

# Lessons learned from Mister Rogers



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

## The Moral Life

pute the importance of those words. Neither will those who believe in the doctrine of creation.

Mister Rogers also did much to show us what it means to live in a neighborhood. We'll meet all sorts of people that are different from ourselves. We might not like them, and we might feel threatened by them, but that doesn't mean we are unconnected. Mister Rogers always looked for ways to be a good neighbor to others, and to let others move from being strangers to becoming neighbors.

It is significant that as an ordained Presbyterian minister he chose the medium of television for his message rather than the pulpit. He showed us that human neighborliness stretches beyond the streets near us to the whole world, and even in this expanded world we can belong to a neighborhood.

I'm very weary of thinking about the world's current crises. Instead, I offer a reminder of this one man who thought speaking to children about things that matter was a vocation worthy of his whole life. I offer a word of thanks for his emphasis on how important each of us is, on how life really is a matter of becoming neighbors and shaping neighborhoods. And finally, I can't help imagining how much he must be enjoying his new neighborhood.

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If one wishes to write a column about the moral life, this is the time to do it. We have crises everywhere. Nationally, we're involved in scandals in both the church and the business world. There are questions about cloning, stem-cell research and respect for human life. Terrorism continues, and the possibility of our country initiating a war against Iraq dominates the news. Locally there is discussion about whether one health-care system will "gobble up" others, leaving our community with no choice in health care.

Those are huge issues, but I thought I'd focus this week on an entirely different news item: the death of the Rev. Fred Rogers, host of the long-running children's television series "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood."

For most of my life I knew nothing about Mister Rogers, until last year when I traveled back and forth to teach a course at our Albany extension site, accompanied by one of our Syracuse students.

In our travels, Tom told me of his admiration and affection for — of all people — Mister Rogers. He told me about having grown up watching the program, how he came to love the music, how he once visited the set and actually met Mister Rogers. On one trip we even listened to a tape of songs from the show, and he always had a few insights from Mister Rogers.

In a world dominated by

the significant and distressing issues we find before us, I thought I'd focus for a minute on Mister Rogers. It may seem simple to apply something — from Mister Rogers to the big stories of today, but there are connections.

For one thing, even though he was talking to a very young audience, Mister Rogers never pretended that bad things don't happen. His show included references to death, divorce, disagreement and disappointment. He remained simple and optimistic, but was also realistic in acknowledging that when bad things do happen we can handle them. He showed his viewers that these things are part of life. We need a dose of that sort of realism today.

Mister Rogers had a core message of valuing the individual. He repeated this often: "There's never been anybody exactly like you before, and there will never be anybody exactly like you in the future. You're the only one. And you're really important." Few parents, educators or therapists will dis-



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

## More Letters

### God Allah.

The president's address is: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500.

Saddam Hussein's address is: c/o Representative Office of Iraq, 1861 P St. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036.

Our pastor wrote further: "... our Faith reassures us that we cannot underestimate the power of God's love nor the power of our own loving prayers ... and that we did not sit idle as passive bystanders."

You need not write a long letter. If you wish, make copies of this letter to send to Bush and Hussein, and encourage others to pray for them and to write to them.

Grace B. Carnes  
 Eagle Ridge Circle  
 Rochester

## See Iraqis as family

### To the editor:

I wonder if President Bush's wife and daughters were Iraqi and lived in Baghdad, would he be so anxious to invade? My point is that we all have family in Iraq — human family. Anywhere on earth there are fathers, mothers and children, we are related. I cannot understand why Mr. Bush seems ready to sacrifice hundreds to maybe thousands of innocent Iraqi lives — not to mention American soldiers' lives — to get one man. This is completely immoral, and Mr. Bush is supposed to be a Christian?

Daniel T. Quilty  
 Kosciusko Street  
 Rochester

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