



Position Endowed by Donald '64 and Michele D'Amour

Professor [J. Brian Benestad](#) , Ph.D., was formally installed May 1, 2015, as Assumption College's inaugural D'Amour Chair in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The Chair affirms the College's commitment to its mission as an institution of higher education that is enlivened by the Catholic affirmation of the harmony of faith and reason that aims, by the pursuit of the truth, to transform the minds and hearts of students.

The ceremony was held in La Maison Française Salon and remarks were given by Assumption College President Francesco C. Cesareo, Ph.D., Interim Provost Louise Carroll Keeley, Ph.D., and the chair's benefactor, Donald D'Amour '64.

In 2008, Donald D'Amour and his wife Michele made a historic \$4.2 million gift to the College—the largest in Assumption's 111-year history. More than half of this generous contribution was used to establish the Donald and Michele D'Amour Chair in the Catholic intellectual Tradition. As the D'Amour Chair, Professor Benestad's responsibilities include teaching one or two courses per semester in his field of specialization and leading a faculty workshop or seminar on the Catholic intellectual tradition as part of on-going faculty development efforts.

"The D'Amour Chair in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition represents a core belief of Assumption College: that education which best prepares us for engaged service and discerning citizenship originates in the 'liberating' force of the liberal arts," said Assumption College Interim Provost Louise Carroll Keeley, Ph.D. "Dr. Benestad's distinguished career has brought the long traditions of classical and Christian thought and political philosophy to bear on the most vexing issues of our age: the family, society, the economy as well as the international order of nations. To read and study with Dr. Benestad is to appreciate the complexities of these issues all the more deeply."

Professor Benestad—who earned a B.A. in 1963 from Assumption, a theology degree from the Gregorian University in Rome, Italy; and a Ph.D. in political science from Boston College—held Assumption's d'Alzon Chair of Liberal Studies in the Department of Theology from 1997 to 2000. He then taught at the University of Scranton until 2013. In spring of that year, Professor Benestad accepted the D'Amour Chair in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and has taught at Assumption since fall 2013.

"Coming back to my alma mater has been a joy for me; it's where I was first introduced to serious liberal arts education in the Catholic tradition," he said.

As D'Amour Chair, Professor Benestad teaches one or two courses each semester for undergraduates on subjects such as the Bible, moral theology, Catholic social thought, and bioethics. In addition, he organizes week-long seminars for faculty at the end of the fall and spring semesters. These seminars—the d'Alzon Colloquia—treat some aspect of the Catholic intellectual tradition. This spring, faculty read and discussed selected writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the past they have concentrated on other saints (St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas More, and St. Theresa of Lisieux), five plays by Shakespeare on the theme of love, and a famous work of Italian literature, *The Betrothed*, by Alessandro Manzoni. Professor Benestad also runs year-long seminars for faculty that meet every three weeks throughout both semesters. In 2013-2014, faculty studied St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and during this academic year they read Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* along with 10 of Newman's addresses on higher education.

During the installation ceremony, the Very Rev. Fr. Richard Lamoureux, A.A., delivered the inaugural address entitled "The Stanza is Alive!": Raphael's Frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura." The Most Rev. Robert J. McManus, S.T.D., bishop of the Diocese of Worcester, offered the invocation; Fr. Dennis Gallagher, A.A., vice president for mission at Assumption,

delivered the benediction.

A 1964 Assumption graduate and a former College trustee, Donald D'Amour is chairman and CEO of Big Y Foods Inc., based in Springfield, Mass. Michele oversees the independent supermarket chain's educational partnership initiatives. The D'Amours' commitment to education at every level includes encouraging Catholic schools and colleges to strengthen their Catholic identity and liberal arts core.

"Though many colleges and universities have lost their religious roots, Assumption College continues to embrace its Catholic identity and protect the integrity of its mission, while also welcoming students and faculty with a diversity of backgrounds and religious beliefs into its vibrant academic community," said Donald D'Amour. "Michele and I consider this gift an investment in Assumption's distinct, high-quality offerings for its present and future students."

Their gift also endowed a distinguished speakers program that highlights aspects of the Catholic intellectual tradition, increased the endowment for the Fortin/Gonthier Foundations of Western Civilization Program, and established a faculty development grant fund. The grants have provided resources for faculty to develop new courses or revise existing courses within the Catholic intellectual tradition, both for the core curriculum and advanced courses across the disciplines.