

UPI/NC News

The Great Lakes Center and Spiritual Integration Seminars are samples of the ever-widening range of options for people seeking guidance in spiritual and vocational formation.

## Ministry centers satisfy desire to unite family, work, faith

By Teresa A. Parsons

When Jim Ramerman embarked on a 10-year career as a youth minister back in the early 1970s, there were no training, formation or discernment programs to which he could turn for guidance. Instead, he recalled "flying by the seat of his pants," gleaned what he could from other denominations and from other individuals whose ministry was effective.

During roughly the same time period, James and Mary Dombeck likewise found little in the way of formal guidance or resources to steer them in the search for a deeper spirituality and integration in their lives. They turned to a group of friends who gathered each week or two to share the search for God's direction in their lives.

At that time, when priests and religious were still relatively plentiful, Church ministry and spiritual direction were not considered appropriate or necessary for lay men and women. But today, growing numbers of people are seeking to integrate their faith with family and career. The search has led some to full-time service with the Church in one or more aspects of an ever-widening range of ministries. Others are reaching for a deeper relationship with God through their work in secular fields.

Whether they term it discernment or spiritual direction, Catholics in both categories frequently find themselves looking for a kind of guidance that is still rarely available in their parishes or through the diocesan structure. But unlike the quests of a decade ago, today's investigations need not be conducted in vain.

Out of their own experience, the Dombecks seven years ago founded Spiritual Integration Seminars, a ministry of Christian spirituality open to anyone — priest, religious or layperson.

Four years ago, Ramerman and his partner, John Engels, established the Great Lakes Center, which offers training and consultation for people of faith.

Both centers present a variety of seminars, workshops and programs of individual discernment or spiritual direction. The Dombecks approach spirituality largely from a psychological standpoint, whereas the Great Lakes Center focuses more on pragmatic vocational discernment, career development and counseling.

Although Spiritual Integration Seminars was formally established in 1980, it really began more than 15 years ago with a group of friends — the Dombecks, two women religious, a priest, and a religious brother — who gathered to talk about spirituality. The talks helped lead Mary Dombeck, a nurse, to wonder how Christianity ought to be affecting her work. She began studying at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and earned a divinity degree in 1975.

During the same period, James Dombeck had been practicing law while studying scripture at St. Bernard's Seminary in his spare time. In 1979, he attended a workshop/retreat that helped steer him toward spiritual direction.

"We wanted to bring together the different aspects of our lives — work, family, prayer — and so we chose the word integration," Mary Dombeck recalled.

Gradually, the whole group began to share with others its integrated view of work, faith and family. Members of the group eventually branched off in different directions, though all have continued to work in spiritual direction.

Both separately and as a couple, the Dombecks have continued to offer retreats, workshops and seminars ranging from Enneagram and the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator to "Self-Awareness through Dream Exploration." Each also offers spiritual direction for individuals, but their mostly urban clientele varies widely.

Mary Dombeck works primarily with priests, ministers, religious and lay people who are usually deeply involved in church ministry. James Dombeck describes those who typically come to him as professional people with

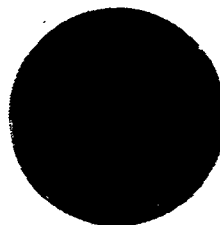
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