



THE LESLIE K. TARR – LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD PRESS RELEASE

The Word Guild Honours Distinguished Novelist and Mentor

OTTAWA, ON —Novelist Michael O’Brien of Barry’s Bay, Ont., has been formally recognized for his contributions to Canadian artistic and literary culture and to the community at Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College. This year’s Leslie K. Tarr Lifetime Achievement Award, which recognizes a major career contribution to Christian writing and publishing in Canada, was announced at The 2020 Word Awards Gala held virtually on June 13.

The annual award is given by The Word Guild, a national association of writers, editors, speakers and other interested Christians. Tarr was an influential magazine editor, and over the years the award in his name has been given to the likes of Jean Little, J. I. Packer, Rudy Wiebe, Maxine Hancock and Margaret Avison. Nominees for this award must have exemplified three key characteristics within their career to be considered. They will have demonstrated excellence in writing; contributed to the development of Christian writing and writers in Canada; as well as helped position the church in Canadian society, leading to better understanding of Christianity. Full details can be found at

<https://thewordguild.com/leslie-k-tarr-award/>.

Michael O’Brien is a visual artist and prolific novelist living in the village of Barry’s Bay, Ont., known and loved by the faculty, staff, and students at Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College, where he serves as Artist and Writer in Residence. Born in Ottawa in 1948, Michael O’Brien is the author of thirty books, including twelve novels, which have been published in fourteen languages and widely reviewed in both secular and religious media in North America and Europe. His books include his nine-volume series of novels published by Ignatius Press, notably his best-selling novel *Father Elijah* (Ignatius Press, 1996), and a grippingly realist novel titled *Sophia House* (Ignatius Press, 2005), the prequel to *Father Elijah*, which grapples with difficult topics such as the Holocaust and patterns of abuse within families. His thirteenth novel, *The Lighthouse*, which takes place in Cape Breton Island, is due to be released in Fall 2020.

O’Brien came to the writing of fiction from a unique background. After his early childhood in Ottawa, he spent his youth in Kugluktuk, Nunavut. Remarkably, he is a residential school survivor who converted to Catholicism at age 21 and found recovery by integrating faith and creativity. In his early twenties, after his conversion, he began to draw and paint and successfully exhibited his work. The influence of Byzantine iconography shines through his images, including those which grace the covers of his novels. It was at the age of 46 that Michael O’Brien began writing. As well as his fifteen fictional works, he has also written non-fiction studies, such as *William Kurelek: Painter, Poet, and Prophet* (Justin Press, 2013) and *The Apocalypse: Warning, Hope, and Consolation* (Wiseblood Books, 2018).

O’Brien’s wide-ranging contributions to Canadian culture as a visual artist, writer, and speaker have inspired the next generation of Christian thinkers, and two such scholars have now produced book-length studies focused on O’Brien. Clemens Cavallin, Associate Professor in History of Religions at the University of Gothenberg, Sweden, has written a biography of O’Brien titled *On the Edge of Infinity* (Justin Press, 2019). And, here in Canada, Crandall University English professor Gregory Maillet has written a book-length study of O’Brien’s fiction titled *Word Awake: An Introduction to the Novels of Michael O’Brien* (Justin Press, 2019). These companion books serve as joint commentaries on O’Brien’s life and work. Michael O’Brien’s testimony, art, and books provide a beacon of hope for young Christian writers today.