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## Catholic saints: An exploration and inspiration in faith

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## Catholic saints: An exploration and inspiration in faith

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### Abstract

During the researcher's career as a religion teacher and librarian she found very few books for primary age students about the lives of the saints. The purpose of this research project was to write an age-appropriate illustrated biography about the life of St. Therese of Liseuex. The format will include events from the life of Therese Martin from her birth, through her entrance into the Carmelite Convent until her death at twenty-four. This book can serve as a prototype for similar books about other saints for the same audience. The targeted audience for this project is primary students in Catholic Elementary School and Religious Education Classes, teachers and parents. The book is designed to instruct and inspire young children in their development of faith.

This Research Paper by:      Therese Drey

Titled: Catholic Saints: An Exploration and Inspiration in Faith.

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## **Abstract**

During the researcher's career as a religion teacher and librarian she found very few books for primary age students about the lives of the saints. The purpose of this research project was to write an age-appropriate illustrated biography about the life of St. Therese of Liseuex. The format will include events from the life of Therese Martin from her birth, through her entrance into the Carmelite Convent until her death at twenty-four. This book can serve as a prototype for similar books about other saints for the same audience.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Apostles' Creed states: "We believe...in the communion of saints.... The communion of saints includes all the faithful living and dead connected to each other through their following of the teachings of Jesus. This includes those faithful to God who did not know Jesus but because of Jesus' act of Redemption have been saved by him." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 1054)

#### ***Background***

Since the first century, Catholic Christians have recognized those people of faith, whose lives were dedicated to God through Jesus Christ, to have remained connected with the faithful on earth even after death (Stravinskis, 1998, p. 257, 1997).

Until the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine, Christians were forced to worship in secret. Those who chose to live a public life, preaching and teaching the Gospel, were persecuted and more often than not, martyred for their faith. In spite of this persecution the growth of Christianity in the early centuries was widespread. The faithful believed martyrs to be in heaven because they had shown proof of their love of God by the supreme sacrifice of their lives. Because of this belief, Christians on earth began to ask the intercession of the martyrs to pray for them for God's grace to imitate those faithful to the teachings of Christ (Bunson, 1998, p. 16).

Towards the end of the Roman persecutions this phenomenon of veneration, which had been reserved to martyrs, was extended to those who, even without dying for the faith, had nonetheless defended it and suffered for it. Shortly, this came to include those who had been outstanding for their exemplary Christian lives, especially in

austerity and penitence, as well as to those who excelled in Catholic doctrine (doctors), in apostolic zeal (bishops and missionaries), or in charity and the evangelical spirit. ( p. 16). Cults formed in various locations to venerate local saints.

The first formal canonization came in 993, when Pope John XV (r. 985-996) raised Ulric of Augsburg to sainthood during a synod at the Lateran Basilica. Further centralization by papal authority proved necessary in succeeding centuries due to laxity in local justifications in which individuals, after further investigation, were found to be of imperfect sanctity (Bunson, p. 17). Until 1634, the canonization process was little more than a superficial examination of a person's life and miracles. In 1512 Pope Julius II had made formal the differences between beatification and canonization. Beatification being the next to the last step in the process of canonization, requiring one miracle attributed to the intercession of the person under examination. Canonization requires two miracles (Stravinskis, p. 132). In 1634, Pope Urban VIII decreed that the pope alone maintained the right of beatification and canonization. Overseeing this process was the Congregation of Rites established by Pope Sixtus V; this became the Congregation for the Causes of Saints reorganized in 1969 by Pope Paul VI. In 1983, Pope John Paul II widened the authority and role of the local bishops in the initial determination of candidates for canonization (Bunson, p. 17).

The process for canonization:

- Local bishops appoint officials to study the life and virtues of the candidate
- Eyewitness accounts are taken as to the life, labors, and purity of the individual being considered. All phases of the individual's existence are documented.

- Submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints
- If the Congregation concurs, a realtor (reporter) and postulator (guides the process) are appointed.
- Historic documentation of the location and era of the candidate.
- The Congregation reviews documentation
- Documented miracles are required for each step from venerable to beatification to canonization.
- Miracles must be authenticated by competent sources, such as medical doctors and competent consultations.

John Paul II, in his twenty-five year papacy has put some 1,330 people on the road

to sainthood. Of those, 476 have officially been canonized saints. The Pope's continued preference for acknowledging more and more people for their heroic virtue is to give Catholics around the world inspiring role models, many of these from their homeland. (LexisNexis, April 26, 2004)

Since 1969, some saints have been removed from world wide veneration (e.g. St. Christopher) to local community veneration or discontinued entirely because of lack of scientific and historical verifications. This does not mean the individual is no longer a saint. Simply, the nature of their sainthood seems to be based on myth and legend.

Every saint from the past, famous or unknown, lived the life that Jesus preached and lived. Every saint of today does the same. Saints, whether they are rich or poor, strive to be poor in spirit. Christ's *Sermon on the Mount*, (Matthew 5:3-12), followers are told to rely on God for their happiness, not on material possessions of this world.



Through bad times and good, they trust and believe in God's promises. Saints realize that they owe everything they have to God, they are humble no matter how successful they are. They try their best to do whatever God asks of them. They are kind, merciful, and forgiving. They work hard to free their hearts of jealousy, envy, and hatred. Peace comes naturally to them, because there is peace in their hearts. (Catechist, 1998, p. 23). Saints are exemplars of Christ, by devotion to them we are able to better understand and appreciate the saving mystery of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection.

(Woodward, 1990, p. 49). Feast days are observed to encourage our own holiness, to remind us that with God's love and grace, we can accomplish in our own lives what the saints accomplished in theirs. We can also center our lives in Christ, love God and practice acts of charity toward others. (Catechist, 1998, p. 23).

### ***Catholic Education***

The lives of saints are an integral part of a Catholic school education (Ellsberg, 1998, p. 54). The lives of saints vary from very heroic martyrs to those who lived every day lives of simple holiness. By our baptism we are called to live lives of faith, believing and trusting in the existence of a supreme being we come to know through revelation.

Young people, Dorothy Day (a convert to Catholicism) liked to say, have an instinct for the heroic. From a very early age, children are repulsed by phoniness. But they are also capable of responding without cynicism to a person whom they see as the real thing. (U.S. Catholic p. 16)

The Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools Standards and Benchmarks for Religion include: Standard 3, "The student will know and follow the teachings of the Church about Christian morality." Standard 4, "The student will know the teachings of

the Church concerning Christian prayer. The student will form a habit of prayer.”

Standard 6, “The student will participate in extending Christian community to the parish community and the community at large.” (Diocese of Des Moines (2004)

***Impact of saints on students.***

Students can see how standards 3, 4, and 6 are personified in the lives of the saints. Author Robert Ellsberg, in his book for adults, *All Saints*, tells stories of men and women throughout history who by their examples have shown us what it means to love God and neighbor. Knowing they struggled to practice their faith in their times can help us find our own ways to be holy today. (U.S. Catholic p. 10) “What stifles the gospel,” says Ellsberg, “is the notion that there are only a limited number of ways of being holy, and that they have all been worked out.” We need to “expand our concept of holiness, to escape the idea that God speaks to us only through ‘perfect’ people.” (U.S. Catholic p. 10)

Ellsberg has chosen for his book, witnesses of faith and prophets who speak to the challenges of our time; persons who did not just accept the tradition as handed down to them but struggled to define ways to make the gospel appropriate or relevant to their own time and place. Many saints invented their own way, cleared a new path.

Dorothy Day believed we are called to be hospitable and open our hearts and our doors to the homeless. She established Catholic Worker Houses in New York and the hospitality movement continued across the United States. (Regnis, 2002, p. 226)

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador spoke out against the oppression and injustice of the Salvadoran government toward its own people and was assassinated because of it. (Ellsburg p. 132-133) Ben Salmon, a Catholic layman, was a conscientious objector

during the First World War. During his 25 years of imprisonment he wrote a manuscript in which he critiqued the church's "just-war" teaching. He argued in this age of modern warfare, he could see not way to reconcile killing with the gospel command to love one's enemies. (p. 79)

Conversion experiences of the saints are not always simply from unbelief to belief, but from a feeling of meaningless or despair to a life of faith. Thomas Merton's story did not end with his conversion and becoming a Catholic and Trappist Monk. While living in the religious world, he overlooked those in the secular world. While standing on a street corner he realized there weren't two worlds, one religious and one secular, but one graced world. (p. 538-540) St. Therese of the Child Jesus while practicing a life of faith and humility as a Carmelite Sister, realized the most important was to serve God was to serve God by her *little way* - living one's life well for the honor and glory of God. (p. 427-428)

The stories of the saints teach us of the ordinary and the extraordinary but most importantly, they teach us to be the very best people we can be. To live lives of holiness and faith, to love God and our neighbor and to develop the gifts God has given us whether those gifts are of personal talent or gifts of the earth (to grow, to build).

We know children learn from example: the example of parents, teachers and those the students respect and admire. The lives of the saints supply the need for examples in the faith education of our children. As people of faith, the saints lead by their example of the teachings of Jesus Christ, to live lives of justice and compassion, of prayer and sacrifice. In many cases the lives of the saints are not far removed from what is deemed possible by secular standards. They are just persistent in their efforts to bring about the

kingdom of God on earth. Ellsberg states: "I also discovered how important an encounter with a saint or the reading of a book about saints was for the formation or conversion of another saint. In his Confessions, Saint Augustine describes the impact of his discovery of the life of Saint Anthony, the desert father, who had lived only 30 years or so before him. This made a big impression on Augustine and helped him to complete his own conversion." (U.S. Catholic p. 14)

We are formed by what we admire, and so it is very important that we are offered examples that are really worthy of our admiration. That is particularly important for young people because they grow by imitation when they decide they would like to be like this or wish they could be like that person. Just as with St. Augustine or Saint Ignatius, when one learns some of these stories about saints, when one hears the heroism of these people, all kinds of possibilities are ignited. (U.S. Catholic p. 16)

Moving into the twenty-first century, educators are challenged to identify the ways children learn information and values. The world is rapidly changing, it is nearly impossible to keep up with ever developing new technologies. Yet, as Catholic educators we are about forming disciples of Jesus. Pope Paul VI stated: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 1975). The lives of the saints, ordinary people doing extraordinary things in the name of Jesus, are those witnesses with whom children can identify.

### ***Available Materials***

In viewing the religion texts (Benzinger, Sadlier, and Harcourt Religion), used by Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of Des Moines, the researcher found limited

references to specific saints. While each series contained a chapter devoted to sainthood and canonization, very few specific saints were profiled. The series *Walking by Faith*, was the only series that provided illustrations and brief descriptions of saints who exemplify the objectives of the chapter being studied.

There exist collections of brief biographies of saints by feast days, patronages, and lists and lists of saints by name, era, works, and date of canonization. Within the past few years publishers have been trying to interest students in the lives of the saints through trading cards (similar to baseball cards), file cards (4x6 cards sent to the subscriber on a monthly basis). Recently, a series of collectable loose leaf pages with each page depicting the life of a saint (Ordinary People Extraordinary Lives – Inspirational Stories of the Saints). All of these are aimed at upper elementary students. There seems to be a void in books and materials that would appeal to the primary elementary student with attractive, colorful and easy to read texts of these heroes of the Catholic Church.

***Problem Statement:*** Knowledge of the lives of the saints is an important part of a Catholic school experience. Although biographies and autobiographies of the saints exist and have for centuries, very few have been written for children and fewer still have been written for primary age students.

### ***Research Questions***

1. How does related children's literature enhance the elementary school curriculum?
2. Does children's literature affect the values and behaviors children imitate?
3. Will picture books on the lives of individual saints find a place in elementary Catholic school and religious education programs?

### ***Purpose statement***

The purpose of this research project is to write the first in a series of primary picture books for Catholic school students and those in religious education. The researcher hopes such a book will invite students to read about a saint on their own and encourage them to imitate the lives of the saints in the way they show compassion, respect and dignity toward others, at home, school and the playground. Such books would provide primary teachers and parents of young children with stories of heroic men and women, who, in living their lives by gospel values achieved sainthood.

### ***Assumptions***

It is assumed that these books will begin to fill a void and that teachers, parents and children will enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to read and learn about the lives of the saints.

### ***Limitations***

This project will be limited by the quantity of biographic literature that can be found on particular saints and the amount of information tolerated by young readers.

Communicating the message through pictures and controlled vocabulary will also be limiting.

### ***Definitions***

**Beatification** – The next to the last step in the process for the canonization of a saint.

(Stravinskas, 1998, p. 132)

**Canonization** – A solemn declaration by the Pope that a person is now in heaven and entitled to the full honors of the Church. (p. 180 )

**Cult of saints** – Reverence and ceremonial veneration paid to the saints or to objects that symbolize or otherwise represent them. (p. 298)

**Doctors of the Church** – A title officially conferred by the Church on ecclesiastical writers of eminent learning and a high degree of sanctity who have distinguished themselves by their defense, exposition and preservation of the doctrine of the Church. (p. 340)

**Intercede** – To pray on behalf of another. Thus Catholics ask saints to intercede with God for them. (p. 540)

**Kerygma(tic)** – Refers to what God has done and is doing in the Person of Jesus Christ. (p. 582)

**Laity** – All those baptized faithful who are not in Holy Orders, or in some religious state of life. (p. 596)

**Martyrs** – 1. The act of being put to death for one's religious beliefs. 2. The state of being a martyr. To be a martyr one must be put to death or die because of suffering endured for the Faith. An unbaptized person who dies for the Christian Faith receives Baptism of blood. (p. 655)

**Medals** – A flat metal disk bearing an image of Our Lord or a holy person or some mystery of religion, etc. It is blessed by the Church. Wearers of medals are to guard against superstition but are to use the medal as a reminder of honor to be given to the image thereon and of the need for advancing in Christian perfection. (p. 662)

**Sacramentals** – Canon law defines sacramentals as “those rites, actions and things which the Church uses in imitation of the Sacraments in order to obtain through her intercession certain effects, particularly of a spiritual nature.” (p. 880)

**Saint** – A member of the Church Triumphant who by an exemplary life of holiness and virtue has been officially listed in the roll of saints by the Church following the processes of beatification and canonization. (p. 893)

**Synod** – The meeting of the clergy of a diocese under hierarchical authority to discuss matters pertaining to discipline and liturgy within the diocese. (p. 948)

**Veneration** – The respect shown to saints. It may take the form of prayers, hymns and services; or it may consist in honoring their relics or statues. Above all, we show veneration by asking their prayers for us, and by imitating their virtuous lives.

Veneration is distinct from the homage we give to God, usually called adoration. (p. 988)

### ***Significance***

While a lot of attention is paid to saints in our Catholic tradition, few picture books can be found depicting the lives of individual saints. This picture book may be the beginning of a series of picture books inviting young children to meet selected saints who were ordinary people who followed Jesus as best they could, whose lives give witness to our call to bring the Good News of Jesus to others. Children imitate those they admire, whether that be early imitations of Superman and Batman or the adolescent rock stars of their times. This book will begin to fill a void in Catholic children’s access to examples of Christian living.



## Chapter 2

### Review of Related Literature

#### *Literature – based curriculum.*

Van Sledright and Kelly, (1998), examined the effects of the use of a literature based curriculum in the study of history for elementary students. “Literature-based accounts of the past provided students with multiple sources for learning (p. 1)”. They asked the questions: “What influence do these alternative texts have on young readers’ in developing an historical understanding when used on their own or in concert with text books? What learning opportunities do they provide? Do they promote interest in reading history? Do students learn to distinguish different types of historical texts and read them for their varying purposes? How does an array of sources influence the ways in which young readers analyze historical evidence, sort out conflicting interpretations, and deal with reliability and validity issues?” (p. 2).

Van Sledright and Kelly found a fifth-grade classroom where the teacher used a textbook supplemented with alternative history texts. In the class of 26 fifth graders, 19 were Caucasian, three were African-American and four were Asian-American. According to achievement test scores, the students were reading in a range from just below grade level to several grades above. Most students were reading at grade level (p.6).

The researchers assessed the teacher’s views and the opportunities he provided the students. Throughout the study they interviewed the teacher to assess the importance he placed on fifth-graders learning history, how he knew using an alternative text influenced the students learning and why he chose the books he chose. Also throughout

the study, the authors interviewed six students. They used think aloud protocol to check comprehension and text processing, classroom observations and read the research literature themselves.

The data gathered suggested the need for assisting students' knowledge of historical subject matter, critical thinking skills and reading for details. The evidence from this study suggests that the six interviewed students enjoyed the alternative texts and preferred to use them to complete their research projects. The assortment of texts, and adding student independent search for information, gave them autonomy over their own learning and seemingly increased their reading of history and historical fiction.

Brophy and VanSledright (1998) reported on research about how fifth grade students learn U.S. history. Brophy and VanSledright studied three fifth-grade teachers of U.S. history. They found each teacher's approach covered some material well while deferring other important material. Making no claims about which methods are best or which teacher is best, they only reflected on the goals and practices of teaching history. (p. 44)

From one teacher's storytelling approach (teacher directed whole group instruction, supplemented by independent assignments) to another's methods of engaging students in simulations and issue discussions and a third teacher's approach as a means of promoting social reform, the investigators did not find one more effective than the other. All worked well when given appropriate time and materials.

They drew four conclusions from their study: (1) young children do "have a sense of history", (2) children must be made aware of the contrasting purposes of different types of historical texts, (3) students have difficulty retaining historical knowledge when

it lacks coherence and has not been “situated” within their prior knowledge, (4) traditional, fact-laden, coverage-oriented approaches to history may “prevent students from developing the critical, interpretive, and synthetic thinking abilities required for cultivating historical understanding” (p. 23).

The authors recommend combining state and national history, stating clear and concise goals and reminding teachers and curriculum directors that U.S. history should be studied not only for its own value but what it can do to prepare future citizens.

### ***Values in Curriculum***

Catholic school curriculum teaches more than the canons of the religion. Schools bear a responsibility to form citizens of the future. Along with Catholic doctrine and teaching, we must form students who are honest, respectful, compassionate, seek justice and whose lives reflect the life of Christ. Suh and Traiger (1999), responded to the call for a social action and participation approach to teaching... (Suh/Traiger 1999 p. 1).

The media, with it’s glorification of sex and violence has deluged young minds with examples of poor behavior and immoral character. Teachers have a unique opportunity to help students make positive decisions regarding their education, their goals for themselves, and the development of positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Teachers need to recognize the role of beliefs and values in shaping behaviors (Suh/Traiger p. 1).

Using literature and the social studies curriculum, four basic approaches can be used:

1. teaching values and providing consistent reinforcement for desired behaviors
2. helping students to become aware of their own values

3. helping students develop ethical principles for guiding their actions
4. helping students develop careful, discrimination analysis to examine values questions (p. 2).

Racism and learning to live cooperatively together in a multi-racial society is another critical area in values education. Starting in the primary grades, children must learn to respect all the different groups that make up the population of the United States. No group is better than another group; all races and ethnicities have contributed to make this country great. The young child must be taught this as soon as possible (p. 3).

This involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups. Reading about the lives of famous people who made their contributions to American society can help students understand the contributions from all different groups. Emphasis should be placed on moral behavior and the emulation of these values (p. 3).

Children's literature is another very important curriculum area where moral values and moral reasoning can be taught. Stories provide a common reference point and good examples for children to learn. The interrelationships between reading, writing and speaking and the exploration of one's feelings and ideas creates an excellent opportunity for values education. Reading and then writing, encourage students to become reflective about their actions (p. 4).

C. Dooley, in *The religious education curriculum in Catholic Schools* (2000), examines the history and evolution of religious education from the 1950s to the present. She first details the effects of the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 65) on catechesis and investigates the implications of these developments with regard to the character of

Catholic schools. Dooley found the role of the religion curriculum in Catholic schools is to support the Second Vatican Council's kerygmatic (proclamation of religious truths as taught in the gospels) renewal by integrating scripture, tradition, liturgy, and the teaching authority and life of the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church defines the Church primarily in terms of the people of God and asserts that the laity have the vocation of building up the Church because they are the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself. Josef Jungmann, a professor of theology at the University of Innsbruck called for a lived faith response. He believed "the child must be taught to put into practice what he learns, so that he may be a 'doer' of the word and not merely a 'hearer.'" (Dooley, 2000, p. 157).

In 1971, the Congregation for the Clergy, published the General Catechetical Directory (GCD), mandated by the Second Vatican Council. Under the umbrella of the ministry of the word, the GCD includes *evangelization* – to awaken the faith, *catechesis* – enables faith to become living, active, and conscious through the light of instruction, *liturgy* – celebrates, proclaims, and hands on the same faith and *theology* – serves catechesis by the systematic treatment and the scientific investigation of the truths of faith (p. 160).

The U.S. Catholic bishops published two documents relevant to religious education in 1973. The first was *To Teach as Jesus Did (TTJD)*. This document identified education as part of the Church's mission, and set out a plan of action. Doctrine was presented as the basis for a way of life; Christian community impels us to service. Jesus himself lived his faith through his actions and his words. The second document published by the U.S. bishops was the *Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious*

*Education (BT)*. This set down the principal elements of the Christian message that is to be stressed in the religious formation of Catholics of all ages. These documents sought to bring together catechesis throughout the country and provide a framework for the content of all religion textbooks being developed (p. 161-162).

The materials of the 1980s were influenced by the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II in 1979, *Catechesis Tradendae (CT)*. CT outlines criteria for curricula and also to the life of the school:

1. Catechetical texts must address the real life of the student.
2. Texts must be comprehensible to the student. (language, reading level)
3. Texts must present the whole message of Christ and the Church.
4. Texts must give students a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ to bring about conversion and obedience to God's will (p. 164).

1992 saw the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*. This was a major event in the history of catechesis. Written in four main parts, the CCC covers the Apostles' Creed (faith professed); the sacraments (faith celebrated); virtues, beatitudes, and commandments (faith lived); and prayer. It is the primary source for writers and publishers in determining the content of religion textbooks (p. 166).

Presently Catholic school curriculum is influenced by catechetical directories, *Catechesis Tradendae*, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and guidelines offered by the United States Bishops Conference. It is based on the catechism tradition of creed, sacraments, commandments, and prayer and embodies sound pedagogical principles and seeks to meet the developmental needs of the learner. All publishers have analyzed their

materials in terms of faithfulness to catechetical directories, encyclicals and the CCC (p. 169).

Dooley concluded that Catholic schools function as a mediator between faith and culture. Schools bring faith, culture and life into harmony and students are encouraged to develop a conscience which enables them to recognize secular values which threaten human dignity.

Emilie P. Sullivan and Carol Yandell, conducted studies to determine if children were comprehending values messages. The first of these studies, "What are the Religious/Spiritual Values in Children's Books?", selected 30 realistic fiction books which had either won, or were honor books for, the Newbery Medal. A panel of experts in children's literature read and evaluated all 30 books. Results indicated 24 books contained non-religious content, 7 of the books contained Christian-Judeo content exceeding 25%. Results also indicated historical fiction was more likely to contain religious values than contemporary fiction.

Their second study, "Do Children Get the Values Messages?", eight children's librarians chose 29 Newbery Award books, identifying specific spiritual values in those books. Thirty-five third through sixth-grade students read a total of 21 of the titles chosen. Students were interviewed to determine what spiritual values they recognized. Results indicated 1) librarians and children were able to identify a wide range of spiritual values in the books; 2) librarians chose stories emphasizing family relationships, love of parents, family unity, or the need for children to experience a loving and supportive, traditional or non-traditional, family unit; 3) in those books conveying spiritual values

which adult interpret as having religious significance, child readers focused only on the value in a non-religious connotation (p. 1).

“The importance of values in children’s books lies in the influence that the content of books may have in shaping children’s thinking.”, states June D. Knafle, Alice Legenza Wescott and Ernest T. Pascarella in their research: “Assessing Values in Children’s Books”. Assessment is difficult and as society’s values change, children’s books will reflect those changes. (p. 1) Reader subjectivity, and rater agreement also come into play. (p. 2)

### *Values In Curriculum*

#### *Heroes, role models*

Little children imitate Superman and Batman; early adolescents imitate teen rock stars and movie idols, impressed with their talent, way of dress and adventures reported by the media. Navone, (1990) states: “Before we can conceptualize our experience and evaluate it, before we can share the experiences of other times and places through reading, before we can share our own experiences with others through writing, we base our conduct upon the models who surround us”(p. 23). From our earliest years we are shaped by our relationships to our parents and significant others whose life stories touch our own (p. 23). For early Christians, the gospel story helped shape their behavior. Later, the lives of the saints gave them incentive to live with compassion and love for others.

In our quest for role models, we desire candor, compassion, wisdom and courage (p. 24). A good leader must have ethos, pathos and logos. The ethos is his moral character. Pathos is his ability to touch feelings, to move people emotionally. Logos is



his ability to give solid reasons for an action, to move people rationally or intellectually (p. 25).

Moral and spiritual excellence requires the fortitude of individuals and groups who are willing to struggle and to sacrifice on its behalf. The martyr is the ultimate symbol of fortitude and heroism (p.27). Saints play an important role in the church. They illustrate not only the grace of God; they also illustrate the multitude of responses to this grace in different times and places.

Everyone has heroes. The danger is that we may not have the wisdom to select the right hero. Our heroes define themselves by their choices and attitudes (p. 28). They know who they are, what they are doing and where they are going. They have a constant sense of identity.

Christ, is the hero of the Christian community of faith. The saints are also venerated for their example and participation in the life of Christ. They are heroes whose lives are true images of the true goodness of Christ (p. 30). Heroes give us hope. All suffered and all managed to find hope for others and themselves. Christ is what we believe to be the supreme good of all humanity (p. 32).

Although risk – taking is not in itself heroic, true heroism entails a selfless act with a degree of risk. When a system of values becomes so important that people are willing to live by it and die for it, heroic figures are born. The hero is the lived action of the value system (p. 32).

Love motivates the hero with the courage to confront complexity responsibly and hopefully. Truth is communicated in the heroes and saints of the Christian community

who have willingly accepted a life of sacrifice in taking responsibility for others. Heroes and saints are capable of accepting the cost of commitment to others (p. 33).

Catholic school curriculum teaches much more than the canons of the religion. They bear a responsibility to form citizens of the future. Along with the 'rules and regulations' we must form students who are honest, respectful, caring, trustworthy, fair and responsible. Suh and Traiger (1999), responded to the call for a social action and participation approach to teaching... (Suh/Traiger 1999 p. 1)

The media, with its glorification of sex and violence has deluged young minds with examples of poor behavior and immoral character. Teachers have a unique opportunity to help students make positive decisions regarding their education, their goals for themselves, and the development of positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Teachers need to recognize the role of beliefs and values in shaping behaviors (Suh/Traiger p. 1)

Using literature and the social studies curriculum, four basic approaches can be utilized:

1. teaching values and providing consistent reinforcement for desired behaviors
2. helping students to become aware of their own values
3. helping students develop ethical principles for guiding their actions
4. helping students develop careful, discrimination analysis to examine values questions (p. 2).

Racism and learning to live cooperatively together in a multi-racial society is another critical area. Starting in the primary grades, children must learn to respect all the different groups that make up the population of the United States. No group is better than

another group; all races and ethnicities have contributed to make this country great. The young child must be taught this as soon as possible (p. 3).

This involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups. Reading about the lives of famous people who made their contributions to American society can help students understand the contributions from all different groups. Emphasis should be placed on moral behavior and the emulation of these values (p. 3).

Children's literature is another very important curriculum area where moral values and moral reasoning can be taught. Stories provide a common reference point and good examples for children to learn. The interrelationships between reading, writing, speaking, and the exploration of one's feelings and ideas creates an excellent opportunity for values education. Reading and then writing encourage students to become reflective about their actions.

The use of saint biographies in Catholic school curriculums would fill a void in rounding the experiences of elementary age children. Shugar (1998) found a lack of contemporary public figure(s) who could be identified as heroes. In her article she quotes Princeton sociologist Suzanne Keller who voices her concern that too many of today's role models are products of the media. These heroes are chosen primarily for their fictional roles and not for their lives' accomplishments.

Contemporary heroes to inspire future generations can be found in the lives of those in various stages of canonization. Some of course will be historical and others more recent but most all of these heroes are ordinary people who chose extraordinary life journeys.

The preceding documentation points to the importance of literature in teaching young children. Stories play an important role in their psycho – social development. Stories help children identify heroes and emulate appropriate behaviors.

***Creative projects for children.***

Gensicke (1993) focused on presenting historical concepts to primary students. This she felt would “assist educators in developing their Iowa history units to meet the needs and interests of the children (p. 3).” This fulfilled what she felt was a gap in historical literature for young children.

Ms. Gensicke reviewed related literature in social studies curriculum and 350 alphabet books to “determine the ways in which the authors and illustrators presented their subjects, and how they dealt with the representation of the sound-letter relationship (p. 21).” She gathered historical information about the state of Iowa that could fit the 26 letters of the alphabet. While involved in the fact gathering stage of the project, she was careful to “keep in mind that within the book there needs to be a balance between the known and the unknown.” extending the students realm of known history.

After gathering data she then had to consider the illustrations to be used. Chosen were a mixture of line drawings and photographs that would be of the best quality visually and complement the text. Attention was also given to the book’s size and layout, as “these must be effective in presenting the information (p. 25).” “Careful consideration was also given to the end papers, the front matter, and the body of the book, quality of paper, binding and book jacket and casing (p. 26)

The challenges in producing such a project were the abundance of information available for some letters and lack of for others. The quality of photographs when

reproduced was often lacking, omissions of historical personalities and historical institutions (i.e. state universities) were necessary because of size limitations.

Mroch (1997), finding a lack of databases available for Catholic school students in their religion curriculum, developed *A Database of Saints of the Catholic Church*. Her purpose was to “create a database of saints of Catholic Church designed for students aged 7 to 15”. The database of the saints will enable student users to quickly access information about saints...(p. 5).

Mroch reviewed literature focusing on database design, curriculum development, and “the saints and their importance to the Catholic Church and its religious programs for elementary and middle school students (p. 8).” She found evidence of the importance of integrating technology and using a variety of software. “The curriculum of the past, designed before computer technology was available, is no longer adequate...(p. 15).”

Her database storage was initially placed on a floppy disk to be later transferred to CD-Rom. She found a relational database file management program on which to enter the information, feeling the need to be able to relate data between tables. The program needed to be user friendly for elementary students. She chose to accommodate information on 300 saints. She based her choices on the curriculum guide for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, the Litany of Saints, and the saints listed in the official calendar of the Catholic Church. Biographic information can be cross referenced with student names and derivations. Two saint biographies appear on the screen at one time and can be printed. From the list of saints selected, only biographic information on four saints could not be found.

Mroch recommends additional Catholic software: names could be added to her own CD-Rom of persons in the venerable and blessed stages of canonization; Catholic Encyclopedia, dictionary, map features; Sacraments, the Mass, Holy Days, etc.

*Description of the final project*

In *The way to write for children*, by Joan Aiken, the author asks: “Is this to be a book for children, or a book about children? Writing for children is different than writing for adults. Children read to learn – even when they are reading fantasy, comics or the back of the cereal box, they are expanding their vocabulary, making discoveries (Aiken p. 4). Children need information imparted in the form of dialogue, or in little palatable pieces layered among the action. The child reads without critiquing the writing. The writer can assume the child reader has never encountered anything of this kind before (p. 9).

Children should get from the stories they read a sense of their own inner existence, and the models that connect them with the past; or draws on similarities of their presence; they need to receive something that extends beyond ordinary reality (p. 17).

Rhythm of a small child’s story is tremendously important. A child’s book will be read over and over again. It must be inviting. Vocabulary – it is a fallacy that unfamiliar words will discourage children from reading. Actually, they may be a particular pleasure (p. 26). Provided sentences are kept short and rhythmic, vocabulary may be quite rich. Educators encourage parents to read to their children, it is good to keep in mind parents want to read stories that are comfortable.

It is impossible to be too speedy with the beginning of a children's book. You have to rush the reader off his feet, if possible, with the first paragraph. If the writer can startle the reader with the opening, do that too (p. 49). Aiken goes on to say: If beginnings are important, endings are crucially important. In fact it is an excellent plan to have a firm and clear picture of the end in your mind before you ever begin to write; even, perhaps have the last paragraph written down. The end, when it comes, must be strong, satisfying, yet perhaps with an element of surprise in it, so that the reader may feel, 'Yes, I see; yes, of course. Yes, it had to happen that way' (p. 52).

Character development is essential in a children's book. Characters need to be round. It would be a mistake to make a good character too good that would be boring. The reader has to feel some emotion toward the characters, he has to be interested enough to care what happens next and want to go on reading about these people (p. 54). A character can only show his nature in relations with other people; he can't function in a vacuum. Sometimes the hero's relationship with a minor character turns out to be an important and pivotal part of the story (p. 59). Details are a pleasure to read they set the stage, paint pictures in the reader's imagination. If the writer can pick out some common denominator of experience that will register with the reader, they will have found a fan.

In *Worlds of Childhood, The art and Craft of Writing for Children*, author Jean Fritz states, "I don't think it's possible to discuss the craft of writing for children without first exploring the nature of the writer." (p. 23) Fritz was born and raised in China, the daughter of missionary parents. When she began writing, she found herself writing fiction set in American history. Her research drove her to write biography: "where I

would be caught up in the life of a real person and where, however strange the events, I could just let 'er rip!" (p. 25)

When asked how she knows what children like, Fritz replied "Well, I was a child." She writes as if she's talking to her grandchildren. Communication is most important and vocabulary will take care of itself when communication is the goal. (p. 27). While her stories are about history and her framework is chronological, Fritz doesn't feel bound by it. She will begin a story with 'once' or 'sometimes' listing events without regard to their exact sequence. Fritz was disturbed by those critics who wanted her to write of past events as perfect and curbed her vocabulary. She tried to show by way of her writing the true persona of her characters.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Currently there are few saint biographies written for children in primary grades. Most are very short biographical sketches of the lives of various saints. Most recently published is the collection *Saints Lives & Illuminations* by Ruth Sanderson. Ms. Sanderson has chosen forty saints from the first millennium. Most of these are lesser known to the general population but never the less important role models for all. Ms. Sanderson is also the illustrator. Her art was influenced by Renaissance art, illuminated manuscripts, icons, old engravings, and woodcuts (book jacket). As these saints lived in the first century C.E., very little is known about them. The text and art can be contained on one page. Not enough information is given to make the saint a real person for the primary student.

### ***Procedures***

Picture books can be appropriate for all ages. The term 'Everybody books' is often used instead of 'Easy'. The researcher has chosen to write a picture book biography on the life of St. Therese of Lisieux also known as St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Little Flower. St. Therese is the writer's patron saint whose feast day October 3 is the birthday of her mother. The story of St. Therese, whose childlike devotion to Jesus, and her decision to dedicate her life to God as a Carmelite sister, was influential in the writer's early life of prayer and devotion to God and His Church.

To begin the process the writer has researched related writings on the use of children's literature in an elementary school curriculum, values education and heroes and role modes. The writer has read four biographies of St. Therese (see Appendix A). The

text for this picture book will be written to highlight the childhood of St. Therese, important sacramental events (Baptism, First Reconciliation and First Communion and Confirmation), and her relationships with her parents and siblings. Therese's profound faith in God the Father, his Son Jesus and their Holy Spirit along with the family's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary will be stressed to communicate to children they too can follow the example of the child Therese and foster their relationship with God.

The book will be approximately twenty pages in length with a drawing to accompany each page. Vocabulary will be limited but not to the point a primary student will be able to read unaided. Illustrations will be colored pencil or pastels.

Biographical information is being collected and two possible illustrators are interested in reading the manuscript. As suggested by the research, anyone endeavoring to write a children's book should be in touch with young children. One possible illustrator is an art major currently employed as a preschool drama and art teacher. The other is a current art education major, the fourth in a family of nine. The timeline proposed is to have the manuscript completed in March with the illustrations completed by the beginning of April 2005. Test copies will be reviewed by the students and teachers of the primary unit at the writer's school.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Project**

See accompanying book

***With All Her Heart***

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### ***Summary***

The purpose of this project was to research and develop an illustrated biography on the life of St. Therese of Lisieux for primary age children. The criteria the researcher used in writing the book were events in the life of Therese Martin with which children could identify. The story of her birth, relationships with her parents and sisters, sacraments she celebrated and her childlike efforts to do God's will.

Illustrations emphasize many of the special events in the life of Therese.

#### ***Conclusion***

A lot is written about the life of St. Therese. She wrote an autobiography in the few years prior to her death and additional material has been written by those who were close to her as well as those who have drawn conclusions from the study of her life and writings. The researcher was limited to the number of events and theological discernings in the life of this saint. Children need to be able to relate to the biographee in order to learn from and exemplify their behaviors and attitudes.

The researcher envisions this illustrated biography as the first in a series of illustrated biographies of saints for primary age students. Besides being used in a Catholic school classroom or Religious Education Program these books would be a good addition to the family's personal library.

The researcher sought out the help of an illustrator to enliven the text and keep the reader engaged. As this is the first book for both the researcher and illustrator, multiple revisions and editing will be necessary prior to publication.

### ***Recommendations***

Additional recommendations for further research projects would include picture book biographies of the popes (especially right now with the death of Pope John Paul II and the subsequent election of Pope Benedict XVI), illustrated books on the Sacraments of the Catholic Church and books illustrating the Commandments with stories of how these moral guides apply to the primary age student.

Mroch with her CDRom of saint biographies and the results of the aforementioned studies on the effects of outside reading (non-text book) on the learning of subject matter by young students, the researcher hopes to impress young students with the attainability of holiness by all of us prior to the cynicism of the teenage years.

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## Appendix A

Books used as reference in writing the text for *With All Her Heart*

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