



connect

A Newsletter for High School Religion Teachers, Campus Ministers, and Principals
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featuring

Catholic Youth and the Bible: Moving from Biblical Literacy to Biblical Spirituality

Brian Singer-Towns



As a college student back in the mid-seventies, I was invited to be part of an ecumenical student Bible study. Born and raised Catholic, I don't think I had cracked open a Bible more than two or three times as a teenager. However, I attended Mass regularly and during high school was even a lector in my small country parish. In this Bible study, my Protestant friends had to show me how to look up chapter and verse, which books were in the Old Testament and which were in the New Testament, and how to use the cross references at the bottom of the Bible's pages.

In many respects you could say I was functionally biblically illiterate. I had little knowledge or experience of using the Bible itself. Even more telling, though, was my lack of biblical spirituality. Despite my hearing the lectionary readings week after week, the values I held were the values of the popular culture; they were materialistic, self-absorbed, and shallow. My involvement in the Bible study group and my own personal reading of the Scriptures were key elements leading to my conversion to a Gospel-centered way of life. But it took involvement with a group outside the Catholic church to foster this growth.

We have ample evidence that biblical literacy among Catholic youth today isn't much different from my experience of twenty-five years ago. Most Catholic teens cannot name the four Gospels. The explosion of interest in the Scriptures by adult Catholics since the Second Vatican Council has by and large not really reached Catholic youth. For example, in a recent Gallup study, only 20 percent of Catholic youth, compared to 60 percent of Christian youth from other denominations, claimed to have ever read the Bible on their own.

Those of us ministering to Catholic young people must become more intentional in fostering biblical literacy and biblical spirituality. We are supported in this by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), who in 1996 surveyed the religious attitudes and practices of youth involved in Catholic youth ministry programs. One of the major recommendations of their study is this:

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in touch

Dear Readers,

The times in which we live are begging for a fresh start. If ever there was a moment for renewal, it is now, when all countries and peoples on Earth are focused on the amazing fact that we have survived a thousand-year chunk of history and are just beginning another. For us Christians this moment is not simply an artificially constructed calendar event but a time we invest with sacred meaning. It's a time for forgiveness, for letting go of old, stale grudges and agendas. It's a time for looking at "business as usual" (the cause of so much injustice in the world) with fresh, critical eyes, and changing the way we go about life together on this Earth as God's children.

Several years ago, anticipating the new millennium, we at Saint Mary's Press considered how we could contribute most significantly

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Catholic Youth and the Bible

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“Catholic youth ministry needs to be more persuasive in helping participants understand that reading the Bible is important for growing in their faith.” (Froehle, *New Directions in Youth Ministry*, p. 16).

Although youth in Catholic schools are probably more familiar with the Bible than those in parish programs, I think the bishops’ recommendation applies to all of us who minister to Catholic youth.

In this article I will explore the issues involved in fostering biblical literacy and biblical spirituality among Catholic youth. We at Saint Mary’s Press hope that these reflections will inspire discussions in your school communities.

The ABCs of Biblical Literacy

If we intend to affect the faith development of our young people, our ultimate goal must be to foster biblical spirituality in them, not just biblical literacy. However, biblical literacy is important because it contributes to that goal, though it is not an end in itself.

I call my guiding vision for biblical literacy the ABCs of biblical literacy. The ABCs stand for *access*, *big picture*, and *context*. Let me share this vision with you briefly and ask that you relate it to your own guiding vision or that of your school.

Access

Biblically literate Catholic youth should have quick and easy access to the Bible text. They must be able to find a passage by themselves. They must be familiar with the names and general order of the Bible’s books. They should know the major sections of the Bible (the Pentateuch, Historical books, Wisdom books, etc.).

Big Picture

To really appreciate the meaning of the individual books in the library that we call the Bible, one needs to be familiar with the overall biblical narrative, which we call salvation history. To know how each book’s story fits into that history is the mark of a truly biblically literate person. This familiarity does not come easily, but many resources and creative techniques can help teach it. It is a knowledge that grows with repetition and review.

Context

It is very possible for someone to have access to the biblical text, be familiar with the big picture of the biblical narrative, and still misinterpret God’s revelation in the Bible. Biblical fundamentalism is the prime example of such misinterpretation. Biblical fundamentalists have not learned to put the Bible’s stories and teachings in their proper context. To help Catholic young people avoid biblical fundamentalism, we must teach them to ask the following contextual questions when reading any biblical book or passage:

- What is the literary genre of this book or passage?
- What historical or cultural situation was the author of this book or passage addressing?
- How does this story fit with the rest of the Bible’s message or teaching?
- How does the church understand or interpret this book or passage?

In many ways Catholic high school theology courses are doing a wonderful job with the ABCs of biblical literacy. I have direct evidence of this from my own son and his friends. After taking a course on the Old Testament, they challenged me to a Bible fact competition. Displaying a wealth of biblical knowl-

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to renewing the world. We concluded that the most important thing we could do, within our mission of serving young people and those who minister to them, would be to help Catholic youth come to understand, love, and live the Bible as God’s word.

And so this issue of *Connect* focuses on how to bring the Scriptures to teenagers in a way that God’s word will take root in their minds, their hearts, and their actions. *The Catholic Youth Bible*, available in February, is our way of welcoming and bringing on the renewal we need in this new millennium.

May we all have faith and hope in the new starts that God gives us.

Warmly,

Barbara

Barbara Allaire
Editor for High School
Curriculum Materials



edge, they even managed occasionally to stump the “old man” (I take it as an affectionate term). I was excited and pleased to see them learning so much.

The challenge for Catholic schools is to keep our efforts at biblical literacy ongoing and not just part of one or two semesters of theology. I would suggest that for every theology course there be a Scripture component requiring Scripture study and reflection. I would further suggest that students be required to read whole books of the Bible, not just in their theology courses but integrated throughout the whole curriculum. Why not read the novelettes of Judith, Tobit, and Esther as part of the English curriculum? How about 1 and 2 Maccabees (books found only in Catholic Bibles) while studying the Greek and Roman Empires in world history?

(see *Catholic Youth and the Bible*, page 3)

Catholic Youth and the Bible

(continued from page 2)

Biblical Spirituality

“One of the great achievements of the Second Vatican Council was its emphasis upon the Word of God as central to Catholic faith and practice. Indeed, contemporary Catholic spirituality is at once a liturgical and biblical spirituality.”

—Cardinal Roger Mahoney,
Archbishop of Los Angeles

Biblical literacy is only the means to an end. And that end is fostering biblical spirituality. People with a biblical spirituality embrace Gospel values and lives them out in decisions both large and small. They strive to be faithful to God’s call, both individually and communally. Such people are in many ways countercultural, as they struggle to live out Jesus’ challenges to forgive “seventy-seven times” (Matt. 18:22), to “love [one’s] neighbor as [one-self]” (Mark 12:31), and to “take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

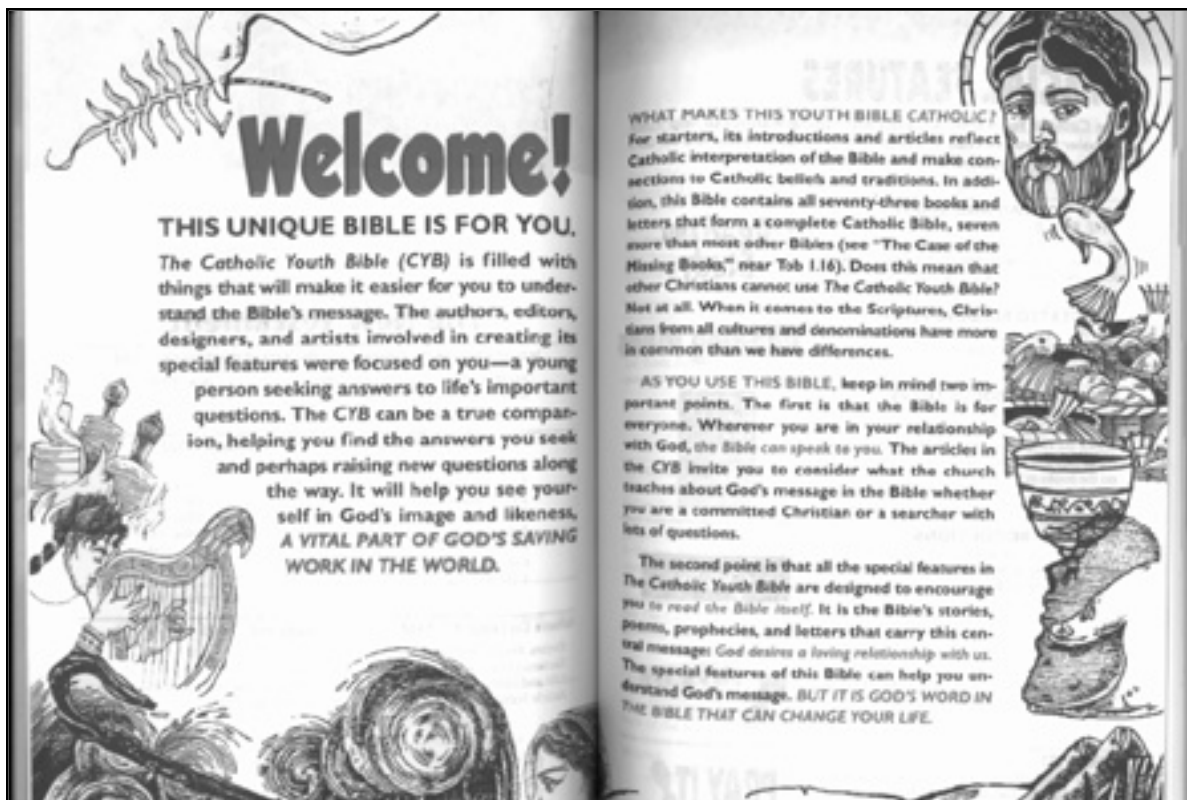
Catholic schools have done a good job of educating for biblical literacy. But that by itself is not enough. Knowing about the Bible is only one part of a holistic approach needed to foster biblical spirituality. We must also encourage students to pray with the Bible and to live out the Bible’s challenge. As whole people, our minds, hearts, and wills are organically connected. We must find ways to touch our young people’s hearts and wills with God’s word as well as educate their minds. This holistic approach is the sign of a community that is fostering biblical spirituality.

What can schools do to encourage biblical spirituality? Let me offer a few ideas to spark your own creativity. Many of these are borrowed from other Christians who have more practice at this than we Catholics. The first constellation of ideas has to do with infusing the school with biblical images and references. This could be as simple

as putting a biblical quote of the week on your school bulletin boards or web site. If you start the school day with a short prayer, be sure it frequently contains a biblical quote or story. Classrooms should also contain biblical quotes or artwork as part of the decor. What math lab would be complete without “*Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure; / not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing?*” (Jer. 10:24, emphasis added). Prayer services and retreats should highlight biblical themes, encourage biblical values, and teach biblical lifestyle choices.

Another constellation of ideas revolves around encouraging students to read and reflect on the Bible. It is especially important that they read whole books; after all, that is how the authors intended them to be read! Some schools give every incoming student his or her own personal Bible to foster Bible reading. If this is done in a special retreat or prayer service, it will

(see *Catholic Youth and the Bible*, page 5)



resource reviews

The Bible Library for Catholics, a CD-ROM for Windows and DOS (Liguori Publications): \$99.95.

This is a great reference tool for teachers. It contains three complete translations of the Bible (New American Bible, New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, and Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha) plus these valuable study aids: Greek and Hebrew definitions, *Nave's Topical Index*, *Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series: New Testament*, and Windows and DOS versions of the *Bible on Disk* program.

Order from Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057-9989; phone 800-325-9521; web site www.liguori.org.

The following CD-ROM and video resources, available from the American Bible Society, give marvelous treatment to three stories from the Gospels: the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, the parable of the prodigal son, and Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac. The CD-ROM version for each title includes videos, music, maps, and interactive features. The brief videos for each can be purchased separately.

The Visit (American Bible Society, 1994): 8-minute video with discussion guide, \$9.95; CD-ROM for Windows, \$29.95.

Re-enacted by Women of the Calabush, this video captures the spirit of the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary. The rhythmic African bass instills the joyous overtones of this encounter, which are rarely portrayed. The dramatic climax occurs with the exultation of the Magnificat. This resource is a tribute to women of the Scriptures and an appropriate multicultural interpretation of this Advent story.

A Father and Two Sons (American Bible Society, 1994): 10-minute video with discussion guide, \$9.95; CD-ROM for Windows, \$29.95.

Developed in a rural ranch setting, this contemporary interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son is presented as a music video. Blues singer Rory Block leads viewers through a ballad of the parable. The use of black-and-white photography is appropriate for the stark presentation of the tension.

Out of the Tombs (American Bible Society): 9-minute video with discussion guide, \$9.95; CD-ROM for Windows, \$29.95.

This award-winning resource offers a compelling way for young people to explore the word of God. Inspired by Mark's story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, it tells of a man who lives in fear and is feared by all—until his encounter with Jesus.

Purchase from the American Bible Society, 1865 Broadway, New York, NY 10023; phone 800-322-4253; fax 212-408-8765; web site www.americanbible.org.

Jesus: The New Way (Christian History Institute, 1998): six 30-minute videos, \$79.99 for the series.

Historian and biblical scholar Dr. Tom Wright takes viewers through a clear, accessible series of six videos (including dramatizations from the Gospels). The series looks at who Jesus was and is, from the vantage point of what Jesus himself meant and how he understood himself in his original context, in the setting of first-century Judaism. Dr. Wright distills the essence of his twenty years of acclaimed research into this series. In the current climate of challenges to the divinity of Jesus posed by members of the much-publicized Jesus Seminar, Wright is known for his historically informed, balanced, orthodox perspective on the question of Jesus' identity. An excellent resource, appropriate for eleventh or twelfth grade high school students through adults.

Purchase from Vision Video, 2030 Wentz Church Road, P.O. Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490; phone 800-523-0226; web site www.gatewayfilms.com.

An excellent resource from Catholic Relief Services for the coming Lenten season is **Food Fast**, a hunger awareness program designed for youth in grades eight to twelve. The program is a twenty-four-hour interactive experience for young people, providing them the opportunity to practice solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the globe who do not have enough to eat. In the last year, over fifteen hundred parish youth groups and schools participated. This year new interactive activities, worship suggestions, and advocacy opportunities are included. The coordinator's manual (with permission to photocopy everything in it) is free, as well as posters, buttons, and bookmarks. The materials can be ordered by calling 800-222-0025; Cheri Herrboldt is CRS's education project coordinator.

“ . . . ”

Everything We Need

The present . . . contains everything that is needed for lovingly beginning the next moment; it seeks only our own willing, responsive presence, just here, just now. . . . There are no exceptions—not in physical pain, not in psychiatric disorder or emotional agony, not in relational strife. . . . Love is too much with us for there to be any exceptions.

(May, *The Awakened Heart*, p. 110)

Catholic Youth and the Bible

(continued from page 3)

underscore the importance of the Scriptures in the life of the school. Some schools even create plans for which books of the Bible will be read in each theology and language arts class, ensuring that the students will have read a significant part of the Bible before graduation. Perhaps even give some thought to making the Bible itself the primary text for your Scripture courses.

I would urge you to consider sponsoring some faculty- or student-led Scripture study or sharing groups in the school. Many young people are eager for this experience—not all, to be sure, but enough to justify the effort. Such groups could use the lectionary or engage in topical study or book study. The crucial goal is that they make the tie between God's word and their own lives. (Interestingly, the ancient prayer form of *lectio divina*—literally, “divine reading”—is making a comeback, with many Protestant churches teaching this form of Scripture meditation to eager groups of youth.)

In making these suggestions, I am not advocating that biblical spirituality is the only part of our spiritual tradition that we need to expose young people to. But a growing consensus in the church—among both the leaders and the community at large—is that biblical spirituality is a part of our tradition that needs greater attention in our ministry with young people. Fostering biblical spirituality is an integral component of building faith communities in our schools. It is an exciting challenge that Catholic schools have unique opportunities to respond to.

Saint Mar y's Press Youth Scripture Resources

Saint Mary's Press is responding to the challenge of fostering biblical literacy and biblical spirituality in Catholic youth through the development of new Scripture resources for students, teachers, and youth leaders. You may have already heard of

our work on *The Catholic Youth Bible*, which will be available in February 2000. In developing this centerpiece of our new Scripture resources, we strove to create the best youth Bible possible to nurture the biblical literacy and biblical spirituality of Catholic youth.

Let me highlight a few of the features that make *The Catholic Youth Bible* unique:

- Helps like blind tabs for book names and an alphabetical listing at the back of the Bible make finding your way around the Bible very easy.
- Sectional and book introductions and an originally designed timeline make the big picture clear.
- “Did You Know?” and “Catholic Connection” articles provide contextual background for a sound Catholic interpretation of the Bible.



- *The Catholic Youth Bible* is unique in that it provides a holistic approach to biblical spirituality. “Pray It” articles help students make connections between biblical events and the liturgy, as well as invite young people into prayer and reflection.
- “Live It” articles call young people to live out the Word of God in their life issues and decisions.
- Multicultural articles show how people of different cultures within Catholicism understand and live out the sacred Word.

You can also be on the lookout for these other new Scripture resources from Saint Mary's Press:

- *The Catholic Youth Bible Teaching Activities Manual*, described on page 6 of this issue of *Connect*, provides you with enough activity ideas to allow you to create a course with *The Catholic Youth Bible* as the primary text.
- *ScriptureWalk Senior High: Youth Themes* is a manual containing a Bible study, an activity, and a prayer service on eight different youth topics.
- The upcoming volumes of our popular guided meditations series, *A Quiet Place Apart*, are all on scriptural themes and stories (images of God, covenant, and justice).
- Our companion books, *150 Opening and Closing Prayers* and *As We Gather, As We Part*, are biblically based and are good resources for class and school prayers, meetings, and so on.

This is just a sampling of our many Scripture resources. We hope that you will find these resources helpful in responding to the challenge of helping young people grow from biblical literacy to biblical spirituality. I invite you to share with us your insights, concerns, and questions on this topic. You can reach me at btowns@smp.org or by calling 1-800-533-8095. We need and value your feedback!

I thank my God every time I remember you, . . . because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1:3-5)

Brian Singer-Towns is a development editor for Saint Mary's Press and has worked in youth ministry for over twenty years. He is the general editor of *The Catholic Youth Bible* and has also written the Horizons manuals *The Bible: Power and Promise* and *Paul: The Man and the Message*.

from the classroom

Active Learning in Scripture Courses

Christine Schmertz Navarro

I first began using multiple-intelligence theory to respond to the variety of gifts in my students. For example, students who rarely participated in class discussion expressed themselves freely in artwork, music, or role-plays. I soon found that the use of multiple-intelligence theory and active learning strategies enhanced learning and theological reflection for all my students.

Theological reflection is not too weighty for high school students; it simply means that students reflect on their own life experience in light of the Christian tradition. This reflection process is especially important when teaching a class on the Scriptures. We can communicate important information to the students *about* the Scriptures, but it is of central importance that the students meet God *in* the Scriptures. The students must learn how to pray with the Scriptures, listening for the ways that God speaks to their hearts. They must understand how biblical themes, principles, and stories can help them make sense of their life experiences.

Active learning encourages such prayer and theological reflection by requiring that all students participate in the learning process; students cannot sit back and allow others to carry the discussion. Active learning can either invite students to reflect more deeply on their own lives or open the biblical texts so that students can engage more meaningfully with them. Using multiple-intelligence theory facilitates this discovery process because it challenges students to think in different ways. The following examples come from *The Catholic Youth Bible Teaching Activities Manual*.

- By reflecting on their own lives, students can allow God to speak to them through the Scriptures. The sixth chapter of John's Gospel includes the miracle of the loaves and fish, as well as Jesus' statement, "I am the bread of life." For this activity students bring in breads from around the world, eat together, and talk about the traditions associated with the breads. The discussion highlights human dependence on bread for survival, and sharing bread creates a community-building experience for the students. This activity is connected to an article in *The Catholic Youth Bible* about the Eucharist. When the students reflect more deeply on Jesus as the "bread of life," they are also invited to contemplate the sacramental mystery that nourishes us spiritually and builds us together into the Body of Christ.

- Before contemplating Ruth's moving statement of fidelity to Naomi (Ruth 1:16–17), students find song lyrics that speak of loyalty.

- To prepare for a study of the effects of jealousy in Saul (1 Samuel, chapters 18 and 19), students must find an object that symbolizes jealousy and explain their choice to their classmates.

Students need time to explore their own life experiences and "warm up" before they approach a passage.

These kinds of activities create a readiness in the students to receive God's word.

Some activities in the manual facilitate theological reflection by opening up the biblical text for the students. Here are some examples:

- An activity for the Gospel of Mark requires students to create small "flipbooks" for the different miracle stories. (Flipbooks are small books of pictures that closely relate to one another so that when one flips through the book, the illusion of movement occurs.) This is certainly an enjoyable and creative way for the students to become familiar with the miracle stories, and follow-up questions make this activity extremely valuable. Some examples: In which flipbook picture is the miracle actually taking place and why? In which picture is the miracle completed and why? Because of the separate frames in a flipbook, the students have to identify when the miracle happens and what causes the miracle. The process of exploring the answers to these questions requires students to look at Jesus and the people he encountered at a deeper level. The students must grapple with the issue of how God acts in our lives and how we participate in that action.

- In Genesis, chapter 12, Abram and Sarai journey to Egypt. Abram asks Sarai to pose as his sister to save his life, and because she does, Pharaoh's men recruit her for his harem. The students must write journal entries that reflect Sarai's experience and God's feelings about the situation. They must also write an apology letter from Abram to Sarai, and discuss the reconciliation between them.

- For the Book of Job, the students must test retribution theology by examining the local newspaper and observing whether the stories reflect that theology.

When the students move beyond reading the text and are required to engage with a passage actively, as in the examples given here, God can surprise them with insight.

The Catholic Youth Bible Teaching Activities Manual uses a variety of active learning styles. When the students become more accountable for learning, the teacher relinquishes the full responsibility of teaching. The teacher listens to students' experiences, invites students to go deeper, affirms spiritual growth, and facilitates discussion based on the gifts that emerge in the classroom. When true theological reflection is occurring, we can stand back in awe and watch God teach.



Christine Schmertz Navarro is the editor and coauthor of the *The Catholic Youth Bible Teaching Activities Manual*. She has taught high school religious education for six years and is currently spending time at home with her daughter, Francesca. She and her husband, Rudy, live in Tacoma, Washington.

from the press

Curriculum Materials

Celebrating Sacraments, our high



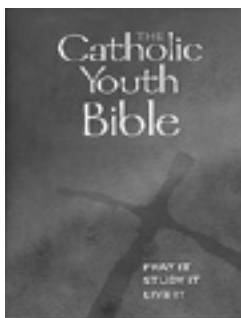
school course for tenth graders, will be published this spring in its third edition. The content of the text, by Joseph Stoutzen-

berger, has been revised to incorporate more doctrinal clarity while retaining its focus on how the sacraments relate to everyday life. A new, appealing design includes seventy-three photos and artworks by Catholic high school students and illustrations of the sacramental rituals by Michael O. McGrath.

The revised teaching manual, by Kathleen Hodapp and Joseph Stoutzenberger, features many new active learning strategies for teaching the sacraments.

For quantity orders (over \$200), the student textbook will sell for \$16.00, and the teaching manual for \$24.95. To order multiple copies or to obtain a complimentary review copy of the textbook and the teaching manual (available in April), contact the Orders Department, Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; phone 800-533-8095; fax 800-344-9225. Or visit our web site catalog at www.smp.org.

The Catholic Youth Bible, referred



to in this issue's feature and "from the classroom" articles, is being sent complimentary to everyone on our *Connect* mailing list, along with the

teaching activities manual coauthored and edited by Christine Schmertz Navarro. We hope that you will enjoy the many features of this Bible and its manual, both of which are described in the flyer mailed to all our *Connect* readers. Our intent is to provide you with resources that can be the core materials for a course in the Scriptures, using a highly engaging approach that draws students into reading the Bible itself.

The price of *The Catholic Youth Bible* for quantity orders (20 or more copies) is \$18.17 each for paper and \$24.67 each for hardcover, and for the teaching activities manual with a quantity order, the price is \$16.22.

Services

High School Web Site

Our high school web site, named **Faith Community Builders**, is being launched in January. The site offers these features:

- a searchable **library of annotated resources** (both previously published articles and strategies contributed by your peers in Catholic high schools)
- a listing of **annotated links** to, and reviews of, relevant web sites
- a **discussion forum**, in which any participant may initiate a question or comment within a given category, others may reply, and the discussion is organized by topic in a chronological thread

Come and see, get involved in **Faith Community Builders!** It's a great way to be nourished and to develop community with other high school religion teachers and campus ministers. Visit the site by going to Saint Mary's Press web site, www.smp.org, and clicking on the **Faith Community Builders** button.

Faith Community Workshops

Our workshops for Catholic high school teachers, campus ministers, and administrators continue to grow and evolve. See the schedule for this summer on page 8.

Beginning with the 2000-01 school year, we will be offering a one-and-a-half-day pilot program in a number of Catholic high schools around the country. The program, on building faith community in the high school, is designed for a school's entire faculty and staff. If you are interested in your school's having one of the pilot programs, or if you want information on any of the above summer workshops, please contact Shirley Kelter at 800-533-8095, or email her at skelter@smp.org.

Celebrate Girls and Young Women

March 25, 2000—the feast of the Annunciation—has been designated by the Vatican as the International Jubilee Day for Women. The team for The Voices Project—an initiative of Saint Mary's Press to nurture the spirituality of young females—has created a packet to help Catholic communities celebrate girls and young women on that day. The packet contains suggestions for a prayer service, a listening session, intergenerational service projects, and other ideas for celebrating the gift that girls and women are to the world.

If you would like a copy of this free packet, contact Marilyn Kielbasa at 800-533-8095 or mkielbasa@smp.org.

Faith Community Workshops

Our workshops for Catholic high school teachers, campus ministers, and administrators continue to grow and evolve. Here is this summer's schedule:

- "The Catholic High School As Faith Community"
 - * 21–24 July 2000, Morristown, New Jersey
 - * 31 July–3 August 2000, Malibu, California
- "Nurturing Spirituality with Faculty and Staff"
 - * 30 June–2 July 2000, Mundelein, Illinois

The cost is \$425 per person with discounts for two or more from the same school.

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The quote on page 2 is from a study cosponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Subcommittee on Youth and the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, *New Directions in Youth Ministry: A National Study of Catholic Youth Ministry Program Participants*, by Bryan T. Froehle (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, 1996), page 16.

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