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More News

Spotlight on our 80th Anniversary: How Did Dialogue Come to Transform Education at the Thomas More Institute?

For our 80th anniversary, the More News will be publishing articles highlighting elements of our rich history.

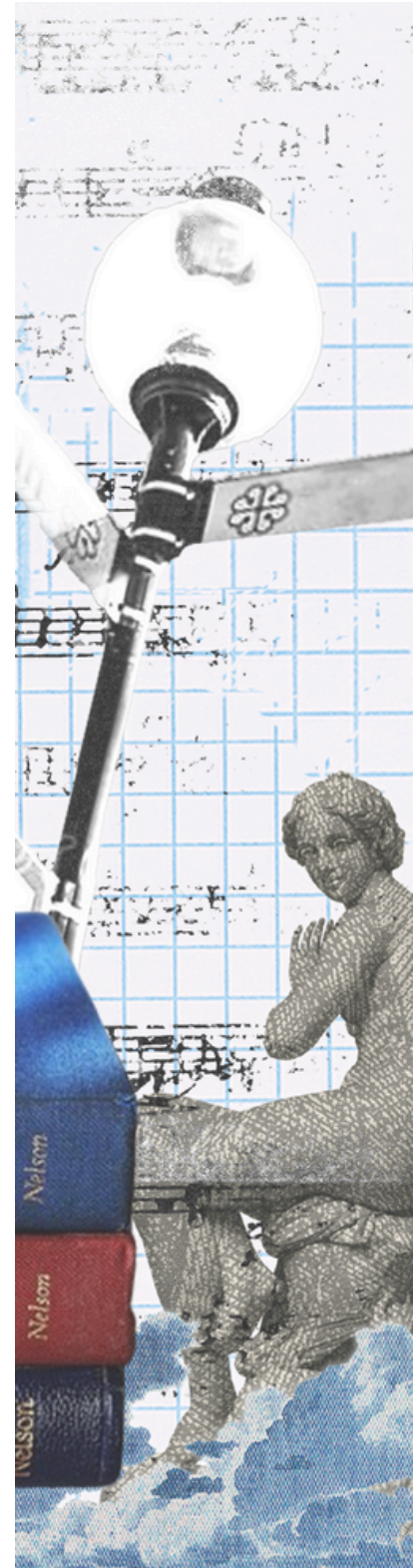
When the Thomas More Institute began as the “Catholic Education Committee” in 1945, it took its inspiration from a series of lectures that had been offered at Loyola College in 1944. By the late 1950s, however, the Institute was known not for its lectures, but for its discussion courses. How did informed dialogue and shared inquiry come to take center stage at Thomas More? (Continued on P.3)

Looking at the Academic Year Ahead: An Interview with Joseph Vietri, Manager of Academic Affairs and Operations

What are some highlights to look forward to from our 2025-26 course programming? Read on for a special look ahead at the year. (P.4)

Upcoming Events: Celebrating 80 Years of Informed Dialogue at the Thomas More Institute

- *Open House*
- *A Journey Through the History of the Thomas More Institute*
- *Emerging Writers Award*
- *History in Motion: The Thomas More Institute's 80th Anniversary Fundraising Walk*
- *The Feast of Lights, 80th Anniversary Edition* (P.5)



thomasmore.qc.ca
3405 Atwater Avenue
Montreal, QC H3H 1Y2
(514) 935-9585

Feature Article

Spotlight on our 80th Anniversary: How Did Dialogue Come to Transform Education at the Thomas More Institute?

When the Thomas More Institute began as the “Catholic Education Committee” in 1945, it took its inspiration from a series of lectures that had been offered at Loyola College in 1944. By the late 1950s, however, the Institute was known not for its lectures, but for its discussion courses. How did informed dialogue and shared inquiry come to take center stage at Thomas More?

The Thomas More Institute and its young founders continually sought to experiment and search for the best ways to provide adult education. In the late 1940s, Great Books programs were gaining popularity.



TMI COURSE PARTICIPANTS, 1945/1949

Founded in 1947 by two University of Chicago Professors, Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, the Great Books Foundation “sought to promote lifelong education through the reading and discussion of outstanding literature.”⁽¹⁾ In May of 1949, Eric O’Connor, Charlotte Tansey, Martin O’Hara and other members of the Institute took a weeklong training with the Great Books Foundation. In 1951, Thomas More co-sponsored another training with the Foundation, which led to the creation of seven First Year Great Books discussion groups in the greater Montreal area, two under the direction of the Thomas More Institute. What began as a way to discuss the classics of the Western tradition, however, soon transformed into the method of education for most courses at the Institute. These reading-discussion courses, as they were referred to, fit beautifully with another of the inspirations behind the Institute, the thought of Bernard Lonergan.

Speaking on the importance of Bernard Lonergan’s lecture course in 1945, the first year of the institute, Eric O’Connor said:

What came through from him was that all questions could be asked and should be asked, that in fact one didn’t begin to learn until one began asking questions. This was a shock to anyone educated before 1945... Having those lectures didn’t become as important as a theory. That is definite. It became important as an experience: the way you learned anything was by slow questioning. ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.greatbooks.org/nonprofit-organization/history/>

⁽²⁾ Inquiry and Attunement, Thomas More Institute Papers/81. Montreal 1981, quoted in: William Mathews S.J., “Curiosity at the Center of One’s Life: Reflections on Eric O’Connor and the Thomas More Institute,” p 3.

Feature Article (continued)

What reading-discussion courses sought to do was to create the experience of questioning in the classroom. Have you ever wondered why every description of a course at Thomas More is filled with questions? Thomas More discussion courses don't push a particular point of view or seek to repeat the orthodoxies of a tradition. They inquire into the meaning of the texts read by the group and seek to understand them along with the questions of the course. As William Mathews put it in his article on the work of Eric O'Connor and the Thomas More Institute:

The Thomas More did not mean to question the correctness of the traditions, be they literary, religious, political, or cultural. The point was, had they been understood, what did they mean?... [It is mere] dogma that the world begins with "our generation" and the past, tradition, has nothing to teach us. The fact of the matter is that there is a wisdom in one's past traditions, which properly assimilated equips a modern generation to understand, diagnose, interpret and respond to the pathologies and the creativities of the human spirit in its own era. Without the proper awakening of our questioning to the meaning and truth of our traditions and their wisdom figures we will be in bondage to them and become bigots. Or we will discard them and become rootless, be at the mercy of the whims of our present with no past wisdom to guide us. (3)

One becomes an adult learner, a thinker, when one questions deeply and seeks to understand the thought of others, whether the classical great works or those of current writers. This in turn leads to one's own insights about the world we live in. What is attempted in every reading-discussion course at the Thomas More Institute is to enable understanding to take place through shared inquiry into the questions of the course and the questions of our time.

--Carol Fiedler



TMI COURSE LEADERS AND PARTICIPANTS, 2023

(3) Mathews, 1981, p. 4.

Preview of the 2025-26 Curriculum

Looking at the Academic Year Ahead: An Interview with Joseph Vietri, Manager of Academic Affairs and Operations

MORE News had the opportunity to sit down with Joseph Vietri to get a taste of what TMI's 2025-26 programming will look like. Read on for an exclusive look at the year ahead!

More News: This Fall, the Thomas More Institute has a number of great courses on offer. Are there any that particularly stand out to you?

Joseph: Yes, I think the variety of course topics, as well as the different lengths, leaves participants with many different choices. We have courses in the classics, like *Queens, Servants and Sorceresses*, which will explore classical stories from the female perspective. We also have social history courses like *Ideologies of Oppression*. Here, participants will examine the history of the caste system in India and the way in which it is or isn't similar to the issues surround race in the United States. Finally, courses like *Hallyu: The Korean Wave in Literature and Drama*, will give participants the chance to explore Korean dramas, which have become very popular over the last few years.

MN: These all sound great. Are there any other courses you'd like to highlight?

J: I think our two music courses will be popular. Our annual Saturday Afternoons at the Opera will be discussing great operas this year. *Tristan und Isolde* or *La Bohème*, for example, are ones you don't want to miss. We are also very lucky this year to be welcoming Rob Lutes to TMI as an instructor. Rob will be offering a course on the history of popular songs in Canada and America. In the *Stories Behind the Songs*, participants will not only go over the history, but as a musician himself, Rob will play many of them live. It'll be a great way to spend Wednesday evenings this fall.

MN: That sounds great! Fall is such a great time of the year. There also seems to be another walking course, correct?

J: There is! After the popularity of our spring walking courses the last few years, this year we are offering one in the fall. With the changing leaves and cooler weather, I'm sure this walking tour will be appreciated by many. Exploring the Montreal's Urban Nature also lets people see that while we are living in a city, there is always a way to get in touch with nature.

MN: Thank you for the Fall update! Looking forward to welcoming people into a brand-new academic year!



Fall Events

Celebrating 80 Years of Informed Dialogue at the Thomas More Institute

2025 Open House

Saturday, September 6, 2025

A Journey Through the History of the Thomas More Institute

We will kick off our 2025-26 year-long celebration of the 80th Anniversary of the Thomas More Institute with a talk on the history of the Institute at our Open House on September 6, 2025. The talk will feature the highlights of the rich history of Thomas More as displayed on three poster boards looking at the founding, the evolution, and the innovations of the Institute.

Emerging Writers Award

In honour of our 80th Anniversary, last spring we announced the Emerging Writers Award and issued a call for applications for this contest in which the Institute will give away spaces in two courses for each of two young writers chosen by the Award Committee. At the Open House, we will be announcing the winners of the Award during our launch of the 2nd edition of our writing journal, *Voices*. Next year's edition of *Voices* will feature a piece from each of the winners.

History in Motion: The Thomas More Institute's 80th Anniversary Fundraising Walk

Saturday, October 18, 2025

Join us on Saturday, October 18th for our first-ever fundraising walk in celebration of TMI's 80th anniversary! We'll trace a special route through downtown Montreal that links all four of our past and present locations, with each stop highlighting an important chapter in our rich history. In the spirit of community, participants are encouraged to raise funds by inviting friends and family to donate in support of their walk. Every contribution will help sustain accessible, university-level lifelong learning in Montreal. Whether you're walking or cheering us on, everyone is welcome! We'll gather at the end of the walk for light refreshments and a community celebration—a chance to connect, reminisce, and mark this milestone together.

Donation details coming soon—stay tuned!

The Feast of Lights, 80th Anniversary Edition

Friday, December 5, 2025

Our annual holiday party will have an 80th Anniversary theme, as we celebrate the Thomas More Institute and the season of lights.

In Memoriam

Alexander Highet (Sandy)



September 7, 1935 – June 25, 2025

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Sandy Highet, graduate, board member, and past president of the Thomas More Institute.

Born in Scotland in 1935, Sandy emigrated to Canada in 1960, where he worked for TD Bank in Toronto. He went on to work with the IDB (the Inter-American Development Bank) and the FBDB (the current Business Development Bank of Canada) in several postings in the Maritimes. He retired as Vice-President from the FBDB in Montreal in 1996. In retirement, Sandy had an active life, doing consulting work for Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and pursuing a B.A. degree in the Liberal Arts from the Thomas More Institute, among other things. From 2005 – 2014, Sandy was a member of the Board of Directors at Thomas More, serving as Treasurer from 2008 on. Sandy graduated with his B.A. from Bishop's University earned through the Institute in 2011. He became the sixth president of TMI in 2014, although sadly his tenure in that position was cut short due to illness.

Sandy will be remembered fondly for his leadership and his spirit of camaraderie. His smile was infectious, and his fine sense of humour brought a spirit of good will to whatever he did. He will be missed.

