



Father Sebastian Falcone, president and dean of St. Bernard's Institute, in the courtyard of the Goodman Street campus.

Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

St. Bernard's Institute Hails Higher Prospects

Following is the first in a series of occasional articles on the development of St. Bernard's Institute, the successor of St. Bernard's Seminary.

St. Bernard's Institute is beginning its eighth academic session, and its president and dean is "extremely elated" over the institute's prospects.

It has not been an easy journey to this point, Father Sebastian Falcone now cheerfully admits. There have been uncertain waters; and there still exist some reefs and shoals to be skirted.

But, all in all, "everything is now in place," the priest said. Enrollment is steadily increasing, and the relationships between SBI and its new fellows are increasingly being strengthened.

To the layman, the setup is simple enough. With the exception of providing seminary training, St. Bernard's Institute maintains the best services of the old St. Bernard's Seminary, but now in affiliation with Colgate Rochester Divinity School. The latter school is commonly known as the Divinity Schools "on the Hill," the magnificent English Gothic institution with the tongue-twisting appellation Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary. The four also constitute the Rochester Center for Theological Studies.

St. Bernard's is a distinct entity "on the Hill," even to maintaining its own library space.

All of the institutions there "retain their own curricula, degrees, endowments and boards, but they share cross-registration privileges, library holdings and services, and the buildings, grounds and gymnasium," the most recent official bulletin states.

St. Bernard's "offers a professional, theological and ministerial education in the Roman Catholic tradition for lay and religious alike... Institute archives contain such valuable collections as the Byrne Collection of ancient Near Eastern artifacts, and the Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Collection of books, papers and radio and television tapes. The ministry preparation program includes four classes of candidates for the permanent diaconate," the bulletin says. In addition, SBI's "clergy education programs and workshops draw from the international scene and its Spiritual Life Forums have been praised for their unique ecumenical contribution."

SBI is a fully accredited member of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, and is authorized by state Regents to grant master of divinity, and master of arts in theology degrees.

It is now three years and four days since Bishop Matthew H. Clark, now chancellor of the institute and of its board of trustees, announced his decision to close the massive buildings of St. Bernard's Seminary.

While that undoubtedly had been a hard decision, a decision with many of the same results had actually been made more than a decade earlier by Bishop Sheen.

A brochure on the school relates:

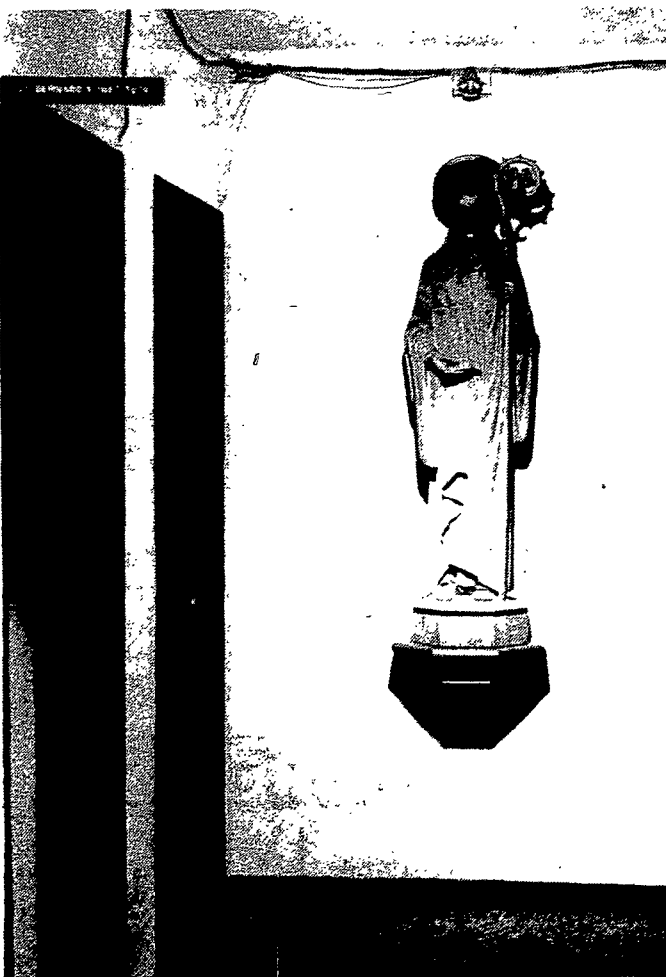
"Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen prodded the traditional all-male seminary to accept the challenges of the Second Vatican Council. This began a series of firsts: the first Roman

Catholic seminary in the United States to admit women to the academic program; the first to grant a woman a Master of Divinity degree; the first with a structured field education program; the first with a lay advisory board; one of the first Catholic seminaries in the Association of Theological Schools.

"And if this were not enough, Archbishop Sheen posed a searching question: Why not locate the study of theology and preparation for ministry in a bonafide ecumenical environment? Gifted with rare vision, he worked to bring St. Bernard's to the campus of Colgate Rochester Divinity School as early as 1968."

It is an open secret that the student tensions of those days soured Bishop Sheen on the last plans; but 10 years later those plans were resurrected and refined to accommodate a changed situation.

It has been said that in private conversation the revered Dr. Gene Bartlett said, "The original vision sparked by the discussions with Bishop Sheen has finally been realized. This is a day of very special blessing." When told that the recent



This statue of St. Bernard was moved from the seminary to the main corridor in Trevor Hall, outside the institute offices.

arrival of the Sheen library and papers on the Colgate campus might be viewed either as ironical or providential, he retorted: "Some ironies are providential!"

On Aug. 26, 1981, the presidents and the chairmen of the boards of St. Bernard's and Colgate Rochester formally agreed to a graduate-level affiliation.

The agreement drew praise as "a singular achievement" by a senior officer in the Association of Theological Schools because of the different religious traditions in the situation, the brochure avers.

At that time, Bishop Clark said, "an educational strategy for ministry, shared ecumenically, broadens the Church's commitment to truth and deepens her expression of love."

Perhaps an interesting factor in the development is the fact that "St. Bernard's receives no Church subsidy. It relies solely for its operating support on monies raised from tuition, fees and the gifts of generous friends," the brochure states.

The faculty of the school includes Father Falcone as professor of New Testament studies; Father Joseph A. Hart, assistant professor of systematic theology; and Dr. Marvin L. Mich, assistant professor of systematic theology.

The adjunct faculty includes Father Joseph P. Brennan, professor of Old Testament studies (former rector of St. Bernard's Seminary); Msgr. George C. Còcuzzi, head of the diocesan Permanent Diaconate Program; John J. Engels, adjunct assistant professor of pastoral studies; Father George H. Hill, adjunct assistant professor of pastoral studies; Father Mark A. Miller, adjunct assistant professor of Church history; James H. Ramerman, adjunct assistant professor of pastoral studies; and Father James A. Schwartz, adjunct assistant professor of pastoral studies.

Allied with SBI is the diocesan Office of Continuing Education directed by Deacon Kenneth Scarciotta.

According to the official bulletin, the course schedules range from one-day seminars to courses with multiple-class sessions. "Topics are addressed academically, and generally have to do with enriching the student's personal faith and ministry

"Speakers are sought from many quarters, the scholarly as well as the practical and pastoral... When applicable, continuing education units are awarded and permanent transcripts are kept on each student."

Of the degrees offered at St. Bernard's Institute, the master in divinity "is intended to be the basic professional degree for pastoral and other ministry. The student completes a comprehensive academic program as well as practical experience in local ministerial situations. The MDiv at St. Bernard's prepares one for a professional career in a religious vocation, and potentially for further graduate study in theology," the official bulletin states.

The master of arts degree in theology, on the other hand "is an academic degree intended as a precursor to further academic work, as a significant scholarly addition to the professional education of a man or woman in a religious vocation, or as a supplemental degree for a professional who wishes to incorporate into a secular career an ethical, theological or spiritual dimension," it says.