

Remembering a Respected Dean, Friend

Canisius College suffered a tremendous loss this winter with the passing of a respected friend and scholar. **Dr. James P. McDermott**, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, died unexpectedly in February at the age of 59. A model of leadership, Dr. McDermott was just beginning his third year as dean at the time of his death.

"Dr. McDermott was a great scholar, teacher and leader of our faculty," said Canisius President Rev. Vincent M. Cooke, S.J. "He was respected by everyone for his honesty and integrity. His death is a great loss to the college."

Educated at Wesleyan University where he earned a BA in religion, Dr. McDermott went on to receive a MDiv from Yale, and an MA and PhD in the history of religions at Princeton University. His scholarly work on Eastern religions has been published in India, England, the Netherlands and the United States, and his studies are frequently referenced in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* and various encyclopedias.

Alumni will remember Dr. McDermott most vividly as an enthusiastic professor of religious studies who was later appointed chair of the Religious Studies Department. During his tenure, Dr. McDermott led the department in hiring its

first female faculty member, Dr. Paula McNutt. He also worked tirelessly to integrate cultural diversity into the department's core requirements and advanced the goal of writing throughout the curriculum. Just as notable are Dr. McDermott's accomplishments during his brief term as dean.

"Dr. McDermott's role as dean enabled him to extend, throughout the College of Arts and Sciences, the concern for high academic quality that had always characterized his career as a professor," remembered Dr. Herbert J. Nelson, vice president for academic affairs. "He saw new majors begin in digital media arts and in bioinformatics and in seeking funding for new faculty positions, in continually reassessing academic priorities, in developing a strategic vision, in allocating resources, Dr. McDermott sought always for ways and means to improve the academic experience of students."

Although he spent years as an administrator, those who knew him say Dr. McDermott was always the ideal of personal care to the students he mentored and a dedicated friend to the faculty he worked with so closely.

"He was a man with such patience, such clarity,



Dr. James P. McDermott | 1943 - 2002

such tolerant attention," remembered Melvin W. Schroeder, associate professor of English. "He was never adversarial. Always attentive. Always looking carefully for everything that could be relevant. I never left even the shortest of conversations with him without feeling wiser – and fascinated."

"His humor made me laugh. His knowledge of his field was impressive. But his care and understanding for others was his triumph," added Dr. Jerome L. Neuner, associate vice president for academic affairs.

Close friend and colleague, Dr. James S. Valone, associate dean of the Wehle School of Business, says that triumph was borne by a man who lived his life deeply aware of God's love for all mankind and con-

vinced of the goodness of God's will.

"He taught his students about Eastern religion, I think in part so they would better understand their own religions. He taught his colleagues what it meant to be a scholar by being a great scholar. And he taught everyone who encountered him to live life in the full knowledge of God's love and care for us," said Valone.

Dr. McDermott is survived by his wife of 33 years, Rev. Alice McDermott; a daughter, Lisa; a son, Kevin; and a sister, Jane Burandt.

The college will conduct a search for Dr. McDermott's replacement in fall 2002. Rev. Benjamin Fiore, S.J., chair of the Religious Studies Department, will serve as acting dean. ■