

# Hobby turns to calling

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Nick Tracz, 24, has always enjoyed spreading the word of God, but it wasn't until recently that he realized he may want to pursue it professionally.

Throughout his childhood and teenage years, Tracz served as an altar server, lector and eucharistic minister at St. Patrick's Parish in Owego. He was also involved with the parish's youth group and Trace of Grace, a praise band at the parish that eventually evolved into a contemporary Christian group. He graduated from high school in 1998 and entered Ithaca College, where he majored in communications. Being separated from his parish, however, didn't prevent Tracz from staying involved with ministry.

While in college, he served as vice president of the Ithaca College Catholic Community's pastoral council, where he chaired the parish's social committee and helped run meetings and plan events. He also stayed involved with music ministry through the contemporary Christian rock band Passing Thru and later the Christian duo Save the Skinks, which he formed with the lead guitarist from Passing Thru. It wasn't until his senior year of college, however, that he discovered that ministry might be more than just a hobby for him.

"I just know that I have to serve God. One expectation God made clear was that he wanted me to serve him. It comes down to what does he want," Tracz said.

Once he realized that ministry was something he wanted to do with the rest of his life, Tracz put together enough course and internship credits to earn a minor in religious studies. Although he knew he wanted to go do God's work, he didn't immediately know which branch of ministry he was being called to, Tracz said.

He spent the first half of 2002 as an intern with the youth-ministry program at Immaculate Conception Parish in Ithaca, where he helped lead youth-group meetings and overnights, and chaperoned teens at World Youth Day in Toronto. Although he enjoyed his internship at Immaculate Conception, Tracz said



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Nick Tracz (left), who works for Cornell University's Cornell Catholic Community, practices Feb. 12 with praise-band members and Cornell sophomores Tony Maione and Michelle Raczka. Tracz, a 2002 graduate of Ithaca College, helped found the band in the fall of 2003.

## Young Adults

the experience helped him realize he was being called more toward campus ministry.

"College students are really just a great age," he said. "They want to come (to meetings and events) and they have a higher maturity level. They come and they listen. They're really experiencing their faith." He added that campus ministry is "an avenue I'm going to explore. It's such a valuable resource for finding friends and for fellowship, for direction, too, and guidance."

After graduating from Ithaca College in 2002, Tracz began working part time as a volunteer chaplain/campus ministry intern at Cornell University's Cornell Catholic Community, and in August 2003, the job became a full-time position. Since he's been at Cornell, Tracz has coordinated the university's involvement with Crop Walk 2003, coordinated volunteering at area soup kitchens and provided music for nursing-home and prison-ministry visits, among other things.

In the spring of 2003, Tracz coordinated an interfaith night of reflection, which brought together Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Catholics and people of other Christian denominations to talk about the

importance and experience of ritual and prayer in each of the faith traditions.

Interaction and discussion between people of different beliefs is important, Tracz said. In 2003, he attended for the fifth consecutive year an ecumenical Christian retreat called Ithaca College PEACE, where he led several small-group sharing sessions. The friendships that grow from retreats like this, he said, start conversations about God that can lead to better understanding and improved relationships between denominations.

"To be able to share the faith with brothers and sisters of all different denominations is a really awesome thing," Tracz said.

Although he's broadened his ministry experiences, Tracz has not abandoned his music ministry. In the fall of 2003, Tracz started a praise band at Cornell University with the help of freshman Erin Brennan. Cornell Catholic Community recently added a 7:30 p.m. Mass to its Sunday schedule, and the band will provide music for it in addition to providing music for four contemporary Catholic fellowship programs throughout the semester. The fellowship programs, dubbed XLT, include praise and worship music, guest speakers, eucharistic adoration, intercessions and small prayer groups, Tracz said.

