

Radio show on seminary training

Dennis Coday | Oct. 13, 2009 NCR Today

"Up to Date," the 11 a.m. talk show on the local NPR station, KCUR, yesterday had a panel of guests discussing clergy training. The guests were Molly T. Marshall, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kan., Ron Benefiel, president of Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., Rabbi Kenneth Ehrlich, dean of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and Benedictine Fr. Samuel Russell, president-rector of Conception Seminary College in Conception, Mo.

Here's a link to [the whole show](#) [1]. It's worth a listen.

Fr. Russell comes in about 10 minutes into the program. He reports that Conception -- a college seminary that educates and forms students from 25 U.S. dioceses, according to its Web site <http://www.conception.edu/conception-seminary-college/history> -- is experiencing a 40-year high enrollment. About 120 seminarians this year, he said.

He said college seminary enrollments across the country are increasing.

He also said the current classes are mostly younger than 15 or 20 years ago, when most students were older, many second career types. Russell said, the majority of seminarians today are traditional college age. "The climate is very different than 20 years ago, the secular climate and our ecclesial climate," he said.

The ecclesial climate, and the young men at Conception, Russell said, are heavily influenced by Pope John Paul II.

As far as the cultural/secular climate, he said, "We're dealing with young men who ... [have] a longing for faith. We live in a time that is increasingly indifferent to religion and at times hostile to religion." This isn't necessarily unique to our time, he said, but "it is a marker of our times." In reaction to this, he said, "The young men who are drawn to the church see the church as a bearer and speaker of the truth, which is the gospel."

Compared to 20 years ago, today's seminarians bring a different understanding of culture and church with them, Russell said.

"With our men it is different from the immediate time after the Second Vatican, which at least some saw as a time of upheaval. We now are settling into a deeper understanding of those conciliar reforms. Our men now would generally be considered more conservative than seminarians of 15 or 20 years ago.

"But there is also deeper spiritual hunger in them and with that there is sometimes a tendency to being a bit rigid and ..."

"So spiritual hunger has its pros and cons," the radio show host interjected.

"Spiritual hunger is always pro," Fr. Russell rejoined. With the men at Conception, he said, "It takes [them]

some times to mature."

This is just a rough transcript of what happened on the show. My report here leaves out the insights from the Baptist seminary president, that parallel Fr. Russell's and puts what he said into a wider societal and Christian context.

If you have 45 or 50 minutes, listen to the show.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.kcur.org/uptodate.html>