I recently had the pleasure and honor to interview the new rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Monsignor Steven P. Rohlfs, who began his tenure on February 7. He is a 1976 graduate of the seminary, holding an MA in systematics and a doctoral degree in moral theology from the Angelicum in Rome. He has also been honored as prelate of honor to His Holiness, knight commander of the Holy Sepulchre, and knight of the Sovereign Military Constantinian Order. Until recently, he had been serving his diocese as vicar general, chancellor and moderator of the Curia.

Almost all of the questions we covered during our time together came from current seminarians, giving the men of the house a chance to get to know their rector a little better.

How does it feel to be getting so much attention and press? Whenever you’re the new kid on the block, you can always expect that attention, but mercifully it fades fast.

How does it feel to come into the seminary halfway through an academic term? Things are up and running, and so as a result you need to depend upon the advice of the administration and faculty for almost everything. You don’t want to interfere in the smooth running of the seminary. As I’ve told a number of people, there’s no school from which you graduate and get a certificate to be a rector. You basically have to watch and learn. My usual modus is to watch for about a year and change very little; then I know why things are the way they are and why things were not changed to something else. Then I can make a much more prudent and informed decision about what I think the direction of the seminary should be in certain areas. And, if there are any changes, then you begin to make them gradually. From what I see so far the Mount is in need of very little change thanks to Bishop Rhodes’ leadership and vision.

So you’re not planning any changes anytime soon? No. All I’m doing is learning the ropes, which I hope is one of the lessons I can teach the men. You are simply courting disaster if you go into a parish and try to change things too fast.

What comes to mind when you think about leading the second oldest and largest seminary in the country? It’s very humbling to realize that I’ve been chosen by Cardinal Keeler and the board to take on this position. Because I graduated from here, every nook and cranny of this institution has a memory; it seems doubly incredible. I feel sometimes like I’m still a seminarian walking the halls, but I keep...
telling myself, 'I'm the rector.' Occasionally, I have to remind myself that I was here 34 years ago.

Do you have any memories you would like to share about your time here as a seminarian?

The first time I came, I thought St. Joseph's motherhouse was the seminary. I began to praise God. I said, 'This is just wonderful.' Then I was told that the seminary was down the road. So my father and I came down Old Emmitsburg Road and I thought that the whole campus was the seminary. I thought, 'This isn't bad; the buildings are a little older, but not bad.' I was then disabused of that notion and told that the one building at the end of the road was the seminary. In the period of about an hour, I had my notion of what the seminary was going to be like completely deflated.

What has impressed you so far about your tenure here as rector?

The improvements that have been made over the years. When I was here, we had close to 170 men in what is now McSweeny and Gallagher halls. I didn't have a private room until second semester, 3rd theology. The second year, five of us were in the basement. We had two bunk beds and one single bed. But the thing that hasn't changed is the real spiritual ambiance of the house. That's very much the same. I think that's probably the strongest point the Mount has in its favor, that it never really lost its spirituality. It's very Eucharistic, and is grounded in a strong Marian devotion. The Mount has never had to recover its spirituality; it never left. I think that's why the Mount has not only survived but flourished all these years when other seminaries have gone out of existence.

Did any particular saint influence your formation?

Saint Thomas Aquinas, precisely because I studied him so much. I was formed by his teachings spiritually and intellectually.

What have you learned as a priest that you wished you had learned in seminary?

To be patient. Everything comes to him who waits. They told me in the seminary to be patient, but when you're 25 or 26 years old you don't want to be patient. Be patient and prudent. It's an essential lesson to learn.

What is your philosophy of formation?

I have no other philosophy of formation than that of the church, than the Program of Priestly Formation. That's my responsibility, to see that the men are trained in the philosophy that the bishops of the United States, confirmed by the Holy See, put forth as the most appropriate for 2005. I'm sure there will be other keen insights they will develop over the years, and my responsibility will be to make sure those insights are also used.

What would you like people to say about the priests that you will be forming? What distinguishing characteristic would you like to see in all priests who come from the Mount?

That they are striving for holiness. That they are Christian gentlemen. That they are never uncharitable to anyone and are full of the compassion of Christ.

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Vice Rector Named  
Executive Director of Catholic Identity and Mission  
By John R. Johnson, Second Theology  
Diocese of Savannah, Georgia

The Rev. J. Wilfrid Parent, vice rector of Mount St. Mary’s Seminary since June of 2003, was named the executive director for Catholic identity and mission at Mount St. Mary’s University, effective Jan. 1, 2005. He continues to hold the position of vice rector for the seminary. Before accepting this promotion, Fr. Parent served the seminary community as acting rector upon Bishop Kevin Rhoades’ appointment as the ninth bishop of Harrisburg, Pa., last fall.

In his new position, Fr. Parent will be one of the university’s six executive officers. It is part of university president Thomas Powell’s plan to fortify the Mount’s Catholic identity through an increased collaboration among the seminary, university and National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes. Fr. Parent believes that all of these aspects of the Mount community comprise “a solid Catholic institution.” In his new position, he hopes to support the Mount community and encourage all “to imagine ways that we can strengthen our already sound Catholic identity.”

Fr. Parent’s primary responsibilities through the end of this academic year will be twofold. First, he will continue to work at the seminary as the search for a new vice rector continues. Second, he will develop a detailed job description of the new position and a plan for incorporating it into the life of the Mount community. Ultimately, Fr. Parent says, the new position is about “evangelization, and converting hearts.” In addition to these responsibilities, Fr. Parent will spend two days a week as a student, finishing his doctoral studies at the Catholic University of America.

“Trying to be a good Catholic,” he relates, “is a lot of fun and a real joy. There is an energy, an inner peace that comes from living the faith that doesn’t come from anything else; it is a path to true happiness.” Fr. Parent feels privileged to be part of what he feels is a “golden age” of the seminary and university.

Monsignor Steven P. Rohlfs, rector of the seminary, expresses his sentiments: “Fr. Parent has all our thanks for a job well done. We wish him well as he enters his new position at the university, and we know that his immense talents and abilities will be put to good use in enhancing the mission and Catholic identity of the Mount we all love.”
BISHOP BENNETT Visits Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

By John L. Lavorgna, Third Theology, Archdiocese of Hartford

The Mount community was grateful to welcome the Most Rev. Gordon D. Bennett, S.J., in January to direct the seminary’s annual retreat. Bishop Bennett is the former auxiliary bishop of Baltimore and the second diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica. Before he could be officially installed last summer, Hurricane Ivan struck the island. The rebuilding process proved to be yet another experience that solidified his resolve to serve and love others through his priesthood, the grace and challenge of which he generously shared with the seminarians.

“He also addressed issues of faith, healing, forgiveness and trust that helped me consider the commitment to holy orders that I hope to make shortly.”

“Do not let this retreat be just a pious exercise; let it change your life,” exhorted Bishop Bennett to those assembled in Saint Bernard’s Chapel. “These days of prayer and reflection will do precisely what you allow them to do with grace. Be thankful for the action of God in your life, and become a more fervent and sincere servant of God.”

Just like the powerful winds of that hurricane, the words and example of Bishop Bennett left a lasting impression. The seminarians were drawn to his candor and the intensity of his message, which focused upon the questions posed by Jesus to his disciples in the Gospel of John.

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It was obvious to all participants that Bishop Bennett took great care in his preparation for the retreat. He often drew from his background as a Jesuit novice master in California. For many of our first-year men, it was an excellent initial experience of an extended time of prayer and spiritual conferences in a seminary context.

“I feel very blessed to have experienced the retreat given by Bishop Bennett at the beginning of my formation for the priesthood,” noted Kris Meiergerd, pre-theologian from the Archdiocese of Omaha. “Each conference challenged me in a unique way to examine my individual relationship with Jesus, and the bishop’s ability to communicate these messages on a very personal and practical level made it easy for me to make applications to my own life.”

Overall, the days on retreat were a source of much enrichment and many graces. Echoing the sentiments of many seminarians, Father John Dietrich, director of spiritual formation, could not have been more appreciative of Bishop Bennett’s efforts. “The bishop has a deep love for the Lord that was clearly evident while he was among us. His presentations proved to be what so many seminarians needed at that time. I could not have been happier with the positive results of this retreat within the house, and we look forward to a return visit some day soon.”

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Foundation Honors Monsignor Roeltgen with Major Gift

In the spring of 2004, The Monsignor Kenneth W. Roeltgen Endowment for Pastoral Formation was established with a pledge of $250,000 by an anonymous donor. This was the first endowed program at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary. Given in the name of the Monsignor Kenneth W. Roeltgen Foundation, the endowment will provide funding each year in perpetuity for the seminary’s Pastoral Formation Program.

In November 2004, the foundation gave $25,000 to the Monsignor Roeltgen Endowment. “Mount St. Mary’s Seminary is very grateful for this gift and honors the work the foundation is doing to keep the spirit of Monsignor Roeltgen alive,” remarked Monsignor Rohlfs, rector of the seminary.

For nine years (1988-97) Monsignor Roeltgen was rector of Mount St. Mary’s Seminary. He was mentor, shepherd, inspiration and friend to seminarians from 40 dioceses as they prepared to become pastors in parishes all across the United States.

“Monsignor Kenneth W. Roeltgen has all the qualities that reflect the heart of a pastor. All who knew him remarked on his warm hospitality, his kindness and ability to make everyone he talked to feel they were the most important person,” said Dan Curtin, chair of the Rector’s Council. “His priestly life and ministry were a blessing to all who knew him.”

Shortly after his death in April 2002, a group of Monsignor Roeltgen’s friends in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., created a foundation in his honor for the purpose of keeping alive his vision of parochial and seminary education. The foundation is now called the Monsignor Kenneth W. Roeltgen Foundation.

The foundation sponsors a memorial Mass in honor of Monsignor Ken, and a fundraiser is held in the fall. In three short years, the foundation has contributed thousands of dollars to the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Arlington for the purpose of promoting vocations to the priesthood and supporting the education of seminarians and priests. “So much of Monsignor Roeltgen’s priesthood was devoted to priestly formation that it only seemed fitting to establish an endowment in his name,” noted a foundation representative.

Said Monsignor Rohlfs of the recent gift, “The contribution will not only honor the monsignor’s exemplary ministry as a former rector, but it will also serve as a reminder of our mission to form priests ‘after the heart of Christ,’…”

A Big Thank You from the Office of Seminary Development!

By S. Renee Miller, Administrative Assistant, Seminary Development

On December 31, 2004, the Office of Seminary Development took a small break from holiday vacation to process nearly $15,000 in end-of-the-year gifts. The complete end-of-the-year processing time frame totaled nearly $40,000 in recorded gifts.

During the 2005 fiscal year, the office has processed almost $500,000 in gifts. Compared to the last year, the Seminary Annual Fund is 23 percent ahead, the Priests for the Third Millennium campaign is 143 percent ahead, and the Rector’s Discretionary Account is 36 percent ahead.

A total of 580 donors have contributed to the Seminary so far this year.

Without the help of our benefactors—seminary alumni, friends, faculty and administration, Rector’s Council, or company matching gifts—we would not be able to meet our goal. Giving to the seminary helps us strive to fulfill our mission of preparing young men to be shepherds in honor of and love for Christ. We thank you very much for your generosity in the past, and hope to work with you again in the future.

We have our 2005 Summer Laity Retreats in June and July. If you would like more information about giving to the seminary or the retreats, please contact the Office of Seminary Development at 301-447-5017, or via email at miller@msmary.edu.

You can also give online at WWW.MSMARY.EDU/SEMINARY. Click “Online giving form.”
“WE HAVE COME ... TO WORSHIP HIM!” This call-and-response chant of more than 1,500 young adults rocked the ARCC throughout the Mount 2000 & Beyond Eucharistic Retreat that took place on Feb. 11-13, 2005.

“We have come to worship Him!” was the theme for this retreat and will be the theme of World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, this summer. In celebrating its 10th anniversary, Mount 2000 enlisted the aid of several speakers to make this retreat one to remember. Combining passionate witnesses, hope-filled teachings and profound devotion, the speakers and retreat participants gathered for a weekend of true worship.

The music ministry of Martin Doman helped establish and maintain an atmosphere of praise and worship. Throughout the weekend, Martin’s music complemented the activities of the retreat, raising the crowd to its feet in songs of praise and guiding participants to their knees with meditative songs as the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. In cooperation with the seminary’s Latin Schola, the music for the Eucharistic Procession provided an aura of adoration, which has led to amazing stories of grace from the participants.

Perhaps the biggest change in this year’s Mount 2000 came in the diversity of speakers. The Rev. Bill Byrne (a Washington priest and chaplain at University of Maryland, College Park) celebrated the opening Mass on Friday night, permanently changing people’s perception of Mary’s Fiat with his interpretive “Happy Dance!” Father Byrne spoke of Mary’s encounter with her cousin Elizabeth as so joy filled that it could cause one to dance. In turn, Father Byrne called concelebrating priests and young people alike to respond to Christ’s presence with similar joy, which he illustrated through his own “Happy Dance.”

The retreat also featured two talks by national speakers Paul George and Jason Evert. Paul George is the former director of parish programs/southern regional director for Life Teen International in Atlanta. He spoke at the World Youth Day Celebration in Rome and currently serves the Diocese of Houma/Thibodaux in Louisiana. Combining compelling stories of Christ’s power with engaging humor, Paul challenged participants to grow in their knowledge and love of Christ as he presented talks on “Our Relationship with Christ” and “Sin and Reconciliation.”

Paul George’s presentation on “Sin and Reconciliation” was one of several workshops offered on the same topic, including, for the first time in Mount 2000 history, a talk presented in Spanish by the Rev. Robert Villa, S’02 (Archdiocese of Hartford). Rounding out this workshop, the Rev. Robert Panke (director of priestly vocations, Archdiocese of Washington) offered his own insights and personal experiences, expressing the love and mercy of God through humorous and engaging stories.

Jason Evert is a national chastity speaker and full-time apologist with Catholic Answers, the nation’s largest lay-run apostolate for apologetics and evangelization. Combining stand-up humor, thoroughly researched facts and profound spiritual insights, Jason presented the talk “Romance Without Regret.” Perhaps the strongest testament to the power of his presentation is the fact that Jason spoke to hundreds of young people for nearly two hours following his talk and for another three hours after the retreat closed on Saturday night. In between these individual and group sessions, Jason also presented a talk, “Defending the Eucharist,” in which he challenged participants to deepen their love and devotion to the Eucharist and to proclaim such Good News through their lives.

The 10th anniversary of the Mount 2000 & Beyond Retreat included many joy-filled moments, including the return of Bishop
Kevin Rhoades (bishop of Harrisburg and former seminary rector) for the closing Mass on Sunday. Bishop Rhoades’ return was anticipated by parishioners from several Harrisburg parishes donning fluorescent yellow t-shirts with the slogan, “On the Rhoad to Heaven with Bishop Kevin!”

Dennis Schuelkens, S’06, Mount 2000 & Beyond chairman (Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston), beamed with joy and thanksgiving as the weekend ended. “I am so thankful to all the bishops, priests, speakers, seminarians, college students and staff who have worked so hard to make Mount 2000 such a success. All the hard work has paid off as God has truly graced those on retreat. … I thank God, and we offer this retreat in worship of Him.”

Ten Years of MOUNT 2000 and Beyond

By Bryan W. Jerabek
First Theology, Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

It began in the fall of 1995 when one of the seminarians approached then-rector Monsignor Kenneth Roeltgen with an idea. The seminarian asked about the possibility of bringing to the Mount a popular Eucharistic retreat called Youth 2000 run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal from New York. Monsignor Roeltgen enthusiastically endorsed the idea, and February 2005 marked the 10th annual occasion of this very successful youth retreat, now called “Mount 2000 and Beyond.”

The first few months of planning in 1995 didn’t exactly go smoothly. The seminarian who originally presented the idea began planning the retreat but then discerned that he was called to leave the seminary. Another seminarian took over the project, but within a few months he, too, discerned that he was called to leave the seminary. Finally, in December 1995, third-year seminarian Dan Leary of the Archdiocese of Washington was asked to rise to the task. As he—now Father Dan Leary—says, “I just ran with it.”

The first retreat, held in 1996, was a huge success, with approximately 1,000 youth in attendance. Father Leary said that he witnessed “great healings and great conversions” during the retreat. Following the format of Youth 2000, the retreat included Mass, extended periods of Eucharistic adoration, Eucharistic processions, talks, opportunities for the sacrament of penance, and vibrant contemporary music. In addition to the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal and many other religious communities attended. “I wanted as many religious sisters there as possible,” Father Leary remarked. Many young people credit their call to priesthood or religious life to an experience they had at Mount 2000.

Father Leary was ordained to the priesthood in 1997 and is now an associate pastor at St. Martin of Tours Parish in nearby Gaithersburg, Md. His parish has a vibrant, multicultural youth group with a number of members who are bilingual. More than 100 members of that group came with Father Leary to the retreat this year.

The basic retreat formula remains the same today as in 1996, though seminarians no longer depend on the Franciscan Friars to lead the retreat. Numbers suggest that this formula is a success. The retreat had to move from Memorial Gym to the much larger ARCC to accommodate the growing numbers, which reached a high of 2,000 in 2001. This year, approximately 1,600 youth participated, a decline reflecting the decision last year to restrict the retreat to high school- and college-age participants in order to provide a more focused, prayerful experience. Remarkably, an event of this scale is planned and largely executed by seminarians, many of whom make great sacrifices to do so while maintaining their demanding seminary schedules.

Commenting on the success of this year’s 10th anniversary event, chairman Dennis Schuelkens of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston said, “The best thing about being involved with Mount 2000 and Beyond was seeing the profound change in young people over a three-day period, and knowing that they had encountered Christ’s forgiveness, love and call to holiness.”

Schuelkens, slated to be ordained a deacon this spring, has passed the baton to Columbus seminarian Joseph Yokum to serve as next year’s chairman. So from a rough start in late 1995, Mount 2000 and Beyond prepares to enter its second decade. The Holy Spirit is indeed at work!”
Faculty Inservice on New Ecclesial Movements

On Feb. 14, 2005, with the support of Callings, a Mount St. Mary’s University and Lilly Endowment initiative fostering the theological exploration of vocation, the seminary faculty held a half-day inservice on the topic of New Ecclesial Movements. As part of a year-long seminary-wide focus on the New Evangelization, representatives of three movements were invited to speak to the seminary faculty and undergraduate theology faculty at the Thornewood Lodge in the Catoctin Mountains.

The Rev. Lee Fangmeyer, S’89, represented the group Communion and Liberation; Dr. Dennis Cali of the Mount’s Department of Communications and Rhetoric represented Focolare; and the Neocatechumenal Way was represented by the Rev. Francis Murphy of the Archdiocese of Washington and Mr. Emanuele Contini. Each presented an overview of his group and an assessment of the interaction of the movements with the parish and the diocesan priesthood. An extensive time of formal question and answer followed. The inservice was coordinated by Dr. Robert Miller, SFO, chair of the seminary’s Department of Sacred Scripture.

Left to right: The Rev. Francis Murphy, Mr. Emanuele Contini, Dr. Dennis Cali, Dr. Robert Miller, the Rev. Lee Fangmeyer