



connect

A Newsletter for High School Religion Teachers, Campus Ministers, and Principals
Compliments of Saint Mary's Press • January 1998

featuring

“To Teach as Jesus Did”: A Teacher’s Reflections

Tim Keogh



“To teach as Jesus did.” It’s a phrase that must have been tucked away somewhere in my mind because it sprang to consciousness when I was asked to consider writing this article. “To teach as Jesus did.” What an awesome and humbling task!

You may recognize the phrase as the title of a 1972 pastoral message from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on Catholic education. I read the pastoral message more than seventeen years ago when I began my teaching career. Although I remember very little of the specifics in that document, its title inspires and motivates me as much today as it

did when, at the ripe old age of twenty-three, I was asked to teach my first theology course in the school’s Christian living department.

When I ask myself what it means to teach as Jesus did, three “answers” from the Gospels come to mind:

- Jesus taught people where he found them.
- Jesus taught with authority.
- Jesus’ teaching held the people spellbound.

I’d like to spend some time looking at each of these answers in terms of the challenges, concerns, and considerations they present to us today as we work with young people in our schools and classrooms.

Jesus Taught People Where He Found Them

“He . . . began to teach . . . in their synagogue, so that they were astounded” (Matt. 13:54). “Again he began to teach beside the sea” (Mark 4:1). “As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd . . . and he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

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in touch

Dear Readers,

We have increased our number of issues of *Connect* to three per year. This year we’re focusing on the three dimensions of faith community in the Catholic high school: our October 1997 issue featured *spirituality*, this January issue considers the teaching of *theology*, and the April 1998 issue will look at *service*.

I’m pleased to have as our feature article the reflections of Tim Keogh on the significant work of teaching theology (or religion, in many of our schools) to high school students. His thoughts lead into “from the classroom” pieces by three teachers on strategies they use to teach religion. It’s a source of energy to me to hear about the wonderful ways these teachers are

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"To Teach as Jesus Did"

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Clearly Jesus recognized a teachable moment wherever people were to be found. He met them where they were, rather than waiting until they came to him.

Beyond the Classroom Walls

I think Jesus' approach is important for those of us who teach religion classes to consider. We are not limited to the four walls of our classroom when it comes to what we teach. I would venture to say that a good deal of my teaching has taken place in the lunch line, in the bleachers at a ball game, on the stage directing the school play, or waiting to get to the soft-drink machine in the gym lobby after school.

Just recently I was walking in the neighborhood, and I ran into a graduate who, as it turns out, lives just a couple of streets away from me. We got to talking about what he was doing with his life. At one point in the conversation (I don't remember what I said to prompt this reaction), he turned to the person with me and noted, "See—he's still teaching me." The whole incident reminded me of the lyrics of a song from the Stephen Sondheim musical *Into the Woods*, "Careful the things you say; children will listen." In spite of their indications to the contrary, our students *are* listening to what we say, wherever it is that they hear us saying it.

The Environment of the Classroom

The classroom, though, is the place where we teachers meet our students most regularly. The guys I teach are pretty typical teenagers: they really get into "hanging out." Have you given any thought to the physical space in which you are trying to teach? Is it a place where your students can feel comfortable talking, discussing, and interacting with you and with one another? Is it possible for you to create the comfort of the lakeshore and the hillsides of Galilee?

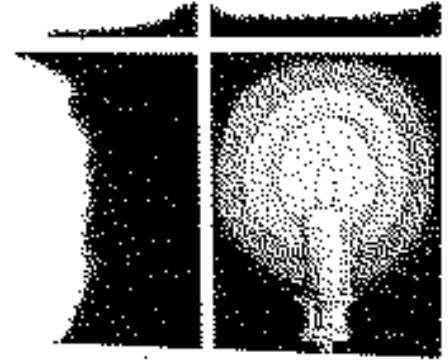
I hate desks, and I have hated them since the time I was a student in a classroom. One of my aims is to have a desk-free classroom some day. Right now I am down to sixteen desks, offering tables with chairs and a couch as alternative seating. I will admit that my principal is not totally keen on the idea, but he has accepted that it seems to work for me. Actually, it works for my students. It creates a space that allows them freer participation, and it establishes a physical comfort zone in which we can interact. It sets up what Parker J. Palmer calls "a space in which the community of truth is practiced" (*To Know As We Are Known*, p. xii).

If "Where" Is "All Over the Place"

Meeting students where they are, of course, does not refer only to the physical dimensions of where we meet them. For the most part, it is about meeting them where they are at psychologically, spiritually, intellectually, and developmentally. Thus, what do we do with students who seem to be "out to lunch" or at best "all over the place" when it comes to religious background and experience? My suggestion is to use what appears to be a problem in a positive way; don't let it become an obstacle.

Here's a good way to look at such diversity: Religious education, like formation, is a process. By our very name *catholic*, we should expect to find a variety within our students' experiences of faith and their understanding

(see "To Teach as Jesus Did," page 3)



in touch

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connecting their subject matter with the world our students live in, and I hope it energizes you, too. Incidentally, one of the pieces came from a suggestion made on our listserv, a free e-mail service that enables high school religion teachers and campus ministers from around the country and the world to communicate with one another (see page 7 for details). The listserv is a great place to share your ideas, and who knows, with your permission they might end up in *Connect*!

We at Saint Mary's Press are increasing our efforts to foster faith community in our Catholic high schools. Be sure to read on page 7 about the regional workshops for summer 1998 and about our vision paper on faith community, useful for faculty and staff development.

Minnesota is deep in the throes of winter now; the days and nights are frigid, the snow is piling up, and darkness seems to be with us more than light. But despite appearances, the Season of Light has arrived. Emmanuel! We are grateful for God-with-us, and especially for the ways that you in high school ministry witness to the presence of God in our world. Peace,



Barbara Allaire
Editor for High School
Curriculum Materials

“To Teach as Jesus Did”

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of it; the students are all *in process*, and we can't expect them to be anything but diverse. (Certainly the recent debate within the universal church over whether Mary should be given the title “co-redeemer” attests to the fact that Catholics do not all share a singular understanding of the faith.) For me, in the classroom, the variety adds spice to the journey and makes for much more lively and engaging conversations.

The diversity in my students also helps me engender in them a sense of respect for differences. They get the message that just because someone acts, believes, or thinks differently from them, it does not mean that the other person is wrong. If nothing else, it may help students to appreciate their own beliefs and trust their own experiences that much more.

In my school students come from a variety of Catholic and public grade schools, and their background with Catholicism varies considerably. So we require our freshmen to take an introductory course in basic Catholic doctrine to ensure that all students have a common knowledge base from which to operate. Also, we do not offer electives. This ensures that all students at a given grade level are getting the same content. This makes “theologizing” much easier.

Jesus Taught with Authority

“Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:28–29).

Walking the Walk

Last spring I was selected by the students of our school to receive the Professional Educator Award. The day after I received this honor, one

of my coworkers asked me if I was surprised. I responded that I was, because I did not sense that I was doing anything differently this year than what I had been doing in past years.

As I later reflected on her question and my response, though, I realized one thing that *is* different from when I began teaching at DeSales: I am much more authentic in my teaching today. In other words, these days I am more concerned with and committed to “walking the walk” than “talking the talk.” You and I know that teenagers do not respond in a positive way to a message that says “do as I say, not as I do.” I have more consciously and faithfully worked on “letting the Word become flesh” within my own person, and perhaps one fruit of that labor is that my teaching is being received in a way that it never was before.

When our students perceive us as mentor-companions on this journey of faith that we ourselves sometimes struggle with and question, what we teach rings much truer for them. When that happens, we have gained authority in their eyes. As an unknown author succinctly stated, “As a general rule, teachers teach more by what they are than by what they say.” I think this is especially true for those of us who teach religion.

A Solid Curriculum

For our authority to ring true for students, I believe we also need to have a solid theology curriculum, developed with the participation of teachers and of those in the diocese responsible for catechesis.

I had a very positive experience with this when I was responsible for overseeing the restructuring of the religion curriculum at a girls' academy where I taught. First, the mem-

bers of the department generated a list of all that we thought a student should be taught during her four years of high school. We then consulted our local bishop and the archdiocesan office of lifelong education and formation for their input on what needed to be included in the curriculum. From this process our department developed courses and created a scope and sequence. Texts were then chosen according to what would be taught in each course. What resulted was a well rounded and firmly grounded curriculum.

I favor such collaborative approaches to determining what we will offer our students. We need to make sure that the subject matter of our religion courses reflects the needs of our particular school's students and the concerns of the wider church as represented by our local bishop and his staff.

At the risk of stepping on toes, I'll voice a concern. I do wonder if by offering entire “specialized” courses in, for example, death and dying or personal spirituality, core content is being neglected or left out completely. I also wonder if our own personal interests or, in some cases, our comfort levels may be shaping what we offer as a curriculum.

Jesus' Teaching Held the People Spellbound

“And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching” (Mark 11:18).

Now I don't know about you, but most days I feel it is a major accomplishment to keep all my students awake, let alone to hold them spellbound! But I do feel that it is my obligation to continually

“To Teach as Jesus Did”

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develop or find ways to present the material that my students will consider relevant and to some degree interesting, or at least different.

The Fresh Good News

Jesus warns us in the Gospels about the danger of putting new wine into old wineskins. I think that in terms of teaching adolescents, we had better avoid putting *old* wine into *new* wineskins! You’ve probably heard this lament at some time during the year: “This is the same stuff we’ve been learning since grade school!” We had better work to make sure we present the “stuff” we’re teaching in ways that sound fresh to their teenaged ears.

Jesus used parables to excite the people’s hearing, and I find that stories really work well with my students, especially their own stories. One strategy I use in class is to invite stories from students that put what I am teaching into flesh and blood, making it real life for them. A student tells the story, and I relate it to the teaching. If no one can come up with a story, I tell one from my own experience, and, yes, I admit to an occasional bit of Irish embellishment if it helps to make the point.

My students spend a lot of time at the movies or in front of the television. I try to check out what they’re watching myself, and sometimes that is a real challenge in itself, given what passes for entertainment to them! Yet when I can bring something from their universe into what we’re discussing, they seem more likely to “get it.” Of course, I have been accused of ruining a good movie or TV show by looking at it through my “religion glasses.”

Fresh Methods

Over the years I have searched for methods to present material

in fresh ways, such as the following:

- using the process of putting together the school yearbook to explain the development of the Scriptures
- turning my classroom into a map of the world to explain the results of the unequal distribution of the earth’s goods
- using the movie *ET* as a source for teaching Christology
- transforming the school grounds into Mecca so my the world religion can make the sac pilgrimage
- teaching my socia classes with the d newspaper within arm’s reach
- ending each class with a prayer to offer God the “stu we looked at in class that day

The Mind-Heart Connection

For me, teaching religion is intimately connected with faith formation. It is important to engage both the mind and the heart of students I am fortunate that I get to be directly involved in the retreat program for our juniors and seniors. This enables me to connect what my students experience on retreat (which tends to be the heart dimension) with what we are discussing in class (which tends to be the mind dimension), and vice versa. It provides me with yet another

opportunity to help them see that what they are being taught in the classroom relates to their personal relationship with God.

“To teach as Jesus did.” It is my daily prayer as I enter the classroom. It is what I do for God, my part in building the Reign. It is what I hope to continue doing for many years to come.

Tim Keogh teaches theology at DeSales High



resource reviews

Mighty Media is a learning company focused on "Wiring Youth to the World." Funded by corporate and nonprofit partnerships, this Minnesota-based company develops Internet–World Wide Web services related to youth and education that are available to the public at no charge. To access these services, use a standard browser and visit their site at <http://www.mightymedia.com>. The following are some examples of their services:

Youth in Action Network is an interactive online service for youth who want to learn about and participate in social action, making the world a better place. Young people from all over the world come together to learn about, communicate about, and take action on such issues as the environment and human rights. The Youth in Action Network also sets up home pages (as a free service) on its Planet Youth site for K–12 student groups who want to use the World Wide Web to spread the word about what they are doing to change the world, and to enlist the support of others. New features include Action Alerts, the Social Action Calendar, and the Service-Learning Center.

Teacher Talk is an online conferencing system for K–12 educators. Teachers exchange ideas, debate issues of the day, and act as resources for one another.

KeyPals Club is an online pen-pal service for matching individuals locally, nationally, and globally. Individuals, classrooms, and organizations interested in sharing e-mail friendships and projects with others can submit conditions and criteria to search the Internet for other interested parties. Participants are from sixty different countries, and that number is growing.

For more information on these services, visit Mighty Media's web site (see above) or contact Josh Hawkins: phone 800-644-4898 or e-mail josh@mightymedia.com.

Choose Life, Choose Love: Sex and Catholic Youth (Tabor Productions); video program of two tapes and a study guide: Tape 1 with two 45-minute segments for adult leaders' sessions, Tape 2 with six 20-minute segments for youth sessions; purchase price, \$79.95.

Kieran Sawyer, SSND, has a credible way with young people. The videos show her sessions with adult leaders and with youth, which, along with the help of a study guide, can be the basis for your own sessions. The youth sessions deal with making choices, dating and the moral ideal, contraception and Catholic youth, the morality of abortion versus the legality of it, homosexuality, and choosing love. Sister Kieran does an effective job of communicating Catholic perspectives on sexuality with great sensitivity to her audience.

Purchase from RCL (Resources for Christian Living); phone 800-527-5030 or fax 800-688-8356.

“ . . . ”

Cardinal Bernardin: Listen to the Young

Before his visit to Denver in 1993 to meet John Paul II, who would address thousands of teenagers, the cardinal [Bernardin] was interviewed by Andrew Herrmann of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. "Today, sometimes people consider youth to be totally different from the way we used to be when we were young," he told Herrmann. "We're told that they're self-centered, concerned only about themselves. But, in fact, I have found young people to be very, very generous," he continued. "We just have to listen to them. . . . You know, we don't have all the answers. Young people have some answers, too."

Then he asked Herrmann: "Want to anger young people? Call them the *future* of the church. They are also the present and that is something we have to acknowledge." (Tim Unsworth, *I Am Your Brother Joseph*, p. 98)

Institute in Pastoral Ministries

Interested in further education? Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, on whose Winona campus Saint Mary's Press is located, offers a Master of Arts or a certificate in Pastoral Ministries, which can be completed in three summers, with an intensive two-week residency each summer. Faculty with high credentials are drawn from pastoral and academic environments throughout the United States. The institute offers a sequential core curriculum, with degree-pursuing students taking six core theology courses, three pastoral skills courses, and three faculty-mentored courses in integrated pastoral research that are completed between summers.

For an application and catalog, contact Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, 700 Terrace Heights #60, Winona, MN 55987; phone 800-635-5987 or 507-457-7500.

from the classroom

Methods That Tune In to the Students' World

Using the Media

Jack Kelly, who teaches religious studies at Saint Albert High School in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, offers us thoughts on how to engage students, using the contemporary media that are so familiar to them.

The textbook, chalkboard, and teacher remain valued components of religious education, but teachers also have to be able to use media technology to capture the interest and imagination of our students, who are immersed in a culture that is highly technological.

The following are some assignments that could be used in a unit on the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke. They could be adapted to other scriptural study topics as well. In one form or another, I have used each of them, often with astonishing results.

Songs. List four major themes of the infancy narratives. For each theme, find five contemporary songs that express the theme in modern terms. For each song submit the title, the artist, the album it is from, and some of the words that link the song to the scriptural theme.

Web sites. The infancy narratives are set in a certain place and time. Locate four web sites that give the history, geography, or politics of the time of Jesus' birth. Submit notes you have taken from each site. In a one-page essay, use your own words to describe the life of the people at the time of Jesus' birth.

TV news. Each of the infancy narratives gives a rich account of Jesus' birth. In each narrative we meet many people, some named and some not named, who were there. Play the part of a roving reporter with Eyewitness News, and

interview some of the characters about what they have witnessed. Present a ten- to fifteen-minute videotaped interview with at least five different people who were involved in the momentous events.

Movies. Numerous feature films, both religious and secular, have depicted the birth of Jesus and the meaning of Christmas (e.g., *Jesus of Nazareth*, *Scrooged*, and *Miracle on 34th Street*). Using a guidebook on videos, choose one religious and one secular film about Christmas. View them both. Compare and contrast them either in poster form or through a PowerPoint presentation.

Chad Steimle, who teaches religion at Assumption High School in Davenport, Iowa, shared on our listserv (see page 7 of this issue) the following suggestions for using media to teach the Ten Commandments.

Music. Have students put the Ten Commandments to music. The best I've seen was when students used the music and rhythm for "The Ants Go Marching One by One." Not only did they include all the Commandments, but they also worked a little with the meaning of some of them as they tried to get them to fit the rhythm.

Media tracking. Have students check out TV news and shows or other media and keep track of how many times they observe each Commandment being violated. Once again, this will help students look for the meaning of the Commandments. This assignment could also lead into a good discussion of which Commandments are broken most often, which ones the media highlight, and so on.



Using Family Rituals to Teach Sacraments

Cynthia Cameron teaches religion at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School in Washington, D.C. She offers the following method for introducing students to the role of ritual in the sacraments.

1. Begin with the following homework assignment: Come up with at least one action that your family uses to celebrate some event every year—for example, reading "The Night Before Christmas" on Christmas Eve, looking at old photos on a family member's birthday, or sharing a meal with family and friends on Thanksgiving.

2. The next day have the students describe their family tradition without discussing the meaning behind it. ("We always look at our old baby pictures on our birthday.") As each student presents his or her family ritual, have the other students try to guess what that ritual celebrates or why it has meaning to that particular family.

3. After each student has had a chance to share, lead into a discussion of the ritual actions of the church and their meanings. Have the students identify some of the ritual actions of our liturgy, such as reading from the Scriptures, sharing the Eucharist, and praying and singing together. Then ask them why we do these things: Why do we

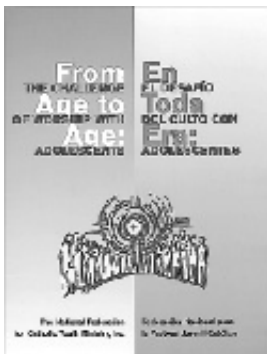
(see *Classroom*, page 8)

from the press



Guided Meditations for Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost, another in the popular series of meditations by Jane E. Ayer,

is now available. The meditations (on the themes of Desert Surrender, Promise Keeping, Why Are You Crying? and On Fire) are available on audiotape (\$9.95) or compact disc (\$14.95), each of which contains high-quality recordings of the meditation scripts with original background music. A leader's guide (\$9.95) contains the scripts and directions for preparing for and following up the meditations.



From Age to Age: The Challenge of Worship with Adolescents is a document published by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Min-

istry (NFCYM) and printed and distributed by Saint Mary's Press. English and Spanish versions are contained in one book. The price is \$9.95.

To place an order, write, call, or fax the Orders Department, Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987; phone 800-533-8095; fax 800-344-9225.

Services

A Listserv for Religion Teachers and Campus Ministers

Our listserv has been active lately as high school religion teachers and campus ministers jump into e-mail discussions about matters of

interest to them. The exchange has been fun, supportive, and enlightening. Want to join in? It's FREE! Just send an e-mail to *CHSRCTM@press.smp.org* and write "subscribe" in the subject line. For more information, visit our web site at <http://www.smp.org>.

Faith Community Workshops

Our workshop on "The Catholic High School as Faith Community" has been offered here on the campus of Saint Mary's University in Winona, Minnesota, for the past three summers. We love to host it in our own backyard, but we want to make it more accessible and give other "backyards" a chance. So in addition to the **Winona workshop on 9–12 July 1998**, we will hold workshops on both the East Coast and the West Coast, using a different leadership team in each region. The **West Coast workshop will be 18–21 July at Serra Retreat, Malibu, CA**. The **East Coast workshop will be 13–16 August at Loyola Retreat House, Morristown, NJ**.

A brochure giving details of all three offerings will be sent to religion department chairs, campus ministers, and principals in January. The cost of the Winona workshop will be \$300; the cost of the East Coast and West Coast workshops is \$350 each. Scholarships are available based on need. For more information, contact Shirley Kelter at 800-533-8095, or e-mail her at skelter@smp.org.



Incidentally, we sent three complimentary copies of a vision paper in booklet form, with the same title as the workshop, to all the Catholic high schools last

August. A number of schools have ordered additional copies (\$5.00 each) for staff development. The booklet was written by Kevin LaNave, one of our workshop leaders who teaches religion and coordinates the service program at Cathedral High School in Saint Cloud, Minnesota.

Request for Teen Stories

We are heading into publishing our fourth volume of *Stories by Teenagers*, and we need your help. The first three volumes—*I Know Things Now*, *Friends*, and *Finding Hope*—gave dozens of Catholic high school students a chance to tell their personal stories and to inspire thousands of readers. For this fourth volume, we would like first-person stories that answer the question, "**What has been an important experience for you of God's presence or absence?**"

The stories may be funny or serious, but they should be honest and authentic and come from the real life of the student. They need to be about five hundred words long, or two double-spaced typed pages, and they should dramatize through a specific incident the experience the student has had of God's presence, the experience of God's absence, or the response to an experience of God. We ask that no more than five stories be submitted from a school and that they be sent by the teacher(s). The deadline for submissions is **1 March 1998**. A letter describing the requirements has gone out to all religion department and English department chairs. For more information or for a duplicatable permission form, contact Carl Koch, 800-533-8095, or e-mail him at ckoch@smp.org. Thanks for your help with this project.

Classroom (continued from page 6)

read the same stories over and over? Why do we share a sign of peace? Why do we repeat the Lord's Prayer? Why do we share a common meal?

4. The preceding steps can also lead into a discussion of the meaning of the rituals used in other sacraments (e.g., weddings and baptisms), of the significance of daily prayer, and of the meaning of sacramentals (e.g., candles, genuflection, holy water).

Acknowledgments

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