

Press Release

BC publishes, "Ten approaches to prayer"

It began as a proposal for a modest series of discussion- and -prayer meetings for members of the Boston College community. Now, after a successful two- and -a -half year run, the popular University at Prayer series at Boston College has concluded with a final, enduring achievement: the publishing of a book on the series' best prayer presentations, *A Hunger for God: Ten Approaches to Prayer* (Sheed & Ward, 1991).

"It went beyond expectations," says William Barry, SJ, former rector of the Jesuit Community at BC and now provincial of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. "there were some very extraordinary, very moving and touching presentations made during the series. To see them preserved for all times is pleasing indeed."

"The University at Prayer series played perfectly into the university mission of uniting the spiritual and the academic," says BC Assistant Chaplain Kerry Maloney, who developed the prayer series with Father Barry. "It confirms our belief that prayer is an important issue in the BC community; there is a hunger for God, a desire to address the question, 'What does it mean to pray?' The book reflects the diversity and richness of the responses to that question."

A key element of the series, according to Maloney and Fr. Barry, was having the contributors employ their disciplinary

perspectives and particular areas of scholarships in discussing prayer. The presentations were made by a variety of invited university faculty and administrators, Jesuit and non-Jesuit, clergy and lay, men and women. For some, like BC Chemistry Professor Dennis Sardella, whose essay is titled "Thoughts about Science and Prayer," it meant an opportunity to link "bits and pieces" of personal beliefs into more structured ideas.

"It seemed to me that a lot of scientists do not have a theological vocabulary and vice-versa," says Sardella, explaining his thesis. "On the surface, science and prayer seem like mutually exclusive things. But I have long been a professor interested in science, yet also active in the church and I do lots of reading and talking about prayer. I just feel there is great room for exploring ways to a common ground."

BC Theology Adjunct Professor Margaret Gorman, RSCJ, who authored "Changing Images of God Throughout a Life of Prayer," had taught and written before on the inter-relatedness of psychology and religion. But seldom had she been able to express her thoughts to an audience like the one at University at Prayer.

"Over the years, I have maintained that the image of God changes as we change," Sr. Gorman says. "There is a link between one's understanding of self and one's self image with one's image of God, and you can

trace this development coherently. I spoke at the series because I wanted to see how other people, from different perspectives, reacted to this."

BC Theology Associate Professor Francis Clooney, SJ, who contributed "Praying Through the Non-Christian," also felt that the series afforded the chance to

reach other segments of the community. He used his expertise on Far Eastern religions and cultures to focus on Christianity in an increasingly global way.

"The point I tried to make," he says, "is that these 'other religions' are not a problem or an issue. You can appreciate your religion all the more for having

been in contact with other sets of beliefs. You can remain a Roman Catholic and be challenged in a way that is productive."

Maloney praised the speakers who had appeared during the series. "It is an intimate, yet profoundly public thing to discuss your approach to prayer," she adds.

