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Lay ministry

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only beginning to explore," Sister Schoelles commented.

This visionary approach to lay ministry goes back to the days of St. Bernard's Seminary, which was closed in 1981, prompting the founding of SBI. St. Bernard's was among the first seminaries in the United States to open its classes to people other than men preparing for the priesthood.

One of those students, Maribeth Mancini, began studying at St. Bernard's Seminary in 1979 and was a member of SBI's first graduating class in 1982, with a master's degree in systematic theology.

"I was delighted to learn (St. Bernard's Seminary) did take lay people. I didn't even realize that was an option open to me," recalled Mancini, who has served in diocesan administrative roles since 1988 and is currently director of the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis.

In May 2001, Mancini was installed as president of the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership. On a national level, she observed, more and more people are apparently finding opportunities to serve as lay ministers.

"When I would go to national meetings (of catechists) in 1982, there were religious women and priests and a very occasional lay person. When I go now, it's mostly lay," Mancini said.

Father Cozzens noted that 80 percent of the church's ministers in the United States are lay, and 80 percent of those lay ministers are women. Most of SBI's students, also, are women.

"The ministry is getting done — by people who have heard their call to baptism and have a love and passion for ministry," Mancini stated.

A raised bar

Barbara Pedeville, diocesan director of recruitment and staff services, said SBI has helped the diocese "in developing criteria for many of our parish positions" in the areas of catechesis, youth ministry, pastoral ministry, liturgical and music ministry. SBI, she added, has enabled the diocese to "set our standards higher. We've raised the bar with expectations for education."

Barbara Swiecki, pastoral administrator of St. Agnes Parish in Avon, began attending SBI in 1988 while she was involved in religious-education administration at Pittsford's Church of the Transfiguration. "What got me going to St. Bernard's is, people started asking me questions that I didn't know the answers to," Swiecki said.

Swiecki obtained her master's degree in systematic theology in 1993. While at-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Jamie Fazio registers for his second-semester courses at St. Bernard's Institute Nov. 30.

tending SBI, she began a 10-year stint as pastoral associate at Transfiguration, first part-time and then full-time.

"St. Bernard's really helped me to get the skills I needed in ministry. The teachers were excellent and I networked well with people in the other parishes," Swiecki said. She later returned to SBI for courses related to pastoral administration, and in the fall of 2000 was assigned by the diocese to her new role at St. Agnes.

Master's degrees are generally required for such administrative positions as pastoral administrator, pastoral associate and religious-education coordinator. Mancini said that people pursuing such non-administrative roles as youth minister and RCIA coordinator are strongly encouraged — but not required — to obtain certification through SBI. Mancini added that she implores parish administrators to send new hires to SBI for certification, if they don't already have that training.

A single graduate course costs \$1,050. However, Sister Schoelles said, most SBI students have received financial aid through a collaborative program begun in 1988 among SBI, the diocese and parishes. For example, Swiecki said that several people who became staff members at Transfiguration — including herself — were sent to SBI by the parish.

Although many SBI graduates now minister in the diocese, Sister Schoelles pointed out, "Just because you go here doesn't guarantee you'll get a job. You have to get hired (by the diocese and its parishes), we don't hire you."

Yet Pedeville noted that many positions currently exist, saying, "The market for good ministerial applicants is excellent." She and Sister Schoelles noted that the diocese and SBI have recently stepped up ef-

orts to get parishes to draft candidates for ministry through attending the institute.

Not all ministries attached to SBI education are parish-based. Laura Bishop, a parishioner St. Salome in Irondequoit, is studying part-time for a master's of arts in theology with the hope of becoming a campus minister or working in a retreat house. Thus far, the graduate courses she has taken include: "Theology of Church and Ministry," "Sacramental Theology," "Contemporary Moral Theology," "Themes in the Hebrew Bible," "Death, Dying and Grief," and "Introduction to the New Testament."

Bishop works full-time in the registrar's office at Nazareth College. She said that Pope John Paul II's words at World Youth Day in Denver in 1993 — which she attended as a teenager — inspired her to pursue lay ministry.

"The calling came back to me to explore it further when the pope kept saying 'This is your church.' He really seemed to be calling us to find that piece within ourselves to make the church our own," Bishop said.

National concern

As the need for lay ministers increases, an increasing number of seminaries and Catholic colleges are restructuring their curricula to accommodate this growth. However, this process isn't happening quickly enough, Mancini stated.

"I see that as a national issue. The preparation of professional ministers is a concern across the United States," she said.

"Many dioceses are not able to have that expertise in their parishes, because they don't have a local theological institute," Pedeville added.

Sister Schoelles said locally-based institutes are crucial because many adults who wish to pursue lay ministry have full-time jobs and/or are raising families. "The majority of people can't move across the country," she remarked.

Other challenges also exist for lay ministers, such as the availability of positions that offer fair wages and workloads. Meanwhile, Father Cozzens said that lay ministers are still not fully accepted in roles that were previously held by priests or nuns.

"Lay ministers have a heavy burden to prove competence, and their mistakes will be highlighted whereas we cut our priests a lot of slack," he said.

Whereas Sister Schoelles said she doesn't want lay ministry to replace the priesthood, she does wonder why so many intercessions at Mass ask for an increase of priests, not lay ministers. "Why don't they pray for those, too?" she remarked.

Yet Father Cozzens noted that a call for increased participation by laity in church life emerged from the Second Vatican Council, saying, "Is lay ministry surfacing solely as a response to the priest shortage, or as a manifestation of the spirit previously not brought to light? The theology of Vatican II has laid the groundwork for lay people doing ministry, not just being a helper to the priest."

Programs key on spirituality

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — U.S. Catholic lay ministry formation programs form their students spiritually while preparing them for ministry intellectually and pastorally, according to a national survey of directors of those programs.

A summary of the results of the study, commissioned by the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee on Lay Ministry and conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, was sent to the bishops in August.

"This report is a quite positive one," said Bishop Joseph P. Delaney of Fort Worth, Texas, chairman of the subcommittee.

He said the results indicate "that spiritual formation is being taken very seriously by the programs that are preparing our future lay ecclesial ministers."

On average, respondents estimate that approximately one-third of a candidate's time is devoted to spiritual formation activities," said the CARA report on the study.

It said the program directors most often cited prayer as one of the most important elements in their candidates' spiritual formation, with theological reflection also high on the list.

Other elements most frequently cited as most important were experience of a sense of community, retreats and development of a healthy sense of self.

Diocesan, college and seminary-sponsored programs are more likely to require formation directors and spiritual directors as part of their program, while independent and clinical pastoral education programs are far more likely to focus on mentoring approaches, the report said.

Currently there are more than 300 professional Catholic lay ministry formation programs in the United States.

They have a combined enrollment in excess of 35,000 — about 10 times the number of seminarians in post-college studies and 13 times the number of men in deacon formation programs.

The CARA study was based on a 117-item questionnaire sent to directors of 323 lay ministry formation programs. CARA received 207 completed questionnaires, a 64 percent response rate.

Hundreds now attend SBI

The roots of St. Bernard's Institute go back more than 100 years. What began as St. Bernard's Seminary in 1893 was restructured into a graduate school for theology and ministry in 1981 when St. Bernard's priestly theology program was discontinued due to a lack of seminarians.

St. Bernard's Institute has operated for its entire 20 years on the campus of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester. The institute also opened an extension program in 1989 in Albany. Bishop Matthew H. Clark serves as SBI's chancellor, and the institute has had two presidents: Father Sebastian A. Falcone (1981-93) and Sister Patricia A. Schoelles, SSJ, (1993-present).

According to Sister Schoelles, 160 students are enrolled in SBI's graduate programs, and 400 students are taking ministry certification programs. An additional 90 students attend the satellite program in Albany. The SBI faculty totals 15 full- and part-time teachers, as well as several adjuncts.

Sister Schoelles said that SBI strives to stay on top of current affairs, particularly through its continuing education program. On Nov. 16, SBI sponsored a breakfast on

company-downsizing (coverage is on Page 4), which was attended by many leaders in the Rochester business community. In addition, SBI is currently offering a series of seminars, reflecting on the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, at diocesan parishes.

In 1998, due to steady growth and a desire to become more nationally recognized, SBI announced its intent to build a new facility. Sister Schoelles said SBI's board of directors has had ongoing discussions with the Town of Pittsford regarding a parcel of land on French Road it would purchase from the Sisters of St. Joseph. "We're becoming too big. We already rent facilities off campus," she said.

Another change in the works is the school's title: SBI is currently awaiting state approval to be renamed St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. The current title of St. Bernard's Institute, Sister Schoelles said, "didn't explain our identity. Some people were calling, thinking it was like RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) and wondering if they could get the same degrees."

For more information on St. Bernard's, call 585/271-3657.

— Mike Latona

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