

# Local film portrays the struggles of the faithful

*Letter to a Priest encourages Catholics to 'talk in a candid way about the meaning of life'*

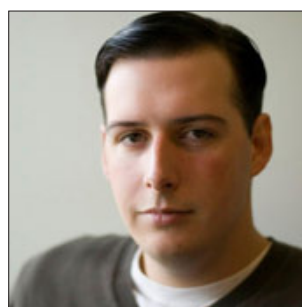
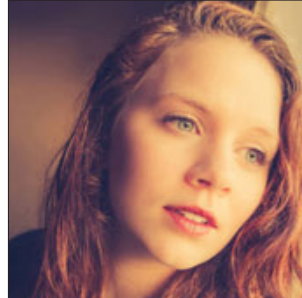
By Kier-Christer Junos

A new local film, *Letter to a Priest*, written, filmed, and produced in the Fraser Valley, will have its worldwide premier at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro this year. The film tackles the subject of those who feel challenged in their devotion to their faith.

"The film is about what it means to walk through the door of faith," said Clayton Richard Long, director and producer of *Letter to a Priest*.

"As Catholics, we know that being saved is not a one-time event. It is a process. I believe the film has the power to make an impact," he added. "It encourages each and every one of its viewers to ask themselves, 'Am I living out the faith to the best of my abilities? Can people see Christ working through me?'"

Motivated by the Church's Year of Faith and



The crew behind *Letter to a Priest* includes (clockwise) Frank C. Turner as Father Boniface, Amy Dauer as Jenny/Simone, Vikki Michele as Magdalena, and Dave Shoffner as Drake, as well as writer Chris Morrissey and director Clayton Richard Long.

the Catholics Come Home campaign, Long wanted to create a film to "attract souls to communion with Christ."

The characters in the 12-minute short are involved in scenarios that affect everybody's life, according to C.S. Morrissey, the film's writer. Morrissey, a philosophy professor at

Redeemer Pacific College, contributes to *The B.C. Catholic*.

"I purposely made (the characters) uncomfortably familiar. I wanted the story to hit close to home," he noted.

"The film's characters are grappling with the most profound questions. People will find the story so rich

that it repays multiple viewings. They will want to talk about the film with their friends," said Long.

According to the press release, the film centres on Jenny, a university student who, in refusing to be baptized, takes Simone Weil as a model for her life. Simone Weil, who was never bap-

tized, was a French philosopher who wrote books and essays on politics, spirituality, and philosophy.

"Jenny comes into conflict with her former boyfriend when she finds out that he, who used to be a lapsed Catholic, is now planning to get married in the Catholic Church. His

new fiancée is an Evangelical now converting to Catholicism. Simone Weil's book, *Letter to a Priest*, plays a key role in the film's plot."

"Simone Weil's book represents the way many non-practising Catholics see the Church. They see it as just an organization with rules," Long explained.

The film, which can be shown as a social event, is accompanied by a study guide and group discussion questions.

"I want people to get together with friends and to talk in a candid way about the meaning of life," Morrissey added.

*Letter to a Priest* will be screened first at film festivals, but its world premiere will be at World Youth Day 2013 in Brazil.

"It's the perfect venue, because the film invites people to think about the Catholic faith. Its story is about the meaning of Church teaching on marriage, baptism, and adoration," said Morrissey.

Shooting locations include areas of Trinity Western University and Vancouver; the trailer shows a glimpse of Gastown's historic steam clock.

The most important scenes in the film were captured in the Fraser Valley. "Father William Ashley of Sts. Joachim and Ann Parish in Aldergrove offered the use of his church, which features heavily in the film.

"I was at the church last year when Archbishop Miller gave a talk on the Ghent Altarpiece" hanging in the church. "I knew right away that this was the perfect location," said Long.

Long said the film has a dramatic and tense tone, but also humour. "Our cinematographer, Mitch Fraser, did a perfect job of capturing the tone visually," he commented.

With a short running time in mind, Long saw the challenge in creating a stimulating film capable of sparking discourse. Long, Morrissey, and Fraser addressed this challenge by keeping the visual action interesting and dynamic.

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**Simone Weil**

## ***Christ-centred film stands out***

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“Our crew was only three people, and we had zero budget. I am very proud of what the crew was able to do with the resources we had available,” said Long.

“For this film especially, seeing as it was my first short, I learned so much about not just myself, but what it really takes to work with real professionals and how to make a good film from start to finish,” said Fraser. “This project stands out from my other work mainly because it is the first purely Christ-centred piece of work I have been deeply involved in.”

“I think all Catholics can relate to the characters in this film. We are all sinners; and yet God never gives up on us. The door to His heart is always open,” Long added. □