

# Ministerial certification effort starts

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester is launching a new certification program as part of ongoing efforts to provide training and education for lay ministry in the church.

Beginning July 1, the diocese will begin the program to certify individuals for a variety of positions that do not require master's degrees, according to Judy Kollar, director of the diocesan Department of Continuing Education. Many of these positions were not included in previous certification programs.

Among the new positions to be certified are parish business manager, visitor, liturgy coordinator, musician and coordinator of social ministry. Some positions for which certification is already provided — such as youth ministry — will be incorporated in the new program.

The diocese is now in the process of hiring a coordinator for the program.

"The purpose of the program is to satisfy a need people in parishes have, some of whom are already doing the work but have not been professionally prepared for the work," Kollar explained. "This program is very focused on public ministry in the parish.

"We're trying to say that you should not be called to lead a ministry area unless you have some training for that area," she added.

Kollar noted that the certification program will not cover pastoral associates, directors of religious education and pastoral administrators — all of which require master's degrees.

The program is intended, in part, to provide professional training for individuals who might not currently qualify for graduate studies in theology, Kollar said, adding that it is not intended to replace graduate degrees.

Under the new program, a minister — working with the certification coordinator — will design his or her own training program. The training program will take into account the skills and experience the person already has — and for which that person can receive credit — and will identify subject areas in which the person needs further education and training. The total program will be 300 credit hours.

Individuals entering the program will also participate in reflection



Judy Kollar, director of the diocesan Department of Continuing Education, is overseeing a new certification program for church ministers. Erik Kunkel/Photo Intern

groups that will meet every eight weeks.

As part of the program, the diocese will offer a variety of courses, each valued at 30 credits. Courses will be offered at numerous locations throughout the diocese.

Some of the courses will be general in scope and apply to all ministerial areas. Others will be specific to the ministry for which the individual is seeking certification. Thus, a business manager might take a course on diocesan accounting, while a musician might take one on music and worship.

The five-week courses will cost \$35 each. Professional development funds are available from parishes to defray the cost to participants, Kollar said.

Kollar cautioned that the diocese will not require certification for individuals already working in ministerial positions covered by the program.

"We're not saying people who are already hired will be fired," Kollar said. "But we want to make this so attractive that people will want to do this to enhance the ministry. The church expects its ministers to be fit ministers."

The program is part of overall diocesan efforts to provide education for those involved in ministry, Kollar acknowledged.

The diocese currently offers — and will continue to provide — a wide variety of continuing-education courses. Those courses are taught in classroom settings and through the Catholic Television Network of America. Satellite "downlinks" for CTNA programming already have been installed at the Pastoral Center; St. Mary's, Bath; Holy Trinity School, Auburn; St. Mary's, Horseheads; St. Januarius, Naples; and St. Cecilia's, Irondequoit.

Among other diocesan programs for ministerial education, Kollar noted, is the Instituto, the Hispanic leadership training program offered through the office of the Spanish Apostolate; parish-council training offered by the Office of Pastoral Council Formation; and training for eucharistic ministers and lectors offered through the Office of Liturgy.

The diocese also works with St. Bernard's Institute to provide education for such positions as director of religious education and pastoral associate, which require master's degrees. St. Bernard's also provides courses and

programs for diocesan and parish employees seeking master's degrees in theology or divinity, and for the diocesan certification program for associate directors of religious education.

As part of that relationship, St. Bernard's offers partial scholarships for diocesan and parish employees. SBI currently provides approximately 25 percent of the tuition, and the diocese contributes an additional 25 percent to employees on a limited basis. In some cases, parishes also provide 25 percent. The Women's Scholarship Fund at SBI provides tuition assistance for women seeking graduate theology degrees.

Three other area colleges also offer tuition assistance to diocesan and parish employees. St. John Fisher College provides a one-third discount. Nazareth College and the University of Rochester each offer 25-percent discounts to five students annually.

These undergraduate college programs are designed to help individuals earn bachelor's degrees, or to fill prerequisites for graduate programs. Kollar said the new certification program will also fulfill prerequisites for individuals interested in pursuing graduate degrees at St. Bernard's.

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