

Joy and Education in the Classroom

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are a part of first grade teacher Emma Ward's regular curriculum at St. Joseph School in Cockeysville, Maryland. But the way in which Ward approaches these subjects blends joy and laughter with a good education.

In 2024, Ward was named the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Elementary School Teacher of the Year. That recognition stems in part from her success at keeping her students' young minds interested in the classroom.

"There has to be movement," she told the *Catholic Review's* Sharon Crews Hare. "That can be singing or dancing to learn the topics. Little bodies cannot sit at a desk all day long. They need to be up and moving and doing hands-on activities."

The award meant a great deal to Ward because of how much she enjoys teaching at a religious institution. "I have such an opportunity to shape the whole child by teaching in a Catholic school," she said. "I just have such a good time in the classroom, and I look forward to coming to school every single day."

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go. (Psalm 32:8)

Inspire teachers to educate and bring joy to students, Lord.

A Beautiful Second Act, Part 1

For writer and author Maria Morera Johnson, enduring a stroke at age 49 served as a wake-up call, leading her to reflect on how she wanted to live as she got older.

Prior to this medical incident, Maria worked a high stress teaching job at a technical college. She was also putting on weight, becoming an empty nester, and supporting her husband through his early stages of ALS. “I was running myself ragged trying to take care of everyone else,” she explained.

Then came the stroke. As Maria entered the ER, doctors rushed to give her the medication to stop it. It was ultimately deemed a mini-stroke which left little lasting damage. The mental, emotional, and spiritual consequences, however, became life-changing.

Maria decided to change her diet and better deal with the stressors in her life. She couldn’t control her kids moving out or her husband’s illness, so she chose early retirement from her job, then started praying for discernment on what God wanted from her next. More tomorrow...

**Put away your...old self...Be renewed.
(Ephesians 4:22)**

Guide me, Lord, when I come to a fork in the road of my life.

A Beautiful Second Act, Part 2

Maria Morera Johnson prayed for discernment to learn what her best path forward should be. For some time, she had been a regular visitor to a Trappist monastery near her home. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her book *A Beautiful Second Act*, she recalled:

“When I would go to adoration, there were times when I just couldn’t be quiet and listen to [God]. I vented, and He lovingly just listened. I think that’s okay sometimes, to be a little angry. I made some demands in one adoration session...I said [to God], ‘Why can’t You just send me an email? I’m happy to do Your will. I want to do Your will. I don’t know what it is.’”

Surprisingly, an email from the website *CatholicMom.com* was in Maria’s inbox offering her a job. Unsurprisingly, she accepted it and marveled at how God had come through. She and her husband then moved to Mobile Bay in Alabama. “It was originally named the Bay of the Holy Spirit,” she said. “So, I would sit down at the water and soak in the sun [and] the Holy Spirit. It drew me to doing what I’ve been doing best these past many years: to look at the saints for guidance.”

**The Lord will guide you continually.
(Isaiah 58:11)**

Show me Your will, Lord. And please make it obvious.

A Beautiful Second Act, Part 3

In light of the major changes in her life, Maria Morera Johnson looked to the saints and other figures who had dealt with their own big transitions. She wrote about them in *A Beautiful Second Act*.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Maria said of this eclectic bunch, “The concept of the book is pairing these notable women with saints...Some of us, maybe, are not likely to pick up a heavy book about the saints, but would pick up something that’s a little lighter fare that reaches you in the culture.”

“So, I [found] these amazing women—scientists, actresses, personalities that we might encounter—and I looked at their human virtues and said, ‘That is something that’s worth emulating.’”

“But what happens if you sprinkle a little bit of grace on there? What happens if you look to those same human virtues that have turned into lives of holiness and sanctity? You find canonized saints that match.”

More tomorrow...

**Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.
(Proverbs 13:20)**

*Sprinkle grace on my best human virtues,
Creator.*

A Beautiful Second Act, Part 4

Maria Morera Johnson begins *A Beautiful Second Act* by pairing glamorous actress Hedy Lamarr with Servant of God Elisabeth Leseur. Lamarr's life was a bit scandalous, but she was also a scientist and inventor who struggled to be taken seriously. She discovered "hopping frequencies," which became the basis for sonar, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth.

Elisabeth Leseur was a devout Catholic married to an atheist who was hostile to her faith. As a result, she turned to writing in secret journals to nurture her relationship with God. She died of cancer at age 48, but left behind those journals, which her husband discovered. Not only was he converted to the faith, he became a priest.

On the surface, these two women have nothing in common. But looking deeper, Maria found a connection, writing: "Both Elisabeth and Hedy faced their challenges with a spirit of resilience in diverse contexts. They were intellectually brilliant and had an impact on the culture outside of their roles, breaking stereotypes while they lived and making an impact on the world after they died."

The good leave an inheritance. (Proverbs 13:22)

*Help me face challenges with resilience,
Father.*

A Beautiful Second Act, Part 5

A personal story that Maria Morera Johnson shares in *A Beautiful Second Act* looks back at a pivotal moment that changed her perspective on serving the poor. When one of her children was in high school, Maria drove a group of teens to a local soup kitchen to do volunteer work.

Once they arrived, Maria was asked to help serve the mothers with young children who had come there for a meal. Though it made her uncomfortable initially, she benefited from the experience.

Maria said on *Christopher Closeup*, “I have to give credit to the gentleman who was the director of the center, because he said, ‘You can feed them. That’s fine. What you want to do today is acknowledge their humanity.’ It was a huge lesson for me, this idea of making eye contact, of smiling, of serving.”

“I moved into working for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, specifically because my experience that day [taught me] to look into the eyes and acknowledge the human being that’s in front of you.”

**By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.
(John 13:35)**

Help me see all people as my brothers and sisters, Creator.

Appreciating the Laborers

In 2024, the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, held several events for the migrant farmworkers who take part in the H-2A program, which “allows foreign agricultural workers to work in the U.S. temporarily,” reported Maria-Pia Negro Chin for *Our Sunday Visitor*.

While some migrants are treated humanely, others cite abuse by bosses and poor working and living conditions. Church volunteers often go to the fields to teach catechism classes to the migrants. When priests come to work camps to give blessings, the migrants eagerly line up to receive them.

Bishop Luis R. Zarama noted that Americans should better appreciate the source of their food: “We don’t realize that...there were hands there who make it possible that we have the food we eat.”

One church held its annual festival for the farmworkers. Migrant Cruz Orozco said, “I am grateful to [the organizers]. There are games, gifts, and everything.” The best part of the day, he concluded, were “the Mass and prayer.”

Do not abuse...hired laborers who devote themselves to their task. (Sirach 7:20)

May we appreciate the workers behind our food, Creator.

Triple Transplant Like a Miracle

Sergio Arias Cestoni of Queens, New York, was in dire straits. The 47-year-old's heart, liver, and kidneys were all failing, so he was in desperate need of a "three-organ transplant," reported Stacey Sager for *Eyewitness News*. This kind of situation is so rare that the procedure has been performed fewer than 80 times in the U.S. over the past 20 years.

Cestoni remained a patient in North Shore University Hospital for three months as doctors kept him alive while he waited for a transplant donor. When the moment finally came, he wasn't sure whether to smile or cry.

The surgery lasted 14 hours as doctors replaced Sestoni's heart, liver, and kidney. "A complex endeavor for a hospital to carry out, it's really the epitome of multi-disciplinary care," said Dr. Nabil Dagher, Northwell Transplant Institute Director.

Grateful for his second chance at life, Cestoni believes he received a miracle, noting, "I feel so proud to get all these organs and try to honor my donor...I do believe that God was working with all these people around me."

Pray for one another, so that you may be healed. (James 5:16)

Bring healing to those suffering medical problems, Lord.

Small Town That's Smaller Than Most

Did you grow up in a small town? Chances are it wasn't as small as Monowi, Nebraska—population: one. That “one” is 90-year-old widow Elsie Eiler, who bears a lot of responsibility in this community (such as it is).

As reported by *The National Desk*, “Being the town’s sole occupant comes with many jobs, including mayor, treasurer, clerk, secretary and librarian.” In addition, Elsie runs the Monowi Tavern, serving burgers, beers, and other fare six days a week.

In the 1930s, Monowi was a “bustling railroad town” with around 120 local businesses. But automation and deteriorating farming conditions prompted people to move away. Elsie has been running the tavern since 1973, and she gets a decent number of patrons every day, including local law enforcement and farmers who drive 20 miles to support her business.

Elsie notes that she is happy in Monowi. She’s also grateful to the friends who come from near and far to give her a sense of community.

**Provoke one another to love and good deeds,
not neglecting to meet together.
(Hebrews 10:24-25)**

*Help me to be part of a supportive community,
Abba.*

A 9/11 Garden of Remembrance

2024 marked the first year that Michael Schreiber was not in New York City to commemorate the anniversary of 9/11. But he had a good reason for his absence. The health and safety officer for the Uniformed Firefighters Association of Greater New York had traveled to Ireland to take part in a three-day, 225-mile bike ride to raise funds for those still enduring medical problems due to the collapse of the Twin Towers.

As reported by *NBC News*, 100 firefighters from New York and Ireland took part in the journey that ended in the Ringfinnan Garden of Remembrance in County Cork. The Garden was created by Irish nurse Kathleen Murphy, who worked in Manhattan after 9/11. She planted 343 oak and sycamore trees to represent each of the firefighters who died on that tragic day. The site is dedicated to Murphy's old friend, Father Mychal Judge.

Murphy passed away in 2011, so her nephew, John, oversees the Garden now. He said, "It's a living memorial with the trees that continue to flourish, they continue to blossom, and they continue to grow...It's for healing and hope and love."

Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing. (Ezekiel 47:12)

Bring peace and healing to those enduring loss, Savior.

Just an Ordinary Person

Bishop Kevin Sweeney of the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey, was working as a parish priest in Queens, New York, on September 11, 2001. Writing for *America* magazine, he reflected on the heroes of that day and what led them to act courageously:

“Those who answered the call on that day did not appear out of thin air or magically receive superpowers. They grew up in families and parishes. They learned from their parents and teachers. Many went to Catholic schools or attended religious education programs. Many not only learned about prayer, sacrifice and service, but at some point, they started to live according to what they had learned.”

“Many or most would have been called ‘just an ordinary person,’” Bishop Sweeney concluded. “Yet they had something in common—when the moment of crisis came and they had to make a choice, they were ready. They courageously and generously ‘answered the call,’ and they taught us what Jesus meant when He said, ‘There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’”

He laid down His life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. (1 John 3:16)

Bless the heroes of 9/11, Prince of Peace.

In Celebration of Scripture

Rosh Hashanah is an important Jewish holiday—or, more accurately, holy day. It is the start of the Jewish new year, and on this day in synagogues throughout the land, the shofar—the horn of the ram—will be sounded, calling the Jewish people to a spiritual awakening.

The day is also of significance to other believers. Scripture tells us that on Rosh Hashanah, the people gathered to hear the word of the Lord, the word Christians say we accept.

The prophet Nehemiah reveals that on Rosh Hashanah, “Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding...and he read from it...from early morning until midday” (Neh. 8:2-3).

In a sense, the day is a celebration of the Scripture revered by Jews and Christians alike. Today, therefore, is a good day for all God’s people to set aside time to read His word.

We have as encouragement the holy books that are in our hands. (1 Maccabees 12:9)

Holy Spirit, inspire us to read God’s word.

Lion Pride Run

When it comes to raising money for scholarships, high school English teacher Kate Fletcher goes the extra mile—or 40! For the last 10 years, Fletcher has racked up “dozens of miles” and “over \$100,000 in scholarship money” in the annual Lion Pride Run, held at Virginia’s Louisa County High School.

“I was inspired to start The Lion Pride Run by my students’ remarkable strengths, as well as their many unmet needs,” Kate explained on her GoFundMe page. “I began running at age 35 to show my struggling students that any goal is possible with dedication and hard work...to set an example of perseverance.”

“In total, it’ll be 41 or 42 miles today [that I ran],” Fletcher told *WRIC News* on the day of last year’s run. “I love teaching, and I love running—and this is an opportunity to combine my two passions in a way that helps the kids.”

“I definitely get inspired by Miss Fletcher,” senior Isaiah Holland noted, “because she’s not one to be like, ‘Oh, I’m scared to do this.’ No, she’s like, ‘I’m gonna do it...I’m gonna make an impact all the way.’”

**Show yourself...a model of good works.
(Titus 2:7)**

Rabbi, we thank You for educators who teach by example.

Fighting the ‘Pathogen of Poverty’

In her work as a pediatrician in Flint, Michigan, Dr. Mona Hanna has seen the devastating effects of what she calls “the pathogen of poverty” on children’s lives. As a response, she created *Rx kids*, a public-private program that offers cash to pregnant women to help them meet their financial needs.

Child poverty is especially high in Flint, with 60 percent of enrollees having an annual income of less than \$10,000. As reported by Mark Strassmann of *CBS News*, “Every expectant mother in Flint, regardless of income, can get \$1,500 during her pregnancy. Once the baby is born, it’s \$500 a month for up to a year—no strings attached.”

Dr. Hanna said, “What we are hearing from our families is that this amount of money is a lifesaver...They can afford to pay their rent. They can buy diapers for their baby. They can buy formula. They don’t have to choose between being homeless or having a roof over their heads...We are telling families, ‘We see you, we hear you, and we trust you.’”

**He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and He will repay him for his deed.
(Proverbs 19:17)**

*Lead us to give children and families the
resources they need to thrive, Father.*

Police Officer Enjoys Helping Others

Officer Roy Gutzman of Inner Grove Heights, Minnesota, loves being “a regular street cop” because it affords him opportunities to connect with people who find themselves in trouble. His goal is to be of service to them in any way he can.

Officer Gutzman told *The Catholic Spirit's* Christina Capecchi that he gets his compassion from his late father, who gained the nickname “Gary Good Fellow” because “he’d do anything for you.”

Despite Gutzman’s good intentions, the Catholic husband and father of two knows that life isn’t all sunshine and roses. Three of his colleagues were killed in a domestic violence call in 2024—and Gutzman himself had to deal with colorectal cancer, a condition that is currently in remission.

Through all this turmoil, he has relied on his faith: “I kept asking God to keep me alive so I can try to help other people...I’d go to the chapel at the hospital all the time...I was told doing the Sign of the Cross is a prayer in itself. I often do it when I’m driving around or see something I’m grateful for—just letting God know I’m praying for all the people who need it.”

Learn to do good; seek justice. (Isaiah 1:17)

Lord, may we make the most of the time You have given us.

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

In 1977, as he was studying to become a priest, Msgr. Joseph Calise was assigned a summer job as a chaplain's assistant at an Army base in Germany. One of his duties was holding discussion groups with military wives, one of whom shared with him a story from her past about judging others.

This woman recalled that she and her friend group noticed that one particular military wife purchased a lot of items at the camp's store using the equivalent of food stamps, which is allowed for nonmilitary civilians. The suspicious women knew how much money this lady's husband earned, so they felt sure she was gaming the system.

One of the judgmental women followed this lady home one day to gather evidence against her. "What she discovered instead," wrote Msgr. Calise in *The Tablet*, "was that the woman was shopping for several elderly neighbors and that the stamps were theirs, not hers. The burden of guilt quickly passed from the woman's behavior to those standing in judgment."

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. (John 7:24)

*Lord, teach me not to rush to judgment—
and to give others the benefit of the doubt.*

Raising Children Who Love God

As a mother of four, Catholic author Mary Ruth Hackett reflected on how to raise children who genuinely care about their faith as opposed to just having a “check the box mentality” toward it. She shared her thoughts in *The Catholic Sun*:

“First, encourage questions. Spiritual curiosity is a beautiful thing. Be strong in your faith, and seek to continue to question and explore answers as well. If [children] see you learning and growing, that will become their primary understanding of what it means to be Catholic.

“Second, don’t expect perfection at any point. There is no such thing as perfection in the spiritual life. Praise their efforts, not the outcome. Look at mistakes or missteps as feedback regarding where and how things need to change.

“Next, recognize kids grow and learn differently...One child may like youth group whereas another may prefer time alone in the adoration chapel...Last, provide support and encouragement when engaged in spiritual activities. We should be sparking curiosity and wonder about the world and our God.”

Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray. (Proverbs 22:6)

Open the hearts and minds of children to Your love, Father.

Teeth Help Restore Vision

You've probably heard the expression about "putting your foot in your mouth"—but how about putting your tooth in your eye? The latter is not an expression, though; it's an operation that restores sight to those with blindness due to corneal damage.

Developed in the 1960s by Italian ophthalmologist Benedetto Strampelli, the procedure involves extracting a patient's tooth because it is made up of "the body's strongest natural substance," reports *Popular Science*.

The tooth is then cut and shaved to create a frame of sorts, and a hole is drilled in the middle where a lens is inserted. This implant is sewn into the patient's cheek where new tissue grows around it for several months. The new tissue from the patient's cheek, as well as the implant, are later sewn into the eye socket.

Though the surgery is rare and presents some risks, it also has a high success rate. Some patients have regained so much vision that they are able to drive or go skiing. It is a miracle of modern science.

**An intelligent mind acquires knowledge.
(Proverbs 18:15)**

Lord, guide doctors and scientists towards new avenues of healing, and remind us to see the beauty You have created.

A Pass and a Prayer

The Scripturally-based “Hail, Mary” prayer is naturally familiar to all Catholics. But it’s also a term that football fans know well as describing a long, sometimes desperate pass thrown down the field. So how did a Catholic prayer make its way into football lingo? Well, it started with the University of Notre Dame.

In the 1920s and 30s, Notre Dame’s Fighting Irish used to gather in a huddle during a game and say a “Hail, Mary” if they needed to make yards for a conversion. That was the prayer’s sports context for the next 40 years.

“That is, until Dec. 28, 1975,” reported *The Tablet’s* Jim Mancari, “when Dallas Cowboys Hall of Fame quarterback Roger Staubach threw a 50-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Drew Pearson to defeat the Minnesota Vikings in the divisional round of the playoffs.”

“After the game, the Catholic Staubach famously said, ‘I closed my eyes and said a Hail, Mary.’ That’s when the common usage of the Hail Mary pass took off.”

Pray in the Spirit at all times. (Ephesians 6:18)

Help me incorporate prayer into all parts of my life, Abba.

Walking: An Ideal Exercise

Good exercise doesn't need to leave you spent, breathless, or achy. Walking is perhaps the most popular form of exercise for obvious reasons.

"Everybody knows how to do it already," says certified fitness instructor Michelle Stanten. "When you believe in your ability to do [an exercise], you're more likely to stick with it...It's easy to do, and you can do it anywhere."

Amy Marturana Winderl and Kristine Gasbarre Qaderi, writers for *The Healthy* (a *Reader's Digest* brand), point out some ways to get started:

- Check with your doctor.
- Start and progress slowly.
- Make it a habit.
- Pick up the pace if or when you want.

Taking care of ourselves is good for us and for those we love.

**He who walks in integrity walks securely.
(Proverbs 10:9)**

*Inspire me, Holy Trinity, to take care of my
body, mind, and spirit.*

Holocaust Survivor Reflects Hope

Nick Hope turned 100 years old in 2024. Though his birthday was a happy occasion surrounded by loved ones in Northern California, Hope still remembers the Holocaust, which nearly cut his precious life short.

When Hope was a teenager, he was imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp in Germany for more than two years. Hope told *CBS News*, “When you step in, you are a dead man.”

But Hope survived, thanks in part to his grandfather’s words about staying “patient,” a message he held close to his heart. Thankfully, Dachau was eventually liberated by the Americans.

Hope went on to live a full life in the U.S. He married Nadia—also a Holocaust survivor—and together they raised three children. The key to a long life, he says, is leaning into faith and finding forgiveness: “God says, ‘Forgive, and be forgiven.’”

**How great is the mercy of the Lord, and His forgiveness for those who return to Him!
(Sirach 17:29)**

Merciful Lord, bless all those who have suffered. May they lean into their faith to find hope and forgiveness.

Dive Deep, Part 1

Sister Orianne Pietra René Dyck may be a Daughter of St. Paul now, but she wasn't even born Catholic. She converted to Catholicism at age 12, after having been raised in a half-Protestant, half-Druze family. What prompted this change?

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Sister Orianne reflected, “I think the beauty that comes—along with the confusion—of being raised between two different faiths is that you have to ask questions. I fell in love with the Lord at a very young age through Scripture, but I was reading Scripture and the Koran at home. That kickstarted a lot of questions in me.”

“I asked questions of God Himself because I knew that He was the one who had all the answers...He started to bring me back to that question of...‘who is love’ beyond the human conception of what love could be. That brought me back to the Cross. I found in the Catholic Church this beautiful ability to hold who Jesus was, as our most personal, intimate friend—and also as God, who created the universe.”

[Jesus] said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”
(Matthew 16:15-16)

Remind me that it is good to ask questions of You, Lord.

Dive Deep, Part 2

Sister Orianne Pietra René Dyck, FSP, spent time working as a teacher, so she became familiar with the spiritual struggles that young people face. And being fairly young herself, she realized that she had confronted many of the same problems.

After feeling God invite her to break open Scripture for youth “in a living way,” she wrote a book for ages 9 to 12, titled *Dive Deep: 40 Days with God at Sea*, illustrated by Romi Caron. This book earned a 2025 Christopher Award.

As the daughter and granddaughter of scientists, Sister Orianne used elements from both faith and the natural world to convey her insights. Though some people view science and faith as opposing forces, Sister Orianne disagrees.

She explained, “Science is the exploration of the rules of physical reality that the Lord has made. Faith is the exploration of the heart of this God who made those physical things and our relationship with Him as people made in His image and likeness...To be able to hold the Lord as the Creator means that we don’t need to be threatened by people exploring creation. We are welcome to do it and encouraged to do it.”

**The firmament proclaims His handiwork.
(Psalm 19:1)**

*May I see Your presence in all aspects of
creation, Father.*

Dive Deep, Part 3

When reading about the Exodus in Scripture, Sister Orianne Pietra René Dyck, FSP, initially felt troubled by the statement, “The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh” because it sounded as if God was infringing on his free will. Upon further investigation, Sister Orianne learned the opposite was true.

In her Christopher Award-winning book *Dive Deep: 40 Days with God at Sea*, she wrote, “In Scripture, when God says that He will harden the heart of someone, He isn’t saying He is going to make that person unable to listen to Him. He is saying that is the reaction the person is going to have to His words.”

Sister Orianne goes on to compare Pharaoh to a porcupine fish because when these sea creatures feel threatened, they swallow a lot of water to puff themselves up and make their spikes stick out so you can’t touch them. She explained:

“That was such a profound, physical example of what we often do...to people who are trying to help us. But we also do it to God, who’s trying to heal us and set us free...To see that reflected in a physical example can make us realize, ‘That’s what I’m doing, and maybe I don’t want to do that to God.’”

Humble yourselves. (1 Peter 5:6)

Jesus, make me receptive to Your guidance.

Dive Deep, Part 4

Continuing with the Exodus story, Sister Orianne Pietra René Dyck, FSP, also dispelled a myth grounded more in the visual imagination of Hollywood directors rather than actual Scripture: namely, that the parting of the Red Sea happened instantaneously upon Moses raising his outstretched hands.

“I watched *Prince of Egypt* growing up,” Sister Orianne explained on *Christopher Closeup*, “so it’s an immediate parting, which is a beautiful way to depict it on film...But in the Scriptures, it talks about this wind blowing throughout the night, and that was what parted the waters. To explore the spiritual lessons that this story has for us, even today, we have to go back to what actually happened.”

“To be able to wait on a miracle when things are going crazy all around you is so important. And that’s what the Israelites had to do...The Egyptians were right behind them, there was a pillar of fire dividing them...and they were waiting for the sea to part so that they could flee. We have to be able to wait on the Lord’s timing, and it’s perfect to be able to see it having happened throughout history.”

Wait for the Lord; be strong. (Psalm 27:14)

Lord, grant me faith and patience in my daily struggles.

Dive Deep, Part 5

Sister Orianne Pietra René Dyck, FSP, infused her Christopher Award-winning children's book *Dive Deep: 40 Days with God at Sea* with touches of her own personality, which comes across as both humorous and joyful. While studying God and Scripture can be serious business, there can be a lighter element to it as well.

For instance, Sister Orianne highlighted the story of Jesus condemning “the yeast of the Pharisees.” The apostles, oblivious to His point, think he’s complaining about them not having enough bread. Sister Orianne then imagines this could be a moment when Jesus does “a facepalm.”

“I think it’s important to recognize that if we are made in the image and likeness of God and we have humor, so does God,” she noted. “We actually see throughout Scripture that He has little quips and little jokes. He is a God of joy. We see the Lord rejoicing in the New Testament. To be able to recognize that He is the God who will sit in the dust with us at our lowest moments—and who will laugh and rejoice with us in our moments of joy—I think [that] hits home.”

**A cheerful heart is a good medicine.
(Proverbs 17:22)**

*May I find moments of joy in every day,
Messiah.*

From Love of Money to Love of the Poor

St. Vincent de Paul is known for his care for the poor, but his early life had a completely different focus. Born into a French peasant family in 1580, he joined the priesthood because he thought it would boost his family's financial situation. In this religious role, Vincent hobnobbed with the rich and was well-liked by them because of his "charm, intelligence, and sense of humor," reported the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Dayton.

In 1605, Vincent was captured by pirates while returning home from a boat trip. The pirates took him to Northern Africa and sold him as a slave, where he remained for two years. During that time, Vincent prayed that if God would grant him freedom, he would dedicate the rest of his life to serving the poor.

When Vincent finally escaped and returned to France, he kept his promise to God. Shocked by some of the poverty he witnessed, Vincent appealed to his wealthy friends for assistance in feeding and building up his neighbors in need. He went on to found "orphanages and homes for people who were mentally ill. He also devoted his last years to serving prisoners and slaves."

If you offer your food to the hungry...your light shall rise in the darkness. (Isaiah 58:10)

Savior, guide me to use my influence to help others.

Family Jam Session

Marci Seither had a good relationship with her new daughter-in-law, Aarika, but she prayed to God that they would grow even closer. When Aarika asked Marci to teach her how to make jam, she was happy to share her lifetime of knowledge.

They gathered in the kitchen of Aarika's mother, who also wanted to learn. Marci had everyone take part in the tasks of peeling five boxes of peaches, boiling the peaches, pouring the mixture into jars, and then placing the jars in a steamer for 20 minutes. Along the way, Aarika's grandmother showed up as well to participate in this special afternoon.

Stories were shared, and laughter ensued. Recalling the event for *Guideposts*, Marci wrote, "I looked over at my daughter-in-law, who was so eager to learn the traditions that [my son] loved. Her mother and nana didn't want to be left out of the fun. Maybe I wasn't the only one searching for a comfortable place in our new extended family. God had found the sweetest way to show me that our place was being all together. It was a recipe anyone could follow."

**How very good and pleasant it is when kindred
live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)**

*Abba, help new families come to know and
love each other.*

Angels from the Sky

During her annual hike up Washington state's High Rock Lookout, 79-year-old Ursula Bannister was quite literally thrown for a loop. After taking a picture of the incredible view, she accidentally stepped in a hole and took a tumble. "By the time I sat up, my foot was pointing the wrong way," Bannister recalled in the *Washington Post*. "I knew right away I had broken my leg."

Fortunately for this hiking granny, help came in the form of 20-year-old U.S. Airman Troy May, who heard Ursula's "cries for help." After learning it would take five hours for a medical rescue team to reach the top of the summit, May decided to carry Bannister down himself.

With assistance from fellow hiker/physical therapist Tim Meyer, "who splinted her leg," and his friend, Layton Miller, May was able to make "the three-hour trek back down," and then drive Bannister to the hospital. "I was just overwhelmed with gratitude," concluded Bannister, who ended up needing 10 screws and a titanium plate in her leg. "I thought these people were...like angels coming from the sky."

One will lift up the other. (Ecclesiastes 4:10)

God, may we be willing to lend a hand to those in need.

Sisters in Touch with Reality

In Cuba, even people with money must contend with their country's food and medication shortages. Therefore, those who are poor or sick suffer even more. Thankfully, a group of semi-cloistered nuns, the Order of the Most Holy Savior of St. Bridget, have stepped in to help.

Sister María Ángel Díaz Ledesma told *Global Sisters Report* that her order runs a hostel for tourists in Old Havana. The money they earn from that venture is used to maintain the building and help those in need in the surrounding area.

Sister Maria said, "Usually, on Thursdays in the afternoon, a different duo of Sisters goes out into the streets of Havana and visits those who are sick, old, alone, and abandoned. First, we offer them our presence and our prayers. Then we see what their individual needs are [in terms of food or medication]."

"It is a way for us to be in touch with reality and touch God in the skin of those vulnerable people...We often hear from people that they are very grateful that in a moment of despair, someone came to help them."

They devoted themselves to...fellowship, to the breaking of bread and...prayers. (Acts 2:42)

Allow me to be "God in the skin" for the vulnerable, Lord.