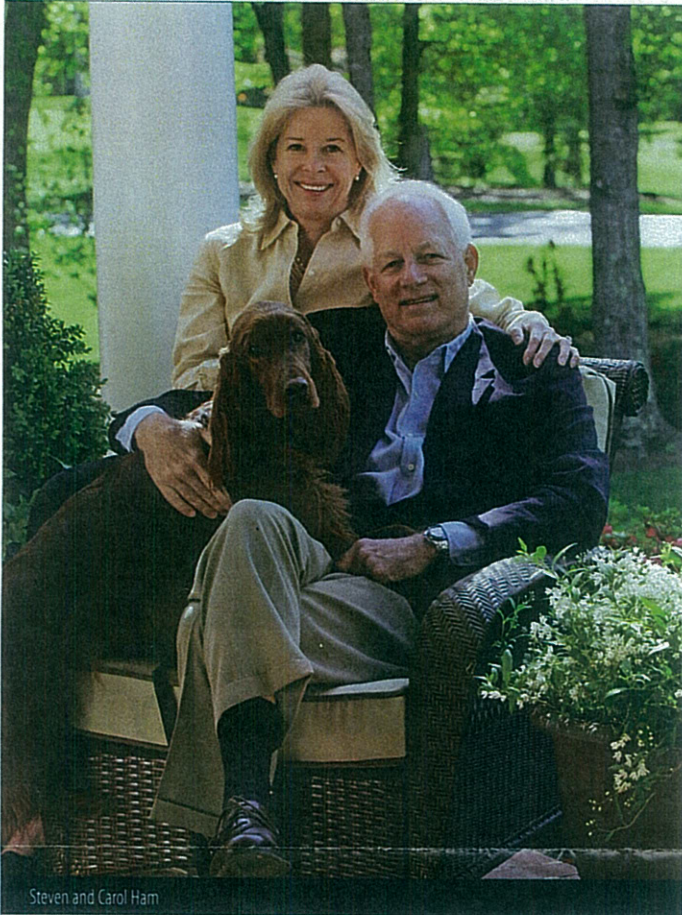


Professorship will expand expertise in the Department of Religion and Culture



Steven and Carol Ham

Steven and Carol Ham of Keswick, Va., recently created the first named professorship in the Department of Religion and Culture.

The professorship, to be funded by their legacy gift, will be named for Monsignor Chester Michael, a 93-year-old retired priest of the Diocese of Richmond, who continues to lead religious retreats and serve as spiritual director to many people, including the Hams.

Steven (industrial engineering '68), a senior vice president at Merrill Lynch who works in Charlottesville, Va., said he wanted to honor a man who "is the closest thing to a saint that I have known in my life," while also helping his alma mater provide opportunities for students to better understand the impact of Roman Catholicism on the world.

Carol, a wealth advisor for Merrill Lynch also based in Charlottesville, said any student with an interest in theology or the history of religion will stand to benefit from the knowledge the Chester Michael professor will bring to Virginia Tech.

"We expect there will be classes, open to all individuals, which will focus on Catholic thought, on reading the doctors of the church like Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint John of the Cross, and on really understanding the fathers of the church, who were the early leaders of Christianity."

The Hams' gift will allow Virginia Tech to add a renowned expert on Roman Catholicism to a department with 11 tenure-track faculty members, all of whom specialize in other areas of religion or culture.

"This will be a new area for us, and I think it will cater well to the student body here at Virginia Tech," says Associate Professor Peter Schmitthenner.

More than one in five Virginia Tech freshmen surveyed in 2009 indicated Roman Catholic when asked their religious preference, considerably more than any other religious choice.

Steven came from a military family. After graduating from Mount Vernon High School in Fairfax County, Va., he followed in the footsteps of his brother William (business administration '64) by enrolling at Virginia Tech.

After graduating, Steven was in AT&T's management development program when he learned he was due to be called up for military service. He joined the Air Force, en-

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rolled in its pilot training program, and spent 20 years as an officer, retiring in 1989 as a lieutenant colonel in command of a flying training squadron. While enlisted, Steven earned master's degrees in both systems management and national security affairs.

He met his wife in 1970, during a temporary assignment at Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Fla. Carol, who had recently graduated from Florida State, was teaching in her hometown, Apalachicola, which was near the base. She later earned a graduate degree in psychology and counseling from Livingston University.

The couple's recent legacy gift continues a long practice of giving to Virginia Tech. Steven has been a consistent donor since the mid-1970s. The Hams belong to the Pylon Society by virtue of their consistent giving and to the Caldwell Society because of their generosity. They are also Platinum Hokies due to their support for athletics.

"I have great respect and admiration for the role the university played in my development and, as soon as I could see my way clear to provide some support, I was happy to do so," Steven says. "I also had a full scholarship for my last two years at Virginia Tech, and that certainly motivates me to give back."