

Student called to ministry

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

It can take years for a person to find a satisfying career, but 21-year-old Christine Nowak is pretty sure she's already found her niche.

Nowak, who believes she is being called to minister to others, is planning to become a youth minister.

"It brings me a lot of joy," she explained.

Nowak, who is in her final semester at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Ind., is majoring in sociology and theology, with a minor in public service. After graduation, she hopes to pursue a master's degree in divinity, which would enable her to become a youth minister.

This summer, Nowak had the opportunity to explore ministry by interning at Rochester's Bethany House, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality that serves homeless women and children, as well as those escaping from domestic violence. Nowak also had an internship with the diocesan urban youth-ministry program, in which she worked closely with coordinator Lynette DeJesus.

Nowak helped with the Bible-school programs for several urban parishes and was involved with several diocesan youth events, including May Day, Faith Fest and the Service Action Learning Teams retreat. Nowak also helped DeJesus coordinate one of the highlights of the Diocesan Youth Convention — the urban parish dinners. Six urban churches hosted groups of convention participants, providing them with meals and entertainment representing the parishes' cultural heritages.

"She was a real godsend for us and for urban youth ministry," said Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry. "Her commitment to social justice and urban ministry was beautiful to see."

DeJesus observed that teens were able to identify with Nowak because she is not much older than they are, and said she was impressed by the enthusiastic way Nowak went about her internship.

"She really didn't have any experience, but she came for experience. She wanted to learn, and she was willing to put herself out there and learn as much as she could," DeJesus said.

Nowak was kept busy as a jack-of-all-trades at Bethany House, where her duties ranged from housekeeping and preparing food for the food cupboard to visiting with residents. Nowak said she was glad that her internship incorporat-



Christine Nowak (left) and Julian Bell lead their group on the River Walk across the Genesee River in downtown Rochester Aug. 9 during the Diocesan Youth Convention.

Young Adult

ed both ministry and service.

"I think that so much of what Christianity is about can be discovered through service. Working with two really different populations and age groups, I've learned a lot. It was a good balance. Either one without the other might not have lived up to my expectations," Nowak said.

In what little spare time Nowak had during the summer, she assisted Nora Bradbury-Haehl in her work as youth minister at St. Paul's Parish in Webster.

Nowak knew Bradbury-Haehl, former diocesan director of young-adult ministry, from her previous work as youth minister at Nowak's parish, St. Joseph's in Penfield, which was the starting point for Nowak's path toward a career in youth ministry.

"I had a really great experience with youth ministry in high school. It was a really formative experience," she recalled.

Bradbury-Haehl recalled that Nowak was quiet and hesitant when she first started attending youth-group meetings at St. Joseph's, but by her senior year had become an enthusiastic participant and a leader among her peers.

"It's really great to have someone like her who's just on fire with their faith in a way that makes other kids want to be that too," Bradbury-Haehl said.

Although she enjoyed youth group, Nowak never seriously considered youth ministry as a potential career until her sophomore year of college. At that time, she received a letter from the rectors of her dormitory, inviting her to take part in a summer program called Notre Dame Vision. During the program, she worked with high-school students, helping them think about how God worked in their lives and how everyone is called to discipleship.

"It was during ND Vision that I realized that youth ministry is what I want to do with my life. Participating in liturgy, prayer, discussion and faith sharing with the teenagers energized me and brought me a sense of purpose and joy," Nowak said.

After that experience, she added theology as a second major and began to participate more in ministry-related activities at school. She helped second-graders in religious education for two years and became a liturgical commissioner for her dormitory. Each dormitory at Notre Dame has its own chapel, so three students from each building volunteer to be liturgical commissioners and coordinate the liturgies.

Bradbury-Haehl, for one, is not surprised that Nowak has chosen to go into youth ministry.

Youth ministry "is a real natural fit for her. That she wants to go into that world, too, and be there for other kids, that really gives me hope," she said.

Events

■ **OCT. 1, 8, 22** — **Theology on Tap**, young adult 20s & 30s, Johnny's Irish Pub, 1382 Culver Rd., Rochester. Oct. 1: "A Match Made in Heaven?" Nora Bradbury-Haehl, speaker. Oct. 8: "Can God Fit in My Briefcase?" panel of Catholic professionals. Oct. 22: "Working for the Church: Called or Crazy?" talk with a priest, sister & lay minister. happy hour 6:30 p.m., discussion 7:30 p.m. Shannon 585/328-3228 ext. 1375; loughlin@dor.org.

■ **SAT. OCT. 4** — **Canal walk**: Odyssey, sponsor, for married & single Catholic young adults ages 25-45; start at Schoen Place, 10:30 a.m., lunch at Cold Tower. RSVP: David 585/467-0826.

■ **SUN. OCT. 5** — **Church sampler**: Odyssey, sponsor, for Catholics ages 25-45; St. Charles Borromeo Church, 64 Maiden Ln., Rochester, 11:30 a.m. Mass, followed by brunch. RSVP: Laura 585/621-5672, Natalie 585/663-0733.

■ **THU. OCT. 16** — **Odyssey dinner**: for married & single Catholic young adults ages 25-45; Woody's 2, 2758 W. Henrietta Rd., Henrietta, 7 p.m., RSVP: Laura 585/621-5672, Roger rscalzo1@aol.com.

■ **SAT. OCT. 18** — **Fright Fest**: at Six Flags Darien Lake. Odyssey, sponsor, for married & single Catholic young adults ages 25-45; meet in Tops Plaza; Buffalo Rd. Gates; car pool to park, 10:30 a.m.-6 p.m., \$10-\$15 plus lunch or dinner money; RSVP: Laura 585/621-5672; lsimflower66@aol.com.

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