



# connect

A Newsletter for High School Religion Teachers, Campus Ministers, and Principals  
Compliments of Saint Mary's Press • October 1999

## featuring

### Addressing the Needs of Young Women

Laurel Zimmerman  
with Marilyn Kielbasa

The voices of women have had a profound effect on the church throughout its history. The women who first experienced the risen Christ ran to the disciples and assured them that their hope was fulfilled and that this Jesus who had been crucified had returned from the dead.



Laurel Zimmerman

The message of young women today is also inspiring and hope filled. In twenty-four years of work with adolescent girls, I have experienced much hope, challenge, excitement, profound happiness, some sadness, and a little exhaustion as I have listened to the movement of the Spirit in their lives.

I have learned a lot about young women in those twenty-four years. And those women have been some of my most significant teachers. They have taught me about their concerns, their joys, their fears, their weaknesses, and their strengths. I have grave concerns about the life of girls. And I have great hope for girls and the difference they will make in the world.

Although many young women are content and uncritical of the culture they live in, some are deeply introspective about their role and place in the church and in our society. Some young women are able to critically analyze the culture, and others seem totally unaware of the issues. I believe the difference in their levels of awareness has a lot to do with how we educators and church ministers lead them and teach them to think.

When given the chance and the tools, young women easily see through the dominant culture in society as well as in their schools and parishes. Still, they feel pressured by its perceptions and expectations. For the most part, they are willing to examine the situations they live in and eager to make significant contributions and work for change. To help them do this, it is both appropriate and necessary for adults who work with young people to look at how the systems and organizations in schools, churches, and society in general create an affirming or demeaning environment for girls and young women.

My experience with adolescent girls has led me to ask questions such as these:

- How do teachers and religious educators perceive the emotional, psychological, and spiritual differences between young men and young women?

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- What are the critical experiences and contributions of young women in our churches and schools?
- What ministries can empower them and call forth leadership?
- How can the adults in their lives attend to their unique spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs?
- How can the critical issues in their lives be addressed, not only through guidance and counseling, but also through religious education and youth ministry?

I ask these questions amid tides of contradiction. What society says about the meaning of being a woman is not the same as what the church says. Young women today hear messages that conflict, so much so that the foundation of ministry to young women is the ability to listen to them rather than to give them more messages. Listening is the beginning of empowerment. Empowerment is the beginning of change.

(see *Addressing the Needs of Young Women*, page 2)

## Addressing the Needs of Young Women (continued from page 1)

### Two Key Issues

Two key, well-documented areas in the psychosocial development of girls and young women are the centrality of relationships and the desire to serve. Both qualities can be either gifts leading to wholeness and fulfillment, or obstacles leading to hardship and struggle. The difference lies in whether or not a young woman brings a healthy spiritual perspective to the issues. Our job is to help young women develop and nurture that perspective.

### The Centrality of Relationships

After many years of observing, interviewing, writing, and studying, I am convinced that the central source of self-esteem for young women is their ability to form, develop, and maintain relationships. They feel successful if they feel popular or well liked. They suffer significantly lower self-esteem if they have few friends, do not date, or are very shy. Relationships in a young woman's life—both same-gender and mixed-gender relationships—consume a tremendous amount of energy. Girls worry about and struggle with adolescent relationship issues beginning in about the fourth or fifth grade.

Training in spiritually based relationship skills is essential for both genders. In particular, effective religious education for young women must start with their focus on relationships, adding appropriate theological foundations and ministerial practices to their life in the faith community. An active faith life and a strong relationship with God can be a valuable anchor for young women.

These are some ways to bring a spiritual lens to the issue of relationships for young women:

- Help them understand how all relationships can lead them to God.
- Foster and support their personal relationship with God, at all times and in all ways.
- Nurture in them a positive self-relationship by affirming who they are and helping them embrace their uniqueness.
- Train them to think about the ethics and morality of all human relationships.
- Challenge them to a profound sense of respect for themselves and one another as creations of God. Challenge them also to live out of that sense of respect.
- Minister to broken and hurting relationships and help young women minister to one another.
- Share with them the gift of reconciliation and teach them to be reconciling human beings.

In my work as a school counselor, the recurring issues I see with young women have to do with self-esteem, broken relationships, inappropriate sexual activity, and violent and abusive relationships. The problems that arise in those areas often create depression, which statistically occurs much more frequently in young women than in young men. A religion curriculum that starts with a focus on spiritually based relationships and is presented within the context of a nurturing faith community will eventually deal with all those issues and bring wholeness and healing to young women.

### A Focus on Service

Research shows that girls, young women, and adult women need to be needed; they need to make a difference. They are nurturers and helpers by nature. In our schools and parishes, girls and young women volunteer in far greater numbers than do boys and young

## in touch

Dear Readers,

One of several exciting developments at Saint Mary's Press these days is The Voices Project, which aims to discover and promote ways of addressing the spiritual needs of adolescent girls. Members of the steering committee of that project, which is in its early stages, offer their insights and experiences in this issue's "Featuring" and "From the Classroom" articles.

Because we're on the eve of the new millennium and the Jubilee Year, it's fitting that several of the resources reviewed in this issue are about reconciliation and forgiveness, which is central to the meaning of the Jubilee.

May this be a time of healing and reconciling in your life and the lives of those you touch.

Peace,

*Barbara*

Barbara Allaire  
Editor for High School  
Curriculum Materials



men. They are music ministers, tutors, servers at soup kitchens, visitors to those who are older, and builders of homes for those who are homeless.

The drive to serve has a lasting and positive effect on our society. Many more women than men choose helping professions such as teaching, social work, counseling, and church ministry. But it also can have a downside. Professionals in those fields usually make far less money than do people with similar levels of education who choose to work in more lucrative fields. The situation sends a clear message

(see *Addressing the Needs of Young Women*, page 3)

## Addressing the Needs of Young Women (continued from page 2)

about what—and who—is valued in our society.

The need to be needed can sometimes have other debilitating effects on young women. They may be easily led into dysfunctional and co-dependent relationships, and they are more likely to stay in those relationships than are people who do not feel that need so strongly. They can experience signs of burnout from giving too much of themselves and not taking time to revive and restore their mind and spirit. They can be overused by peers and adults who come to rely heavily on their willingness to help. Finally, they are often unwilling or too intimidated to take on public leadership positions, preferring instead to work in the background.

As educators in a Christian tradition, we know that this tendency toward service is a gift that young women bring to the church and to the world. This gift needs to be celebrated and affirmed in our schools and other faith communities. It also needs to be understood in a healthy spiritual context by the girls themselves. Here are some ways to add a spiritual perspective to young women's inclination toward helping others:

- Help young women understand that all service is rooted in the Gospel. To love God and serve others is at the heart of the Christian vocation.
- Emphasize the concept of servant leadership. The most effective and authentic leaders are those who lead by serving. Service and leadership go hand in hand. Jesus is the perfect example.
- Affirm young women for the helping roles they assume.
- Point out that compassionate listening is the beginning of service. Help them develop the skills of active listening and accurate empathy.

- Create opportunities for them to debrief after both formal and informal experiences of service. It is as important for a person to talk about her experiences after a late-night, intense listening session with a friend as it is after a trip to a homeless shelter.
- Emphasize the importance of taking time for themselves. Teach them prayer skills like centering and meditation as ways of letting their souls be refilled.
- Help them recognize and deal with co-dependent situations in their lives.
- Teach them to set boundaries and to respect their limits.



### Focusing the Lens of Spirituality

As Catholic educators, we view all our students through the lens of spirituality. We understand that each student is first and foremost a spiritual being, a unique creation of a loving God, and a gift to the world. Gender is part of that gift. The suggestions I have already made can and should be integrated into the total community life of any school. They are simple ways

to respect and affirm gender differences when educating both the female and the male populations of the community.

Another way of addressing those differences is to offer gender-specific courses in spirituality. At my school, we offer separate courses in feminine and masculine spirituality, having been convinced long ago of the need to provide within our religion curriculum something that is built around the unique ways of knowing God as a young woman or a young man. Those courses explore personal spiritual growth, focus on relationship as a mode of God's love, and examine the Scriptures.

The women I know who teach courses in feminine spirituality are creating the courses as they go. Textbooks or other resources for the high school level do not exist at this time. Those people share ideas with one another in a variety of ways. They find one another at conferences, through mutual friends, and in cyberspace. The companion "From the Classroom" article by Julia Keller, in this issue, is an example of some of the creative ways that have been developed to address the feminine spiritual perspective.

The people at Saint Mary's Press understand that girls and young women approach spirituality in a different way than their male counterparts. They also see the need to address the unique spiritual needs of each gender, and recognize the lack of materials to support teachers and campus ministers in that effort.

### The Voices Project

The mission of The Voices Project, an initiative of Saint Mary's Press, is to significantly advance ministry to girls and young women, recognizing and valuing their unique

*(see Addressing the Needs of Young Women, page 5)*

## resource reviews

**Stand Against Violence**, a packet of materials and resources, is released annually by the Anti-violence Working Group, a coalition of national Catholic organizations. A new packet is developed each year in response to the U.S. Catholic bishops' call to focus on nonviolence during the week between Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday (January 15) and the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 decision legalizing abortion (January 22).

This year's packet will focus on the Jubilee Year theme of reconciliation and will include materials to help dioceses, parishes, and schools to work toward nonviolence.

The packet will be available after 1 October 1999 from the United States Catholic Conference (USCC): phone 202-541-3185; write Dan Misleh, USCC, 3211 Fourth Street NE, Washington, DC 20017; or e-mail Dan at [dmisleh@nccbuscc.org](mailto:dmisleh@nccbuscc.org).

**Catholic Update Video** is a series produced by Franciscan Communications of St. Anthony Messenger Press, which publishes the excellent *Catholic Update*, a four-page monthly publication on topics of interest to Catholics.

Several Catholic Update videos, intended for adult and high school audiences, consider the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. I viewed three—*A Walk Through the Mass*, *The Church Celebrates the Reconciling God*, and *The God Who Reconciles*. Each is about a half hour long and consists of (1) a story segment (a well-done minidramatization), (2) a witness segment (sincere and credible reflections of ordinary Catholics on their experiences), (3) a teaching segment (by Fr. Tom Richstatter, OFM, on the history and theology of the sacrament), and (4) a music video reflection (by composer David Haas with

a concert ensemble). For its story segment, *The God Who Reconciles* uses pieces from the video reviewed next in this article, *Pardon and Peace . . . Remembered*.

These videos are well worth the price of \$39.95 each. Besides being excellent for use in high school sacraments classes, they can serve well for faculty and staff formation. Order them from St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1615 Republic Street, Cincinnati, OH 45210-1298; phone 800-488-0488; web site [www.AmericanCatholic.org](http://www.AmericanCatholic.org).

***Pardon and Peace . . . Remembered*** was produced by Franciscan Communications, runs for 15 minutes, and costs \$39.99. In this production, an excellent short film seen by many Catholic young people in the 1970s has been updated and revitalized for today. The old film, *Pardon and Peace*, was a modern retelling of the parable of the prodigal son. Now the old

footage has been integrated into a new, contemporary version and shown as flashbacks of twenty years earlier. That's a fine way to breathe new life into a film that deserves to be seen by another generation of young people. The production is moving, engaging, and well acted. Focused on God's forgiveness of us and our responsibility to forgive others in turn, *Pardon and Peace . . . Remembered* would be a good choice for the Jubilee Year theme of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Order this film from Oblate Media and Communications, Videos with Values, 1509 Washington Avenue, Suite 550, Saint Louis, MO 63103-1821; phone 800-233-4629; fax 314-621-5810; web site [www.videoswithvalues.org](http://www.videoswithvalues.org).

***Bernardin*** was produced by Journey/Frost Productions and Family Theater Productions in 1998, runs for 57 minutes, and costs \$29.99. This public television documentary on the life and legacy of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin gives moving testimony to the grace that grew in the beloved church official. Following Bernardin's life and career is like studying modern Catholicism, because he was a leader in the major issues and developments in the U.S. church of the late twentieth century. The video could be useful in a number of high school courses: church history, social justice, lifestyles, sacraments, and ecclesiology.

When available, a complimentary copy of Bernardin's personal reflections in the last months of his life, *The Gift of Peace*, is sent by Oblate Media and Communications with the purchased video. The book is simple, profound, and eloquent. Bernardin's account of his reconciliation with a young man who wrongly accused him of sexual abuse is especially moving.



*Homecoming*,  
by Marion C. Honors, CSJ

## reviews (continued from page 4)

I imagine high school students would do well to hear that account just as it is written.

Order the video from Oblate Media and Communications (see the ordering information for *Pardon and Peace . . . Remembered* in the preceding review).

## Addressing the Needs of Young Women

(continued from page 3)

experience and spiritual perspective. Through The Voices Project, we hope to nurture the critical mission of listening to and praising the contributions of young women, at times in contrast with the messages of North American culture.

We recognize that similar efforts need to be directed toward boys and young men. But at least for right now, our aim is to offer direction, focus, and resources to those who have the daily task of listening to young women and empowering them to greater self-esteem, to a deep relationship with God, and to an acceptance of their vocation to make a profound difference in the world.

**Laurel Zimmerman, EdD**, is a guidance counselor at Cretin-Derham Hall in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and an adjunct professor of education in the graduate division at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. She is a member of the original steering committee for The Voices Project.

*Note:* To find out more about The Voices Project or to add your name to the mailing list, contact Marilyn Kielbasa at Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; 800-533-8095; or [mkielbasa@smp.org](mailto:mkielbasa@smp.org).



### Our Goal Is RBIs

Robert Bertram, who retired after fifty years of teaching theology, wrote to former students and congratulators the following letter, in which he reflected on the role of a teacher. Although his career was in higher education, his thoughts can be relevant for us in high school teaching as well.

Teachers are not in business to hit home runs. Our goal is RBIs. We are not soloists. Our students are already on base. We bat behind them and, if we succeed at all, we help drive them in. We score only as they come across home plate. What's more, if you've been teaching as long as I have, something else wonderful happens. (Notice, by the way, that to have taught for 50 years says nothing about whether the teaching was any good. As Peter Mead recently reminded me, "Our Lord, after all, brought it off in just three years.") But when you have taught long, the runners whom you once batted in are now far enough along to bat *you* in. Former students, like your own kids when they grow up, become your teachers in turn. Again and again I'm experiencing that blessing: students who teach me every bit as much as I may have taught them, students to whom I may have delivered the Message but who believe it more boldly, more cheerfully, more sacrificially than I. In fact, that's what you have just been doing with your recent encouragements, advancing this poky runner toward home. That, I count all joy. (Quoted in *Context*, 15 October 1998, p. 8)

### Woman Un-Bent (Luke 13:10-17)

That Sabbath day as always she went to the synagogue and took the place assigned her right behind the grill where, the elders had concurred, she would block no one's view, she could lean her heavy head, and (though this was not said) she'd give a good example to the ones who stood behind her.

That day, intent as always on the Word (for eighteen years she'd listened thus), she heard Authority when Jesus spoke.

Though long stripped of forwardness, she came forward, nonetheless, when Jesus summoned her.

"Woman, you are free of your infirmity," he said.

The leader of the synagogue worked himself into a sweat as he tried to bend the Sabbath and the woman back in place.

But she stood up straight and let God's glory touch her face.

(From Irene Zimmerman, *Woman Un-Bent*, p. 46)

## from the classroom

### Ideas for Teaching Feminine Spirituality

Julia Keller

In 1994, I started teaching a course on women's spirituality for seniors at Holy Names High School, an all-girls school in Oakland, California. Finding materials for such a class was a challenge. No textbooks or other resources existed that were appropriate for high school students. The materials I used in graduate school were way above the academic and experience levels of a seventeen-year-old girl. So through trial and error—and a whole lot of listening to my students—I came up with a workable curriculum to help girls think about the experience of gender and how it affects spirituality. What follows are a few successful activities from the course.

#### Popular Gender Psychology

A study of gender psychology is a great way to walk the students through the connection between experience, gender, and spirituality. Carol Gilligan, the author of *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, 1993), has done wonderful work in this field. In the classroom, we discuss professional researchers' observations about men's and women's experiences of life. The students then compare the theories with their own experiences. For example, we look at the theory that girls lose their identity during adolescence. The girls talk about whether or not this is true for them and their friends. We then wrestle with questions about how the loss of identity might affect the way we relate with God.

#### Modern Literature and Films

Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) and Dorothy Day's autobiography *The Long Loneliness* (Harper,

1952) are excellent books on the spiritual journeys of two very different women. Both books are also available in film versions. However, in the film *The Color Purple* (Warner Home Video, 1987), the treatment of spirituality is not as explicit as it is in the book. *Entertaining Angels* (Warner Brothers Home Video, 1996) is an excellent and engaging movie portraying Dorothy Day's life.

After we read and discuss the book or view the movie, the students write an essay describing the effect of gender on the spirituality of the main characters and relating their insights to their experience.

#### Women in World Religions

The students work in small groups to examine the roles of women in different religious traditions. Together the group members write a research paper and do a class presentation summarizing their work. Topics may include the different religions' attitudes toward women, the roles women play in worship, and the part of women in the leadership of the religions' institutions.

#### Women in the Scriptures and Tradition

Mary is the predominant female spiritual role model in the Catholic Tradition. Though she is indeed a wonderful model, other strong, holy women are out there waiting to be discovered by today's young women.

For this assignment, the students each research a woman of the Bible or a female saint and write a short essay. They also each present their holy woman to the class in a speech or a creative project.

The girls answer four questions in their research:

- What is the woman's story?
- Why did you choose her?
- Why is she a good spiritual role model for young women of today?
- What was the most significant insight you gained from studying her?

#### Spiritual Autobiographies

The spiritual autobiography is a rich part of our Catholic heritage. In class, we talk about the tradition of the spiritual autobiography. Then the students read excerpts from well-known works, such as those by Catherine of Siena or Dorothy Day. As an assignment, they write a five-page autobiography, paying close attention to their experience of being female and how it influences their spiritual growth.

#### Children's Books

A popular assignment in my course is to write a book for children about what it means to be a girl today. After telling the students to identify the age of the girl they want to address, I ask them to think about the question, "What advice would you give to this child about being a girl or a young woman?" They are to include advice for building a relationship with God. I encourage the girls to be creative with the format. Some of them produce well-documented books that are wonderfully elaborate and full of wisdom!



**Julia Keller**, who lives in Arnold, California, is currently working on her elementary education certification. She is a member of the original steering committee for The Voices Project.

## from the press

### Publications

This fall we are introducing a line of short fiction books that accompany our high school textbooks, with leader's guides for classroom use to relate the fiction to themes and concepts in the texts. The high-quality, original short stories can also be read independently of our textbooks, and thus would make thoughtful gifts, or might be used in connection with texts that cover similar themes from different publishers.

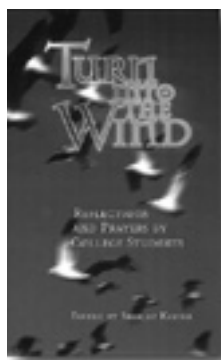
Accompanying our texts *Creating a Christian Lifestyle* and *Christian Justice: Sharing God's Goodness* are the line's first two books with leader's guides. They are,



respectively, ***Waking Up Bees: Stories of Living Life's Questions***, by Jerry Daoust, and ***Mountains of the Moon: Stories About Social Justice***, edited by Stephanie Weller Hanson. We're excited about the potential for using fiction to consider religious themes, and hope you will be too. Each short story book sells for \$6.95, and its leader's guide for \$5.00, with discounts for quantity orders. You may request a

complimentary copy of each book in order to review it for possible multiple-copy purchases.

***Turn into the Wind: Prayers and Reflections by College Students***, edited by Shirley Kelter, is a collection of Scripture-based prayers, poems, and reflections from U.S. college students, dealing with relationships, classes, future plans, challenges, joys, growth, and faith in the God who guides



their journey. It could serve as a gift to recent or upcoming high school graduates and could also provide daily prayers for your religion classes and other gatherings of students. The price is \$7.95.

To order these and other books, write Saint Mary's Press, Orders Department, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; phone 800-533-8095; or fax 800-344-9225.



### Services

#### Regional and National Workshops

We just had our fifth summer season of workshops for high school religion (and other) teachers, campus ministers, and administrators, on topics related to building faith community in your school. Look ahead to summer 2000, when we will be offering at least three workshops. The cost of each offering, generally between \$350.00 and \$400.00, includes the workshop, room, and meals. Some scholarships will be available, based on a school's financial need.

Brochures will be mailed out in early 2000, so be on the lookout. Workshops will again be held on the East Coast, on the West Coast, and in the Midwest.

#### Direct to Your School

Now we're also branching out beyond the national and regional workshops to bring a variety of customized services—that is, workshops, retreats, consultation, and process facilitation—directly to schools and clusters of schools. Broad topics, to be made specific according to the goals of each school or cluster, include these:

- the Catholic high school as faith community
- faculty and staff—spiritual growth and building community
- students as servant leaders
- connecting school, family, and parish communities

For information on services and costs, contact Shirley Kelter, editor and coordinator of services to schools, at Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; phone 800-533-8095; e-mail [skelter@smp.org](mailto:skelter@smp.org).

#### Web Site

The new Saint Mary's Press web site is under construction! We will keep you posted on its debut, we hope in January 2000. Look for a subsite for Catholic high school teachers and campus ministers, including a library of articles, a threaded discussion forum, and annotated links to relevant sites. Our listserv for Catholic high school religion teachers and campus ministers will be replaced by the high school web site, which should provide a more reliable, effective, and focused way to communicate with one another.

## Frontiers of Justice

Catholic high school teachers are invited to apply, by 1 January 2000, for Frontiers of Justice, a summer overseas program for teachers sponsored by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the National Catholic Educational Association's secondary schools department. Past trips lasting several weeks were to El Salvador. The destination for summer 2000 will be El Salvador or Ghana. To apply complete the application form on the CRS web site, [www.catholicrelief.org](http://www.catholicrelief.org). For more information, call Eileen Emerson at 410-625-2220 or e-mail her at [eemerson@catholicrelief.org](mailto:eemerson@catholicrelief.org).

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