



Saint Mary's College Mourns Loss of Beloved Professor

By Jennifer Wake

Hundreds of students, friends and colleagues gathered at a prayer service in the Saint Mary's College Chapel on Feb. 11 following the shocking death of long-time professor John Dennis, Ph.D. Dr. Dennis was killed at his home in Oakland on Feb. 9. He was 59.

At the prayer service, Brother Michael Sanderl described Dennis as someone who educated many minds and touched hundreds of hearts.

Dennis was a member of the Saint Mary's History Department, teaching a variety of courses including Modern African History, Roman and Early Christian Thought, as well as courses in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program. He was also director of the High Potential Program from

1993 to 2005. The program prepares first-generation college students (primarily Latino and African-American students from the Bay Area) for college through summer coursework, mentoring and enrichment activities.

Ironically, just last month, Dennis taught a January Term course entitled, "Beyond Death and Dying," which invited students to "view life and death through multicultural lenses."

In the course description, Dennis wrote, "America abounds in 'truth seekers' who have sought to know 'God' and the spirit-world first hand.

Whether triggered by a near-death experience, a life-altering spiritual encounter, an active dream life, a deep-seated quest for meaning, or the gift of ESP, they come to

see life in a new light. Like their Hollywood counterparts, this special group of teachers invites us to discover the power of the mind and the gift of the inner life. Most important, they want to teach us to value life, to discover our unique gifts and to love ourselves and others."

Dennis sought to "empower, enrich and inspire students to take time to revisit the losses in their personal lives and to explore the questions of the immortality of the soul and its need for 'salvation.'"

In addition to his 29-year tenure at Saint Mary's, Dennis also taught at City College of San Francisco. He earned a bachelor's degree from UC Santa Barbara and a doctorate in African History from Stanford University.