



Lay ministry training leads to growth in faith

Interviews to begin in spring for classes

By Jack Sheedy
Transcript Reporter

BLOOMFIELD—Mary Marsan is no stranger to religious education programs. Since moving to Connecticut from Oklahoma 20 years ago with her husband, Joe, she has been active in adult ministries throughout the Archdiocese of Hartford. So, when a director's position opened up in the lay ministry formation program of the Office of Religious Education (ORE), she applied.

"I had been very active in adult ministries in all of my positions," she said. "For many years, I was involved in RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults]. The lay ministry program was exciting for me because [I have] worked in parishes and ... worked for people who are interested in and involved in the parishes."

Her first full-time job in the Archdiocese was as director of religious education (DRE) at Holy Spirit Parish in Newington. She also worked at St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Rocky Hill; St. Ann Parish in New Britain, as a pastoral assistant; and at St. Christopher Parish in East Hartford, as DRE.

When Mrs. Marsan joined the office in January, she vowed to attend every session of the lay ministry classes, even the ones she did not teach. The zealous newcomer wanted to learn everything about the program. She got up to speed in a hurry and now oversees most of the details, including teaching,

conducting workshops and booking speakers.

"The lay ministry program is a two-year program with a three-point focus," she said. "It helps people develop spiritual skills, pastoral skills for ministry and theological knowledge."

The spiritual teachings help people grow in their faith by stressing their uniqueness and through weekend retreats, she said. Pastoral teachings develop leadership and ministerial skills. And the theological aspect of the program teaches canon law, Christology, liturgical spirituality, moral theology and more.

"Generally, [participants] have a field of interest," Mrs. Marsan said. "They may have been asked [by their parishes] to work with adult faith formation or the RCIA process or bereavement, social justice or evangelization."

They are then teamed with a mentor who has knowledge and experience in the chosen field, she said.

Msgr. Michael J. Motta, ORE director, said, "The program is about 25 years old. We have about 300 commissioned ministers out there. We recruit every other year, and people cannot join the program unless they're sponsored by their pastor."

Mrs. Marsan added, "It's not any kind of a catch-up program for somebody who's just coming back to the faith. It's for people who have been active in the parish and have some sense of stability there. We

hope that people are growing in their own faith as well as picking up some skills."

Usually the parish will pick up the \$1,200 tab for the two-year program, most of which goes to pay speakers' fees.

Guided by their mentors, participants usually take on a parish project and develop it during the two years of study. "For instance, one man is in liturgy, so he developed the whole Advent liturgies for the parish – all of the music, the readings," she said. After completing the lay ministry training, he developed adult education formation programs centered on the themes of the Sundays in Lent.

"We try to help them and give them the skills they need to do a better job with this, become more effective," Mrs. Marsan said.

"It's kind of that safe step that you can take to actually try out and test your skills," she said. "People may have doubts. They'll start out and say, 'I don't know, am I doing the right thing? Am I really cut out for this?' With the nurturing support that they get, many times they find out, 'Yeah, this is the place for me.'"

Interviews will begin in the spring for the next two-year class, which meets Wednesday nights at the Archdiocesan Center at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield. Information is available from pastors, the ORE at (860) 243-9465 or Mrs. Marsan at mmarsan@adh-ore.org.



BUILDING FAITH – Valerie and Larry Yergeau, of St. Ann Parish, Milford, are studying adult faith formation at lay ministry workshops sponsored by the Office of Religious Education. (Photo by Jack Sheedy)

Participants described as 'charged up'

BLOOMFIELD – Laurie DeLuca joined the lay ministry formation program to study adult faith formation. "I think it was just a natural progression for me," she said moments before a Wednesday night class was set to begin at the Archdiocesan Center at St. Thomas Seminary.

"I've been active in my parish for many years. I've served on the parish council. I'm a lector and a Eucharistic minister. I've done a lot of different kinds of projects in getting people to come back to the Church," she said.

So she asked her pastor at St. Augustine Church in Hartford if he would recommend her for the program run by the Office of Religious Education. Mrs. DeLuca is now finishing her second year, mentored by Sister Maria Toce, a Sister of St. Joseph and the former director of the program.

"Now I'm teaching a class, an RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults] class, as part of my project. I love it. I think it helps me more than it helps them," Mrs. DeLuca said.


Richard DeCapua, a member of St. Mary Parish in Milford, is studying business management, a new field of study under the lay ministry formation program. "We assist the parish priests in the business aspect of running the parish," he said. "Like any other business, you look for the quality of what's being delivered and the costs and the ability of the contractor to do the job."

Nancy Vai, of St. Ann Parish in Milford, is also in the business management program. "I love business. I was office manager for a business at one time and when the business manager aspect opened up, I just thought that would be a good use of my past experience for my own parish," she said.

Also from St. Ann's are husband and wife Larry and Valerie Yergeau, who are interested in adult faith formation. As part of their project, they are creating a reading room. "We're hoping to have a reading room in the library and then bring speakers in. It's mostly a library for adults," Valerie said.

Mary Marsan, program director, said, "I'm always inspired after Wednesday nights, because I see these folks who have already worked a full eight-hour day and then drive up here and spend two hours with us. They're charged up, they're excited about what God's called them to do and how they're offering their gifts and their talents to their parishes. That kind of enthusiasm spreads so rapidly and it charges everyone else up. That's the beauty of this type of a program."


– Jack Sheedy



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