

Rev. John Koopman's desire to serve God doesn't end with his church duties. He and his wife also recently became foster parents, providing a loving home for children in need.

he graduated in 1984, John's plan was going according to schedule as he had already purchased a small farm with hog barns near Florence. He and his wife Sue were married in 1986, and for the next few years the couple worked to expand their farming operation.

John had always been active in the Free Reformed Church in Chatham, and in 1992 the call to become a minister became too strong for him to ignore. He started taking classes at the University of Western Ontario, while still continuing to farm with the help of a hired man. In 1994, John and Sue sold the farm, and after he graduated with his B.A., the family, now including four children, moved to Hamilton so John could attend seminary. He was ordained at the St. Thomas Free Reformed Church in September of 1999, and he still serves that congregation.

John feels that his education at Ridgetown has greatly benefited him. "I remember taking a communications course with William Culp in my senior year. Part of the course was public speaking, which I thought was a waste of time," admits John. "That, ironically, has turned out to be a very useful skill for me." He also has many church members who are farmers, and they appreciate his knowledge of their business.

John also sees having education in a non-religion field, and having experience in a non-ministry occupation, as a real advantage. "Ministers often get criticized because they lack life experience," explains John. "Ridgetown really broadened my horizons."

The class of 1984 deserves special mention because it produced not one, but two graduates who have devoted their lives to full-time ministry. Besides John Koopman becoming Rev. Koopman, Maurice Charbonneau is now known to many as 'Father Mo'.

When **Maurice Charbonneau** was 15 years old, his parish priest in Chatham told him that he would be a priest some day. Maurice didn't give the comment much thought, and followed in the footsteps of four of his older brothers, all of whom had attended Ridgetown College. He studied horticulture at Ridgetown, with farming or research being his preferred career options. Maurice realized early in his senior year, however, that he probably wouldn't be following through with his initial goals.

"I was renting a house in Morpeth and found a devotional book called 'My Daily Bread'," says Maurice. "The book just grabbed me – I felt like it was speaking directly to me, and I seldom put that book down for the rest of the year." This was a turning point for Maurice, and he began to seriously consider devoting his life to the church.

Although he lost interest in his agricultural education somewhat after that, Maurice still graduated and began his career in agriculture research. After a brief stint with

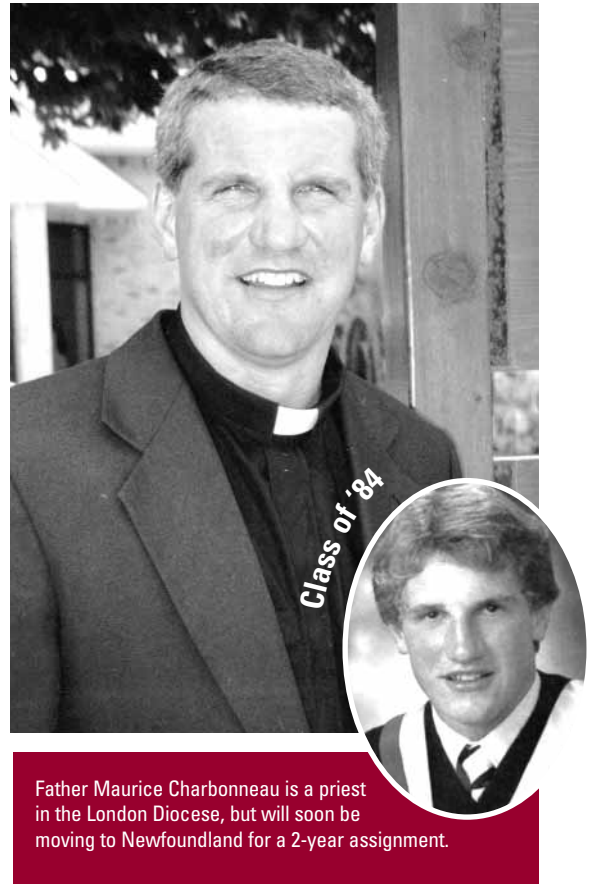
Continued on following page...

Pioneer Hi-Bred in Ridgetown, Maurice began working at the College as a research technician for Dr. Charlie Baldwin. He worked for Dr. Baldwin until the fall of 1985, when he made the decision to formally begin the steps necessary to become a priest.

Maurice continued his education at King's College in London, earning a B.A. in 1988, and a M.Div. in 1991. After interning in London and Kingsville, Maurice was ordained on April 30, 1994. He served for five years in Essex, and is currently at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Dublin, Ontario.

Like Dave and John, Maurice has always served in rural areas where his agricultural background helps him relate to his parishioners. Father Mo may soon be wishing he took a few extra courses in aquaculture – in January he will be moving to Gander, Newfoundland for a 2-year assignment with the Grand Falls Diocese.

While it may seem that being an ordained minister is a rare choice for a person who originally studied agriculture, there are several other Ridgetown College alumni who have followed this path. Russel Rogers ('53) and Martin Dawson ('73) are both active ministers in the United Church of Canada, while Kim Cooper ('75) recently became an ordained minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. 🍷



Father Maurice Charbonneau is a priest in the London Diocese, but will soon be moving to Newfoundland for a 2-year assignment.

ROOTS congratulates any other alumni who have entered the ministry and were not mentioned in this story. If you know of any other Ridgetown grads that have become ministers, please let Roots know. We'll be sure to mention them in the next issue.

Do you have story ideas for ROOTS?

Are you moving and need to change your address?

Contact: Janet Nauta at Alumni Services

Phone: 519-674-1504

Fax: 519-674-1530

Email: roots@ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca