

Ecumenical Institute kicks off 40th anniversary

During the past 40 years, the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary & University, Roland Park, has seen its enrollment more than quadruple and its current faculty represents several creeds.

In celebration of its 40th year, the institute will kick off its year-long commemoration with a Nov. 3 open house at the Roland Avenue campus from 8:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m. – featuring faculty members speaking on a variety of topics on the theme of “What’s God Got To Do With It?”

Mini classes will also be set up during the open house to give visitors an overview of the institute’s master’s degrees in theology and in church ministries, its graduate certificate programs, and its post-master’s Certificate of Advanced Studies in Theology.

Some 100 churches within the Archdiocese of Baltimore participate in a partnership scholarship fund with the institute, in which the parish supplies a third of a parishioner’s tuition, the university pays another third, leaving only the final third for the student to fund, said Dr. Michael J. Gorman, dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology and professor of sacred Scripture.

“We take a lot of pride in the fact that so many of the parishes around us see the value of our program,” Dr. Gorman said, “that they would make that kind of investment.”

With master’s programs in theology and church ministries, about 80 percent of its graduates are involved in some kind of church ministry and most of them are paid positions, said Pat Fosarelli, M.D., assistant dean of the institute and a 1994 graduate.

“Of the 50 graduates of the church ministry program (which had its first graduating class in 2000) all of them are using their degrees for practical purposes,” said Dr. Fosarelli, a parishioner of Corpus Christi, Baltimore.

Those positions include religious education, youth ministry, parish nursing and pastoral care, she said.

Past high-profile graduates include WBAL-TV reporter Tim Tooten Sr., Therese Wilson Favors - director of African American Ministries for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and Baltimore City Councilwoman Helen Holton.

"Over the last 40 years the seminary has been greatly enriched by the presence of the Ecumenical Institute, which is - and will continue to be - an important part of St. Mary's into the future," said Father Thomas R. Hurst, S.S., president-rector of the seminary. "As a seminarian who was here when the Ecumenical Institute began in 1968, and as a former member of its faculty, I am confident that its future is bright and its mission more relevant and necessary than ever."

The institute was established in response to the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council's commitment to ecumenical and interfaith outreach, Dr. Gorman said. Its first graduating class in 1972 garnered seven master's degrees. Last spring 34 students earned their master's and one received a post-master's certificate.

With an average of 200 students enrolled each semester, about 40 percent are Catholics - the largest group - followed by Methodists, Baptists, non-denominational, Episcopalians/Anglicans, Presbyterians and Lutherans, with ages ranging from 22 to 82.

Other religious groups represented in the student body are Pentecostal, Quaker, Mennonite, Brethren, Orthodox Christian and Jewish.

The faculty also comes from a diverse religious background, including one rabbi, Dr. Gorman said.

The institute will also celebrate its 40th anniversary with high-profile speakers in February and the fall of 2008, and it already kicked off its \$4 million fundraising campaign to strengthen its endowment fund to ensure future scholarships and build the program, Dr. Gorman said.