

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Raising the next generation of girls
- The needs of early-adolescent girls
- Girls' spiritual development

## "Sisters" by Jennifer Christ

Although the Girl Scouts is not a religious organization, the scout promise includes the phrase "to serve God." In my seven years as a leader, I have watched my small group of girls, who consider themselves "sisters," grow into a supportive community made up of unique, individual parts that contribute to the one body.

Last fall my girls chose as a service project bussing tables and selling concessions at the Holiday Folk Fair. Once our four-hour shift ended, we would be free to explore the fair. On the morning of the outing, I had five extremely excited, energetic twelve-year-old girls bouncing around my kitchen. Where was Jamie? "Hurry up, Jamie, so we can leave," I thought to myself. After waiting for fifteen minutes, I decided to call Jamie's house. No one was home, but I listened to the message Jamie's mom had left on their answering machine. A standard message was followed by: "If you are calling for Jamie, do not leave a message. She is grounded for a month and cannot return your call."

The girls were shocked when I told them. Jamie was a very good student, a well-behaved leader, and an all-around nice girl. What could she possibly have done to get grounded for a month?

Once in the van, the girls began speculating wildly about Jamie's mysterious misbehavior. Finally I called a halt to the conversation, saying that whatever it was, we needed to respect and support Jamie's mother's decision. There was a lesson here for Jamie, and it would play itself out in good time.

With this redirection, the girls quickly turned to telling "round robin" stories. One girl starts the story and then passes it on to the next girl, who adds a new twist to the adventure. Today's round robin story unfolded into a fantastic plot to rescue Jamie through her bedroom window and carry her off to the Holiday Folk Fair!

Once at the fair, the girls had fun working their shift and were anxious to eat and shop. At the Korean booth, they purchased extremely lovely paper parasols. Amid the excited "oohs" and "aahs," the idea spontaneously arose that the girls should pool their leftover money to buy a parasol for Jamie. They planned to present it to her in one month, celebrating her "ungrounding." The girls counted their change, and together bought the most exquisite parasol of all.

Sisters, community, serving God by caring for one another. . . . It's not just a motto or a promise memorized and recited at meetings; it's a message to live out in our relationships with others. I was in awe of my girls; I learned the lesson. Girls need to know that there are rules and that there are caring adults who will enforce them. Yet girls can still support one another through life's challenges, calling forth the best in one another.

On the way home, the girls began a new round robin story, describing what they would be like when they grew up and pondering the thought of their own daughters as Girl Scouts. I knew in my heart that these sisters would leave their campsite a little better than they had found it!

### WANTED: Prayers, Poems, and Reflections by Girls and Young Women

In conjunction with *The Voices Project* (see p. 2 sidebar), we are publishing a volume of prayers, poems, and reflections by girls and young women who are in middle school and high school. We invite you and the girls you work or live with to be a part of this project.

The theme of the new book is simply *spirituality*. We are looking for poems, prayers, and reflections from girls on the lived experience of their beliefs. We are leaving our request deliberately vague and open-ended to allow for flexibility and creativity, but the following questions may help you and the girls you know get directly at the issue:

- What is your experience of God?
- Who is God for you?
- How has God touched your life?
- What gives you hope and inspiration?
- From whom or what have you learned the most about God?
- Where do you see God?
- What do you value? What and who is important in your life?

For more information and a submission packet, visit [www.smp.org/voices/index.cfm](http://www.smp.org/voices/index.cfm), or contact Marilyn Kielbasa at Saint Mary's Press, 800-533-8095 ([mkielbasa@smp.org](mailto:mkielbasa@smp.org)).

# My Daughters' Faith

by A. J. Wagner

I recently attended an interfaith prayer breakfast at which I had the opportunity to meet my daughter's new pastor. I introduced myself to him, but he seemed reluctant to make my acquaintance. After I assured him that I was glad that my daughter attended his church, he eased up, saying: "We get quite a few people who were raised Catholic at our church. Sometimes their parents get pretty upset about it."

Later when I told my daughter of the encounter, she confirmed her pastor's observation about the number of parishioners who were raised Catholic. Then she asked if it was really true that I was glad that she was at another church. I replied that I would rather have her going to *some* church than *no* church. I just hoped that this was a part of her search, not its conclusion. She was kind enough to assure me that it was.

As we raised our daughters, my wife, Joan, and I challenged them to be independent thinkers. We also taught them to be Catholic. Our efforts resulted in a twenty-one-year-old daughter who doesn't miss a Sunday Mass, and a twenty-two-year-old who has, for now, rejected Catholicism.

If you ask our older daughter why she has rejected the church of her Baptism, she will tell you, forthright, that as a woman she feels like a second-class citizen in that church. By attending a church where women can be ordained, she believes she is doing what is right. Yet if you ask what her religion is, she will still say Catholic.

If you ask our younger daughter why she accepts the church of her Baptism, she will tell you that it makes her feel good. It isn't that she has a particular notion of being Catholic, but at her college she has found a liturgy that she loves. Father Ken speaks to her through his sermons, and she hopes to someday make a career of serving others the same way. To her this is not a Catholic notion; it is simply what she wants to do.

Are either of these responses what we hoped for in the faith life of our daughters? Perhaps not, but both of them are fully engaged in a faith journey. Do we have a right to ask for more? I believe so, just as we ask more of ourselves as we continue on our own faith journey.

If you had asked me twenty-two years ago what I thought would be the hardest part about raising girls, I would probably have mumbled something about sports. I would have worried that my daughters would never have the opportunity to be professional athletes. I never would have thought it difficult to raise children who remain Catholic. You take them to church, send them to Catholic school, live the Catholic life, and *voila*—you have a Catholic! It's not tough.

Now, however, I realize that even though our daughters are adults, we are still raising them. We remain challenged to convey the notion of an independent woman who is Catholic. We remain challenged to continue to live the Catholic life ourselves, believing that actions speak louder than sermons. We do not take for granted that our younger daughter who regularly goes to Mass will continue to do so, and we do not assume that the spiritual development of our older daughter is complete. We can only hope that, twenty-some years from now, when our daughters are raising their own daughters, they will say the same thing.

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## The Voices Project: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Girls and Young Women

Saint Mary's Press launched *The Voices Project* in 1998 in response to a call from teachers and youth ministry professionals from around the country for materials to use with adolescent girls. In August of 1999, a team of twenty-four women met to envision ways to significantly advance ministry to adolescent girls and encourage their involvement in the life of the church and society.

Task groups formed at this national team meeting are now conducting research about girls' spirituality, developing resources for use in parish youth ministry and Catholic schools, compiling a bibliography of print and nonprint resources, and conducting listening sessions with girls in a variety of settings. The team also plans to host a national gathering in 2002 that will bring together educators, psychologists, theologians, and pastoral ministers whose work is committed to the moral and spiritual development of adolescent girls. One goal of *The Voices Project* is to bring together the knowledge and energy of the secular Girl's Movement with the wisdom of women's spirituality.

The work of the project will eventually expand to include adolescent boys, as we at Saint Mary's Press make a commitment to explore and nurture the gender-specific spiritual needs of our young people.

For more information on *The Voices Project*, visit [www.smp.org/voices](http://www.smp.org/voices), or contact Marilyn Kielbasa at Saint Mary's Press, 800-533-8095 ([mkielbasa@smp.org](mailto:mkielbasa@smp.org)) or Janet Claussen at 402-982-0692 ([claussenjk@aol.com](mailto:claussenjk@aol.com)).