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University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



Exploring a Life of Ministry

06.14.2011 | Students, Service and Giving, Catholic, Campus and Community As with many college students, Caitlin Cipolla-McCulloch is still undecided about her plans after graduation. But she's certain of one thing: she wants to serve.

The University of Dayton senior from Powell, Ohio, will have an opportunity beginning next week to explore a life of Christian ministry at the Fund for Theological Education's (FTE) Leaders in Ministry conference June 15-19 in New Orleans. The theme of the conference is "Renewing the Church in Service to the Common Good."

"I think of ministry in the less traditional sense of the term," Cipolla-McCulloch said. "It's not just about a formal label, it's about serving others. Whatever my career choice is, that becomes my ministry."

Watch Cipolla-McCulloch talk about her faith and work. (url: <http://www-ig.udayton.edu/Stories/Story/?contentId=26045>)

As one of just 40 college students in America to receive an FTE undergraduate fellowship, Cipolla-McCulloch will receive a network of support and a \$2,000 stipend for education expenses or ministry exploration. She is the University's first student to receive the fellowship.

Cipolla-McCulloch is a biology and religious studies double major with an interest in applying science to serve others and improve their lives. At the University of Dayton, she is an undergraduate researcher for the biology department, conducting experiments on fruit flies to test the toxicity of materials found in common consumer products such as makeup and sunscreen.

Her research on fruit flies can be tedious, and she admits it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the big picture.

"I have an eye for detail, and I enjoy the work I do, but in the end I try to think about the contribution it's making to the body of knowledge, and that hopefully some of what we're doing can lead to helping people live healthier lives," she said.

In addition to her scientific pursuits, she is also very involved in campus ministry and residence life. She has been a Mass coordinator and liturgical singer for three years. And she worked for two years as a resident assistant and will be a neighborhood fellow in the student neighborhood this fall.

Her work allows her to facilitate retreats and service programs and help other students plug into the local community. She said her experiences provided her a taste of what life as a minister could be.

"You can take it as a job that you do when you're on duty or just on the floor with your residents, but it's most rewarding for me when it becomes part of who I am, something I incorporate into my life at all times, on and off campus," she said.

Just a few months ago, Cipolla-McCulloch was planning to attend medical school immediately after graduation. Now, she is considering a year of international service before entering graduate school to pursue a medical degree or possibly a degree in pastoral ministry or public administration. She said she is eager to explore the many possibilities of ministry the FTE fellowship has to offer.

"Caitlin is an extremely passionate and engaged student in the classroom and in the community and exemplifies the characteristics of a Christian leader, one who provides us hope for a better future," said Maria Ollier Burkett, assistant director for the University's Program for Christian Leadership. "Caitlin will be a wonderful ambassador of the Catholic and Marianist character of the University, and she will benefit from engaging with strong leaders in ministry from diverse religious traditions."

The Fund for Theological Education was created in 1954 out of concern the quality of those entering the ministry had declined and that highly talented students were too often choosing other careers. It assists young people from all denominations and backgrounds with an interest in ministry.

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