

M

essages from above

The meaning of St. Peter's windows



Story and photos by Paul Mayne

Since entering St. Peter's Seminary in 1958, the Rev. Michael Prieur has spent countless hours in its chapel praying and participating in liturgical celebrations.

As a student and, later, professor of moral and sacramental theology, he always appreciated how the oak woodwork and jewel-toned stained glass windows filled him with wonder and awe.

Yet, it was just a decade ago when Prieur realized the three-storey windows located in the Chapel of St. Thomas Aquinas, ones he'd been passing every day for 40 years, held a spiritual treasure trove he never imagined.

"It was a whole fresh infusion of what beauty can do to you," says Prieur about "discovering" the windows for the first time. "All of a sudden, in every window, surprise upon surprise. You can live in beauty your whole life and take it for granted, but then when you stop and start wondering ... wow. I started looking at them and said to myself, 'There are things here that I didn't realize.'"

What initially ignited his curiosity was a window located near the front of the chapel. Why is St. Jerome dressed like a cardinal when the church had no such official dress for cardinals during his time, he wondered?

Then he started looking around and saw St. Gregory to his right, who had a staff in his hand with three bars on it. What is that all about, he thought?

"My questions haunted me, and I began my research," says Prieur, a faculty member at St. Peter's Seminary since 1969, which is affiliated with King's University College.

With great fervour, and binoculars at the ready, Prieur began learning all he could about the nine small windows and 14 three-storey, Neo-Gothic windows – each with four panels depicting events and people important to the Christian faith.

For the next six years, embarked on the mission of a great detective, he deciphered the clues in the windows that were a part of his life.

"I soon decided these windows deserved a high-quality,

hardcover book in which I would attempt to bring these sparkling tapestries of Scripture and history alive for people searching for the meaning of our Catholic tradition."

In 2005 *Panes of Glory* was published, with Prieur treating the 73 window panels individually – each earning a two-page spread including detailed photographs, commentary and an inspiring prayer related to the particular saint. The book has gone on to sell more than 1,300 copies.

"The windows are just beautiful. They are as beautiful today as the day they built them and the messages are there today. They are timeless," he says.

The story of these magnificent windows is now set to be shared with a much larger audience. Early in 2010, a documentary crew from Salt + Light television, the first Catholic television network broadcasting 24/7 across Canada, spent almost two weeks filming *Panes of Glory: The Windows of St. Peter's Seminary*, the story behind Prieur's book.

"I watched in amazement as seemingly tons of photographic equipment and electric cables snaked their way along our Seminary hall and chapel," he says. "Three helium-filled white balloons, each giving forth 1,500 watts of light, hovered in the chapel; banks of lights stood guard everywhere; two cameras were ready. This was no small production."

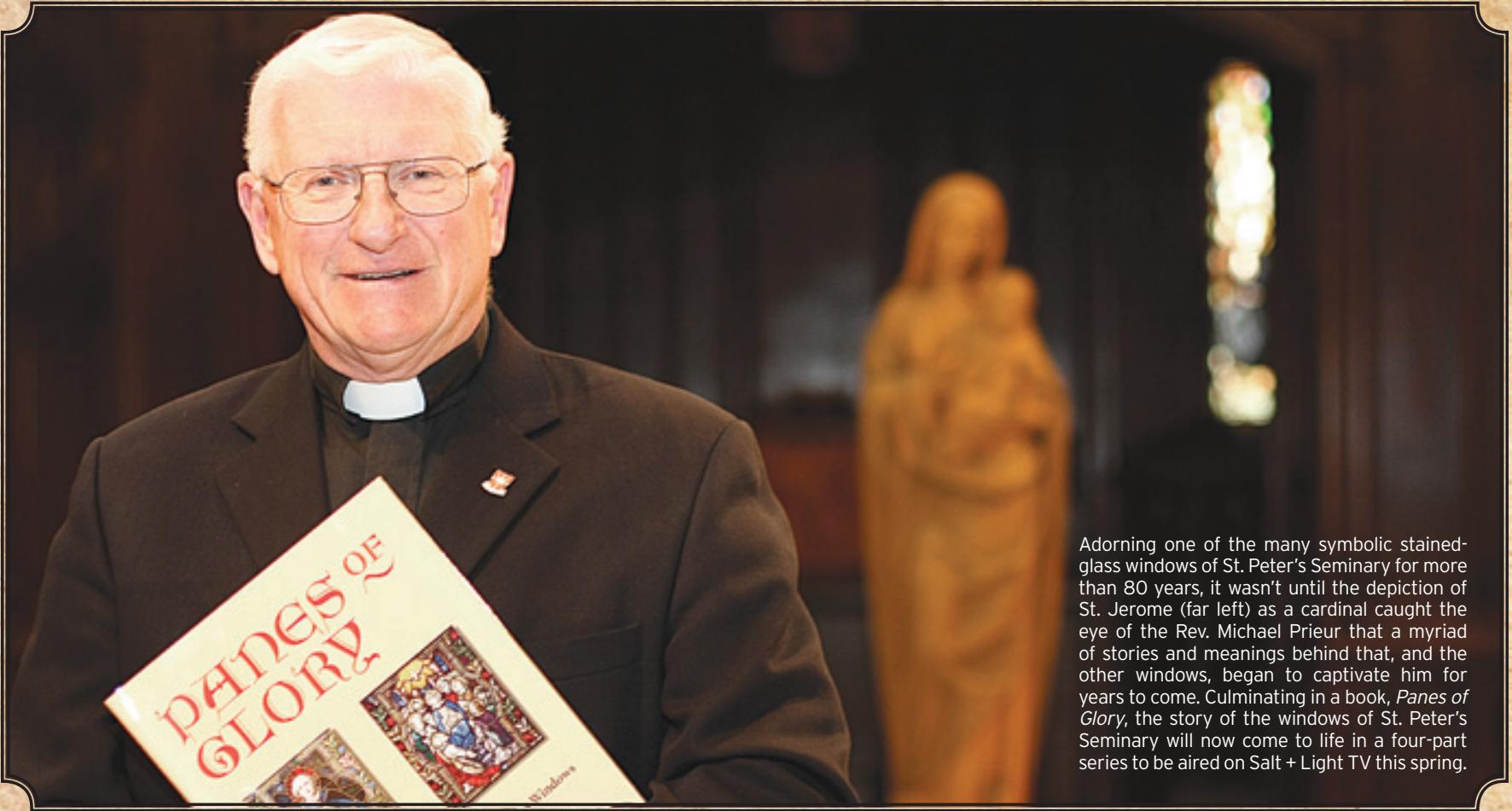
The four-part series, to air this spring, will feature Prieur revealing his insights surrounding the beautiful stained-glass to an audience of more than 1.5 million households across the country. Three of the London-based Amabile Choirs are also part of the series.

Salt + Light television is available on Rogers Cable in London on channel 240.

"If you had said to me when my book was launched, that our seminary windows would be featured on TV, I would have gasped in disbelief. It's about the beauty that is here, our faith, the seminary, training people for the priesthood and ministry. We have a tool to attract people to God and the saints.

Learn more about the upcoming Salt + Light series at saltandlighttv.org/panesofglory/





Adorning one of the many symbolic stained-glass windows of St. Peter's Seminary for more than 80 years, it wasn't until the depiction of St. Jerome (far left) as a cardinal caught the eye of the Rev. Michael Prieur that a myriad of stories and meanings behind that, and the other windows, began to captivate him for years to come. Culminating in a book, *Panes of Glory*, the story of the windows of St. Peter's Seminary will now come to life in a four-part series to be aired on Salt + Light TV this spring.

