

St. Bernard's grad hopes to reel in students

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Brian Millette, an avid sports fisherman, once wanted to be a "fisher of men."

Instead, the former seminarian is tackling a new role as director of recruitment for St. Bernard's Institute, 1100 S. Goodman St.

Millette, a 1991 graduate of St. Bernard's, became the theology school's first-ever full-time recruiter on Aug. 20. Since that time, he has begun initiating programs to draw more students to SBI.

As he considers how to attract more students, Millette need only look at what brought him to Rochester from Canada in the first place.

A native of Pembroke, Ontario, Millette first attended St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ontario, for his undergraduate studies. He later came to the realization that — although he wanted to continue his theological studies — he did not want to pursue ordination.

"When I knew I was leaving the seminary, I knew I wanted to continue in the field and hopefully get involved in ministry," Millette recalled.

After searching through graduate school catalogs, he came across a publication from St. Bernard's Institute.

The school appealed to him in part because it was in the United States — where he preferred to study — but also because of its affiliation with Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

"I was intrigued by the ecumenical setting," Millette said. "Just the diversity intrigued me to check into it."

When he enrolled at the school in 1988, Millette was one of only a few Catholics to live in the campus dorms. That living situation, he noted, was a learning experience in and of itself.

"It's always an education to be with students from other denominations, to learn about their traditions," he said. In fact, Millette said he enjoyed the experi-



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Brian Millette is the new director of recruitment for St. Bernard's Institute.

ence so much that when he returned to the school in August as director of recruitment, he moved back into the dorms.

While a student at SBI, he also learned about the differences between his home diocese of Pembroke and the Diocese of Rochester. Chief among those differences was the disparity in lay involvement.

"Not a lot has come into place for the laity (in Pembroke) in terms of providing the kinds of placements I've experienced in Rochester," he observed. "It's very much clergy run, so to speak."

Millette added that his home diocese is relatively rural, with relatively few financial resources. Therefore, even if a pastor

were inclined to hire lay people for such positions as youth minister or religious education coordinator, he would not have the money to do so, Millette said.

The lack of job opportunities in Pembroke hit home when Millette completed his course work for a master's degree in pastoral ministry at St. Bernard's in 1990 (the actual degree was awarded in 1991). After he returned to Canada to seek work, Millette discovered that there were few opportunities for lay ministers in parishes. He then became coordinator of pastoral services for the elderly at Immaculate Conception Home — a long-term care facility.

While working at the home, he learned through a friend that St. Bernard's was seeking a full-time director of recruitment. Millette applied and was hired.

Although recent enrollment figures at the institute have remained fairly consistent — St. Bernard's current enrollment stands at 125, with an additional 25 students from the divinity school cross-registered in courses there — SBI officials

knew they couldn't simply sit back and let students come to them.

"Our commitment to leadership in today's church means going out and beating the bushes, so to speak, trying to educate people as to what's available," Millette explained. "I think there are still people who don't even know St. Bernard's exists."

In addition, St. Bernard's has a commitment to help lay people prepare for leadership roles in the church, he said.

"The ideal is to get people to think and feel in terms that everybody in the community can serve in some very real way," Millette said. This ideal, he added, "is really an affirmation of what's happening in the (Rochester) diocese."

In line with this philosophy, Millette has designed a recruitment campaign with the theme, "Shaping Leadership for Tomorrow's Challenges."

He has already prepared posters based on that theme. He will soon begin visiting parishes and college Newman Centers to recruit more students. He is also trying to establish community contacts so he can come in contact with more prospective students.

In addition to providing education for individuals preparing to assume leadership roles in the church, St. Bernard's also offers professors "who provide a great deal of support and guidance for the student body," Millette said. These faculty members offer not only academic advice, but frequently become spiritual advisers for the students, he added.

"I think this is a very sensitive community," Millette said. "Sensitive to the kind of commitment it takes for a person to go through a program. It's a sacrifice for many people."

In addition to his duties at the school, Millette hopes to become more familiar with the Diocese of Rochester through visits to parishes and people's homes.

He is also looking into getting a New York state fishing license so he can take advantage of the pastime in western New York.

His favorite fish?

"Northern pike, because they're fighters," Millette said.

As for his new role at SBI, Millette said he anticipates success as he reels in more students.

"In two years time, hopefully I'll be celebrating the significant enrollment growth here at St. Bernard's," he said.

COMING UP . . . Focus on Mission: Oct. 24
Missionary work will be the topic for the issue of Oct. 24. In addition to a front-page article focusing on the challenges of evangelization in an ecumenical era, the edition will contain a special pull-out section on missions and missionaries.
"I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the church's energies to a new evangelization and the mission ad gentes," the Holy Father said in his 1991 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*. "No believer in Christ, no institution of the church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples."
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