

## DIRECTORS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

As Coordinator of Elementary Religious Education at Holy Family parish in St. Louis Park (Minneapolis), the sufferings I see in some of the children I meet can overwhelm me at times. Some carry the hurt of divorce. I've met children who carry the burden of drug addiction or alcoholism in their families. I've met children exposed to internet pornography as young as second grade. There are children with illnesses including mental illness at such tender ages. And then there are the almost universal sufferings of so many who struggle with grades, struggle with friendships, or struggle to overcome certain fears. I often pondered, "Is there something I can do that would really make a difference in the lives of these children?"

***Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.***

Matthew 11:28

At the end of the 2000 school year, I seriously asked myself that question. "Is there something that I can do that would really make a difference in the lives of these children?" I was specifically thinking of the public school children that came to the parish religious education classes on Wednesday evenings that I coordinated. I went to my pastor, Father Thomas Dufner, and expressed my concerns. What more can be done that we are not already doing in the short amount of time we have them?

When dealing with personal challenges, trials, and sufferings, I knew the answer. I knew where to go. I knew Who to go to. I turn to our Lord in prayer, making a daily visit to our Adoration Chapel, asking Him to help me, heal me and guide me. He is always available for me to come to Him and bring Him my burdens so He can console me and strengthen me. But how could that truth be bridged over to children? How do you make that truth a reality in their lives? And not just in the lives of a few children but in the lives of many children?

***Let the children come to me; do not prevent them,  
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.***

Mark 10:14

In the Fall, I took the Wednesday night religious ed students, grades 1-8, into the sanctuary and together we knelt in front of the altar. Father exposed the Blessed Sacrament for us and that was the first large group time of Children's Eucharistic Adoration at Holy Family. Using the hand held microphone, I greeted Our Lord truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I thanked Him for always being here for us. I stood up and pointed to the little white Host in the monstrance and told the children, "This is really and truly Jesus. Isn't He so smart and wonderful to think of such a tremendous way of always being with us?" We prayed our decade of the Rosary together for our families and for all the families of the world. Then we had a few moments of quiet time. I said to them, "Boys and girls, now I want you to think of anything that you are worried about. Anything that is on your mind. Anything that is important to you. You

tell Jesus about it right now. He is so interested. He will hear you and help you if you ask Him.” And in those moments of silence, He did hear. And He continues to hear. Since that night, we have implemented Children’s Adoration into our public school program every month, every year. The effects of our time in prayer have been transforming not only to the overall success of the Wednesday Religious Ed program, but most importantly in the lives of the children themselves. They began to experience the effects of their prayers. They met Jesus personally. They started to understand that the Jesus they were learning about in class, who walked on this earth 2000 years ago, is really and truly present for them, right now, tonight, at this moment.

***I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,  
for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned  
you have revealed them to the childlike.***

Matthew 11:25

For the past 8 years it has been an amazing experience for me to pray with children before the Most Blessed Sacrament. And it doesn’t matter if it is the public school children, the children making their First Holy Communion, children coming to special retreats, children from our parish school or the overwhelming group of children gathered for Catholic Vacation Bible School every summer. We sing for Him, bow and adore Him, thank Him, offer our prayers of petition and entrust to Him all our cares.

This year I have the great honor of leading the newest formed group of children in guided Eucharistic Adoration. They are the toddlers and preschoolers of Holy Family. Yes, you read that correctly. And they really get it. I think my favorite part of our time together is the very end. Spontaneously they will often start waving their little hands and calling out, “Goodbye Jesus! Goodbye! We love You!!!” These are the moments I just can’t seem to forget. I wonder what Our Lord is thinking?

***Once, after adoration for our country, a pain pierced my soul and I began to pray in this way: “Most merciful Jesus, I beseech You through the intercession of Your Saints, and especially the intercession of your dearest Mother who nurtured You from childhood, bless my native land. I beg You, Jesus, look not on our sins, but on the tears of the little children, on the hunger and cold they suffer. Jesus, for the sake of these innocent ones, grant me the grace I am asking of You for my country.”***

***At that moment, I saw the Lord Jesus, His eyes filled with tears, and He said to me:***

***“You see, my daughter, what great compassion I have for them.  
Know that it is they who uphold the world.”***

– Entry #286 from the *Diary of Saint Faustina*

Mrs. Jean Prather, Coordinator of Elementary Religious Education  
Holy Family Catholic Church, St. Louis Park, Minnesota

