

## NEW DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY IS A WOMAN WITH A PLAN BY RICK HAASE

**Laura Ramsey** doesn't waste any time.

Fresh from three weeks in LaGrange, TX., (suburban Austin) where she attended the 2009 Youth and Family Institute CERT School, Ramsey has already developed and presented a one-year-long pilot plan to Divinity's Planning Council.

Make no bones about it.

With Ramsey, it's all about Divinity's youth.

"I'm looking to make (the) Youth Ministry (here) a ministry that is self-sustainable and (one that) can evolve with the changing times," she says.

She hopes to achieve a ministry that moves and empowers youth to:

- ↯ Define their spiritual gifts through training and self-reflection
- ↯ Foster faith between their home life and church life through spiritual growth
- ↯ Raise awareness to the true meaning of living our lives as disciples in Christ through their service.

So how does she hope to help Divinity accomplish this?

"By being more intentional about how we interact cross-generationally," Ramsey explains. "It's about taking the time to have a caring conversation...a five-minute conversation can do a lot."

She wants to put the youth at the forefront of ministry at Divinity, and help them to recognize and realize the gifts that they have.

"We need to recognize our youth and children as our most valuable members of the congregation and assets to provide 'a place of hope, healing and welcome.' I believe that all generations should embrace, empower and build up our youth. They are the Church here and now, as well as being the future of the Church."

The three-week CERT (Certification) School program was financed by an anonymous Divinity benefactor.

Ramsey, who joined the Divinity staff in November 2008, said she applies her most recent work experience -- two years spent in the Peace Corps --

to her ministry on Blossom Avenue.

After three months of training right out of Ohio University, where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, Ramsey spent 21 months in Topala, a village of 1,100 people in the Republic of Moldova in Eastern Europe.

"I kind of won the lottery," she says, perched comfortably on a chair in Senior Pastor **Doug Gunkelman's** office, her chestnut hair casually clipped up. "I got to dip into just about every type of program that the Peace Corps offers."

She was officially known as a "Development and Organizational Volunteer."

That really meant doing everything from organizing health expositions in the Moldovan capital, to teaching English, to co-directing and facilitating summer camp programs for disadvantaged youth. She also created a community center.

In case you aren't aware, the Republic of Moldova rests between Romania and the Ukraine.

"It's a tiny country about the size of Rhode Island," Ramsey said. "You can drive it in a day."

The Peace Corps experience was a good one for Ramsey. "It prepares you for a lot of things."

Her Moldovan stint was interrupted by a family tragedy.

Her brother-in-law, a police officer, was brutally murdered after she had begun to fulfill her two-year commitment.

She returned home for his funeral, and to help out and be with her family, but then went back.

Ramsey, 27, describes herself as "energetic, dedicated and passionate."

Gunkelman agrees with that self-assessment, and adds: "The thing I like about Laura is that she is so hard working. And the kids love her. That's what is most important."

Ramsey also brings to the parish experience working in the child care arena for the Pike's Peak Region YMCA in Colorado, where she and husband, Wes, an Information Technology (IT) Specialist with Progressive Insurance in Mayfield Heights, lived before moving to Cleveland in August.

Wes Ramsey was transferred here, but the couple also made the move north to be near family.

His parents live in Southern Ohio in the hamlet of Ridgeway.

"It's a farming community. It has one stop sign and no traffic lights," Ramsey said.

Her parents are divorced.

Her father, **Michael**, lives in Gambier, Ohio -- most notable to Ohioans as the home of Kenyon College -- where he serves as a minister at the Hopewell Methodist Church.

Her mother, **Terri**, is an elementary school teacher in Arizona.

Ramsey and her husband recently purchased their first home in Bedford.

They met in high school as participants in the All-Ohio State Fair Youth Choir.

"It was all because we both had sisters in the same class," Ramsey said. The siblings, she pointed out, "like to take credit for hooking us up."

And yes, both sisters were in the wedding when the couple married on September 2, 2006.

Ramsey admittedly has lofty goals for her new position.

"I want to be that authentic, available and affirming individual who helps them (Divinity's youth) find out what their faith means to them."

"It's all about relationships," Ramsey said.

She hopes to train youth and parents in Peer and Mentoring Ministries, and train youth, parents and elders in small-group facilitating, to foster faith in both the home and in the congregation.

"Be intentional about the time you spend in relationship with God inside and outside of the 'church box,'" Ramsey said. "It's o.k. for your children and youth to see you really speak with God. It's contagious." And, she advises: Entertain questions and keep an ear out for the forming of faith statements."

Ramsey's immediate agenda includes continuing to get to know the members of the congregation to "form new relationships and strengthen others," and to carry out fund-raising and events already scheduled for youth and their families through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) National Youth Gathering this coming July in New Orleans.

Then, next fall, she wants to form a committee of

adults wanting to work with Divinity's youth, meet with the Parish Youth Board and with the youth themselves to plan for 2009-2010.

That could also lead to the possible creation of a Divinity Youth Council, and outreach to Senior High School-age Youth who are not normally active within the congregation.

Professionally, Ramsey believes she is definitely on the right path.

"There is education in my future," she said, alluding to her desire to attain a Master's Degree in either Religion or Youth and Family Ministry.

(Whatever happens) it will be in God's plan," she said. "I'm counting on Him."

## REFLECTIONS FROM RAMSEY

**Name:** Laura Ramsey.

**Age:** 27.

**Residence:** Historic Bedford, Ohio.

**Occupation:** Director of Youth Ministry, Divinity Lutheran Church.

**Family:** Husband, Wes, an Information Technology Specialist with an east-side insurance company; Parents: Michael, Pastor at the Hopewell Methodist Church in Gambier, Ohio; Mother: Terri, an Arizona elementary school teacher; Sister: Natalie, a performer who travels throughout the U.S. and is a musical theatre graduate of Otterbein College; Brother: Jared, a member of the United States Marine Corps, currently stationed in Cape Town, South Africa, and heading soon to his next assignment in Germany.

**Favorite Food:** Eggplant Parmesan.

**Pets:** Two cats -- Aza and Tavi. Aza is "a simple girls' name in Romanian, while Tavi, short for Octavius, was the name of a Moldovan camp counselor befriended by Ramsey.

**Favorite Color:** Yellow. "It's bright. It's out there," she said.

**Hobbies:** Camping, Hiking, attending plays and musical theatre performances, and Cleveland Cavalier games. "We're huge supporters of the Cavs."

**A Really Great Evening to Me Is...**

camping...probably (in the) fall, out under the stars, with a couple of tunes...hanging out and talking about everything and nothing at all."

**What's in her CD Player Right Now:** (Carlos) Santana (The Soundtrack from) Wicked, Jesus Christ Superstar, and Brad Paisley.

Divinity brothers and sisters in Christ,

As March 1 and my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday bears down on me, I'm reminded of how Billy Crystal describes mid-life crisis in his movie "City Slickers." In that movie he spoke for many of us when he said, "value this time in your life, kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices, and it goes by so quickly. When you're a teenager you think you can do anything and you do. Your twenties are a blur. Your thirties, you raise your family, you make a little money and spend it and you think to yourself, 'What happened to my twenties?' Your forties, you grow a little pot belly, you grow another chin. The music starts to get to loud and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother.

Your fifties, you have a minor surgery. You'll call it a procedure, but it's a surgery. Your sixties, you have a major surgery, the music is still too loud but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it

anyway. Seventies, you and the wife retire to Florida, you start eating dinner at two, lunch around ten, breakfast the night before. And you spend time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering, 'How come the kids don't call?' By your eighties, you've had a major stroke, and you end up babbling to some nurse who your wife can't stand but who you call angel."

By the time you read this, I will have had ashes smeared on my forehead while being reminded from where I came and to where I shall return. So I nervously laugh at fellow baby boomer Billy Crystal's description of life, knowing that much of what he jokes about is all too real.

I will no doubt continue my nervous laugh on Sunday morning, March 1, when my friend and colleague, Pastor Steve Marsh will return to Divinity to share the gospel message with hopefully not too many embarrassing stories about me. On that same Sunday I'm looking forward to the return of the male quartet, "One Accord" from Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries and the 2100 Lakeside Men's Shelter. With Steve preaching and "One Accord" singing, it will be a memorable Sunday of worship and thanksgiving even though I will no doubt be dressed in black. After all from ashes we come and to ashes we shall return.

***In Christ, Pastor Doug***