

A spark of light to grow by

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

"Crises always happen at 11:30 at night" for college students, said Sister of St. Joseph Jane Pitz. So, as a campus minister, she chose to have her lifestyle "dictated by that of the students," sleeping when they slept and ready to listen whenever they needed her. But it was always "an abrasive thing," she added.

For 10 years Sister Pitz was a campus minister at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana where she now is rector of a graduate women's residence.

What brings students to a campus minister?

Sometimes they are questioning the value of their studies, Sister Pitz said. This often happens when students are fatigued after a period of working very hard. They begin to doubt that their studies have anything to do with their real lives. Their common lament is that "grades, even an A, tell me nothing about myself," she said.

Most often "students come with a vague gnawing concern," Sister Pitz continued. They feel miserable but can't put their finger on the cause of their anxiety.

As a campus minister, Sister Pitz tries "to be a verbal mirror — to reflect back to students more clear-

ly what's going on." This requires "active listening," she said. It includes tuning in to students' feelings by being alert to their tone of voice and body language.

Occasionally a student, numbered by some experience, tells Sister Pitz: "I go to the library and I can't study. I go to the dining hall and can't eat. I'm having a terrible time sleeping."

If she thinks a student is on the verge of depression, Sister Pitz said she usually tells the student to take some specific steps. She suggests the student make plans for dinner with someone or find a new place to study. Her aim, she explained, is to help students get rid of the terrible feeling of powerlessness by taking charge of some area in their lives again.

In most situations, however, Sister Pitz avoids giving direct advice to students. Campus ministers "don't work out others' lives," she said. "We're there for support, to help people work out their problems."

For Sister Pitz, the death of a student is always the hardest part of being a campus minister. "It rips your heart apart," she said.

Yet every year at Notre Dame a couple of students die tragically — in an automobile accident, for example. Such tragedies "raise questions in people's minds about life

and death," Sister Pitz commented. Death reminds everyone that "life is limited in the physical realm."

Often campus ministers at Notre Dame respond to student deaths by holding a memorial service in Sacred Heart Church. People in the community "need to gather and express how they feel," Sister Pitz explained. "They need to cry and to hug each other, and having a ritual allows us to do that," she added.

Sister Pitz indicated that she places a high value on her years as a campus minister. Part of the reason can be traced to the students she has met. "I have seen such absolute goodness in students," she said. And encountering a good person "makes me reflect on what kind of God" we have.

Based on her campus-ministry experiences, Sister Pitz is convinced that it's when "we are immersed in pain not of our own choosing" that some really good things begin to happen. Often, she added, it's in the midst of pain that "something of God appears."

Pain can "spark lots of growth," Sister Pitz concluded.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

Dealing seriously with youth

By Father John Castelot
NC News-Service

When Samuel the prophet was looking for someone to replace the unfortunate King Saul, he was directed to Bethlehem. There he found Jesse, father of eight sons.

Before Samuel made his choice, God gave him the following advice: "Do not judge from his appearance or his lofty stature....Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Seven of Jesse's sons were presented to Samuel. They were strong, mature, poised, but Samuel was not satisfied. When he asked if there were any others, Jesse replied: "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep."

So Samuel asked Jesse to send for the youngest, whose name was David. "Jesse sent and had the young man brought to him. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The Lord said, 'There — anoint him, for this is he'" (1 Samuel 16:11-12).

Good looks are hardly adequate qualifications for ruling a country,

but Samuel, guided by the Lord, saw something in David. True, he was young. But his youth was no obstacle to greatness.

Samuel could have given David a pat on the head and sent him back to his sheep. But he didn't. He respected him as a person with potential and anointed him king.

David became the greatest king in Israel's history, founder of that dynasty from which the Messiah was to come.

It pays to take youth seriously.

One day a young man approached Jesus, in fact came running up to him, and asked: "Good Teacher, what must I do to share in everlasting life?" Jesus could have smiled at his innocence and evaded the question, but he didn't. He sensed the fellow's sincerity and idealism and took him quite seriously (Mark 10:17; Matthew 19:16).

Jesus suggested that the young man keep the commandments, to which he replied in all honesty: "Teacher, I have kept all these since my childhood." Then Mark tells us, "Jesus looked at him with love."

Yes, he was young and perhaps a bit ingenuous. But he was

serious and evidently eager to grow. He had potential Jesus could not ignore.

So Jesus challenged him to strive for the ideal. But this involved something the fellow had not bargained for. Since he was rich, he figured he could do anything Jesus might suggest. To his dismay Jesus advised him to strip himself of his possessions and rely, not on his own resources, but on God.

This was not exactly a call to poverty. It was a challenge to recognize that sharing in everlasting life does not depend on our efforts but on God's free favor. "At these words the man's face fell" (Mark 10:22).

The young man had ideals; he was thoroughly good and eager to be better. Jesus took him seriously and engaged in honest dialogue with him.

And who can tell if this response of the "good teacher" did not bear fruit later on, when the young man had more time to reflect on the implications of Jesus' advice?

(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)

By Father Robert Sherry
NC News Service

It was 8:15 Monday morning. Thunder roared and lightning crashed behind Jim Knox. His back was to the window, against which the rain was pounding like jabs and pokes against this teenager's emotions.

Jim had left home an hour before, again without breakfast, again without money for lunch, again without any sign his busy parents cared for him. Now he was in the waiting room of the principal's office, summoned "on suspicion."

Only then did he learn what the trouble was. Some neighbors had called the police to a loud party Jim attended at a classmate's home the previous Friday night. But an hour before the police arrived, he and Liz had left "to get away from the noise." Maybe the principal was going to blame him again as the "ringleader." The rain beat harder against the windowpane.

Jim reflected that he had never had a party at his house. "Your friends — if that's what you call them — would ruin this place," his parents said more than once.

"We don't trust you" was another of their favorite refrains, ever since his older sister years ago was caught smoking. She was 17 then, just a few days before her high school graduation. To teach her a lesson, her parents refused to attend the ceremony.

As lightning struck just outside the window, the florescent lights went off in the waiting room. The secretary jumped in her chair.

"When I have children, they're going to trust me," thought Jim. "I'm going to be honest with them, tell them I'm not perfect. They'll know it anyway. They're going to know I was senior class president. But they're also going to know that I didn't get along with my sister all the time, that I flunked geometry and that I hurt inside because my parents didn't trust me."

The lights came back on in the room.

Looking up, Jim saw a plaque next to the crucifix on the wall behind the secretary's desk. It read: "It's

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