

New Becket Hall program looks to the future of ministry

By Teresa A. Parsons

Beginning this fall, a diocesan discernment program will open its doors to ministry students seeking to serve the Church through avenues other than priesthood.

Becket Hall, a residential discernment program that to date has been directed toward men considering priesthood, will in September initiate a field-education program for men and women interested in lay as well as religious vocations.

The program will be supervised by James Ramerman and Sister Jean Rodman, SSJ, who will work closely with Father James Schwartz, director of Becket Hall.

Ramerman has been Becket Hall's field education director for three years. When he moved to Rochester from California, he discovered that Becket Hall's field education for seminary candidates consisted of one hour a week of unsupervised apostolic work.

But he also found that he and Father Schwartz shared the same vision — to establish a solid field-education program and open it to a wider range of ministry students seeking to identify vocations.

"I think the vision is the wave of the Church — the cutting edge," Ramerman said. "It is great for the diocese to be forward-looking enough to serve the needs of the future by beginning now."

The program will not only offer a new opportunity to ministry students discerning vocations other than priesthood, but will also enable a variety of people to share their discernment process and spiritual growth through ministry.

"One of the signs of the times today is that we have to move away from formation in isolation," Father Schwartz said. "We need to develop a comprehensive ministry formation program. This is just one step along that process."

"My input was that people discerning from a variety of vocations would better represent the whole Church, and that the contact between the men at Becket and others would be helpful to the idea of having men and women working together on ministry teams," Ramerman explained.

Becket Hall's board of directors has discussed broadening the field-education program for several years, according to Father Schwartz. At its spring meeting, the board's development committee decided to initiate the program this fall and to hire Sister Jean as a second field supervisor.

"Obviously, we did not come up with a woman for this position by accident," Father Schwartz explained. "I think it is a healthy step to have Becket guys responsible to a woman religious."

Field education activities will include such service-related areas as religious education, ur-



Edwin Garcia finishes stripping the detailed woodwork on the front door of Becket Hall on Rochester's Gregory Street.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

ban ministry, or parish or hospital work, according to Sister Jean. "It would be something that matches the person's abilities and stretches them a bit," she explained.

"For many of these people, their prime ministry will be something not related to the institutional Church. Most of them will still be earning a living in other ways," she added. "The primary call for all the baptized is to work in the world. A big part of our resolve is to support and foster precisely that work of the Christian in the world."

Organizers hope to draw to the program as many as two dozen participants from all over the diocese. Ideally, they will form two groups of a dozen each.

Applicants, who should be at least 20 years of age, will first meet with one of the program's supervisors to discuss their gifts and interests regarding ministry and to decide if field education would match their needs.

Those whose current activities qualify as ministry may simply continue their work in the context of the program. Others, with the help

of program supervisors, will choose a site at which they will volunteer a minimum of three hours each week.

Participants will work closely with an "on-site reflector — somebody who knows the ministry they'll be involved in and will be there and be able to give feedback," Ramerman said. They will meet at Becket Hall in small groups every three weeks for discussion and reflection with Father Schwartz and the program supervisors. Supervisors will also visit ministry sites once during the semester.

"It's not a class," Ramerman said. "It's unpacking ministry experience to give people for use in their own awareness and discernment."

The program is a compilation of California youth-ministry programs, seminary education in Seattle and ideas from local resource people according to Ramerman.

"It's really a little bit unique," he said. "It's a synthesis of field-education programs tailored to our particular situation."

In addition to the men residing at Becket Hall, four women have already indicated their

interest in the program. One is Martha Brownell, 26, a social welfare examiner for the Ontario County Department of Social Services.

"I needed somewhere I could be active in ministry of some type and gain insight from people on that ministry," she said.

Brownell believes there is great potential for ministry in her work with chronic-care elderly. "I'm looking for a way of putting together my work with the elderly and my training as a paralegal," she said. "That may not sound churchy or religious, but I have a great need to work with the elderly, and one of things they need is legal advice and direction as to where they can find the right information."

Although her particular field education activity has not been decided yet, Brownell said she may lead a Bible study or prayer group with nursing home residents.

"Everyone in day-to-day life needs to discern and grow in self-awareness," Brownell said. "I think this will be a big help to the Church in general."

In year after Encuentro

Dioceses developing programs to involve Hispanics in parish life

By Stephanie Overman

Washington (NC) — One year after a national gathering of Hispanic Catholics, the head of the U.S. bishops' office for Hispanics said he finds more unity among the various Spanish-speaking groups and sees the beginning of Church efforts to expand its ministry.

The Third National Hispanic Pastoral Encuentro was held in Washington Aug. 15-18, 1985. That encuentro (Spanish for "encounter") was a step in the process toward a national pastoral plan of Hispanic ministry, due to be voted on by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops this November.

Encuentros also were held in 1972 and 1977. The third encuentro grew out of the U.S. bishops' 1983 pastoral letter "Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment."

The proposed pastoral plan also will be on the agenda of the bishops' Administrative Committee meeting Sept. 9-11.

Pablo Sedillo, executive director of the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, said that last year's gathering has already had an impact by bringing diverse Hispanic groups together to face common problems and by making the institutional Church more aware of the need to include Hispanics in all areas of ministry.

And, as the national plan moves toward a vote, dioceses have begun to take action on their own. The Los Angeles Archdiocese has begun a program set up to reach every Spanish-speaking person in the archdiocese.

Sedillo noted a recent Gallup Poll that shows 88 percent of Hispanics are not active in their parishes, although 83 percent said they consider religion important. "The plan tries to address why" they do not participate more fully, he said.

The lack of participation by the 21 million Hispanics in the U.S. Catholic Church is in sharp contrast to their roles in some fundamentalist sects, where Spanish is often spoken at services and Hispanics are recruited as ministers.

Sedillo said some sects go so far as to include statues of Our Lady of Guadalupe in their churches in order to attract Hispanics, even though these sects do not venerate Mary.

The proposed pastoral plan is not just a reaction to such proselytism, Sedillo said, but hopes to offer a strategy "to make our people comfortable in our churches."

Spanish-speaking people in the United States come from widely varying backgrounds and although they sometimes have difficulty working together, "the encuentro has developed a unity of Hispanics," Sedillo said, helping them to cope with common

problems.

The pastoral plan will address those problems, he said, citing surveys that show a quarter of U.S. Hispanics live in poverty. Hispanics suffer from prejudice, lack of education and frequent disruptive moves, Sedillo said.

The proposed plan is national in scope but planning at the diocesan level is encouraged as well, according to Sedillo.

He called the pastoral plan unveiled by Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles in June "a perfect example" of diocesan-level efforts.

Archbishop Mahony's five-year plan is designed to promote vocations, halt gang violence, help immigrants and make sure that every Hispanic feels welcome in the archdiocese, the largest in the United States.

The key to the plan is a visitation program aimed at every Spanish-speaking person in the archdiocese.

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