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Events | Alumni Directory | Get Involved | Reunion Information | Alumni News

Ordained Alumni Go From Law Library to Church Sanctuary

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- Alumni
- Alumni News
- Get Involved
- Reunion Information
- Giving to Albany Law
- The Alumni Association
- Institutional Advancement
- Alumni Affairs Staff
- Events
- Summer 2013 Events

by Paul Grondahl

While it is commonplace for lawyers to possess an abiding belief in the legal system, a quartet of Albany Law School alumni places their faith in a higher power. The paths to the pulpit for these reverends are as varied as their reasons for going to law school in the first place. The two women and two men share a deep spiritual calling that carried them from the law library to the church sanctuary.

Mother Anne F. Curtin '82 never expected to become a woman of the cloth. She was ordained an Episcopal priest in 2001, one of the first women priests in the Albany diocese, after retiring from a 20-year career as a lawyer with state agencies including the Public Service Commission and Consumer Protection Board.

"This was God's idea of my retirement, not mine," said Curtin. She and her husband of more than 40 years, Dan, have two sons and three granddaughters. She is retired from active legal practice. "This is not typically what you do when you get a state pension," she said. "I kept asking God, 'Are you sure you really want me to do this?'"

Her ministry began in Troy where she was pastor of Holy Cross Episcopal Church. There she organized a healing service for survivors of abuse and those who have supported them. She also led the Diocesan program for abuse prevention. For the past five years, Curtin has served as executive director of Healing a Woman's Soul, a ministry for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. She offers healing prayer, retreats and therapy sessions.

"I'm not a professional counselor, but the ministry brings peace and comfort," she said.

Curtin's ministry began after she organized free legal clinics for battered women through the Capital District Women's Bar Association and helped secure a grant for a domestic violence hotline.

"This work has deepened my faith," Curtin said. "I've always been a person of faith, but to walk with these women is such a privilege. The pain I hear and see in them would be impossible for me to bear alone. God helps me help them."

Reverend Kenneth J. Doyle '78 had been a Roman Catholic priest for nearly a decade when he enrolled at Albany Law in 1975. At the time, he was the editor of the Evangelist, the Albany diocesan newspaper. He wanted to know more about the legal ramifications of issues the paper covered, particularly the death penalty. While attending law school on a scholarship, he edited the Evangelist, served as chaplain at the Doane Stuart School and worked weekends at St. John's Parish in Valatie.

"I enjoyed the experience of law school because I got the chance to slow down, read and contemplate the law after working full-time as a priest for nine years," he said. He played rugby and is grateful for the lasting friendships he made at Albany Law, especially the three classmates he has joined on a winter golf vacation in Orlando, Fla., for 33 consecutive years.

Doyle his legal expertise directly as director of government relations for the New York State Catholic Conference. He now serves as the Albany Catholic diocese's chancellor for public information and pastor of Mater Christi parish in Albany. "I use what I learned in law school every day," he said. "Law teaches you a certain way of looking for an orderly format of thoughts and ideas. I actually think it helps me to write homilies, too."

Doyle never litigated a legal matter, but last year was invited to argue a case involving suicide before the justices of the state Court of Appeals. He lost. "I'm 0-for-1 lifetime in court," he joked. "I guess I should be grateful that I have another profession to fall back on."

After a 15-year career as a counsel in the U.S. Department of Justice, the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies, in 1985 Harriet Tucker Watkins '70 married Henry G. Watkins, a federal immigration judge, and her life shifted away from legal work. They moved to San Diego, she became active in the Mount Olive Church of God in Christ and was ordained along with six other women in 1990. "We were the first women ordained without restrictions, meaning we could perform weddings, funerals and conduct pastoral work," she said. Her duties included visiting the elderly and infirm and training ministers and missionaries in church protocol.

"Even in law school, I stayed involved in my church, Albany's Wilborn Temple, and that was very important to me," she said, which was part of the reason why she transferred from Howard University Law School to Albany Law after one year. "The common element I found in faith and the law was doing research. My favorite legal term is *res ipsa loquitor*: the thing speaks for itself. You learn that phrase on your first day in law school and I ended up using it often in sermons."

Tucker Watkins is retired from the law and she begs off when friends ask her for free legal advice. She and her husband, who is also retired, now live in Arizona and she keeps in touch with former parishioners at Peach Tree Baptist in Atlanta, where she served as an associate pastor in the mid-1990s. Her passion for preaching at Sunday services led to her current project, a scholarly study of the Bible's Book of Psalms. "I'm still using the research skills I learned in law school," she said.

Pastor Jerry Lynn '67 entered the active ministry after working for 13 years in a general law practice with his late stepfather, Morton Lynn, a 1936 Albany Law grad and Albany City Court judge. They sold the firm, both retired from legal work in 1983 and they joined with Lynn's mother, Verna, to lead Bible studies for a small band of the faithful in rented space starting that same year. The seed they planted grew into Reach Out Fellowship, a non-denominational Evangelical congregation that draws about 100 people to Sunday services at the church building they own in Colonie. "I had fallen away from the church and wasn't even religious in law school," said Lynn, the pastor. "I became born-again in 1978 and I've been busy in the ministry the Lord called me to ever since."

Lynn is widely known for his Bible commentaries, which have been broadcast on two local radio stations for the past two decades. He also leads a Bible study group and a few members have been attending the pastor's weekly session for more than 20 years. Lynn completes a full cycle of the Bible in his taped commentaries every six years. "I'm called to teach the Bible and I gear my talks to all people, with the goal of getting them to study the Bible on their own," said Lynn, who has kept current on his certification but has not practiced law since 1983.

"I find a lot of overlap between faith and the law," he said. "The Bible and legal work is based on law, particularly the Book of Leviticus. There are a lot of connections. I consider studying the Bible to be a lot like doing legal briefs."



Mother Anne Curtin '82



Father Kenneth Doyle '78



Harriet Tucker Watkins '78



Pastor Jerry Lynn '67

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