

The Stethoscope in God's Hands

IPS Alumna Serves Seminarians *by John Burger*

In 2005, Pope John Paul II spoke in favor of seminaries turning to the “work of competent specialists to help seminarians comprehend more thoroughly the requirements of the priesthood, recognizing celibacy as a gift of love to the Lord and to one’s brothers.”

One professional who has devoted herself to the formation of seminarians, including in the area of celibacy, is Dr. Christina Lynch.

Dr. Lynch was the first graduate of the Virginia-based Institute for the Psychological Sciences (IPS) founded by the Legionaries of Christ, earning her doctor of psychology degree there in 2005.

St. John Vianney Seminary

Since August 2007 she’s been the staff psychotherapist at the St. John Vianney Theological Seminary of the Archdiocese of Denver.

“Dr. Lynch has been an extraordinary blessing to the seminary,” said St. John Vianney rector Father Michael Glenn.

“Foundational to her approach is her conviction that God has called her to be a servant in a special way of priests and priestly formation.”

Lynch helped develop the school’s curriculum on celibacy and gives lectures on the subject, according to the seminarians’ level. The lectures cover human development, the emotions, issues around addictions, such as internet addiction and pornography, intimacy and loneliness.

Setting Benchmarks for Growth

“It’s all about knowing the self,” she said. “The better you know yourself interiorly, the better you can serve others.”

She’s also available to help any of the 100-plus men in formation, who come from several dioceses around the country.

Candidates are evaluated psychologically by their own dioceses, but Lynch is available if any seminarians want to review those evaluations and help them set benchmarks for

human growth in intellectual, spiritual, psychological and pastoral areas. “There might be areas they can strengthen, areas of weakness,” she said. “I try to help them be aware of the weakness and set a timeline.”

That could be dealing with issues from their family, for example, issues that need “healing through prayer and counseling and spiritual direction.”

“We all come from wounded backgrounds,” she said. “We try to find what areas are blocking them from spiritual growth so they can become holy men.”

Father Glenn said Dr. Lynch has been “extraordinarily successful as a staff therapist because of her ability to unite spirituality with the best of modern wisdom regarding counseling.”

“She had created an environment where counseling is seen as normal and has removed almost any feeling that it could be seen as admission of weakness or failure,” the rector said. “This kind of experience sets men up to take personal ownership for their psychological health, not only in preparation for ordination but beyond in the busy and often difficult life of priestly ministry.”

Look First at the Person

Lynch said that she went to Institute for the Psychological Sciences to learn more about her faith and be in a position to use her God-given talents to help those in need, specifically as a licensed counselor. She and her husband had been running a maternity home for women in crisis pregnancies, but she felt she needed more training to be able to help such women and their emotional needs.

The institute, which was founded in 1997, is dedicated to the development of a psychology consistent with the teachings of the Church.

Lynch speaks highly of the “integrated” formation IPS students go through, and the emphasis of studies to always look first at the person.

“In a secular university or institute, there are wonderful tools to help a person discover issues,” she said. “But [the focus at IPS is that] God is the healer, not the psychologist. We are his instruments. I’m the stethoscope in God’s hands as I have a person pour out his heart.”

A New Generation of Psychologists

The school experienced a 40% increase in enrollment for the current academic year and was recently accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

“We all know people who have been touched by psychological hurt and in many instances have not been well served by modern therapies that are closed to transcendent and moral values,” said Father Charles Sikorsky, LC, president of the institute. “We’re working to form a new generation of psychologists who can integrate the science of psychology with the Christian view of the person, something that Pope John Paul II saw as an urgent need for both the Church and society.”

Father Sikorsky knows how important that is from Catholics he’s spoken with. “I’ve spoken to a great number of lay people and priests, who tell me how hard it is for them to find a psychologist they can trust, someone who



Dr. Christina Lynch outside of the St. John Vianney Seminary.

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respects the Church’s beliefs and values regarding life’s most important questions,” he said.

As for Dr. Lynch, he said, the “great work” she is doing in Denver to serve the Church and the priesthood makes IPS proud. “With God’s help, each year more and more graduates from our unique program will be out on the front lines serving the Church and society by offering hurting individuals the true freedom to love, heal and flourish,” Father Sikorsky said.



Photographs by James Beza.