

## MEDICINE AND MINISTRY

After four years of attending seminary part time, middler M.Div. student Mary Louise Russell is now enrolled full time and having the best year of her life. A pediatric rehabilitation physician, Mary Louise left her practice last year and is devoting 12 months to furthering her education at PTS.

Mary Louise's background as a physician has given her a unique perspective on seminary education and her hopes for ministry. While still in college, Mary Louise attended a Sunday school for children living in a residential facility for the physically handicapped. "After my first visit, I could not speak about the experience. I was overwhelmed; there were 30 children in wheelchairs in the room. A message welled up from within me. I believe that the message was from God. I was to work with such children, but to do so, I would have to 'get serious' with God." Mary Louise returned to the facility and began the discernment process through prayer.



As she was nearing the end of her college career as a biology and chemistry major, Mary Louise knew she needed to make a decision about her future. Since her church did not permit women's ordination, she needed to decide between medicine and ministry and ultimately became a doctor. However, in the back of her mind Mary Louise considered ministry as a possible second career. As she advanced her career in medicine, Mary Louise continued to keep her Sunday school ties, which she describes as the joy of her life. She married 15 years ago and became a member of the PC(USA), which encouraged and nurtured her sense of call.

Mary Louise has been humbled during her many years in practice. "I realized more and more how God expressed His love for me and for the world in Jesus Christ. That has been an answer to the temptation to become angry, frustrated, or bitter by the human suffering which I encounter." She is grateful for classes such as pastoral theology with Dr. Andrew Purves—a class which has taught her that Jesus is already present with the person with whom she is to interact.

"I think that as a physician, as well as a seminary student, I am less tempted to regard people as only physical bodies or only spiritual beings," she says. Mary Louise hopes that following her year of seminary studies she will work again as a pediatric rehabilitation physician part time while continuing to pursue her M.Div. degree at the Seminary. Open to bi-vocational ministry, Mary Louise is planning to pursue hospital chaplaincy or medical missions as she continues to bridge the Word and the world.

Written April 2012

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