

Church Women

Probing History with Girls

Laurie Delgatto

with Marilyn Kielbasa

Voices:
Nurturing the
Spirituality of Girls


Saint Mary's Press
Christian Brothers Publications
Winona, Minnesota

The following authors contributed to this manual:

- Sheila Bourelly, Chicago, Illinois
- Alice Davis, Shorewood, Wisconsin
- Kat Hodapp, Louisville, Kentucky
- Julia Keller, Pebble Beach, California
- Pamela Reidy, Worcester, Massachusetts

A special thank-you to the following girls from Orlando, Florida; Birmingham, Alabama; Lackawanna, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; and Winona, Minnesota, for contributing their thoughts about what they would like the world to know about them. Their quotes are used in the prayer "These Stones Will Shout."

- Alicia, Anna, Ashley, Cara, Emily, Frances, Jaclyn, Jessica, Jessica, Julie, Liza, Lizbeth, Megan, and Stefanie

 Genuine recycled paper with 10% post-consumer waste.
Printed with soy-based ink.

The publishing team included Cheryl Drivdahl, copy editor; Lynn Riska, production editor and typesetter; Cindi Ramm, design director; Cären Yang, cover designer; back cover images copyright © Rubberball Productions; manufactured by the production services department of Saint Mary's Press.

Ann Coron, cover artist, Winona Voices Group, Winona, MN

The acknowledgments continue on page 136.

Copyright © 2002 by Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320, www.smp.org. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce only the materials intended for distribution to the program participants. No other part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 2010 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02

ISBN 0-88489-701-X

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Delgatto, Laurie.

Church women : probing history with girls / Laurie Delgatto, with Marilyn Kielbasa.

p. cm. — (Voices)

ISBN 0-88489-701-X (pbk.)

1. Church group work with teenage girls. 2. Catholic women—Biography—Study and teaching.

3. Teenage girls—Religious life. I. Kielbasa, Marilyn. II. Title. III. Voices (Winona, Minn.)

BX2347.8.Y7 D45 2002

282'.092'2—dc21



To my grandmother Gertrude Reilly, whose life can be defined only as phenomenal.
And for my sisters, Lisa and Melissa, who carry on the tradition.

—Laurie Delgatto

We thank the following people, who helped to shape the final chapter of this book.
Each generously and vulnerably shared his or her story
about an extraordinary young woman: Carrie Mach.

Richard Bancke
Kristen Considine
Fr. Gerald Feierfeil
Phyllis Harrington
Fr. David Hogan
Sue Hrasky
Lisa Niedergeses
Linda Shoemaker
Gina Shook

We also express deep gratitude to Carrie's parents, Rick and Ann Mach,
and to her friends, who loved and knew her so well.
And most especially, we acknowledge Carrie herself.
We will always remember how she gave others the courage to give.
—Laurie Delgatto and Marilyn Kielbasa

Contents

Introduction 9

Part A: Phenomenal Female Saints and Mystics

Julian of Norwich 19

Who Was Julian of Norwich? 19
Images of the Trinity 20
The Worth and Beauty of Creation 20
All Shall Be Well 22

Hildegard of Bingen 26

Historical Context 26
A Day in the Life of . . . 27
Music of the Soul 28
Hildegard's Spiritual Legacy 29
Just Like Jutta 30

Foundresses of Religious Communities 36

Monasticism and Women's Communities 36
Praying with Strong Women 38
Community Charisms 38
Becoming Foundresses 39

Saint Jane Frances de Chantal 43

A Woman of Favor, Fortune, Faith, and Forgiveness 43
Spiritual Guides for Today 45
Finding All the Pieces 46
What Forgiveness Is, and Is Not 47
Reconciliation Timeline 48
Prayer Service: An Affirmation of God's Call 48

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha 53

The Patron Saint of Ecology 53
Fortitude Defined 55
The Reality of the Cross 56
A Litany for Kateri Tekakwitha 56

Saint Teresa of Ávila 60

Room 1: What's in a Name? 61
Room 2: Love God and Love One Another 62
Room 3: Learn from One Another 63

Room 4: Our Mothers, Our Selves 64
 Room 5: The Voyage into the Unknown 65
 Room 6: Becoming Who We Are Created to Be 65
 Room 7: Being All That We Can Be 66
 Prayer Service: The Awakening of the Soul 68



Part B: Phenomenal Female Visionaries and Prophets

Sr. Thea Bowman 73

Woman of Song, Woman of Courage 73
 The Power of Song 74
 Singing the Scriptures 75
The Cypress Will Grow 75
 Preaching the Word 76
 Prayer Service 77

Sr. Helen Prejean 82

A Mission for Life 82
 Called to Learn 83
 Listen and Learn from the Stories 85
 Prayer Service 85

Dorothy Day 92

Discovering Dorothy Day 92
 “A Permanent Revolution” 94
 A Saint Is . . . 95
 The Magnificent Seven: Catholic Social Teaching 96
 Prayer: A Decade with Dorothy Day 97

Women Martyrs in El Salvador 106

Six Women, One Shared Fate 106
 A Pledge for Justice and Peace 108
 Let’s Get Political 108
 Letters to the Editor 109
 Prayer Service: Go Out and Be Light 110

Carrie Mach 120

Extraordinary if . . . 120
 An Extraordinary Wall 122
 Developing a Personal Action Plan 123
 Prayer Service 124

Appendix A: Strategies for Exploring Phenomenal and Holy Women 128

Appendix B: More Phenomenal and Holy Women 132

Introduction

“You are made in the image of God.” That simple statement is the heart of spirituality—a profound statement about who we are and who we are becoming. There is no more important mantra for adults to communicate as they parent, teach, minister, and pray with young people.

The journey to adulthood has always been a time of transition. Those who walk with adolescents know that the journey is also unique for each person. In fact, recent studies confirm the age-old intuitive sense that girls and boys experience life in ways that are unique to their gender. If gender differences affect physical, emotional, and psychological development, then certainly, spirituality is shaped as well by feminine or masculine perspectives.

For girls in this country at the turn of the millennium, opportunities for equality are greater than for girls in any previous generation. Still, psychologists, educators, ministers, and parents know that the risks and issues that confront young females seem rooted in a different reality than those that face young males. Brought up in the crucible of a media world, girls continue to receive messages that beauty and body are more important than mind and spirit. Told that they can do anything, they too often engage in behaviors that endanger them more than empower them. In the interest of “being nice,” they abdicate their voice to males, exhibiting a dramatic drop in self-esteem in their adolescent years.

Girls experience life in terms of relationships. While their male counterparts charge headlong into separation and independence, young women, by nature and nurture, seem predisposed to connectedness and intimacy. Psychologists like Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*) and Mary Pipher (*Reviving Ophelia*) have brought attention to the life of girls, spawning an entire genre of literature aimed at addressing the phenomenon of the female adolescent experience. Addressing young women’s psychosocial world is a good beginning, but few experts in the field of girls’ development have ventured into the realm of spirituality.

Spirituality is about relationship—relationship with the One who created us. It is about loving and living out a call to become the kind of person God created us to be. Girls need to hear this message, embrace it, and live it. They need guidance to challenge a culture that contradicts their sacredness; they need adults who will listen to them, relate with them, and walk with them, reminding them of their destiny, reminding them, “You are made in the image of God.”

“Herstory” of the Voices Project

The Voices Project is the realization of the dream of a national team of female educators, youth ministers, parents, and mentors who have a special concern for the spirituality of girls. They envisioned a multifaceted initiative that would bring together the energy of the girls’ movement and the wisdom of women’s spirituality. Their dream was a convergence of the work of psychologists Mary Pipher and Carol Gilligan with the work of Catholic writers like Maria Harris and Elizabeth Johnson. As a result of listening sessions with girls from around the country, the team identified the need for resources for adults who work with girls in Catholic school and parish settings. One response to that need is the Voices series.

Overview of the Voices Series

The Voices series consists of six manuals that present strategies to use with adolescent girls in schools, parishes, and single-gender settings. The authors and consultants of the series have extensive experience working with girls in both coed and single-gender situations. The manuals they have produced are different from one another in content and focus, yet all share the same purpose: to help girls embrace the true meaning of the phrase “created in the image of God,” a profound statement about who they are and who they are becoming. This manual, *Church Women: Probing History with Girls*, is one of the results; the other manuals in the series are as follows:

- *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls* offers a variety of activities to help girls critique the culture for both its negative and its positive influences.
- *Retreats: Deepening the Spirituality of Girls* presents seven retreats on themes such as friendship, media, and childhood myths. Also included is a retreat for mothers and daughters.
- *Prayer: Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls* provides ideas for community prayer services and suggestions for enriching girls’ personal prayer life.
- *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls* suggests ways to help girls get to know the women in the Scriptures and examine the roles they played in communities of faith and the beginnings of the church.
- *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls* offers methods for exploring and discussing theological and moral issues from the perspective of women.

Where and When to Use the Voices Series

The Voices resource manuals can be used in a variety of settings, though they are intended for use with girls in single-gender groups. The rationale for meeting in single-gender settings is particularly compelling for young women. Numerous studies indicate that girls are much more likely to speak up, express their opinion, and be genuinely heard in “just girl” groups. Some topics related to growing up and finding one’s way in society are difficult for females to discuss in the presence of males. Imparting the particular wisdom of women to girls, and of men to boys, is a time-

honored practice that can be highly effective when used occasionally in educational, church, and social institutions.

Unless you are on the staff of an all-girls high school, finding opportunities for single-gender gatherings can be a challenge; consider these suggestions:

- Offer gender-specific electives within a school or parish catechetical setting.
- Work with Scout groups, which are already gender specific.
- Form “just girl” groups that meet beyond the typical school day or parish youth night.
- Establish weekly or monthly sessions within the school or parish schedule, at which girls and boys discuss related topics separately. Subsequent discussion with both groups together can lead to greater understanding between the sexes.
- Create mother-daughter or mentor-mentee discussion groups.
- Organize diocesan days for “just girls” or “just boys,” or both.
- Arrange retreats and youth rallies that have gender-specific components or workshops.

Who Might Use the Voices Series

The six resource manuals in the Voices series may be used by coordinators of youth ministry, directors of religious education, teachers in Catholic schools, campus ministers, youth ministers in parish settings, Girl Scout and Camp Fire leaders, parents, mentors, and other adults who work with girls ages ten through nineteen. Flexible enough for single-sex groups in any setting, the manuals’ ideas are designed to engage girls in both headwork and heart work, challenging them to think while nurturing their spirit.

Overview of This Manual

The strategies in *Church Women: Probing History with Girls* are designed to help girls discover the richness of women’s contributions to the life of the church throughout its history. Part A of the manual focuses on saints and mystics. Part B develops the theme of visionaries and prophets and focuses on women who have made recent contributions and have influenced the church in the modern world.

We could have included hundreds of women in this manual, for women have been impacting the life of the church from its very beginning. However, we had to make some choices. The women in this manual were selected with certain criteria in mind:

- They are not represented in the Scriptures. Women whose stories are known through the Scriptures are presented in another manual in the Voices series, *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls*.
- Their stories are generally not well known to girls. For example, we did not include Mother Teresa because most girls have heard her story since they were young, in classes, in homilies, and in books.

- Their stories expand the stereotypical view of feminine sanctity that has been promulgated through the ages. Far from being passive, submissive, and yielding, these women challenged their world and our own.
- Their work is likely to enliven the hearts of young people and ignite their passion for justice, inspiring girls to emulate the women’s spiritual life and to continue their work.

How to Use This Manual

You may present the material in this manual in its entirety, or you may select pieces to supplement your regular curriculum in a school or religious education program. Many of the activities have connections to liturgical seasons or church observances. For example, you might use the material on Sr. Helen Prejean during Lent, the rosary activity “Prayer: A Decade with Dorothy Day” in October, or an activity on Sr. Thea Bowman during Black Catholic History Month. All the chapters are formatted as follows:

Thematic Activities

Each chapter contains several fully developed activities, most of which are designed for a time frame of 30 to 60 minutes. The first activity in each chapter is biographical and therefore should be used before any other activity in that chapter. Other thematic activities develop ideas, charisms, the devotion, or the zeal of the woman and her work. Many of the thematic activities offer one or more variations, or different approaches for presenting the material.

Options and Actions

Most of the chapters include additional activities to support the learning process. These provide good follow-up for the thematic activities and allow for age-appropriate assimilation of the material. They might include multigenerational interaction, service options, and social action.

Resource Materials

Some of the chapters provide a list of resources—such as print, video, and Internet—for more exploration. In addition, some activities mention resources that address the person or themes covered. Materials published by Saint Mary’s Press may be ordered from the press’s Web site, www.smp.org, or by calling 800-533-8095.

Background Information

Most of the chapters include background information on the woman and her work. This material is given to help you guide the girls in their discussion and exploration of the topic.

Notes

Space is provided for you to jot down ideas, reminders, and additional resources as you use the chapter materials.

Handouts and Resources

All the necessary handouts and resources for a chapter are found at the end of the chapter.

How to Get Started

Know the Material

Read each chapter or activity before you facilitate it, and use it creatively to meet the needs of your particular group of girls. In particular, look for ways to make the material most accessible for the girls’ ages and for the size of the group. All the suggestions in this manual can be used with girls ages fourteen to nineteen. Some material is also appropriate for younger girls. Most of the activities in this manual are designed for groups of twenty to thirty young people, but can easily be adapted for any size group.

Know the Young People

When you have a wide variety of ages together, keep in mind the following differences between young adolescents and older teens:

- Young adolescents think in concrete terms and may not yet be capable of considering some topics abstractly.
- Young adolescents generally need more physical movement than older teens do. You can address that need through simple activities such as forming small groups for discussion and moving to different halves of the room to indicate the answer to a yes-or-no question.
- When they are working in small groups, young adolescents do better with an adult or older teen leading them. Groups of older teens can often be left alone for discussions.
- Older teens can usually handle open-ended assignments, but young adolescents respond better to writing exercises and discussions if they are led. For example, a junior in high school can be expected to write a letter to God about a certain topic on a blank sheet of notebook paper, whereas a sixth grader will be more focused with sentence-starters to guide different parts of the letter.

Create a Welcoming Environment

When possible, adapt the physical space to allow for open discussion and sharing. Consider moving chairs into a circle or inviting everyone to sit on the floor, at times. Groups that meet regularly may want to create a sacred space for ritual, using candles, fabric, music, favorite statues, sculptures, and images. Encourage the girls to be involved in creating that space and keeping it special.

Create a Safe Environment

When involving mothers, mentors, and other adults, provide written guidelines and even training in group leadership to help them understand the process and dynamics of the group. Consider the following guidelines for any adults who work with the group:

- To hear girls at the level necessary for meaningful interaction, adults need first to listen to themselves and to remember their own adolescence (Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice*, p. 119).
- Girls need adults who will listen to them and affirm them even when their questions and actions seem uncomfortably challenging, and adults who will allow themselves to be questioned at deep levels (p. 120).
- Girls need confidentiality in any group that engages them in deep thinking, feeling, and sharing. Yet, they and the adults who lead them also need to know when to go beyond the resources of the group to seek help.
- Girls need adults who will help them be countercultural in ways that bring animation and love to their life, their community, and their world (p. 121).
- To help girls recognize and nurture their own relationship with God, communities of faith need to listen to and learn from them and take them seriously, with engaged hearts, minds, and souls (p. 121).

General Resources

Print

Cowan, Tom. *The Way of the Saints: Prayers, Practices, and Meditations*. New York: Perigee Books, 2000. This book contains more than two hundred biographies of saints, a history of sainthood, and an explanation of the canonization process. Readers will also find prayers, practices, and meditations inspired by each saint.

Jones, Kathleen. *Women Saints: Lives of Faith and Courage*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999. This book highlights forty women of chronological, geographical, and spiritual variety, expanding the traditional view of feminine sanctity and challenging readers to lead a more authentic Christian life.

Madigan, Shawn, ed. *Mystics, Visionaries, and Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women's Spiritual Writings*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. This compilation presents the writings of twenty-seven women representing seventeen centuries of church history. It also includes informative historical introductions and bibliographies.

Morgan, Robert. *On This Day: 365 Amazing and Inspiring Stories About Saints, Martyrs, and Heroes*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference, 1997. This year's worth of stories about mystics, reformers, missionary heroes, and modern-day saints and prophets gives readers glimpses into church history.

Internet

www.americancatholic.org. St. Anthony Messenger Press.

www.catholic.org. Catholic Online. This site contains a large collection of facts and information concerning saints and angels. Its Saints Index is an exhaustive list of information pertaining to the various saints.

www.catholic-forum.com/saints/indexsnt.htm. Catholic Community Forum. This site offers information about and profiles of patron saints, including portraits, biographical information, areas of patronage, prayers, links to related sites, and readings.

www.disciplesnow.com. Disciples Now. This Web-based ministry and informational resource for youth focuses on the traditions, life, and mission of the Catholic church.

www.nwhp.org. National Women's History Project. This Web site and its sponsoring organization are dedicated to recognizing the accomplishments of women by providing information and educational material and programs.

Voices Internet Resources

Log on to the Voices Web site, www.smp.org/voices, for ideas, activities, resources, and links. This Web site is updated weekly.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the Voices series. We are also interested in new strategies for use with adolescent girls. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write c/o Voices, Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; use the "Contact Us" page at www.smp.org/voices; or contact the editorial development department through our toll-free number, 800-533-8095. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these manuals.

Part A

Phenomenal Female Saints and Mystics



Julian of Norwich

Overview

There are many lessons for adolescent girls in the life and writings of Julian of Norwich. Her love of creation, use of imagination, images of God, and belief that all will be well can lead the girls in your group to deepen their own spirituality and grow in their faith.

This chapter contains activities to help the young women explore three major themes expressed in Julian's writings. The activities are appropriate for girls in junior high and high school, though some adaptations may be needed, depending on your situation.

Thematic Activities

Who Was Julian of Norwich? (5 minutes)

Preparation

- Prepare to give the girls the background information on the life, spirituality, and writings of Julian of Norwich from the end of this chapter. Become familiar enough with the information that you can share it in a storytelling style. The material is taken from *Praying with Julian of Norwich*, by Gloria Durka (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1989). It might be helpful for you to have a copy of that book for your own reference and enrichment.

Begin the exploration of Julian by offering a brief biography in your own words. Then, as you lead each activity, share relevant information from the section on Julian's spirituality.

Images of the Trinity (45–55 minutes)

Preparation

- Read step 2, decide which method of creating stained glass windows you will use, and gather the appropriate supplies.

1. Julian’s words. Explain that one of Julian’s outstanding traits as a theologian was her imagination. For example, she spoke of the Trinity in terms of maker, protector, and lover. Read aloud the following passage from Julian’s *Showings*:

☉ “Suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of the greatest joy, and I understood that it will be so in heaven without end to all who will come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is our endless joy and our bliss” (p. 181).

2. Divide the girls into three groups and assign each group a different one of the images maker, protector, and lover. Announce that each group will create a stained glass window that captures what its image is all about. Tell the groups each to spend some time brainstorming possibilities and then create their window.

Propose one of the following methods for creating the windows. The second method is likely to take longer than the first.

- *Method 1.* Use markers or crayons to create shapes and colors in the style of stained glass on a sheet of white poster board.
- *Method 2.* Cut the outline of the window from a sheet of black poster board. Cut pieces of “glass” from tissue paper in various colors, and then glue or tape the pieces to the back of the poster board outline.

3. When the groups have completed their windows, invite them to present their work to everyone and to explain it. Post the windows where they can be seen and appreciated by the parish or school community.

4. Lead a discussion using questions like the ones that follow:

- ☉ How are Julian’s images of maker, protector, and lover different from the traditional images of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? How are they similar?
- ☉ What other images show the relationship between the Triune God and humanity?

Variation. Create a list of images for the Trinity that emerge from the discussion. Use the various images in future gatherings whenever you call the girls to prayer.

The Worth and Beauty of Creation

1. Julian’s words. Explain that during a time when the world was not appreciated for itself, Julian saw the worth and beauty in all of God’s creation, great and small. Read aloud the following text from Julian’s *Showings*:

☉ “[God] showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? . . .

“In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what did I see in it? It is that God is the Creator and the protector and the lover” (p. 183).

2. Lead one or more of the following exercises.

Symbol Sharing (10–20 minutes)

Preparation

- Set up a prayer table in the center of your meeting space.
- Ask the girls to bring in small items that remind them of God’s creation, God’s love, and God’s protection.

Gather the girls in a circle, with the prayer table at the center. Invite each girl to share with the group the items she brought to represent the three properties about which Julian wrote. As each girl finishes, invite her to add the items to the prayer table, speaking these ideas from Julian’s passage as she does so: “God made it. God loves it. God protects and preserves it.”

Variation 1. Do this exercise in a park or another natural setting. Instead of asking the girls to bring items from home, send them on a quiet walk to find three items that remind them of God’s creation, God’s love, and God’s protection.

Variation 2. Combine this exercise with the next exercise, “Message in Movement,” and suggest that the girls include their symbolic items in their movement prayer.

Message in Movement (30–45 minutes)

Preparation

- You may want to provide a variety of music for the girls to choose from.

Create small groups of six to eight girls. Announce that each group is to develop a short dance, mime, or motion sketch that expresses the three properties noted in Julian’s message “God made it. God loves it. God preserves and protects it.”

Invite each group to present its creation to everyone, preferably within the context of prayer.

A Twist on the Creation Story (10–20 minutes)

Read one or both of the Creation stories from the first and second chapters of the Book of Genesis. Lead a discussion focused around questions like these:

- ☉ How does the passage from Julian’s writing compare with the story (or stories) from Genesis?

☉ What might Julian have changed in the Creation story (or stories) if she had written it (or them)?

Conclude by reading (or rereading) the first Creation story from Genesis. Instead of repeating, “And God saw that it was good,” at the end of each day of Creation, call the girls to respond: “God made it. God loves it. God preserves and protects it.”

All Shall Be Well

1. Julian’s words. Explain that one central message from Julian of Norwich is a simple message of optimism—that all shall be well. It is an important message for each of us to take to heart. It is a statement of faith and trust in God. Read aloud the following text from Julian’s *Showings*:

☉ “And so our good Lord answered to all the questions and doubts which I could raise, saying most comfortingly: I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well” (p. 229).

2. Lead one or more of the following exercises.

Bookmark Reminders (15–30 minutes)

Provide a variety of art supplies and stiff papers. Encourage the girls to create bookmarks for themselves, friends, and family members, with the phrase “All shall be well” on them. The bookmarks can be embellished with tassels, glitter, and so forth.

Variation. Use this exercise as a fund-raiser for your group. Have the girls create and decorate a wide variety of bookmarks with the phrase “All shall be well” on them, and sell them at a parish or school function.

Music Search (10–40 minutes)

Invite the girls to bring in popular music with lyrics that have a message similar to Julian’s assurance that all shall be well. Invite the girls to play the songs for the group and to explain why they chose the pieces. Discuss the lyrics of each song with the group using questions like the ones that follow:

- ☉ How is the message of the song the same as Julian’s message? How are the two messages different?
- ☉ According to the song, what will make all things well?
- ☉ How does life look when all things are well?

Scripture Search (15–20 minutes)

Encourage the girls to find Scripture passages that express comfort in the same way that “All shall be well” does. Use those passages as the basis for a journal-writing exercise or art projects. Some passages that may be used are as follows:

- Ps. 23:1–6 (The Lord is my shepherd.)
- Isa. 43:1–5 (Be not afraid.)
- Isa. 49:13–16 (We are inscribed on God’s hand.)
- Matt. 11:28–30 (Come to me; I will give you rest.)
- Rev. 21:5–7 (I make all things new.)

Reflection Questions (15–20 minutes)

If the girls know one another well and are willing to share their thoughts, lead a discussion or a sharing partners exercise, using questions like the ones that follow. You can also use questions like these for reflection, journal writing, or prayer time.

- ☉ Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Give an example that demonstrates your preferred style.
- ☉ What does Julian’s message “All shall be well” mean to you?
- ☉ When have you felt that all was well? When have you felt the opposite? How did you feel God’s presence or absence in each situation?
- ☉ Where in your life right now do you need to hear and believe Julian’s message that all shall be well?
- ☉ Who else do you know who needs to hear and believe that message?

Variation. Begin the study of Julian’s optimism by leading the girls through a personal style inventory that helps them understand if they are an optimist or a pessimist. Such an inventory can be found on pages 46–48 of *Finding Your Personal Style*, by Marilyn Kielbasa, in the Horizons Program (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1996).

Options and Actions

- As part of a prayer, suggest that the girls use Julian’s message as a mantra that emphasizes God’s love and care for each of us: “God made me. God loves me. God protects me.”
- With the girls, create posters, PowerPoint slides, T-shirts, murals, or other eye-catching devices on which you present key phrases or main themes of Julian’s spirituality, such as “God made it. God loves it. God preserves and protects it” and “All shall be well.” Place the devices in strategic locations while you are discussing each particular aspect of Julian.
- Create journal or reflection pages, with a quote from Julian at the top of each one. Distribute the pages and invite the girls to spend quiet time writing about a word or phrase that strikes them in each quote. You could also provide reflection questions, Scripture passages, or other guidelines for writing.

Background Information: The Life and Spirituality of Julian of Norwich

Biography

The woman we have come to call Julian of Norwich (we do not know her real name) was born in Norwich, England, in 1342, most likely to an upper-class family. She was educated at a Benedictine convent and was better than most of her contemporaries at mastering literary skills, including the speaking and reading of French.

When Julian was thirty, she suffered a serious illness. During her illness, she received sixteen dramatic revelations of the love of God. She called those revelations showings, and she believed that they led her to become an anchoress.

To become an anchoress, a candidate had to meet with the bishop to show that her calling was sincere and that she had adequate means for support. After a special Mass, the anchoress would then live in a small room called an anchorhold, which was often built into the wall of a church. Here, she could see the altar and receive the Eucharist through a special opening. Julian's anchorhold was in the church Saint Julian's of Norwich, and she took its name when she became an anchoress.

Julian withdrew from society and devoted her life to prayer, contemplation, and counseling visitors from the window of her anchorhold. She wrote one work based on her sixteen revelations, titled *Showings*. She has been cited as the first English woman of letters and the first theologian to write originally in English. Some scholars have said that her book of medieval spiritual writings is profound and complex.

Julian lived a long time, but the exact date of her death is not known. She was named in a will in 1416, so we can assume that she was still alive at the age of seventy-four, which is amazing considering the frequent outbreaks of bubonic plague in England during that period.

Themes in Her Spiritual Writings

Images of God and the Trinity

Julian spoke of the Triune God as maker, protector, and lover. She also used both masculine and feminine images of God. Those themes are developed in her writing, where she makes this point about the Trinity:

And so I saw that God rejoices that he is our Father, and God rejoices that he is our Mother, and God rejoices that he is our true spouse, and that our soul is his beloved wife. (*Showings*, p. 279)

References to maternal and feminine images of God are found in the Scriptures, and Julian applied them to Trinitarian relationships. In her interpretation, fatherhood meant power and goodness, and motherhood meant wisdom and lovingness. She presented the motherhood of God as a complement to the fatherhood of God.

Her writings about Jesus focus on his role as Christ the servant. It was through Christ that she reached God.

God's Unbounded Love for All Creation

Julian emphasized the ultimate worth of all of creation in God's eyes. Every human person has significance. Every acorn, every bird, every branch, every rock is created by God, loved by God, and protected by God. Her thinking was unusual in an atmosphere of anthropocentricity, that is, of considering human beings to be the most important entity of the universe and believing that everything else exists for their use (a viewpoint that is still dominant in Western culture today). Consider her words:

[God] showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? . . .

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what did I see in it? It is that God is the Creator and the protector and the lover. (*Showings*, p. 183)

Optimism

Medieval life was marked by an obsession with sin, damnation, and death. Church teaching during the Middle Ages emphasized God's judgment, final damnation, and salvation. In contrast, Julian spoke of God's goodness, love, and mercy.

She struggled with those conflicting messages, and worked out a theology of sin and salvation that was faithful to her own experience of God, as shown in this passage:

And so our good Lord answered to all the questions and doubts which I could raise, saying most comfortingly: I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well. (*Showings*, p. 229)

Being Grounded in God's Word

Julian's book, *Showings*, is filled with biblical spirituality though she rarely quoted from the Bible. All that she wrote points to a profound knowledge of the scriptural text of the Latin Vulgate. The writings of Saint John and the letters of Paul are reflected in her work, but she was comfortable writing about God's revelation as she experienced, understood, and interpreted it. And for Julian, God's revelation was love. Consider this passage from her final chapter:

So I was taught that love is our Lord's meaning. And I saw very certainly in this and in everything that before God made us he loved us, which love was never abated and never will be. And in this love he has done all his works, and in this love he has made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting. . . . In this love we have our beginning, and all this shall we see in God without end. (Pp. 342–343)

(The material in this section is quoted, adapted, and paraphrased from Gloria Durka, *Praying with Julian of Norwich*, pp. 15–23.)

Notes

Use this space to jot ideas, reminders, and additional resources.