

Interview with Donna Gray, Regional Youth Minister for St. Lawrence and St. Charles Borromeo

When did you begin thinking about working in the Church?

I began thinking about working in the Church when my 3 sons were attending St. Lawrence school. I wasn't sure what that calling was. I had actually looked into becoming a part of the Sisters of St. Joseph's community because of my friendship with Sister Concepta Vay who worked at the school at that time. But God called me in a different direction when our Parish Business Manager asked me if I would be interested in applying for the job as Parish Youth Minister. That was in 1996.

Who was involved in your considering lay ecclesial ministry?

I volunteered a lot in the school while they attended and at the church and felt a calling to do more. My Pastor at this time, Father Frank Falletta, and our Parish Business Manager, Alex DePasquale, along with our school Principal, Sister Diane Dennie, SSJ, were involved in my consideration of this position along with Sister Concepta Vay, SSJ.

How did you prepare for your role? What training did you receive—from where? From whom?

Preparation began with some mentoring from Alex over coffee for the job interview which was very sweet of him. There were quite a few parish employees in my interview from my recollection. After my interview I spoke with the previous Parish Youth Minister, Andy Hoelperl, for some job advice. Maribeth Mancini from the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis came to visit and introduced herself and the department to me. I was assigned a mentor, the youth minister from Holy Name, Pat Donohue. In my first year I attended every meeting/conference etc. that the Diocese offered. I also began the certification for Youth Ministry Program at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. I received my certification in May of 2002. Michael Theisen, diocesan Coordinator of Youth Ministry at this time, was also a wonderful mentor to/for me.

What is your title and what do you do?

I am the Parish Youth Minister at St. Lawrence (in my 30th year) and at St. Charles Borromeo (in my 4th year). I also am the parish liaison at St. Lawrence for our Girl and Boy Scouts, helping them with their cookie and popcorn/nut sales, recruiting, large Scout events which we host here such as their crossing over and Blue and Gold Dinners, Scout Sunday. I am the Confirmation Coordinator at St. Lawrence and have taken on this responsibility for St. Charles this year. I assist with the Summer Faith Formation programs at St. Lawrence and St. Charles. I am the Athletic Director at St. Lawrence for our CYO Sports program which includes both soccer and basketball.

What is your advice to others thinking about a similar path?

My advice would be, if God is calling you to lay ecclesial ministry, stop and listen. I listened through the happenings in my life at the time of my calling....all the volunteering I was participating in at St. Lawrence Church and School, my love for the Eucharist/attending Mass, the people who were in my life at that time. If you feel a strong sense of needing to do more for the Lord, become a lay ecclesial minister. This ministry is rewarding in so many ways. It has made me a better person, a fulfilled person, a person filled with appreciation for everything (the blessings 😊) in my life. Most importantly this ministry has enriched my relationship with God and continues to do so each day.