CAROL PRIEST: An Appreciation of Her Twenty-Five Years of Service to Gettysburg College

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In the summer of 1999 Lisa Portmess, who was Chair of the Philosophy Department, and I, who chaired the Religion Department at the time, hired Carol Priest to be our Office Administrator. To this day, I consider that to be one of the wisest decisions I made in my ten-year stint as Department Chair. While Carol was a fine College Store employee and a valuable asset in Student Activities during her initial years on campus, Carol has been a super Office Administrator for the Departments of Religion and Philosophy and for the Programs in Latin American Studies and Global Studies.

In preparation for this evening some of Carol’s co-workers were polled, and here is what they said about her: Carol Priest is “efficient, friendly, and proactive”; she works “patiently and tirelessly” with faculty members and students alike; she is “a delightful colleague” who can “keep confidences and remain ‘calm and organized when faced with multiple deadlines’; she has been a “wise and efficient” mentor to many new Department Chairs and Program Coordinators and has been “a good friend” to us all; she does everything “with energy” and with “unfailing good humor.” Simply put, “She walks on water!” One person summed up the sentiment of us all by saying, “We all frequently ask ourselves how in the world we managed before she came to us.”

Carol may be petite, but everyone who comes in contact with her quickly learns that she is a force with which to be reckoned. She is not easily intimidated. She speaks her mind and says what needs to be said without apology. Her distinctive and forthright mode of operation has inspired her faculty colleagues to coin a new verb in her honor. The verb, “to carol-ize,” is normally used in its passive sense, “to be carol-ized,” and it means to be reminded, in a kind but firm way, of one’s obligations and to be held accountable for those obligations. But “carol-ization” is often done with such grace and sincerity on Carol’s part that the offender doesn’t even know that they have been “carol-ized” until after the fact!

I recently overheard Carol leave a voice mail message for a faculty colleague of mine who had missed the deadline for textbook orders for the spring semester—by several months! She began by saying, “Hello! This is your conscience calling. . . .” She then went on to explain that his book orders were needed ASAP, if he expected to have them in time for the beginning of the new semester next week. That’s “carol-ization.”

Maintenance people and housekeepers also know what it is like to be “carol-ized.” Just ask someone who promises Carol that a problem will be fixed by 3:00 PM one day and shows up at 9:00 AM the next day to begin work! In an affable but unyielding way, Carol will remind that worker of their transgression. That’s “carol-ization.”
Students also know what it is to be "carol-ized." Just ask a student who has not submitted a chapter of his or her senior thesis on time and has not responded to the many email messages that Carol has sent to that student. When that delinquent student next appears in Carol’s office, she or he can expect to hear about how they need to complete their work in timely fashion and read their email more regularly. That’s “carol-ization.”

But this is not a phenomenon simply known on campus. When a colleague had problems securing a visa from the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C., Carol called the Embassy and let them know that she was displeased with their delay. That’s “carol-ization.” Now, even the nation of India knows what it is like “to be carol-ized”!

But we all know that “carol-ization” comes from a caring heart and from Carol’s deep-seated and single-minded commitment to insuring the success of everyone with whom she works. She has high expectations of us, and that makes all of us work harder to live up to those expectations. This was amply demonstrated this last semester in the case of a second semester senior student who had withdrawn from the College a couple of years ago when his mother was dying of cancer. After his mother’s death, this student decided to return to the college to finish his degree. But he was nervous about his ability to succeed. Carol took this student “under her wing.” For an entire semester Carol met this student each morning in our lounge, made him coffee, offered him a word of encouragement, and saw that he got to his 8:00 AM Logic class on time. This student graduated in December thanks in large measure to Carol’s care and concern.

Carol may be small of stature, but she has a big heart. And she is a person of many loves. She loves her family, she loves life, and she loves people. Carol loves a good glass of wine (or two), and she loves to dance all night long with her husband Jon at the local Lodge. Carol loves NASCAR in general, and she loves Number 24 in particular. Carol loves mid-winter vacations in warm places, and she loves crossword puzzles and Sudoku, both of which she works with lightning speed. And Carol loves Gettysburg College and those of us who work here.

All of this, my friends, is what makes Carol Priest such an asset to our departments and to this school. She gives so much more than what is expected. She does what needs to be done and more, without asking if it is in her job description or if she will get more compensation. Here is a person who lives the motto of this College, for day in and day out she truly does “do great work.”

Carol, on the occasion of your 25th anniversary, we congratulate you on this milestone and want you to know that we are proud of all that you are and we are grateful for all that you have done and continue to do for us. May God bless.

Delivered at the Gettysburg College Staff Appreciation Banquet at the Wyndham Hotel & Conference Center January 13, 2007