Ken Stenstrup Selected for 2023 Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award

THE NATIONAL BOARD OF THETA ALPHA KAPPA is pleased to announce that KEN STENSTRUP is the 2023 recipient of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award. He will be honored at the society’s Annual Business Meeting on Wednesday, November 8 (online).

Dr. Stenstrup joined the Theology faculty at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota in Winona, Minnesota, in 2001 after teaching religion in high schools the previous decade. He received his B.A. in Theology from Creighton University, an M.A. in Theological Studies from Claremont School of Theology, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Old Testament from Claremont Graduate University. His dissertation examined Jewish and Christian portrayals of King Manasseh. He is the author of Titus: Honoring the Gospel of God (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) and several journal articles, and he specializes in reception history and social-scientific criticism. He served five years as chair of the Department of Theology at Saint Mary’s.

“My interest in Theology began at the diocesan seminary in Milwaukee,” Stenstrup recalls. “When I transferred to Creighton University, I found those interests expanded and developed in ways I had never imagined. There, courses with Bruce J. Malina and Michael Lawler were especially appreciated. With their encouragement and support I was accepted at the Claremont Graduate University (formerly Claremont Graduate School), where the graduate cohort and instructors Burton Mack, Rolf Knierim, and especially James A. Sanders were added blessings to an already thoroughly appreciated education. Over the past twenty-two years, their insights and especially pedagogy have continued with me in the classrooms of Saint Mary’s University.”

Stenstrup has taught a wide range of courses and notes that “the most enjoyable classes have been those filled with people willing to engage the material. A vast majority of the over four thousand students that have shared a classroom with me were filling ‘General Education’ or ‘Priest Formation’ requirements. Yet within these requirements some groups really took on the material with interesting questions and insights. And looking back, I appreciate those classes the most.”

Likewise, Stenstrup has been deeply involved in the work of Theta Alpha Kappa, as a volunteer judge for papers submitted for the national Albert Clark Awards but especially as chapter representative at Saint Mary’s from 2003 until 2021. He finds special significance in the fact that Saint Mary’s, a Catholic university founded by the Christian Brothers, shares that tradition with Brother Albert Clark, who played a key role in the founding of the honor society at Manhattan College in New York in 1976. He values very much the way the TAK chapter at Saint Mary’s has served to affirm the importance of academic study of religion alongside the major emphasis on service at his university.

TIM KUJAWA, a seminarian in his sophomore year at Saint Mary’s University, is the 2023 recipient of the KCW Student Award, which is presented annually to a student selected by the winner of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award.

Kujawa especially impressed Stenstrup with his interest in biblical exegesis in a year-long introductory Scripture course: “As a not so traditional student, Tim quickly became a model within and beyond the classroom” due to “his willingness to work through the material and his ability to ask important questions about what he had read.”

Kujawa cites work on the Gospel of Mark (“where I learned that no word is wasted”) and Paul’s Epistle to Philemon as experiences that fueled this passion. He hopes to do additional work on Philemon and is “excited to learn more from the greater TAK community.”