

# EI offers lineup of popular speakers

Need an interesting speaker?

The Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University offers a roster of faculty members who speak to local church and community groups.

Right now, said Dr. Pat Fosarelli, M.D., D.Min., assistant dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology, one of the most requested topics is Islam.

Dr. Fosarelli also gets lots of calls for speakers to talk about Scripture, both Old and New Testament. Family-oriented topics – such as the spiritual and moral development of children and adolescents, and Christian parenting – are always in demand. The mind-body-spirit connection intrigues people as well, especially in the light of recent medical research about religious ritual and healing and stress relief.

“Sometimes people just want an overview of world religions,” Dr. Fosarelli says.

The Institute offers speakers on a variety of topics; a sampling includes The Historical Jesus, Women in Church History and Today, God and Ethics, The Spiritual & Moral Development of Children, and Lay Ministry in the 21st Century. The issues surrounding death and dying are another popular topic, and when discussing those difficult issues, Dr. Fosarelli notes, “Sometimes it’s easier to have an outsider come in.”

No matter what the topic, the talks are not canned; the speakers develop each program specifically for the requesting group.

When someone calls to request a speaker, Dr. Fosarelli calls them back to determine exactly what they want, whether it’s a one-time only talk, a day-long presentation or a series, and what age groups the speaker will be addressing.

“Any way we can help them, we will help them,” she says.

She’s also become adept at determining what people really want; some callers are hesitant to say, especially if it’s a difficult topic.

Sometimes people will request a Catholic speaker, but Dr. Fosarelli helps them

decide if that's really necessary; after all, someone explaining the basics of Islam doesn't need to be Catholic. "But sometimes they want someone to connect the dots with Catholic teaching," she says.

The speakers try to be available at all times, but Sunday morning is difficult because many of the non-Catholic speakers are themselves ministers. Dr. Fosarelli urges groups to give as long a lead time as possible when requesting a speaker, to allow the speaker to make arrangements and to give them time to prepare.

The Institute does not charge a fee for a speaker.

"Most of us accept whatever we are offered," Dr. Fosarelli said. "Congregations that are more far-flung understand that gasoline is expensive and the person is coming out."

To request a speaker, contact the Institute at 410-864-4200 or e-mail them at [ei@stmarys.edu](mailto:ei@stmarys.edu).