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### In Memoriam: the Honourable Dr. John Godfrey, former president, University of King's College

Posted by **Bill Lahey, President, University of King's College** on January 4, 2024 in [In Memoriam](#)

*Just prior to the holiday break, the University of King's College received word that former King's President and Dal faculty member the Honourable Dr. John Godfrey passed away. The following message was shared with the King's community in his honour by King's President Bill Lahey.*

I write on the sad news of the passing of former King's President, the Honourable Dr. John Godfrey PC, CM., DCL'06.

John was born in Toronto in 1942. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity College at the University of Toronto in 1965 and went on to earn a Master of Philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford, in 1967, followed by a Doctor of Philosophy (both in history) from St. Antony's College, Oxford, in 1975. By then, he was teaching history at Dalhousie. He gained popularity for his unconventional approach to teaching History 100 to non-history majors, which incorporated lectures, videos, rap sessions and happenings. Between 1971 and 1976 he was Don of Chapel Bay. Appointed to his role

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as President of King's in 1977 aged 34, he was the youngest president in the College's history.

John's time at Oxford instilled in him a strong belief in the living and learning community exemplified by the Oxford-Cambridge collegiate model. During his 10 years as president of King's, he championed its value for King's students, and the model remains at the heart of the education King's offers.

During John's tenure as president, the journalism school was founded and quickly established its reputation as one of Canada's premier schools of journalism. Now called the School of Journalism, Writing & Publishing, it was and remains the only school to offer journalism degrees in Atlantic Canada.

After departing King's in 1987, John held a variety of leadership roles with a national profile. From 1987 to 1991 he was editor of The Financial Post, and from there he spent two years at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. In 1993, he launched a lasting career in national politics when he was elected a Member of Parliament (Liberal Party) for the Toronto riding of Don Valley West, holding the office through 2008. From 1996 to 2004, he served as Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. In 2004, John was appointed to the role of Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities. When he left politics in 2008, he returned to education as Headmaster of the Toronto French School.

More recently, between 2015 and 2018 John was the Government of Ontario's Special Advisor for Climate Change and Chair of the Government's Climate Action Group. On social media, his spouse, Trish Bongard, has said that John's "greatest worry was our mothership, planet Earth" and that "he wanted us all to do more to protect it".

This extensive career in education and public service was recognized at the highest level in 2018 when the Governor General awarded him the Order of Canada.

John created a strong academic legacy at King's that remains integral to the unique and dynamic education we are known for and for this, we are grateful. His love for King's never dimmed: anyone who visited John and Trish at their summer place in Nova Scotia could expect to find the King's flag flapping in the wind over their yard. Our thoughts and condolences are with his family as they mourn his loss and celebrate his life.

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*Bill*

*William Lahey*

*President, Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Law*

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