

Fr. James L. Heft, S.M. (Marianist)

Fr. Heft is a priest in the Society of Mary, an educator, author, and leader in Catholic higher education. After finishing his doctoral studies in historical theology at the University of Toronto, he spent the next 29 years at the University of Dayton, a Catholic University run by the Marianists. There, he served as chair of the Theology Department for six years, Provost of the University for eight years, and most recently, chancellor of the University for ten years. After discussions with the leadership of the University of Southern California, the Board of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies (ifacs.com), and his own religious superiors, he left the University of Dayton in the summer of 2006 to begin a full time effort to establish the Institute at USC, where he now holds the Alton Brooks Professorship in Religion.

He has been deeply involved in the leadership of Catholic higher education in the United States, serving on the board of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) for nearly a decade, and chairing that board from 1999-2001. Along with three other leaders in Catholic higher education, he founded in 1996 *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*. He has published and edited eight books and written over 150 articles and book chapters. He is currently finishing a book on Catholic high schools in the United States: their challenges and future. He is the recipient of four honorary degrees.

The purpose of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies, of which he is the founder and President, and with the full support of USC can be stated simply. There are many intellectuals today with little interest in the study of religion. There are many religious people with little interest in the intellectual life. The Institute exists to make it possible for more intellectuals to take seriously the study of religious, and in particular, of Catholicism, in an ecumenical and inter-faith context. Ideas are important, especially ideas that have to do with people's deepest religious beliefs and the clear and crying needs of our world today. Catholicism has extraordinary resources intellectually and historically, to make major contributions towards a more vibrant and thoughtful Catholicism and a more peaceful and just world. For further information, see the Institute's website at ifacs.com.

Recent publications of the Institute include *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Fordham University Press, 2006); *Beyond Violence: Religious Sources of Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Fordham University Press, 2004), both edited by Fr. Heft, who is currently editing *Learned Ignorance: the Limits of Knowing*, which contains papers that grew out of a week's meeting in Jerusalem in 2007 among Jewish, Catholic and Muslim Scholars.



Guiding Questions For Today's Discussion

Opening Questions:

Are we as Jewish Educators confronting the challenge of transmitting Judaism to the next generation? If yes, how does this challenge manifest itself? What are ways in which we need to be better prepared to meet this challenge? What resources are required?

Post Presentation Questions:

Does the transmission of religious belief and behavior automatically guarantee that more teens will become involved with Judaism? Do the same teens become involved in different ways?

In what ways can we as Jewish Educators respond to the communal concerns about engaging our youth?

What are tangible next steps that we do together on this agenda?