



Special Feature (Theocentric Education)

SAGI: The Greatest Experiment

He Leadeth Me

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Words of Wisdom: "Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all that you do with love." These words of wisdom were written by St. Therese of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun, who was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II in 1997. In her everyday life, even the most mundane tasks in her cloister were performed with great humility and love. No matter where we live, what our mission in life is, or who is with us, we are called to live each and every day as holy servants of God. As St. Therese also stated, "Holiness consists simply in doing God's will, and being just what God wants us to be." As a wife, mother, and teacher, I strive to live her words of wisdom every day. During my years as a teacher, my desire was to give students, no matter their academic ability, the means of being successful in their learning; most importantly, I wanted them to know that they were as God made them to be...valuable and precious. Not a day goes by during which I do not think, remember, or reflect on the many students I was privileged to have throughout my thirty-five years of teaching. It was my delight to watch my St. Mary students as they learned, worked together as partners, laughed together, watched and sang to *Fiddler on the Roof*, read and watched the video of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, recited poetry, and, lastly, as they performed Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*.

THE BEGINNING OF MY PASSION FOR TEACHING

I now know that God had plans for what would become my mission in life, plans that began to form while I was still very young. I did not, of course, understand the beginning steps toward His plans at that time, but He, in His wisdom and compassion, was laying the foundation for what I was gifted to later become. Despite all the trials and difficulties which I faced during my younger years, His grace and great love led me to the thirty-five years I would devote to my teaching career.

As the second oldest of ten siblings, I experienced and learned much about childcare from taking care of younger brothers and sisters, from their infancy and through their younger years. These years of caretaking laid the foundation for my God-given desire to work with children. My first, solid indication of my calling to teach came while I was in high school. A substitute teacher for catechism at my home parish was needed for a few weeks, and I believe it was my mother who volunteered me to help.

Working with kindergartners sparked a love and desire in me for teaching. I remember giving special attention to a boy who remained at a distance during my first class. During the next few weeks, I encouraged and helped him to engage and believe in the importance of

His presence in class. That first teaching experience is forever engraved on my heart. As I was told later by my mother, this shy, little boy told his mother that he liked being there even more than in his kindergarten class during the school week. This first experience, and those to come, of helping students to realize their value and worth would become my greatest joy.

EDUCATION INSPIRED BY FAITH AND LOVE

When I began college, it was with the intention of earning a degree in Education. I did not have to discern or discover what my career path would be; God placed me there, exactly where I was meant to be. Before earning my degree, I spent two years working as a teaching aide in a middle school, learning-disabled classroom. What I did not know at the time was that this experience would later be of great help to me as a full-time teacher. It inspired me to give students, no matter their academic ability, the means of being successful in their learning, and, most importantly, to show them that they were as God made them to be — valuable and precious.

In April 1982, I graduated with a degree as an English major, with a minor in Elementary Education. Over the next thirty-five years, I was first a public-school, substitute teacher. I was then blessed to be hired as a full-time Catholic, middle school teacher. Within a short time, I knew this was where God wanted me to be. During my nineteen-and-a-half years at St. Mary Catholic School, Christ was the center of everything. With God's grace, I grew and developed skills that would help instill in my students the means and desire to learn and grow, not only in academic abilities but also in study habits, organization and time-management skills, social interactions, and, most importantly, faith in God.

Over the course of those years, I made many adaptations to help students with individual learning needs be successful, while simultaneously helping them also accept who God made them to be. I held high expectations for all students, encouraging them to complete assignments, to develop and practice good study habits, and to treat each other with respect and compassion. Within a few short years, Language Arts became my passion. I wanted to foster within my students a love for reading and skills to become proficient writers. There have been many moments in which the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has enlightened me and led me; for instance, three years into teaching at St. Mary, I suddenly knew that my approach to writing needed to change.

It was especially important to me that my middle school students go onto high school, and later college, with the ability to write well. For this to be attained, my approach to Language Arts had to become more comprehensive. Rather than teaching grammar, spelling, vocabulary, sentence structure, composition, editing and rewrites, and literature in isolation, I developed a methodology that would integrate all of these things on a daily basis. Starting with sentence composition, we then moved onto note-taking methods, then paragraphs, short compositions, formal letters to their bishop, essays, formal book reports, quarterly history projects, quarterly vocabulary tests, and, eventually, to scientific research papers. Students practiced weekly and mastered grammar rules, the understanding of vocabulary in its various parts of speech and denotative and connotative meanings, and sentence structures with necessary punctuation in all their written work. To enhance the academic abilities of all my students, their daily practice was discussed and completed with partners or small groups. What a blessing it was to see and hear the humor, laughter, and creativity that abounded as students worked together and had fun with it all! After my beloved St. Mary Catholic School closed in 2004, I was blessed to teach Language Arts to middle school students for two years at another Catholic school. Instead of a class of fifteen students, I then led six Language Art classes of 120 students!

"ONCE A TEACHER, ALWAYS A TEACHER"

Three years after I retired in 2006 from full-time teaching, my role as a Language Arts teacher resumed. My brother and sister-in-law needed me to tutor my nephew in developing his writing skills. This began seven delightful years of working with Catholic, home-schooled students, using my same Language Arts approach. Over the course of those years, I helped students from early elementary throughout high school. During my last three years as a tutor, I traveled five days a week and worked with six different families.

When my husband and I moved to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in 2017, I once again considered myself retired. Little did I know that Divine Providence had brought us to the Upper Peninsula that particular year. Here, too, God had plans for me; within just a few short months, I would learn that my teaching career would continue. Two of my nephews, who were struggling with high school, wanted to quit their studies. I spent the next three years tutoring and assisting them until their graduation in 2020.

"Once a teacher, always a teacher!" In small ways (thank you, St. Therese), I continue to use the gift of teaching given to me by God. Whether it is while substituting for catechism classes, or when grandchildren come to visit, or when friends want to learn new crafts, the teacher within me is there, ready to help. I sincerely believe that I would not be the person I am today without His presence in me. Yes, He leadeth me, and I am forever grateful for such a blessing.

A SPECIAL MESSAGE

To all my home-schooled students and their families: Working with you each week was, for me, the highlight and joy of countless days. I was greatly blessed by your kindness and warmth. We had much to cover each week, and you worked very diligently. I think of each of you often and look forward to the times we meet. May God love and bless all of you — always.
