

## Pathways to Ministry

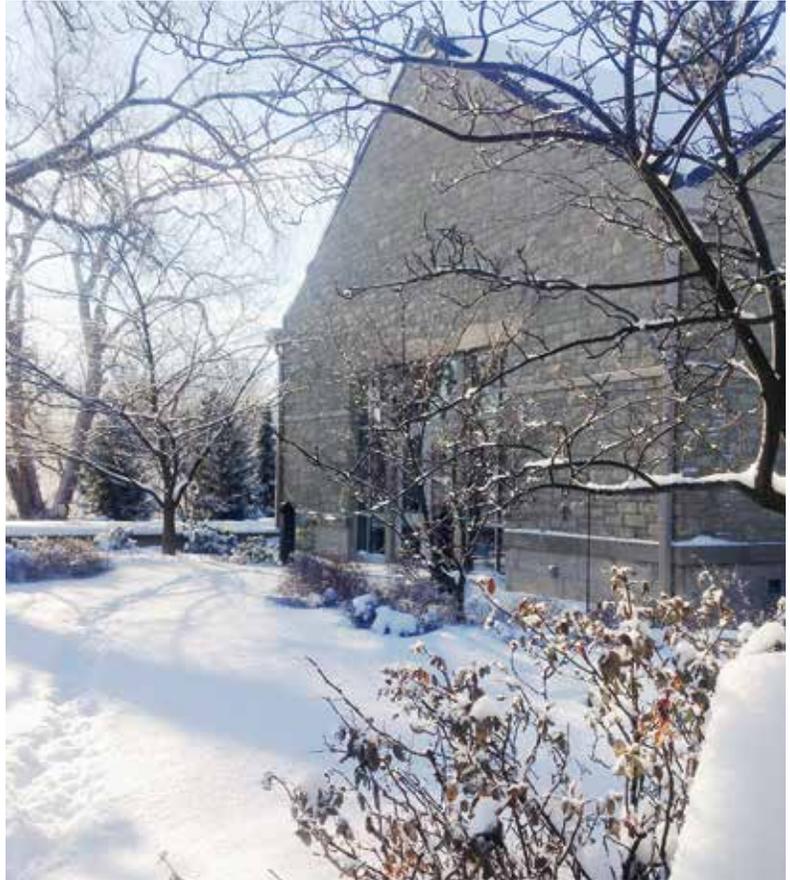
*Nurturing faith's journey*

By Dr. Patricia A. Schoelles, SSJ  
President

Across the world of theological education and across all denominations, it has become more and more difficult to attract men and women who feel called to a career in church ministry. In fact, an article in *In Trust* magazine, a journal for those in ministry education, cited recent research conducted by Auburn Seminary that actually charted the path of many ministry candidates from initial inquiry to eventual enrollment in a school of theological education. The first few sentences of the article name the situation that most schools like St. Bernard's face today: "In today's educational environment, most seminaries and theological schools have difficulty recruiting enough students to make full use of their faculty and facilities. But presidents who wring their hands over the struggle to maintain enrollment often add, 'We still attract some amazing students who would succeed in any vocation. Yet they choose ministry.'"

The article goes on to report on additional research on the paths that most often lead men and women into the educational programs that will prepare them for positions in church ministry. The major finding: "The pathway to seminary is the long, slow nurture of faith in community."

We at St. Bernard's find that many of the points made are ones we have come to realize ourselves. Attracting students to consider a masters level program in ministry preparation is not a matter of clever marketing. Most students who enroll



here have been on the path for a long time. "Most have been embedded in religious culture, involved in religious institutions, and exposed to religious role models over time."

Many candidates for ministry formation have been part of communities where many others play a hand in their eventual decision to enroll and pursue the call they sense within themselves. Pastors, retreat directors and spiritual directors, fellow parishioners and volunteers, current and past teachers, family members become catalysts for an individual's discernment and the eventual decision to become a minister of the Gospel.

In this issue of *Sheaf* we hope to illustrate some of what the

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research cited in the *In Trust* article maintains by introducing two current students, telling something of the journeys that led them to pursue admission to St. Bernard's in preparation for ministerial roles in the church. We hope that in reading about these two individuals, you will become more aware of the role played by you and many others in bringing the best candidates to begin their preparation for church service.

### A growing relationship with God

Katherine Cappuccio is a good example of someone whose road to ministry formation took a variety of turns. Kathy grew up in Amsterdam, NY, steeped in traditional Italian-American Catholic values. She attended Catholic grammar school and high school, conscious of God's blessings from an early age and aware that she had been given living models of the Christian life in her family and teachers. College led her to Cornell University followed by graduate school at Tufts, where she completed a M.Ed. leading to a career as a clinical dietitian.

Kathy married, had two sons, and eventually changed careers, teaching science at the middle school level. Her husband, who was a physician and professor of medicine at the University of Rochester, suffered from multiple medical problems himself and gradually became disabled. After a long struggle, Joe died in 2009 at the age of 52. Kathy then concentrated on deepening her ever unfolding relationship with God and discerning the directions her life might take.

Part of Kathy's quest involved completing the 19th annotation of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. Insight from this experience led her to enter into a retreat at the Jesuit Campion Renewal Center in Weston, MA. There, during a five day silent retreat, it became clear to her that she was being called to minister to the sick and dying, and especially their caregivers. This deep sense of call was rooted in her experience of sharing her husband's journey through sickness and suffering, and in her profound sense of God's presence and action in her life during that period and beyond.

### *Did you know?*

Over 80% of St. Bernard's students receive some form of financial aid or scholarship. For more information about scholarships currently available to new and returning students please contact:

- **In Rochester and Syracuse**, Christina Schmidt, [admissions@stbernards.edu](mailto:admissions@stbernards.edu) or 585-271-3657 ext. 289.
- **In Albany**, Sr. Kitty Hanley, [Kitty.Hanley@rcda.org](mailto:Kitty.Hanley@rcda.org) or 518-453-6760.



**Kathy Cappuccio visits with Sr. Mary Lynch, a resident at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse. Kathy plans to graduate in May with a Master of Divinity degree.**

While Kathy's sense of call was real, she was unclear about how to pursue it. She had for years been a Eucharistic minister to nursing home residents, and now began to volunteer in hospice care at Advent House. She became part of her parish's new bereavement ministry. She participated in the "Just Faith" Engaging Spirituality program. These varied experiences fueled her desire to minister to the sick and provided direction for her ongoing discernment about ministry—even though at the time she was not aware that that was what was underway within her.

It took a while for her to become aware that a Catholic lay woman could study to become a hospital or hospice chaplain. That realization led to her search becoming more concrete and intentional. She knew St. Bernard's offered Masters level education for lay ministry candidates, and she began the Master of Divinity program at St. Bernard's in January of 2012. As part of her curriculum she took the Hospice Chaplaincy course taught by Dr. Roslyn Karaban. The fieldwork involved in this course strongly validated Kathy's ongoing discernment. At the same time, she became increasingly aware of the importance spirituality was playing in determining her new career path. She found that a new development in her life was the ease with which she was able to integrate and apply her life experiences with her formal theological studies.

At this point, Kathy is an intern completing a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at the University of Rochester Medical



**Arthur Cuestas is part of the diaconate formation program at St. Bernard's. He is currently studying for a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies.**

Center and plans to graduate from St. Bernard's in May, 2014. Her path to ministry exemplifies much of what the *In Trust* article emphasized: for many today, the path to ministry preparation takes place over many years, often involves twists and turns and significant life experiences, emerges from a growing relationship with God, and relies on ongoing interaction with a variety of kinds of Christian communities.

### **A quiet, persistent call**

Arthur Cuestas followed a similar path. Art is now in his third year of diaconate formation. For him, an awareness of the call to serve God and witness to His love has been part of his consciousness for as long as he can remember. Because of a variety of situations in his life, Art felt that he could not take concrete action to realize this sense of call or even explore it more deeply. Part of his reluctance was rooted in a severe speech impediment which he felt would prevent him from proclaiming God's word or serving the church community. At this stage, Art actually eliminated himself as a potential candidate for ministry.

In spite of these personal doubts, Art was tapped by the religious order that ran the college he attended to become a student minister for the campus. He did not seek this position and felt unqualified for it, but became aware that the community seemed to be "calling" him anyway.

Another college experience that affected Art's approach to ministry emerged from his job in food service at the time. In this job, Art witnessed first hand the discrimination that many

Americans have to endure. He watched various colleagues who were immigrants being taken advantage of, and he became aware of their inability to speak out against the unfairness they endured. He comments, "They were treated differently because of a border, a language, or even an accent." Through the new consciousness that was dawning on him, Art began to be more aware of social justice issues. The persistent "call" that had been within him for so long continued to tug at him.

Years later, Art noticed that many within his parish community seemed to sense in him qualities that suggested ministerial aptitude. He was invited to become a religious education teacher, asked to be the guest speaker at confirmation retreats, to present classes for parents of children preparing for sacraments, and even served as Master of Ceremonies for selected Diocesan events. The one who thought himself unqualified for ministry was now sought out by others—to minister!

Gradually, Art became more aware of the "ministry" in everyday life. He found increasing awareness within himself that in his managerial position at work, his treatment of others, his conversations and interaction in the corporate world could be a way of letting God speak through him and letting

God's presence be realized in very secular settings. Art began to be more aware that he experiences God in the concrete relationships with his wife and in their parenting of their twin sons.

When Art finally began to investigate enrolling in the deacon formation program at St. Bernard's, he was responding to his life-long sense of being attracted to ministry. For years he had assumed that attraction could lead nowhere and his "call" remained unanswered. Like Kathy, Art's journey to study theology and prepare for ministry followed a circuitous path and evolved over many years. As he overcame his fear of his own inadequacy, as he grew in awareness of God's presence in the concrete world around him, and as he experienced the call from the community around him, he took the first concrete steps toward formation for ministry with enthusiasm and conviction.

### **St. Bernard's Graduates in the Community**

Our students pursue theological studies for a variety of reasons. From business owners to pastoral administrators, teachers to youth directors, social workers to hospital chaplains, St. Bernard's graduates are making a positive impact in your community.

**Want to read more about our graduates?**

**Please visit our website: [www.stbernards.edu](http://www.stbernards.edu)**

## Want to learn more?

In Rochester, St. Bernard's will host an **Open House** on June 14th from 9–11 a.m. at our Rochester campus.

**Rochester's 2014 Seminar Series:**  
Roman Catholic Theology & Ritual Practices: Death, Funeral, Liturgy, Burial & Remembrance Co-sponsored by St. Bernard's and Holy Sepulchre Cemetery/Ascension Garden. For more information please visit [www.stbernards.edu](http://www.stbernards.edu) or call 585-271-3657 ext. 289.

In Albany, stop by our table at **Spring Enrichment**, College of St. Rose, May 12–14.

**Want to sit in on a class in Albany?**  
Contact [Kitty.Hanley@rcda.org](mailto:Kitty.Hanley@rcda.org) to arrange a visit.

In Syracuse, stop by our table at the **Catholic Men's Conference** at the SRC Arena, March 29th.

Think you are too busy to attend classes every week? Learn more about **our new online hybrid courses** available in the upcoming 2014–2015 academic year! Contact Christina Schmidt, [admissions@stbernards.edu](mailto:admissions@stbernards.edu) for more information.

**Interested in our summer offerings?**  
Summer classes begin April 29 in Albany and May 10 in Rochester and Syracuse. Check our website [www.stbernards.edu](http://www.stbernards.edu) for more information.



## St. Bernard's School of Theology & Ministry

For more information on current course offerings or applying to St. Bernard's, please visit our website: [www.stbernards.edu](http://www.stbernards.edu)

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