

# LIMEX students head to Loyola University for commencements

By Melissa Miller Young  
Springfield, MO

Four women from the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, accompanied by friends and family, joined Karen Pesek, Director of the Office of Religious Education, in New Orleans on Sat., May 8, for Loyola University New Orleans Spring 2010 Commencement Ceremony. They join the ranks of 56 others who have graduated from Loyola's Institute for Ministry Extension Program (LIMEX) since it was launched in the diocese in 1991.

The LIMEX program, offered through the Loyola University Institute for Ministry, offers master's degrees and certificates in pastoral studies and religious education. The program, a 36-hour curriculum with 10 common curriculum courses and two focus courses, is actually done entirely in a local venue within the diocese. Through a partnership with the diocese, LIMEX develops the theological and ministerial competencies of participants through an integration of rigorous academic study alongside theological reflection on ministerial practice and the participants lived adult experience as people of faith. This enables participants to integrate their knowledge of the Catholic faith with their own ministry experiences. The program is practical and affordable. With Ignatian spirituality woven through it, students learn to read the signs of the times and respond to them faithfully and effectively.

"It is a great formation program. Participants can take advantage of graduate level Catholic education from a well-respected Jesuit institution," Pesek said. "The benefits for the students include career opportunities, formation for ministry in the parish or school, and personal and spiritual growth. For example, the program has built-in Ignatian spirituality exercises and there is a new undergraduate degree program too."

The four graduates that took part in the spring commencement began their



**LIMEX GRADUATES**—Four women graduated from Loyola University New Orleans on May 8 in the Louisiana Superdome. Annette Peterson, of St. Mary Parish, Joplin, earned a Master's Degree in Religious Education; Mary Elick, St. Mary Parish, Joplin, earned a Master's in Pastoral Studies, and served as the group's facilitator; Freda Epperson, St. Agnes Cathedral Parish, Springfield, earned a Master's in Pastoral Studies; Patty Wheeler, St. Mary Parish, Joplin, earned her Master's in Religious Education. (Photo by Chris Peterson)

studies four years ago, and found graduation to be the culmination of a challenging period of study and growth, and the beginning of the next phase of service.

Freda Epperson, secretary to both the chancellor and the Director of Vocations/Seminarians in the diocese, received her Master's Degree in Pastoral Studies. She entered the program, like those before her, with a plan, but also with an openness to the Holy Spirit.

Following the May 8 commencement, Epperson said that the LIMEX program was a life-changing experience in many ways, and definitely did lead to tremendous personal, professional, and spiritual growth.

"Pursuing this degree has been challenging at times, but it has also been a true blessing and time of tremendous growth," Epperson said. "I have learned a great deal from my studies and from the others

in my learning group. The dialogue with the other students as we processed the materials was a very important part of the LIMEX experience."

Mary Elick, St. Mary Parish, Joplin, couldn't agree more with Epperson. The facilitator of the class, Elick also received her Master's Degree in Pastoral Studies, and touts the LIMEX program as being a truly awesome experience in so many different ways.

"The methodology of the program is a big component for the preparation for ministry, and the learning is strongly dependent on discussion and dialogue among those who are in the program together," Elick said. "In so many ways the structure is very much like the structure of a faith-sharing group—with discussion built around the assigned readings."

#### Professional, spiritual

Patty Wheeler and Annette Peterson, also of St.

Mary Parish, Joplin, rounded out the group. Both received their Master's Degrees in Religious Education. Like Epperson, Wheeler entered the program with a plan, in her case to be a better Parish School of Religion (PSR) coordinator, and came out with an openness and unbelievable growth in both her spiritual and academic life.

"I did not expect the program to change my spiritual life as much as it did," Wheeler said. "The transformation may not be visible to anyone but me, but I know that I now can serve God and others with a greater sense of confidence."

Confidence was a benefit for Peterson as well, who stated that the LIMEX process taught her not only the process of reflection, but also of action, making her more aware of God's call and presence in the world.

"The LIMEX experience gave me the confidence I needed to become more involved in my faith as a catechist," Peterson said. "Through the experience, I feel empowered to participate more actively in my faith by encouraging others to reflect and practice their Catholic faith."

Elick added that she became aware that service to others and her own personal faith development go hand-in-hand, that her spirituality and ministry mutually influence each other.

"Through [LIMEX], I think we also came to really believe that anything we do can be called ministry. Ministry is simply giving of self for the enrichment of others, anything we do to help bring about the reign of God," Elick said.

While there are two other students in Springfield currently getting their master's degrees through Loyola University this summer through a combination of Online courses and residence courses, there is currently not another LIMEX group underway. That is something that Pesek would like to change. Not only does Pesek see personal and spiritual growth happening among the LIMEX participants and

## Interested? Is the LIMEX experience one for you?

For more information on LIMEX go to <http://lim.loyno.edu/extension/and/or> contact Karen Pesek at The Catholic Center, (417) 866-0841, or via Email at [kpesek@dioscg.org](mailto:kpesek@dioscg.org).

their immediate ministries, she sees the benefits of the program being felt throughout the diocese.

"Since the first graduating class in August 1994, we have had 60 graduates, 43 have degrees and 17 hold certificates," Pesek said. "Of those, 15 are in Catholic schools in the diocese; one is principal. Six are Directors or Coordinators of Religious Education in parishes, four are volunteer Church ministry, one is a non-chaplain administrator in a Catholic hospital, and one is a pastor."

Pesek would love to get one or two more LIMEX classes going, and offers periodic informational sessions. Once she has a group of 10 interested students, they form a learning community and meet once-a-week in an adult-learning environment. Pesek chooses a facilitator for the group who attends facilitator training and certification through Loyola. The class receives educational resources from Loyola's staff and faculty via printed materials, video, Internet, and telephone, and the program takes three-and-a-half to four years to complete.

"If someone is feeling the call in this direction, and chooses to commit to the program, the growth can be tremendous," Elick said. "The entire program is powerful. How we serve is going to be an aspect of our individual personality, our God-given talents, and our experiences."

"The LIMEX experience has been a gift from God and I now offer it back to God," Epperson said, "asking that He lead me and use me according to His will." ©TM

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