

# Teach Religious Education? Why Me?

By Carmen J. Vignacci

The idea of me teaching in our parish Religious Education program was preposterous.

Sure, I knew the need for teachers was critical. I had heard our pastor, Father James Moynihan, mention it from the pulpit more than once. But, me? You might better ask me to bat against Nolan Ryan.

Besides, my wife already was a "CCD" teacher and how much could they expect from one family? And being the editor of a Catholic newspaper doesn't mean you know anything about religion.

Thus, I would have shrugged off the situation except for Eileen Slagis, the parish Religious Education coordinator, who applied a bit of gentle pressure through my wife.

"Well, why don't you consider it?" asked the missus after a talk with Mrs. Slagis. "But I'm trying to cut down on nights-out." I tried what I thought an effective line. "This is different," she rejoined. "But, me? They must really be desperate." Anyway, it came to pass that I was to teach 10th graders a course titled, "Jesus and You."

To be absolutely honest, I had substituted once or twice at the parish but the idea of taking on a class was new and a bit frightening. I had never even prepared a lesson plan.



The class, at least most members, was glad to stop for a photo.

But I was to share the course with Father Steve Kraus, and Mrs. Slagis got us together, for my benefit. He gave me pointers on the course, how to plan it and also a few valuable teaching tips. I still had questions.

"As you know," I said to Father Steve, "I am no theologian. Nor do I wish to spread false doctrine, ideas or anything like that. What happens if I get hit with a question I can't answer?"

"Just tell them you don't know," came the obvious reply. "They don't expect you to know everything. Then between classes, find out. And if you can, call the person that asked the question at home."

That kind of personal attention is great.

So, now to teach.

Frankly, I found the textbook somewhat pedantic, a little esoteric (I mean, who believes you can get teenagers interested in Kahlil Gibran at 8 p.m.), and not always geared to the teenagers as I know them. But then again, what do I know?

I believed, however, that if I were to relate to the class it would have to be on ground I understood. So, to get them interested in picturing Jesus the man, I used photographs of modern Israelis as contrast to the Holy Card depictions with which they were

familiar. It made for discussion.

I was never unduly worried about behavioral problems. I decided to let them know that I was taking the class seriously, so they would also. I let them know at the beginning of class that if we proceeded on course there would be a chat break halfway through.

But I also made the mental note that these kids had already put in a full day at school. And, in some cases, had come straight to religion from after-school sports practice.

The kids? Well, they were beautiful. They tried. Remember, they were af-

flicted with my shortcomings as a teacher but they pitched in to make the classes as productive as possible.

Actually, I had three sets of classes; we changed every six weeks and I had quarter off. With a couple of the classes, I took informal polls. One of my questions was, "Why do you come to Religion Education?"

Now, teenagers are often painfully honest and the consensus was because their parents made them. But there were other reasons — "To know more about my religion," "To socialize," "To discuss interesting topics."

"How could we do it better?" was another of my questions. More class discussion was number one on that chart. And, although some mentioned movies as a teaching aid, others rejected them "because they put you to sleep."

I really can't attest that my students learned anything new about Jesus through my efforts, but I know that I got a little closer to Him through the students.

In all, it was, as Father Moynihan had offered in one of his sales pitches, a rewarding experience. I'm going to try again, if they'll have me.

And, the moral of this story — if you have the opportunity, don't pass it up.

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Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

## God Answers All Sincere Prayers

Dear Father Hohman,

I am Sandra P. Sta. Maria and I would like to ask for your advice regarding this matter:

I have a patron saint and I made a promise to spread devotion to him in this place. His name is St. Pancratius, patron saint of people

seeking for a job. I came here to the United States from the Philippines, as a tourist, looking for a job. I made a promise that if I can have my visa converted to a Working Visa so I can find a job, I'll spread devotion to him. My visa has just been converted and now I have a very good job.

I would like to fulfill my promise to him. Please advise me on how I can make this possible.

Thank you very much for

your kind consideration.

(Signed)  
Sandra P. Sta. Maria

Dear Sandra,

Frankly I had no idea that St. Pancratius was the patron saint of people seeking a job. But your letter does offer the opportunity of reviewing the Church's attitude toward saints and their place in our lives. Saints are of course people who are in intimacy with God and as such carry, according to the Church's consistent teaching through the centuries, an intercessory power. To attribute power of one kind or another to this or that particular saint is an invention of our own and not an assignment delegated by

God. When we pray for specific things like a job we are not making demands on God and certainly not on His saints who are quite incapable of granting our requests apart from their intercession with God. We are expressing our needs in the most concrete form that we know and expressing our complete dependence on God. It is in the context of that need and that dependence that God will answer our prayers. The answer may not be precisely what we thought we wanted but there definitely will be an answer. God will not leave us alone if we pray to Him sincerely either directly or through the intercession of one of the saints.

Most of us need to learn to pray a prayer of dependence and humble submission to the will of God more and more, so that His will for us will be the guiding factor in our lives. Many people have been crushed and alienated from the faith because of what they regarded as God's refusal to answer their prayers. We are not God's boss. We belong to Him.

## Deaths

### George Sullivan, Priest's Brother

Mass of the Resurrection was celebrated Tuesday, April 7, at Mother of Sorrows Church for George P. Sullivan who died, at the age of 66, on Good Friday, 1980.

Mr. Sullivan's brother, Msgr. Joseph P. Sullivan, pastor of Holy Family Church

in Auburn, was among those who concelebrated the funeral liturgy. He was joined by Father George Wood, Father Elmer Heindl and Father John O'Malley.

A graduate of Aquinas Institute, Mr. Sullivan was a

Post Office worker for more than 30 years. He is survived by his wife, Pearl Knitter Sullivan; two other brothers, John of Olean and Bernard of Syracuse; a sister, Mary Sullivan Carey of Rochester, and several nieces and nephews.

### Sr. M. Kiefer, SSND

Sister Mary Ludwig Kiefer of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who taught in the Rochester Diocese for 40

years, died on Holy Saturday evening after an illness of several months. She was 96 years old.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated April 9, 1980 at the Notre Dame Motherhouse in Wilton, Conn. She was buried at the order's plot in Bethel, Conn.

Sister Mary Ludwig entered the order in 1910 from her home parish at St. Joseph's on Franklin Street. In addition to her years in Rochester, where she taught at Holy Redeemer and Holy Family, she also served in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York City,

Brooklyn, and in Buffalo.

She retired about 15 years ago to the Holy Family Convent on Jay Street where she lived until she was transferred to the School Sisters of Notre Dame Health Center in Wilton several weeks ago.

Sister Mary Ludwig is survived by two nieces, Ruth and Rita Kiefer, and three nephews, Lawrence, Louis and Rene Kiefer of Rochester.

A Memorial Mass for Sister Mary Ludwig will be celebrated at Holy Family Church on Tuesday, April 22, at 7:30 p.m.

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**Quiz on Page 11**  
**PUZZLE ANSWERS FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 1980**  
I. 1. Tiberias 2. fish 3. faith 4. health 5. sand 6. ears 7. stony 8. cliff 9. too 10. tend 11. had 12. wed  
Key Passage I. "Cast the net off to the starboard side," he said "and you will find fish."  
II. To this, Peter and the apostles replied: "Better for us to obey God than men! The God of our fathers has raised up Jesus whom you put to death, hanging him on a tree."  
III. I, John, had a vision, and I heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, thousands and tens of thousands.