a life-long Minnesotan and even four years in New Jersey has not gotten it through to me that I can plant earlier without fear of frost. I enjoy these activities with my wife, Grete Anne. We also have a dachshund named Hershey.

9) What do you think the world needs most right now?

The mutual reconciliation of groups, nations, and peoples requires many things and many communities working together. The world does not always have the time and space to explore the facets of reconciliation much less to achieve it. Some thinkers have been exploring the possibility of whether gift-giving or forgiveness is even possible. I hope both are; whether they are at least requires mutual humility and moderation. Both are virtues, which the human community surely exercises at its best moments and desperately needs in its depths.

10) What is one of your favorite memories as a student at St. Olaf?

There are many "a-ha!" moments in the course of study that are wonderful to remember but I must mention broomball. We nearly won the broomball tournament both my junior and senior years. I was from Ellingson Hall and our rivals were a group from Hoyme and by the end of our senior year we respected each other so much that we asked each other to play on each other's teams to the derision of all others.

11) What is one of your more embarrassing memories as a student at St. Olaf?

Getting lost in Nerstrand Big Woods State park looking for Dwarf Trout Lilies. I have yet to see one and will go to great lengths to see them, even if it means, as it has, getting very lost.