

# Professor says to follow God's call, learn to grieve

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

If you hear God's call, be prepared to grieve.

That may sound overstated, but Roslyn Karaban, associate professor at St. Bernard's Institute, believes the same steps that help us get through a loss can be vital to discernment. She discovered that after years of observations of students as well as herself.

It's all in her book *Responding to God's Call: A Survival Guide*, released this year.

Grief is a normal response to a perceived, significant loss, she writes. Just as grieving can help deal with a death or other loss in life, it can help deal with obstacles and losses in the discerning a life path.

"It is impossible not to respond to God's call in our lives," she wrote in *Responding*. "Whether the call is a gentle nudge or an incessant pulling, we will eventually respond to God's call."

Karaban, at St. Bernard's for 11 years, teaches a course on dealing with grief, death and bereavement, as well as a course on self-discernment in ministry.

"So I was teaching discernment here," she said, waving her arm, "and grieving and loss over here, and the stories of what people were going through were sounding rather similar. There seemed to me to be a link."

Discerning God's will can lead to losses, Karaban noted, whether one leaves behind a successful career, a community, a house, a good income or even estrangement from family members who don't believe in what you're doing.

At St. Bernard's, she said, "Most students here are in their 40s and 50s. For some people it wasn't that the call came later in life. They raised families first or had another career first. And now they're coming back to be a student after being an executive or

a bank officer or whatever. Even if they're happy about it, their life is changing."

Some changes will provoke grief, which varies with the person, and which needs to be recognized, she stated.

Eileen Pollack, 47, who arrived in 1996 to study at St. Bernard's, understands such changes.

"I know I'm supposed to be here," she said. "But never before did I see the blatant connection between discernment and grieving. That's what the book gave me. It's so easy to see myself in there."

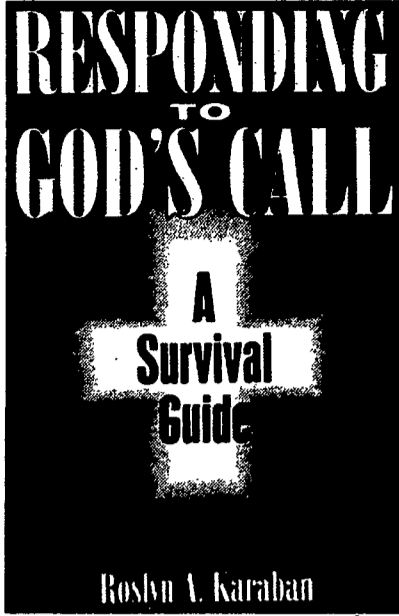
"It helps me recognize it in other people and be supportive when they're going through it."

A former business analyst who is considering working with poor women, Pollack said she left behind "wonderful friends" in Syracuse to come to SBI. When she's tried to express the sadness of that loss, friends tell her she should just be happy.

Deacon candidate Ken Arnold, 54, a research engineer, also read Karaban's book.

"When I started reading it, I didn't put it down," he said, making the connection with lifestyle changes he and his wife Ursula, parishioners of St. Joseph Church in Penfield, have had to make. Both are taking four courses a semester.

While Karaban's book is for anyone attempting to determine God's will, the professor said she thought that in particular it would draw "people like Roman Catholic



women, who have complicated discernment processes."

Half the work of grieving, she wrote, is to recognize and name one's losses.

"If we do not name our constant companion as grief, we will become confused and anxious, and the process of discernment will be harder and longer ...."

It also helps to express one's emotions about a loss — by talking, crying, praying or journaling perhaps. And lastly, grieving involves reinvesting emo-

tions in a new area.

Karaban used her own story as an example of how grief is involved in responding to a call. She began with a recollection of meeting with other Brownie Scouts in the basement of the Protestant church in Beacon Falls, Conn.

She remembered peeking into the church interior in an era when Catholics and Protestants didn't grace each other's houses of worship. It was then that she also learned the minister's wife helped in church.

Explaining that she'd recognized by that age of 8 she had a call to church ministry, she wrote, "I got caught on the revelation that ministers could have wives ... Maybe I could still be a Roman Catholic female, but I could marry a Protestant minister and help him in his ministry."

In college she came to understand her call as one to the priesthood. Changes the church was undergoing led her to think that

"the church would have a place for me."

But in 1976 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith issued "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood."

"It is sometimes said ... that some women feel that they have a vocation to the priesthood. Such an attraction, however noble and understandable, still does not suffice for a genuine vocation," it stated.

By the time Karaban had graduated from Harvard Divinity School with her master's degree in 1978, there were not even lay ministry roles for her. Even pastoral counseling, her specialty, was done by priests.

She attended Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, receiving a Ph.D. in religion and the personality sciences. But she was experiencing a cycle of denial, anger, bargaining and depression.

She moved with her husband, Devadasan Premnath (an ordained Protestant), she'd met at Berkeley, back to his homeland of India. And she explored other churches that would allow her ordination but found she didn't fit in. Eventually she followed up on a tip about a St. Bernard's opening.

"I had expected to meet with a number of angry Roman Catholic men and women — like those whom I had left behind," she wrote. "Instead, I found determined Catholics — clear on their calls to ministry and committed to staying in the Roman Catholic Church. I was challenged to open up my discernment process once again and to acknowledge and admit that my call remained to be a Roman Catholic priest and to minister within a Roman Catholic community."

"... Accepting this call, then, means being able to grieve the loss of fulfilling that call. What I have come to understand is that anyone's call to ministry will involve many losses."

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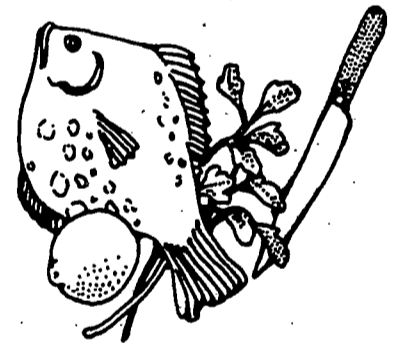
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