

# CITATION

February 27, 2010

In keeping with the resolve of the Mathematical Association of America to take substantive action each year to honor extraordinarily successful teaching at all post-secondary levels, the Northern California, Nevada, and Hawaii Section of the Association is pleased to identify

**DENNIS C. SMOLARSKI, S.J.**

as the recipient of its sectional

## AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY TEACHING OF MATHEMATICS

This year's award highlights the MAA's mission in a new way: Professor Smolarski cites two previous award winners as his principal mentors. We have observed how he has incorporated their practices into his own approach, and how he is using this to extend his influence not just to students in his university, but to alumni after graduation, to his academic and Church colleagues, and to the discipline of mathematics. His career has broad educational roots, and its trunk at Santa Clara University supports several branches of professional work.

In 1969, Dennis completed undergraduate studies in mathematics at Santa Clara, and entered the Society of Jesus. During 1975–1982 he earned a masters degree in mathematics at UC Santa Barbara; two more, in Church subjects, from the Jesuit School of Theology; taught briefly at Santa Clara; was ordained as a priest; and completed PhD studies at the University of Illinois at Champaign, with a dissertation on the numerical analysis of sparse linear systems. The two sides of his career then came together at Santa Clara with appointments as resident minister and assistant professor of mathematics and computer science. Throughout his career he has emphasized areas where these disciplines overlap.

Professor Smolarski has carried on and adapted the traditions of award-winning mentors in his department. He has acquired a reputation as a well-organized, demanding, and caring teacher. Many students have been won over by his enthusiasm and skills of gentle persuasion. They comment, "He is knowledgeable and knows how to unfold

new ideas so that students can learn...,” and “His lectures are both humorous and understandable. He really shows interest in his students and goes above and beyond to help students outside of class.” A colleague reports that Smolarski “has occupied every possible position at Santa Clara that has to do with students and their participation in the mathematical community... He simply cares so much about these students that he can’t stand the possibility of leaving anything to chance.” His work with individual students has often extended to personal matters, to which he attends as resident minister. On this account, his department can claim to offer “full service”!

Dr. Smolarski serves as a career model, too. During summers he has maintained a program of research on sparse systems and their applications in science. He has reported that in the professional literature. His publications also include textbooks on elementary computer science, many articles on history and pedagogy of university mathematics, and scores of items on various aspects of religion. Quite a few of the latter emphasize connections with science and mathematics. This dedication to our discipline affects his students: one alumnus relates, “Fr. Smolarski was also aware of [our] needs and what would help [us] progress. This applied not only to coursework, but also to advising... The joy and sense of accomplishment I experienced in his courses has inspired me as I have pursued a career in computer science.”

A Santa Clara colleague reports, “Among our faculty he is a leader in introducing technology into the classroom and in encouraging others to be innovative and up-to-date.” Another writes that Dennis “is a full participant in all aspects of the... Department, [including our] endeavor to keep the computer-science curriculum current and relevant, and studying and writing about... teaching in an ever-changing field. With the information that he gleans through study and his connections with others in the profession... he is a powerful resource for his colleagues—thereby improving the quality of teaching in the entire department.”

We are proud to present this year’s Section Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics to an extraordinarily effective, inspiring teacher, Fr. Dennis Smolarski.