

Religious diversity can nurture faith

A few weeks ago, my husband, Joe and I watched the Rugrats' Passover Special on the Nickelodeon channel with our son, Bobby, and our daughter, Teresa. When the program was over, Bobby asked, "Aren't we just a little bit Jewish, Mom?"

I told Bobby that one of his uncles is Jewish and two of his cousins are part Jewish, but he is Catholic.

"I know I'm Catholic, but I really want to be Jewish too," he said.

Bobby's desire not only comes from the fact that his favorite cartoon characters are Jewish, but also because he attends a public school where two of his close friends and his former kindergarten teacher are Jewish. During his school's winter sing-along, there were songs, stories, and poems about Christmas, Hanukkah, Los Posados and Kwanza. There were also Asian and Native American stories and songs, reflecting the wonderful diversity of religions and cultures of all the students.

I've heard it said on more than a few occasions that all this exposure can confuse children or weaken their faith. It's too bad some people feel this way. Aren't we confident enough in our own religion to expose our children to what others believe? Do we lack knowledge of our religion or fail to live out our roles as teachers of the faith? Do our children see that our faith is at the center of who we are and what we're about? When children have a strong understanding of their faith, they won't be confused about their faith but there's a good chance they will be curious about other faiths.

We live in a world where people have been persecuted and wars have been waged over religious hatred and intolerance. When I read about another bomb being set off in the Middle East or Northern Ireland, I find my son's interest in other religions refreshing and hopeful. We have a



family matters

BY ELLEN MARX

ways to go not only in the far corners of our world but in our local communities as well.

Although there have been significant advances in interfaith dialogue and in collaborative efforts among different faith groups, our religious differences can still divide us. Many of us don't know a whole lot about what Jews, Muslims, Protestants or Hindus believe. Often what we know about other faiths isn't accurate.

We are fortunate in our country that we don't live with the daily fear of being physically harmed because of the religious labels we wear. But we have our subtle ways of allowing the stereotypes, the mistrust and the judgments to take root in our hearts and divide us from people of other faiths. Without question, we have a responsibility to speak out whenever our religion is being attacked or unfairly depicted. But we also have a responsibility to teach our children to love and respect people of other religious traditions and to gather with other Christians united in the bond of Jesus.

Seven years ago I became friends with Fran, a woman in my neighborhood and the mother of three children who happens to be Protestant. We discovered how important faith was to both of us and to our families. For the first time, I experienced a friendship that was founded on faith.

Over the years, we shared so much about our different faiths and the misconceptions we had about each other's religion. Fran's prayers and words of God's love helped me through some of my most difficult hours. Her unshakable faith and knowledge of the Bible have deeply enriched my spiritual life.

During the many conversations I had with Fran, I often felt that God was smiling on us, pleased that we transcended the stereotypes and instead focused on what united us in our faith. I am a better Catholic because of Fran's love and example.

For me, having a friend who is Catholic is a bit like putting on a pair of old shoes. They're comfortable. They feel right. We've walked on familiar and common ground together for years. Meeting a friend who isn't Catholic may be more like buying a pair of new shoes. At first they might be uncomfortable. They may be a style or color that we normally wouldn't buy. We're unsure how they'll look on us. I believe God is telling us we need to wear both kinds of shoes on our journey of faith. We need the loving and mutual support of our family of faith — its beliefs, traditions and values we have known and loved for years. But we also need the richness of other religions and cultures that reflect the diversity of the world God created.

The most effective way we can work toward the unity that God wishes for all the world's people is to be a shining example of God's love in the way we treat all people rather than claiming religious superiority. And one of the first places we begin this is by teaching through word and example to be respectful of the many ways people search for God in our world.

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

Films feature fine sea tales

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Theatrical movies on video have a USCC classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating.

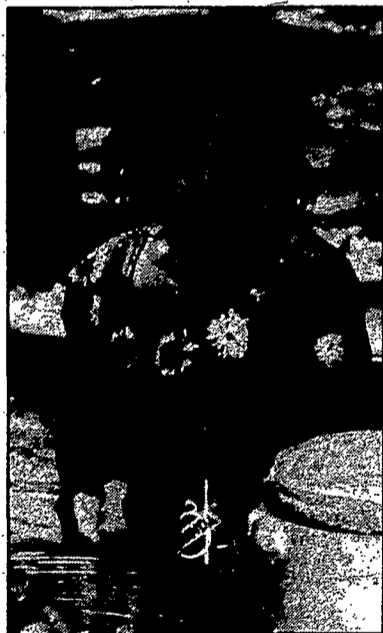
The Secret of Roan Inish

Wispy Irish tale in which a young girl (Jeni Courtney), whose baby brother had been carried off to sea from the island of the title, hears the legend of an ancestor who married a Selkie, a creature half-woman, half-seal, and becomes convinced her brother is still alive. John Sayles capitalizes on a fine Irish cast, lyric locales and moody seascapes to create a compelling fantasy about the bonds of family, the mysteries of nature and the power of the human imagination. A youngster in perilous circumstances and a wee bit of profanity. USCC classification: A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

The Little Mermaid

Disney animated feature adds a hopeful, happy ending to the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale about a feisty mermaid (voice of Jodi Benson) who falls in love with a human prince. The characters are delightful, the music is exhilarating and the underwater animation is magical. USCC classification: A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.

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Share a Great Compassion



Sr. M. Brigida
Native of: Chicago, Illinois
Prior Experience: Medical Technologist

My discovery of my vocation was gradual. It began with a growing desire to spend my whole life loving and serving God and assisting in the salvation of men. While my work was honest and good, I felt I was called to more direct service to others, and a much deeper prayer life. After praying to the Holy Spirit for guidance and the grace of trust, and investigating several communities, I knew God was leading me to the Hawthorne Dominicans.

In God's will is our peace; I wish no other life than the one God has offered me in the precious gift of my vocation.

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