

For Immediate Release: January 9, 2024

## **VST ANNOUNCES 2024 HONORARY DOCTORATE RECIPIENT VANCOUVER BUSINESS LEADER AND PHILANTHROPIST RECOGNIZED**

VANCOUVER, BC, January 9, 2024. The Board of Governors of the **Vancouver School of Theology** is pleased to announce that **Michael Francis** has been selected as the recipient of the 2024 Honorary Doctor of Divinity.

This Honorary Doctor of Divinity (HDD) is awarded to individuals who exemplify the values of VST, an internationally recognized theological school known for its innovation and global leadership. VST's HDD recipients have made significant contributions through the integration of theology and practice of ministry in one or more of the following: theological scholarship, ecumenical dialogue, the life and ministry of the Christian community, and interdisciplinary scholarship involving theology with other fields.

### **About Michael Francis**

Michael Francis is known by many to be a kind, forward-thinking, and collaborative leader. He has shared his gifts and skills widely throughout his career, which has been diverse and impactful.

After twenty year as a Chartered Accountant, Mr. Francis' expertise in the field was recognized when he was elected a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 2000. His career transitioned from public practice to the founding of Seed Management Inc., a venture capital firm specializing in early-stage technology investments. His focus on commercializing research from British Columbia universities proved a strategic move, with many of these investments blossoming into successful commercial enterprises.



Beyond his achievements in the business realm, Mr. Francis has been an active participant in civic affairs, arts and culture, and education. He has chaired the Vancouver City Council's Committee on the Arts—leading to his subsequent appointment as Co-Chair of the Vancouver Centennial Commission, served as the Chair of the Playhouse Theatre Company, played a crucial role in reviving Theatre Under the Stars in 1970, and served as Chair for the Vancouver International Film Festival for over two decades, overseeing its flourishing expansion and establishment of the Vancouver Film Centre.

In education, Mr. Francis served as Chair of the Board of Science World from 1989 to 1993. His commitment to higher education is evident in his role as Chair of the Board of Governors of Simon Fraser University and his ten years as Chair of the Board at the Vancouver School of Theology. At VST, Mr. Francis' skill and leadership was invaluable as the school went through a time of a transition and renewal. His service on the board and on various teams and working groups has well-prepared the school for a sound financial future to ensure VST's growing student body will receive a robust and innovative theological training.

With a lifetime dedicated to professional excellence, community service, and philanthropy, Mr. Francis exemplifies the positive impact one individual can make across diverse spheres

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of society, and the way business skill, acumen, and forward thinking can benefit theological education. For all these reasons, VST is pleased to confer on Michael Francis honoris causa the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

*Michael Francis is a moral and acutely intelligent man who shared his gifts of financial management and business strategy in a manner that has fundamentally changed the school's trajectory, placing it on solid footing for, God willing, many years to come. That VST received such leadership from someone with integrity, kindness, and grit is a blessing.*

Mr. Iain Black (former Chancellor of VST)

*Michael Francis is the finest of gentlemen and embodies VST as a thoughtful, engaged, and generous Christian leader. His engagement has inspired many.*

The Right Reverend David TJ Lehmann (Chair of the Board)

*I have observed and collaborated with Michael as a VST Turning Point Team member, the VST Property Development Team, and, most recently, the VST Foundation. He brought intelligence, humour, and dedication to his ministry among us. I have the highest regard for his moral character and dedication to others.*

Archdeacon Ronald E. Harrison (retired, Past Chair VST Foundation)

*Michael has always been deeply committed to the school. The Board was kept well informed during his tenure. Meetings were well run, members were asked for their opinions, and there was always a strong sense of his desire to put "VST back on the Map." Michael worked hard to help VST grow as a welcoming and important theological destination for diverse students.*

Mrs. Judy Hager (Board Member)

*Michael's wisdom, good-humour and delight at plans gone well have been a constant source of inspiration to the school as a whole. Under his leadership as Chair of the Board, we moved the school, relocated to our current premises, exercised fiscal discipline and strategic thinking, and expanded programs for impact in the life of the church and the world. Michael would be the first to say – "we are not yet done," "team-work is essential" and "we must continue to broaden our circle of friends." All true. And I am so very grateful for this man, Michael Francis, who in the providence of God (with help from the Very Rev. Dr. Peter Elliott) was Chair and friend while I have been Principal and President.*

The Rev. Dr. Richard Topping (President and Vice-Chancellor)

### **About VST**

VST's core mandate is to educate and form thoughtful, engaged, and generous Christian leaders for the church in the 21st century. VST is a leading theological school viewed as a change agent and innovator for the church.

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VST is an affiliated college of the University of British Columbia, ranked in the top 100 schools globally and in the top 10 of the most improved theological schools. VST has been recognized by In Trust Magazine for realizing transformational change as it renews theological education. A recipient of a prestigious Pathways for Tomorrow grant from the Lilly Endowment, VST is redefining the critical role of theological field education in preparing clergy. VST is accredited by the Government of British Columbia and in North America by ATS (Association of Theological Schools).

The Vancouver School of Theology celebrates its foundational relationships with the Anglican Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada (through St. Andrew's Hall), and the United Church of Canada. VST welcomes students from many Christian communions, other faith traditions, and Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Studies Program at VST is central to the school's identity and commitment.

The Vancouver School of Theology recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2021. VST, through its predecessor schools, has taught theology in Vancouver since 1893.

The Vancouver School of Theology acknowledges that the land on which they are located is the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) People.

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