

# SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

Positive stories  
Valuable work



## Briercrest leader returns to his roots

*Michael B. Pawelke takes the reins as school's sixth president*

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ChristianWeek Staff

CARONPORT, SK—When he walked through the doors of a growing Bible college as a young student, Michael Pawelke had no idea he would one day return as the school's sixth president.

He was there to prepare for vocational Christian ministry, which would include more than three decades as a pastor and an eventual reconnection with the school where his leadership journey began.

Newly appointed as the sixth president of Briercrest College and Seminary in Caronport, Saskatchewan, Pawelke says the

school gave him a biblical foundation that was "pivotal" in his pastoral career.

"Briercrest also encouraged me to grow in confidence—something I wasn't expecting," he says. "The student life experience, the opportunities to develop leadership qualities—they were instrumental in helping me grow as a leader. The whole Briercrest experience is more than just education, it is a whole environment that shapes a whole person."

Just a few months into his new job, Pawelke has a positive outlook.

"Briercrest's vision fits so nicely with my own sense of call," says Pawelke. "Many years ago, in my role as a pastor, I sculpted

a vision statement for my own life, which was to love, lead, feed, and seed.

"When I think of the mission of Briercrest—to be in community, to seek the Kingdom of God and to be formed by the truths of Scripture for lives of service—I see perfect alignment with what I've always felt God calling me to do."

A Briercrest board member since 2002, Pawelke was also an instructor since 2010, commuting from his home in Ontario, where he served as senior pastor for Brant/Compass Point Bible Church.

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## Spots

- Briercrest's roots begin in 1935, when Briercrest Bible Institute opened its doors to eleven students.
- Today, 23,000 Briercrest alumni are serving God in 80 countries around the world.
- The school's aim is to call students to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ and equip them spiritually and intellectually for lives of service.
- Located in a rural setting away from the hustle and bustle of the city, Briercrest offers an extensive 160-acre campus.
- The centrepiece of the school is Hildebrand Chapel, which seats 2,400 people and is the largest church auditorium in Saskatchewan.



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“It was something that I had to wrestle with because of my deep love for the church I was serving at the time, but I really believed in what Briercrest was doing, what Briercrest stood for, and what Briercrest was seeking to accomplish with its mission. It was a tough decision to leave, but it was not a tough decision to come.”

Pawelke’s first tasks are to absorb and understand his role, reaffirm Briercrest’s roots, and recalibrate the school for the changing context Canadians live in. Along these lines, one of Briercrest’s recent initiatives was achieving university status for its BA Humanities degree.

“My greatest objective,” Pawelke says, “is to promote [the school] and encourage people to consider Briercrest as a possible place to come for education. I think over the last number of years we have really worked hard at our standards of education and our quality of staff and faculty. I anticipate our influence will spread in the Canadian context.”

Followers of Jesus should value education, says Pawelke. “A disciple is a learner,” he says, “and you never graduate from the school of discipleship; you are always learning.”

What particularly excites Pawelke about Briercrest’s offerings is that

they are seeking to equip students for many occupations, not just for vocational ministry or service in the church.

“We want to equip students who are who are going into professional settings, who are continuing on with their education elsewhere, who are going into research. We want to give them the very best training so they look at their world from a Christian perspective.

“To that end, we want to be an institution of influence. We want to train students to be effective in their critical thinking skills and their ability to handle biblical truth and theological frameworks as they interact with our changing world.”

The students’ ambition to take what they’ve learned and apply it is energizing.

“When you see students walking across the stage and receiving their diplomas, degrees, certificates, or honours, it is so inspiring because those students are going to change their world for the purposes of God,” says Pawelke.

“[Graduation] just ignites and catalyzes excitement throughout the whole campus,” he adds. “The ceremony is, in many ways, the climax of the students’ experience, but also exciting for the faculty and staff



Michael B. Pawelke is the sixth president of Briercrest College and Seminary.

Photo courtesy Briercrest

as they see the end result of their efforts.”

Pawelke looks to the coming days

with anticipation. “I’m looking forward to this season of stewarding and the opportunity to serve.”

## Edubits

### Regent announces endowed chair

VANCOUVER, BC—Iwan Russell-Jones, an award-winning filmmaker, theologian, and writer is the first incumbent of the newly established Eugene and Jan Peterson Chair in Theology and the Arts at Regent College. He is currently Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and head of the Theology and the Arts Program at the school and will be officially installed as the new chair October 26.

Eugene Peterson was the James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College from 1993 to 1998. In addition to being a poet, author, and scholar, he is also an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). He has written numerous books but is perhaps best known for his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*.

Peterson has long sought to re-imagine pastoral theology through the world of the arts, says Regent president Rod Wilson; both he and his wife Jan believe that a chair in the arts best reflects their passions and interests.

([www.regent-college.edu](http://www.regent-college.edu))



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