



# connect

A Newsletter for High School Religion Teachers, Campus Ministers, and Principals  
Compliments of Saint Mary's Press • October 2001

## featuring

### On the Frontier of Justice in Ghana

Diana Turney



*"Africa has been the land of hope, salvation, and redemption. Abraham had come to Africa, Joseph from slave to savior. It was the land of refuge for Jesus and helped to carry his cross. Will we continue to dismiss Africa as hopeless, helpless, an 'irrelevant appendage'? Africa is now the robbed, wounded man at the side of the road; will we be the Samaritan or the Levite?" As we prepare to land in Accra, the capital city of Ghana, those words of Ghanaian bishop Charles Palmer Buckle, heard last night, return to me. . . . I wonder: what, then, will Africa be for me? What will I see and what am I going to do with what I learn? As the wheels touch down, a group of Ghanaians bursts into song in their*

*native tongue: "Praise God, for he never sleeps!" It is the most hauntingly beautiful landing I have ever experienced.*

We had come from all over the United States, Catholic educators bound together by our desire to acknowledge the call of God in our life and to enhance our abilities to teach through this firsthand experience of the developing world. As Frontiers of Justice participants, we were being offered a glimpse, in microcosm, of the mission of Catholic Relief Services in eighty countries around the world: "Promote the alleviation of human suffering, advance full human development, and foster charity and justice in the world."

At a recent CRS world summit meeting, a key vision emerged: Solidarity will transform the world. The organization supports what is already in place for development, focusing on empowering poor people. A CRS program officer explained to us that CRS enters communities through its partners: local churches, agencies, and organizations. The process of building relationships within the community is slow but essential. No one enters with solutions; together the partners identify and prioritize problems and develop a course of action. The community is involved in every step of implementation: monitoring, evaluating, generating alternatives when necessary. The local partners, as the CRS program officer explained, then realize that they have resources they never knew they had. Frontiers of Justice is one component of CRS's effort to build solidarity. Partnering with

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## in touch

I can't remember my sixth-grade teacher's name, but I have never forgotten the day she showed us slides of her trip to Rome. Even though my own father frequently traveled overseas on business, I remember being impressed that my teacher had been to the very places we were studying. And I also remember thinking that her work must be very important to her—important enough that she would be thinking about next year's classes while she was on her vacation.

Well, Diana Turney has done my long-ago teacher one better. She writes this month's feature fresh from her trip to Ghana with CRS's Frontiers of Justice program. My sixth-grade self is green with envy. I can't imagine a more engaging way to gain a global perspective than to hear my own

## On the Frontier

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NCEA, CRS provides teachers and administrators with a connection, an opportunity to build relationships so that we in turn can help our students make a global connection.

### Encountering Suffering and Hope

At the Shekhina Clinic, a CRS supported facility for people who are sick and destitute, we learned that everyone who works here is a volunteer. The building was built with funds provided by Ghanaians in the United States. A new AIDS hospice is being built, also paid for by donations. A parish in Chicago gave \$20,000 to build a laboratory that will incorporate a blood bank, x-ray lab, and clinic.

*I can't hold back the tears when one volunteer explains that the clinic is divine work. The workers have no technical expertise but love and care, knowing the Supreme Being loves everyone. "We crave your prayers."*

We traveled to a nearby village to talk with the Attributu Peace Building Committee, trained at the Unity Center of the Catholic Diocese of Damongo. Through workshops and seminars on the underlying causes that contribute to injustice, participants learn how authentic, peaceful conflict resolution can be realized. They travel to other towns to share what they have learned, for there is always conflict in the north. They face real risks in doing their work, from imprisonment to life-threatening situations, and have successfully resolved conflicts where the courts and the chiefs could not. One woman shared a story of resolving a conflict in the market; another told how a family, bent on retaliation for a murder, was persuaded to

recognize that two wrongs don't make a right. The wise chief of the village shared with us his belief that conflict comes out of poverty. The lack of opportunity and ability to realize dreams causes great frustration and tension. Conflict results.

*Today is the most gut-wrenching and uplifting thus far. I try to reflect on the enormity of what I encounter; my heart and psyche have been pummeled. I physically ache. The poverty and suffering are so absolute and yet so is the hope. Just when I think that I need to turn away, the sheer burden of witnessing such horrific conditions overwhelming me, the women and men speak, sharing their life of dignity, courage, and strength. I recognize that I have been feeling pity. How arrogant that emotion is.*

Collaborating with the Ghana Education Service, CRS operates Food Assisted Education, the largest program in Ghana, which takes a holistic approach to educational support. The program serves approximately fifteen hundred schools throughout the three northern regions, where illiteracy and malnutrition are rampant. The objective is to increase enrollment in rural schools through school feeding, and to retain girls through a take-home ration for those with good attendance. The obstacles facing education are daunting: lack of teachers, lack of adequate teacher training and pay, negative socio-cultural practices, and poverty. At Saint Thomas Primary School, we met the cook in her kitchen—a mud hut. She volunteers to make the food every day. Her day begins at 7 a.m. when the children bring water and firewood, and by 12 p.m. she finishes making what looks like large grits. Sometimes parents take up a collection for her.

## in touch

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teacher speak of Africa in the first person. This month's issue brings you another voice from the Frontiers of Justice too. Kevin LaNave was part of the CRS program back in 1996 when the group visited Gambia. The lesson he shares with us in "from the classroom" is an adaptation of one that he wrote at that time for CRS's Operation Rice Bowl.

A recipe for a memorable lesson? Start with a global perspective, and add a generous portion of solidarity. Sprinkle with justice, compassion, and wisdom. Shake together with first-person narrative and garnish with slides for a lesson that your students will remember some thirty years from now. (If you want them to recall your name, you may have to hire singing waiters.)

Whatever you're cooking up, blessings on the newly started school year!

Live, Jesus, in our hearts forever!

*Lorraine*

Lorraine Kilmartin  
Senior Editor for High  
School Curriculum



*Back on the road, I wonder about the volunteer cook. What work waits for her at home? Does she also have a farm to work and her own family to feed? Staring out the van window, I am captivated by the women I see. Enormous amounts of material balanced on their heads, babies tied to their backs. Many of the women are pregnant. Could I carry such a burden? How can I help carry their burden?*

## On the Frontier

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### Discovering Joy and Connection

Sitting majestically under an enormous tree, the women soybean farmers waited for us. They have received training, as well as marketing and credit support, from CRS. Dressed in multicolored dresses, babies at the breast, they made a beautiful sight. We had learned in our travels that women do not have a voice here; they work the land and are solely responsible for providing food and education for their children. These women told us that they have increased their yield of soybean, an environmentally friendly crop that has been introduced recently to the area. They described how they have helped their households by earning extra money. They said that they are learning how to bargain and negotiate prices for their crops, and that they have learned how to incorporate soybean into local dishes.

*Listening to these women who have found their voice, who are changing the life of their families and thus changing their village, their nation, I feel euphoric. My eyes are constantly drawn to their feet; if they have shoes, the shoes are flip-flops. Their feet are calloused, scarred, and in various stages of*

*healing. I cannot help but contrast them with my own, with what I have failed to do walking the paved streets and manicured lawns of my homeland. They inspire me. . . .*

CRS works with the Ministry of Health to train health volunteers for the Nanyaare FACS (Food Assisted Child Survival) clinic. Clinic programs benefit pregnant and lactating mothers and children under the age of two, emphasizing preventative health. A CRS officer, himself a beneficiary of CRS school feeding as a child, described the clinic as a community-based venture that “works in the communities, with the communities, and for the communities.”

The poorest, the neediest, and the marginalized are given a voice in all matters concerning issues of community health. When the most vulnerable are helped, the entire community is strengthened by the respite given to these people. The powerlessness of any member in the community wounds the entire community life.

*It interests me that a male is teaching the women about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. We find out later that male volunteers teach this so that it will be recognized as important; a woman teaching this would be dismissed as ranting. A woman lets me hold her baby. I hold this tiny baby who is feverish, malnourished, and lethargic, and think about holding my own boys when they were sick. I feel a connection with this mother that I cannot describe.*

We met Monami, a man living with AIDS, who courageously travels in a region far from his family to let people know that AIDS is real. He has to tell his story far from home so that there will be no retaliation against his family. He

has chosen to sacrifice being with his own family so that he can help other parents stay alive to raise their children. To fight the spread of HIV is to stand against a cultural mountain: polygamy is encouraged because manhood is measured by the number of children one has; people do not want to be tested for HIV because of the harsh stigma associated with HIV; female circumcision is still practiced in some places, the same knife used over and over; many people are in denial about the disease's existence; and many people receive a great deal of misinformation.

We also met kids involved with a program called Youth Alive, a Catholic youth group that uses music and drama to promote abstinence and to educate about AIDS. After witnessing their enthusiasm and energy, I was reminded of the African proverb, Many drops of water make a mighty ocean. I know that these young people are changing their world.

Witnessing Operation Rice Bowl in action was incredible! Rice Bowl funds directly support the Rural Women's Association, a village-based women's group that generates income for their families during the dry season (from October to July). The women, whose businesses range from pottery to hat making, told us that the loans they have received from CRS have changed their life. Once they got their businesses off the ground, they were able to repay the loan, save money, and invest in their children's education. They said that they were able to stay in the village more because they didn't have to travel to town to get work.

### Bringing the Frontier Home

*As our time in Africa draws to a close, we turn our attention to how*

“ . . . ”

It's important to acknowledge that . . . a spiritual life in modern culture is swimming upstream a little bit. But the beautiful thing is that it's possible and that it can transform everything that we touch.

—Jack Kornfield (interview accessed at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

## On the Frontier

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*we will bring our experiences back into our schools and communities. We all have our different strengths and spheres of influence, and so will be addressing different groups of people, but some key components emerge from our discussion.*

**Personal Conversion.** In order for our trip to have authentic bearing on professional responsibilities, we must start with ourselves. "Solidarity is the conviction that we are born into a fabric of relationships, that our humanity ties us to others, that the Gospel consecrates those ties, and that the prophets tell us that those ties are the test by which our very holiness will be judged" (Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, CRS theologian and consultant). Everywhere we went, we were welcomed and called sister, brother, or mother. The shift from merely saying those words to living them is easier for having been in Ghana.

**Education.** CRS and NCEA have a wealth of resources, including lesson plans, to help teach Catholic social teaching. Operation Rice Bowl, Food Fast, and the NCEA convention in the spring are just some of the resources that these organizations offer to teachers. Partnering with the local diocese is another avenue. Most dioceses have a local migration and settlement office, a missions office, and a social action office. There are diocesan directors for CRS in every diocese. Consider partnering your school with a school in a developing country to establish a relationship. Without building relationships, we cannot ensure that interdependence and solidarity will be recognized. We have as much to gain from a school in Ghana as they have to gain from us.

**Advocacy.** We have a responsibility as Catholic educators to help our students be informed on international issues. They need to think critically about American policies

in relation to human dignity and the preferential option for poor people. Explore whether youth in your area celebrate Lobby Day. You might join the CRS Legislative Network to stay informed about current national legislation affecting the people served by CRS throughout the world.

Consider becoming involved in Africa Rising: Hope and Healing, a campaign of the United States Catholic Conference that emphasizes health issues such as AIDS and peace-building for Africa. Bread for the World and Pax Christi are other great sources of information. To learn more about CRS programs and classroom-parish resources, contact Eileen Emerson, Church Outreach Department, 209 West Fayette Street, Baltimore, MD 21201; phone 410-625-2220, ext. 3231, or e-mail [emerson@catholicrelief.org](mailto:emerson@catholicrelief.org).

A little boy recited this poem to us at Saint Thomas Primary:

*If all the oceans were one ocean,  
what a mighty ocean that will be.  
If all the trees were one tree,  
what a mighty tree that will be.  
If all the axes were one ax,  
what a mighty ax that will be.  
If all the men were one man,  
what a mighty man he will be.  
And if the mighty man took the ax  
and cut down the mighty tree  
and it fell into the mighty ocean,  
what a great splash there will be.*

I am one of sixty-five million Catholics in the United States. What a mighty voice we will be if, united by our faith, we challenge structures and policies that contribute to injustice throughout the world. It begins with relationships. Solidarity will indeed transform the world.

**Diana Turney** is cochair of the theology department at Saint Agnes Academy, in Houston,

## it works for me

**From Br. Tim Coldwell, Saint Paul's School, Covington, Louisiana:** I photocopy selections from *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)* to help acquaint students with the church's "seamless garment" worldview, and its position on euthanasia, capital punishment, and abortion. We read *Dead Man Walking* and *The Giver* to place the question of life's meaning into historical context. I use Pope John Paul's beautiful words to help students develop a critical Catholic consciousness. My hope is that students will identify cultural cues that promote seeing humans as things, and will respond by standing against these efforts to degrade humanity.

**From Mary Copen, Saint Joseph Grade School, South Bend, Indiana:** For my middle school students, I put together a packet of newspaper articles on topics ranging from the music of rapper Eminem to controversial religious art. Class discussion, followed by an assignment requiring students to present arguments for both sides of an issue, helps students to understand why the church stands where it does on each issue. Students also learn to apply critical thinking and decision-making skills to today's issues.

Texas, where she teaches classes in morality and Catholicism. Diana has a master's degree in theological studies from the University of Saint Thomas, in Houston.

## from the classroom

### Children of Blessing

Kevin LaNave

Kenyan communities view the birth of a child as a source of blessing for the entire community. I sense that our culture has some things to learn from African peoples about the need for the community to support its children. This idea can be challenging for our students—and our culture—to appreciate; while we stress family values, we do not always appreciate the family's need for societal support. The objective of this lesson is for students to reflect on children as God-given gifts, in need of supportive communities, and with the potential to bless those communities in life-giving ways.

1. Open the lesson with a matching game conducted in small groups or spelling-bee style with the entire class. Display a variety of seeds, along with pictures of the flowers, plants, or trees that the seeds will become. (Two or three students could be assigned ahead of time to design the game for the class.) When the game is over, point out how different the seeds are from the flowers, plants, and trees, recognizing that such growth is amazing to think about, but it is not guaranteed; it requires a supportive environment. Ask the students, in pairs, to quickly brainstorm the characteristics of an environment that supports the growth of seeds, and briefly share answers in the large group.
2. Next display or pass around pictures of young children. (The more multicultural and multinational the pictures, the better.) Give the students a minute to look quietly at the pictures. Then suggest that in some ways children are like seeds: They have tremendous potential for growth, and they need a supportive environment in order to grow.  
As a large group, brainstorm characteristics of an environment that supports the growth of children. List them on the board, encouraging students to be expansive in their thinking.
3. Display the African proverb, It takes a village to raise a child. Invite comments on its meaning. Review the brainstorming list, and identify the items that require support beyond that of a person's nuclear family.
4. Ask each small group to imagine that they are advocates for children in one of these situations:
  - living in poverty in American cities
  - living in refugee camps in developing nations

- living in affluent American homes with two working parents
- living outside the home because parents or guardians are abusive
- living with physical or mental challenges

Allow the groups about five minutes to discuss these questions:

- Which items on the list do you think are most critical for the children you represent?
  - As advocates, what would you ask of the wider global community?
  - Which of these solutions would you want to be part of yourself?
5. Invite small groups to share their ideas.  
*Note: In the course of the discussion, students may raise issues such as child abuse, abortion, or poverty. Encourage them to see that while individual parents make choices that lead to these situations, the absence of wider societal support is also a factor. Remind the students of the African proverb, and explore wider issues, such as jobs with inadequate wages and benefits, and a lack of adequate housing, health care, and child care. Students may also raise questions about whether people who live in poverty, especially in developing nations, are having too many children. Such questions can generate a lesson themselves—but whatever time you choose to spend on an individual lesson, be sure to communicate these two key points:*
    - There are enough resources in the world to meet everyone's needs (though not everyone's wants). The problem is one of maldistribution and over-consumption.
    - A deep love for children is a feature of many traditional cultures. When everyone who cares deeply for children receives the support they need, those children—and our world—will benefit greatly.
  6. Offer the following perspectives:
    - Like seeds that need good soil, children need an environment that supports growth. If the community views children as a blessing and is willing to embrace and support them, the children will flourish.
    - Think about what the plants we discussed earlier can offer: food, shade, shelter, beauty. In the same way, children can become a blessing for their community.

## from the press

If you want to tie a more formal learning component to your students' service work, consider using *Giving and Growing: A Student's Guide for Service Projects*, by



Frances Hunt O'Connell. This guide provides information and self-directed exercises to assist students who are doing service

projects in school or parish settings. The **student's guide** provides space for recording responses to reflection questions and exercises, thus becoming a record of the student's thoughts and experiences. The book includes five units that cover the usual stages in a service project:

- finding the right place for you
- your first few weeks
- evaluating your growth
- resolving conflict
- ending the service experience

The **leader's manual** complements the student's guide with directions, prayer services, and activities that raise awareness of the spiritual aspects of service experiences. *Giving and Growing* can be easily adapted to a service program that is already established, or it can provide you with the resources to build a new program. Student's guide: stitched, 80 pages, \$4.25; leader's guide: stitched, 32 pages, \$3.95.



Saint Mary's Press distributes some outstanding resources by Free Spirit Publishing, including two great books by Barbara A. Lewis:

*The Kid's Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference* is a project sourcebook. Pick a topic from one of the fifteen subjects in the book—animals, community development, crime fighting, the environment, friendship, health, and more. Then flip through the guide to find ideas for all kinds of service projects, from simple things individuals can do on their own to large-scale commitments that involve whole communities. Paper, 184 pages, \$12.95.

*The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose—and Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*, by



Barbara A. Lewis, is ideal for schools and youth groups, though it was designed for kids to use on their own. It

includes stories about real kids who are making a difference at home and around the world; step-by-step guides to social action power skills, such as letter writing, Internet researching, interviewing, fund-raising, media coverage, and more; ideas for working with government, including tips for lobbying lawmakers; and social action tools, including a resource guide with addresses and Web sites for social action groups and government offices, an index, and more. Paper, 208 pages, \$16.95.

To order these and other books, write to Saint Mary's Press, Orders Department, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; phone 800-533-8095; fax 800-344-9225, or order online at our Web site, [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org).

## from the classroom

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- The story of Jesus' birth illustrates that point. In Jesus, God came not as a mighty military ruler with an army but as a child. Recall the people in the Gospel narratives who saw Jesus' birth as a blessing: his parents, Elizabeth, the shepherds, the Magi, Anna, Zechariah. As a Jewish child, Jesus had the support of a community that cared about him; when he became an adult, he blessed the members of his community by revealing God to them—and to all of us.
  - (Refer to the pictures of children.) Certainly we need to think responsibly about whether we can meet the many needs of children before we create them. But Christian faith clearly states that children are blessings—that families and communities that welcome and support children will be blessed and improved by them.
  - (Point to the African proverb.) It takes a village—actually a global village—to raise children.
7. Offer follow-up ideas if time allows:
    - Brainstorm ways to offer support to children at home, in your neighborhood, in your school, or at your church.
    - Post a list of names and phone numbers of organizations that work with children in the local community.
    - Encourage students to research global relief organizations.
    - Pray for children.
  8. Say a closing prayer. Invite students to look again at the pictures of children. Offer a prayer for children and for

## resource reviews

Some videos to use in your own classes, or to recommend to colleagues in other departments:

***The Antique Watch and Other Tales*** presents nine timeless tales, each followed by a brief discussion of the tale's themes. Storyteller and author John Shea discusses each story and provides an excellent introduction to the use of stories in our spiritual growth. The small cast combines storytelling and acting techniques to produce creative and professional "reader's theatre" vignettes. The thought-provoking stories, some of which are very short, are effective discussion starters, journal exercises, and prayer service selections. They can also be used in conjunction with lessons on the themes they address. A book containing the stories is available. English teachers might be interested in using this resource in a unit on the short story. The 45-minute video and brief discussion guide are available from ACTA (Assisting Christians to Act) Publications, 4848 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60640-4711; phone 800-397-2282; fax 800-397-0079.

***Sexual Abstinence*** is an outstanding video that focuses on an actual high school class whose assignment is to create a rap about abstaining from sex. The 1989 hairstyles and the strong New York accents may be off-putting at first, but the film itself covers important issues that teens face today. The students' discussions about pressures, stereotyping, and the risk of pregnancy or disease gradually develop into rhymes and lyrics. Scenes from the classroom and the recording session are interspersed with scenes from an assembly on the same issues, and with interviews of young people in the community. Embarrassment, humor, anger, anxiety, and wisdom are all part of the conversation, and the result is remarkably authentic. Health

teachers might find this 45-minute film and teacher guide helpful. The pair is available from Human Relations Media (HRM Video), 175 Tompkins Avenue, Pleasantville, NY 10570-3156; phone 800-431-2050; fax 914-747-1744; Web site [www.hrmvideo.com](http://www.hrmvideo.com).

***Beyond the Dream*** looks at the lives of Catholics who came to the United States between 1840 and 1920. Several celebrities whose own forebearers were among those newcomers comment on the culture, the struggles, and the contributions of the Irish, German, and Italian immigrants. The 58-minute film provides an excellent overview of both the nation's and the church's responses to the needs of immigrants during that period. Teachers of American history could incorporate this film into a unit on immigration. The film is available from the United States Catholic Conference Publishing Services, 3211 Fourth Street NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194; phone 800-235-8722; fax 202-722-8709; Web site [www.nccbuscc.org](http://www.nccbuscc.org).

***My People, My Prayers*** is a provocative, must-see video about the spiritual quest behind the return to native religious practices on the part of Native American Catholics. It deals in a nuanced and respectful way with the issue of inculturation through the experience of some Chippewa communities as they incorporate sweet grass, the pipe, drums, and dancing into their Christian worship. The film focuses on the conflicting views of older members of the community who believe that the old ways oppose Christian practice, and the younger Chippewa who believe that the traditional worship practices can help bridge the gap that they experience between church teachings and their "true selves" as Native Americans. Social studies teachers could use this 25-minute film as

part of a unit on multi-culturalism. The film is available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences, P.O. Box 2053, Princeton, NJ 08543-2053; 800-257-5126; Web site [www.films.com](http://www.films.com).

### Call for Student Writings

By now you should have received a packet inviting you to submit writings by your students for a forthcoming publication. The working title of the book is *He Said—She Said*. This book will showcase the thoughts of adolescent boys and girls on various topics related to life and faith. The comparisons should provide for some fascinating reading! The deadline for submissions is 17 December 2001. If you have not yet received a packet, call Marilyn Kielbasa at 800-533-8095, or download the forms from [www.smp.org](http://www.smp.org).

## from the classroom

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our own and our community's supportive response to them as sources of blessing.



**Kevin LaNave** lives in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, with his wife, Katy, and their two sons. Kevin is the coordinator of the Julianne Williams Foundation for

Social Justice, and has taught in the religious studies department of a Catholic high school for sixteen years. He has collaborated with Saint Mary's Press as a writer, teacher consultant, and workshop team member.

## Frontiers of Justice

Catholic high school teachers are invited to apply by 1 January 2002 for Frontiers of Justice, the summer overseas program for teachers that is sponsored by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the National Catholic Educational Association's secondary schools department. The destination for summer 2002 is Africa. 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 800-235-2772, extension 3231, or e-mail her at [eemerson@catholicrelief.org](mailto:eemerson@catholicrelief.org).

### Acknowledgments

This lesson in "Children of Blessing" is an adaptation of a plan that Kevin LaNave originally wrote for CRS. It was published in 1996 in Operation Rice Bowl's Educator's Guide.

*Connect*, a complimentary newsletter from Saint Mary's Press for high school religion teachers, campus ministers, and principals, is published each October, January, and April.

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