



Bits & Pieces from U.S. Catholic Magazine

Last week, I looked through a few issues of the magazine *U.S. Catholic* and pulled out the following miscellaneous pieces. They deal with:

- Small children who make noise during Mass
- Mother Cabrini
- How to contribute to the ongoing faith development of an infant who has been baptized in church
- Divine Rebels—book review

Feedback from the pew on noisy kids in church

The following piece from *U.S. Catholic* is an excerpt from a monthly feature article called *Sounding Board*. Readers of *U.S. Catholic* were invited to respond to two questions:

The way I keep (or used to keep) my kids from disrupting Mass is by ...

Helping them participate. The more involved they are in Mass, the less time they have for getting into trouble.

Modeling the behavior I expected from them. When I sang, I shared the book with them and we sang together. When I knelt, I had them stand (so they could see), but I had my arm around them. I also sat in front (front???) so the children could see.

Going to early Mass and allowing church-related books. If they were too young to read, they could bring one “quiet toy” like a doll or stuffed animal. We also used bribery: If they behaved well, we went and got a “Sunday snack.”

Expecting the children to be quiet to the best of their ability. You have to set some expectations even if they are not always met.

Feeding them before Mass when they were very young, so they usually slept. Timing is everything.

Doing our best to separate them (like my parents did!) and telling them to go get a drink of water when they have the urge to nudge someone.

Bringing lots of quiet activities and books. Having two adults helped!

Having children participate. I always pointed to the words of a hymn or prayer even before my child could read them. My little one would clap after every song. She even said, “Yeah!” after the Amen once. I was mortified, but the priest acknowledged it, saying that we should all be so excited.

Bringing them week after week and letting them know that it is a priority for Dad and Mom.

Sitting as close to the altar as possible so the kids could see what was going on. I never really had trouble with my kids at Mass. I would have one on each side and I held the third one. When they got bigger, my husband and I would sit between each kid so no one could poke at another one. That worked really well, along with a well-placed look.

Sitting close to the front so they feel the priest is looking directly at them. I also prepare them ahead of time by reminding them of proper behavior at Mass, and congratulate them when Mass is over if they have been good.

When it comes to small children at Mass, I am most annoyed by ...

Parents who bring the toy box but don't make any attempt to help their child understand the solemnity of Mass.

Non-reactive parents who seem to have zero boundaries.

I don't have time to notice. I'm too busy tending my own!

Un-Christ-like adults who glare at the noises children make.

Parents not even attempting to correct their children during the most sacred time of the Mass, just letting them scream. Whatever happened to showing reverence?

Disapproving parishioners who give parents nasty looks or make comments about a child's behavior.

The institutionally oppressive system that won't allow for optional liturgical experiences (i.e., house churches).

Feeling the need to constantly monitor the volume and movements of my child. Yes, we've had to go potty during Mass.

The fact that we do not have a ministry for parents to drop the little ones off in a nursery so they can recharge during Mass.

The parents who try to entertain the children with electronic games even before the Mass has started.

My own 2-year-old.

Mother to the masses

The following piece was written by Sr. Joan Sauro, C.S.J.

The immigrant saint, Mother Cabrini, welcomed and cared for the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. Her example inspires us to do the same.

I was born in a little Italy in upstate New York, where my aunt and uncle ran a small grocery and a large apartment building.

When I was 5, my uncle gave me a bag of fresh bread to bring to the sisters next door. My kindergarten teacher opened the door, hugged me and the bread, and gave me a beautiful African violet plant and a holy card of Mother Cabrini.

“When she was your age,” the nun said, “she used to pick violets on the riverbank near her home in Italy. She pretended the flowers were missionaries and sent them in paper boats toward China.”

I left the convent intending to do likewise with the violets. Unfortunately, we were surrounded by a sea of cement. So I gave my mother the flowers and kept the holy card near my bed. In the coming years I read all I could about Francesca Cabrini.

The grown-up Cabrini was considered too frail for convent life, so she started the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. When the pope turned her dreams away from China and toward America, Mother Cabrini and six former orphans sailed for New York City in 1889, ministering to Italian immigrants holed up in steerage with their cardboard suitcases. My aunt, uncle, grandparents, and father followed not too long after.

The sisters passed through Ellis Island and landed homeless and penniless in New York City’s Little Italy. There they found women and children in rags raiding garbage cans and sleeping in doorways. After a night on a bed of straw and leaves, the sisters brought empty baskets to be filled by the Italian grocer, the fish monger, and the baker down the street. There was never enough food or heat but more than enough reason to trust God and the goodness of others.

They taught catechism in a church basement and ended up building a school. That was just for starters. “Like St. Teresa, with five pennies and God, I can accomplish many things,” Cabrini said. She and her community were like loose change in God’s pocket, and God worked wonders through them.

This frail woman was resourceful and tireless in helping others, the same qualities I found in my parents and immigrant relatives. Mother Cabrini traveled from New York to Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Seattle, and down the dark shafts in Denver to miners who couldn’t believe their eyes. She went to England, France, Spain, and Italy, and crossed the South American Andes on a mule. An orphanage, school, sanitarium here; day care, nursery, hospital, mission church there.

In each new place she began in the same old way, with prayer and begging, showing that when we approach God

and each other it is best to go with an empty basket.

The first canonized American saint, an immigrant, Mother Cabrini was not perfect. This I find consoling, being among the imperfect myself. When asked to start a hospital, the nun protested—her sisters were not trained as nurses and, she admitted, she found the work repulsive.

When she dreamt about the Blessed Mother herself nursing the sick “because you won’t,” she conceded and started Columbus Hospital in New York City—with enthusiasm. My wily, blue-eyed countrywoman won political and financial support from her paesani by naming the hospital in honor of their hero.

I don’t know if it was the violets, the holy card, or living next door to a convent, but when I grew up I too, entered a religious community that taught and nursed first and second generations of immigrants. I took Mother Cabrini’s five pennies and added hundreds of shiny ones for schoolchildren to place wherever they saw something beautiful—be it a dandelion, the school water fountain, a statue of Our Lady, their father’s hands. That was just for starters.

I recited poetry from atop the teacher’s desk, bribed children with delightful notepads—which I begged from printers—prayed, sang, and twirled long colored streamers with them, bargained posters and books for well-written essays, used high drama and Cabrini-like wile to inspire willing and unwilling students alike.

Today my former Little Italy is home to new cultures and new immigrants from Burma, Senegal, Syria, Cambodia, Thailand, the Sudan. Now I bring Mother Cabrini’s pennies and baskets of school supplies to help the children write stories and draw pictures of their homelands, to help them see beauty. At Christmas I ask a suburban church for special wrapped toys and clothes for each child, remembering how Mother Cabrini spent the last night of her life wrapping Christmas candy for children.

Sometimes I put my own stories into paper boats and send them across perilous seas to readers in lands I shall never see. In all of this, I am guided by Mother Cabrini’s simple wisdom. Cardinal Samuel Stritch of Chicago pinpointed it on the day of her canonization. “She saw God in every man, woman, and child. She loved us.”

Take the plunge—concrete suggestions on the ongoing faith formation of your child in early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence.

The following piece was written by Annemarie Scobey, writer of *At Home with Our Faith* (homefaith.com).

“DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE UNDERTAKING?” It’s the question asked of parents and godparents before every baptism. And at every baptism the young parents and godparents nod and say they do, and the sacrament continues.

In the second before the answer, though, I hold my breath and look around, trying not to snicker. The church should almost erupt in laughter at this question. Because, really, do any of us truly understand what we are undertaking when we agree to raise our children to be faithful people? Do any of us really know what we're getting into?

Perhaps a better question to pose to parents would be: "We all know you have no idea what lies ahead of you with this child. Let's not pretend otherwise. Will you go forward anyway?"

The promises that parents and godparents make at baptism extend into childhood, and each stage brings with it an opportunity to lead a child a little deeper into a relationship with Christ.

Early childhood. *Small children are all about routine, and the best way to be true to those baptismal vows*

"We have stories about Jesus mixed in with all our other picture books," says Carol, mom of four. "At bedtime, we may choose a Jesus story, or we might read a nonreligious children's book. The point is not that we read a religious book each night, but that ... it's just part of the mix." The same goes for music and videos—keep some Veggie Tales alongside the Rescue Heroes and some kids' Christian tunes along with the soundtrack from Tangled.

Middle childhood. *Seven- to 12-year-olds have tremendous potential for faith development. For kids this age, action is paramount. They know the Jesus story and are looking for adults to show them how it fits into their lives.*

Andrew and Nikki, parents of two, have found that service work makes faith come alive for their children. "Our biggest faith focus lately has been service and the foundations of Catholic social teaching," Nikki says. "We aren't doing anything formal, but we are making an earnest effort at living it. We try very hard to get our children actively engaged with service, with a personal investment in the world around them."

The two have taken their children, ages 5 and 9, to make sandwiches for local homeless people, to deliver goods to a shelter for women, and to pull weeds for the parish garden. They also have stressed that stewardship for the earth is part of being a responsible Catholic. "Recycling, not wasting food, not buying things that we don't need, donating items we no longer need are all part of what we need to do to care for the earth," Andrew says.

Teens. *The adolescent years can be a time that kids take on their parents' faith as their own. But a true adult faith comes only after questioning.*

"When my son questions the existence of God, I understand because I went through that, too," says Jeff, who considers himself to have a strong faith as an adult. "I'm glad he wants to talk to me about it, and I try to just

share my experience of faith without telling him what he should believe."

Divine Rebels—American Christian Activists for Social Justice

Kristin Peterson writes the following review of the above-named book.

In her collection of profiles, Divine Rebels, Deena Guzder seeks to dispel the assumption that religion causes nothing but problems in modern society.

A non-Christian herself, Guzder once saw only the negative effects of religion, so she decided to profile Christians who have been compelled by their faith to struggle against poverty, war, racism, the death penalty, and nuclear weapons. For each activist, belief in a loving God is essential for doing this difficult work.

Guzder's profiles include Jim Zwerg, who struggled with the tenets of nonviolence but eventually had the courage to face death during the 1961 Freedom Rides, and Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois, who went from wanting to fight communism as a soldier in Vietnam to starting one of the largest annual peace protests against the School of America's military academy. Jim Corbett started a national campaign to provide sanctuary to Central American refugees after he saw what was happening to the detained refugees in his community.

Some just fell into the social justice work. Charlotte Keys got involved in ecojustice after a chemical explosion in her town, and SueZann Bosler started speaking against the death penalty after her father was murdered. No one was born an activist, and Guzder details each person's transformation and the difficulty of this lifestyle.

Most of the individuals featured are Catholic or members of the historic peace churches, such as Mennonites and Quakers. A second installment or a revised edition of the book ought to feature leaders from non-Christian faiths, along with more women.

At the same time the book is the perfect blend of inspiration and challenging social commentary. Readers will be motivated to join the featured activists on the front lines of the work for social justice and peace.

Have a blessed week,

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