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Thanks Giving Appeal '86

SALT process offers to season women religious, lay ministers

By Teresa A. Parsons

There was a day when Mary Jo Smith, administrative assistant at Good Shepherd Church, would not have answered if you called her a parish minister.

"At first, I didn't consider a parish secretary a minister, but over the last four or five years, I've been realizing it," she said. "In this position you're the first person to meet people, to greet them at the door, and to help them when the priest isn't in. And I mean it's not very often that one of the priests is just sitting around here waiting for someone to show up at the door."

There was a day, too, when the diocese offered training programs only for ordained ministers.

This Thursday will be a sign that both days are happily past, as Smith and 10 other women become the first non-ordained persons to graduate from the diocesan Supervisory and Leadership Training Program (SALT).

A diocesan-sponsored program that combines supervisory training and internships, SALT was hitherto reserved for clergy. Expanding it to encompass burgeoning areas of ministry was among the priorities set by Father Michael F. Conboy when he took over the diocesan intern process in 1984. "It should be obvious to everyone that while few priests are being ordained, other areas of ministry are growing," he explained.

Not only do those ministers need training experiences, but future priests also need to learn to collaborate with them. "We as priests don't work in a vacuum," Father Conboy said. "We need to be comfortable working with people of both sexes."

Two years ago in May, Father Conboy officially opened SALT to all full-time church ministers. Eleven women — including pastoral assistants, religious educators and one administrative assistant — began the training process. Last May, they were joined by several permanent deacons.

Smith learned about SALT from Father Edward L. Palumbos, pastor at Good Shepherd and a member of the SALT training team.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
Mary Jo Smith, administrative assistant at Good Shepherd Parish in Henrietta, is among the first class of women to graduate from the diocesan SALT program (Supervisory and Leadership Training). At left is intern and parish secretary Joyce Strang.

"Let me tell you, it was a strange feeling walking in there," she said, recalling her first SALT session. "But it was interesting to be on an even keel, to be on the same level with the priests when they've always been sort of up there somewhere... They accepted us very well."

The inclusion of women in SALT has been "a very definite plus," according to Father Frederick F. Eisemann, pastor of Holy Family Parish and another member of the training team. "There's no more game playing. The women demand business," he said.

Catholics have always been great believers in on-the-job training. Before Bishop Joseph L. Hogan established a deacons' internship

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