

Processes foster professional ministry

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

For many years, youth ministry and religious education have been treated as the stepchildren of parish ministry.

But the day is coming to an end when just anyone can "volunteer" to be a youth minister or a religious education coordinator.

In a move to increase professionalism and to acknowledge the growth in responsibilities and demands of both positions, the Diocese of Rochester is introducing standards of certification for youth ministers and catechetical leaders.

On Feb. 25, the Diocesan Board of Education approved a proposal for certification of those who head parish religious education programs. Under the proposal, all

catechetical leaders in the diocese must take part in 10 hours of ongoing formation each year, and must be certified or enrolled in an approved certification program. The proposal, which is still being evaluated by religious education personnel, is scheduled take effect July 1 unless further changes are needed.

In conjunction with the proposal, St. Bernard's Institute will offer a Certificate of Catechetical Leadership which can be used to fulfill requirements for the newly created position of Associate Director of Religious Education.

In March, meanwhile, approximately 12 youth ministers will begin a two-year certificate program at St. Bernard's Institute. According to the director of the Department of Youth Ministry, Patrick Fox,

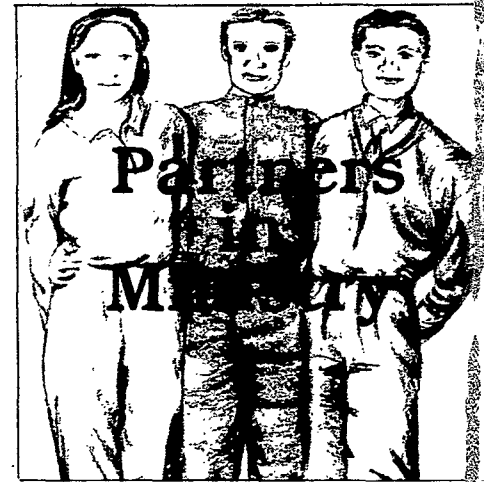
within three to five years, youth ministers in the diocese — both paid and volunteer — will have to be either certified or in the process of becoming certified.

"I think we're past the stage of good will and some level of interest being enough to sustain people in some area of ministry," Fox said. "We are talking about professionalism. (Ministers) ought to be equipped, and we have a responsibility to do that."

Although the two departments have chosen slightly different paths and time frames for their certification processes, both are pushing to provide support and clear criteria for ministers. What the departments are doing fits in with the emphasis on the professional development of ministers in the commitment to ministry process, according to Sister Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, director of the Department of Religious Education. "I think the whole commitment to ministry process is calling for qualified people in ministry," she said.

The Basic Certificate in Youth Ministry is based on a model created by the National Center for Youth Ministry in Naugatuck, Conn., which is currently used in 40 dioceses. The certificate program will consist of weekend learning sessions, readings and papers, two week-long summer sessions, and individualized learning contracts with each of the participants. The teachers will be locally and nationally recognized figures in youth ministry.

The certificate will be one of several ways to gain certification, Fox noted. Of 33 paid and approximately 100 volunteer youth ministers currently working in the diocese, Fox estimated that approximately



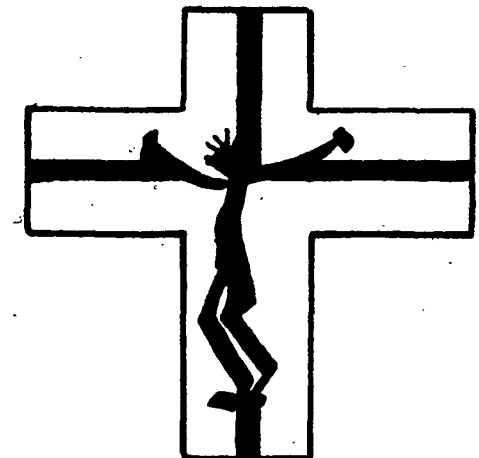
one third already qualify for certification through a combination of experience and education. The diocesan personnel office, in conjunction with other departments, will develop specific guidelines and means for certifying youth ministers.

Officials in the the department of religious education, on the other hand, hope to put their certification plan into effect this summer. In regional meetings on Feb. 21 and 22, department personnel met with catechetical leaders to discuss the certification proposal approved by the Board of Education. Catechetical leaders have until April 1 to respond to the proposal. In addition, department officials will be discussing the proposal with pastors and gathering their comments.

Unlike the youth ministry certification process, the catechetical leader certification process is already developed. Catechetical leaders will meet with department personnel and develop a learning contract based on criteria for the particular religious education position they hold, previous experience and competencies, and areas needing further growth and development.

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Lenten stories show us ourselves



GROSS OF GLORY
LIFE IN CHRIST

By Father Robert J. Kennedy
Guest columnist

Given the choice, everyone loves a good story. Good stories fire the imagination, open new worlds and touch the hearts of the hearers. They reveal the spirit of the storyteller. For speaker and listener alike, stories help us to know who we are and what we mean to each other.

The "good stories" of the Christian people are above all the Scriptures, and especially the stories about Jesus and those stories he told. For in these stories, we see ourselves. Jesus' story is our story; our stories are Jesus' story. If those who are being initiated this Easter are to find their identity in Christ, and if the rest of us are to remain in Christ, then our individual stories must find their meaning in Jesus' own

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