

# Modern seminaries now serve diverse menus

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But the closings were only one of several transformations to take place in U.S. seminaries since Vatican II. Most of the facilities that survived the enrollment drought have modified their curricula, finances and, in some cases, even their student bodies.

Before the council, for example, it was an anomaly for a non-seminarian to enroll in a seminary class.

Today two-thirds of the seminaries admit non-seminarians as students. At some of these schools, non-seminarians constitute the bulk of the student body.

Seminaries that once offered no academic degrees now award masters' degrees in such fields as theology, pastoral ministry, Scriptures, counseling and divinity. Frequently, they also provide programs for deacon preparation, and certification in such fields as religious education and youth ministry.

And whereas the typical seminary faculty of 30 years ago consisted exclusively of priests, today's seminary faculties comprise women religious and lay educators as well.

Some of these changes were made to support the lay-ministry explosion touched off by the council; others were simply survival tactics. Yet the situation of U.S. seminaries still operating today is far brighter than what was feared just a few years ago.

"Over the next 10 years, I think we'll see the final shakedown of schools that are not going to make it," observed Father Robert Leavitt, SS, rector of St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. "I see there are some indications that national enrollment in seminaries is holding steady."

The sharp drop in numbers of seminaries and seminarians appears to be bottoming out, agreed Father Howard Bleichner, SS, executive director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Priestly Forma-

tion Committee.

"The drop is at about the point of leveling off," he predicted.

Indeed, the 1990 total enrollment figure of 6,233 U.S. seminarians actually exceeded the 5,646 level of 1989.

Further, Father Bleichner pointed out, those seminaries that have survived also have found ways to improve their financial statuses.

"I think they are substantially in better shape than they were 20 years ago," Father Bleichner observed. Many seminaries now have development programs, he explained, and are creating endowment funds to finance their operations.

Father Bleichner's optimistic assessment rings true to Father Fred Leising, the rector of Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora, near Buffalo.

"If this seminary were to close, it would have closed two years ago," Father Leising remarked.

In the last two years, the number of seminarians enrolled by the eight dioceses served by Christ the King has risen from 32 to 37.

In addition, 74 lay people currently are enrolled in the seminary's three degree programs, 25 men are participating in its deacon-training program, and 130 students are preparing for certification in religious education and youth ministry.

The seminary has admitted lay students only since 1983. Father Leising explained that officials decided to do so in light of Vatican II's call for greater lay involvement in the church. Council fathers declared that all people were called to ministry by virtue of baptism, he noted.

"Lay people have a right to do ministry," Father Leising said. "If the numbers of clergy were to change completely, I don't think it would lessen the number of lay people getting training."

At Christ the King and a number of other

seminaries, seminarians and lay students attend some classes together.

Allowing seminarians and lay students to mix in classes is helpful for the seminarians, according to Father Sebastian Falcone, president of St. Bernard's Institute.

"It already puts shoulder to shoulder the priests and the various people they would be working for and with in the parishes," said Father Falcone, who taught at St. Bernard's Seminary from 1967-81.

Mixing lay students with seminarians is not universally accepted, however.

In fact, the question drew the attention of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, which studied U.S. seminaries between 1981 and 1990.

As part of that study, congregation prefect Cardinal William Baum issued a 1986 letter on theologate, or graduate-level, seminaries. Cardinal Baum cautioned that these seminaries should not train lay people as well as seminarians if such efforts would adversely affect the training of priests.

In some cases, the study found, including lay people in classes and dividing the seminaries' missions had "led to a fragmentation of the enterprise, confusion about the priesthood and a lowering of theological standards."

Nevertheless, the study found that on the whole, "the theologates of the United States are generally satisfactory," and are "serving the church well in preparing candidates for priesthood."

A similar assessment of seminaries emerged in a study done by Sister Katarina Schuth, OSF, who currently holds the endowed chair for the Social Scientific Study of Religion at the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn.

Sister Schuth published the results of her study in a 1989 book entitled, *Reason for the Hope: The Futures of Roman Catholic*

*Theologates.*

"I think what gives me a lot of hope is the (faculty members and the administrators) at the seminaries are very fine, by and large, and they are very attentive to the needs of the church," Sister Schuth said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

She said one of the advantages of mixing students in the classroom is helping to prepare priests for parish ministries that increasingly call them to work collaboratively with the non-ordained.

Of the seminaries Sister Schuth studied that mixed seminarians with other students, "I have not been at a school at which they have said they wish they had not done this," she said.

St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore chose not to make the change, and officials are satisfied with their decision, Father Leavitt observed. The school runs separate programs for lay people and seminarians, and — with few exceptions — the two groups of students do not attend the same classes.

In a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Father Leavitt explained that today's seminarians are beginning their studies at a later age, having already attended college, and having lived and worked in parishes as lay adults. "It's not like somebody who's been in a sheltered environment since their teenage years," he noted.

Further, he noted, seminarians gain practical experience through the pastoral year now required by the majority of diocesan priestly formation programs. During the pastoral year, seminarians prepare for ordination by working in parish ministry.

It is better to keep theologate programs separate from other seminary offerings, Father Leavitt argued, because the separation emphasizes the "more distinctive nature of the education you must provide for priesthood candidates."

St. Mary's seminary program serves 139 students from 32 dioceses, including Rochester. It also has an evening program for non-seminarians, which draws approximately 200 students from various religions. At their option, seminarians are allowed to take some courses in the evening program.

Whether seminaries opt to segregate or mix their lay students and seminarians, all will face certain challenges during the next decade.

Although the number of seminarians appears to be stabilizing, no projections indicate growth in the coming years.

Seminaries like St. Mary's that serve multiple dioceses are somewhat insulated from minor enrollment shifts. But such smaller seminaries as Christ the King are subject to sudden drops in numbers if one or more of their client dioceses opts to send students elsewhere.

Seminaries that intermingle students will need to ensure the adequacy of their seminarians' training, especially in light of new guidelines for priestly formation now being developed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Further, to offset the effect of potential cost increases and/or enrollment fluctuations, seminaries must increase their efforts to raise funds and create or enhance endowments. "The only secret to long-term strength is an endowment fund," Father Leavitt noted.

Father Falcone observed that seminaries also must alter their visions if they wish to survive.

"I see more seminaries will continue to close unless they broaden the scope of their programs," Father Falcone said.

The key is planning for the future needs of the church rather than clinging to the past, he asserted.

"If you don't plan in the face of the demographics, then you are forced to back into the future," Father Falcone concluded. "You will not be going ahead with a vision of what's possible."

## @bituaries

### Fr. William Nayden, parochial vicar, 66

ROCHESTER — Father William Nayden, CSSR, died suddenly Sunday, Sept. 8, 1991, of a heart attack at Willard Fillmore Hospital in Williamsville, N.Y. The 66-year-old priest had been parochial vicar at Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph Church since April, 1991.

A memorial Mass for Father Nayden is scheduled to take place at the church, 210 Pleasant St., Rochester, at 12:10 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 19.

Father Nayden was born in Annapolis, Md., on Oct. 27, 1924. After completing his studies for the priesthood at Redemptorist seminaries in Pennsylvania and New York, he was ordained in 1949.

The Redemptorist priest served in the order's mission in Santa Domingo, the

Dominican Republic, for four years before being transferred to New York City. While in New York, Father Nayden served English and Spanish missions along the eastern seaboard.

In 1967, he was assigned to the Redemptorist Retreat House in Tobyhanna, Pa. Father Nayden pursued his master of arts degree in American and Latin American history at the University of Scranton. He later entered the doctoral program at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Father Nayden was assigned to the CSSR Historical Department at the order's generalate in Rome, Italy, where he translated the Redemptorists' worldwide newsletter and edited the translated St. John

Neumann's Spiritual Journal for the CSSR Historical Journal *Spicilegium Historicum*.

Father Nayden returned to the United States in 1980, serving missions in the Buffalo and Erie dioceses until 1987. He was then asked to serve as vicar general of the Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, while the bishop there underwent a series of operations over a two-year period.

Father Nayden again returned to the states in January, 1989, when he was assigned to the Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia, Pa. He was assigned to Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph Church in April.

Interment was at St. Mary's Cemetery in Annapolis, Md., on Sept. 12.

### Julia A. O'Neil, 80, active member of St. Patrick's

Julia A. O'Neil, a longtime parishioner at St. Patrick's Church in Cato, died Tuesday, Aug. 13, 1991, at Auburn Memorial Hospital after suffering a heart attack. She was 80 years old.

Father William Moorby, former parochial vicar of the Northern Cayuga Cluster, celebrated a Mass of Christian Burial for Miss O'Neil at St. Patrick's on Friday, Aug. 16.

The daughter of the late Bernard and Anna Kiley O'Neil, Miss O'Neil was born in Cato March 10, 1911. She graduated from Cato High School in 1928, and Cortland Normal School in 1934. In 1951, she earned a B.S. degree in education from LeMoyne College near Syracuse.

After teaching at various Cayuga County schools for nine years, Miss O'Neil taught

in the North Syracuse School District from 1941-73.

She retired from teaching in 1973, when she returned to her family farm in Cato. She then became an active member of St. Patrick's Parish.

According to her sister-in-law, Ethel O'Neil, of Weedsport, the parish became Miss O'Neil's life.

"She sort of dedicated her life to it," Ethel O'Neil said.

Miss O'Neil was a religious education teacher, earning a special award from the parish in 1989 for 25 years of service. For 23 of those years, she taught the first communion class.

In addition, Miss O'Neil served as a member of the Altar Rosary Society; directed the parish's annual Thanks Giving Ap-

peal campaign; and tabulated, recorded and deposited the parish's Sunday collection.

Last March 11, the parish organized a surprise 80th birthday party for Miss O'Neil. "She was so surprised," Ethel O'Neil recalled. "She enjoyed it so much. The Cato church is going to miss her so much."

In addition to her sister-in-law, Miss O'Neil is survived by several nieces and nephews as well as 31 grandnieces and grandnephews.

Interment was at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Weedsport.

Contributions in Miss O'Neil's memory may be made to the St. Patrick's Church Memorial Fund.

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