



I was 34 and expecting my only child, when a parish survey was passed around with the collection plate, asking whether people had various skills such as calligraphy, painting, carpentry, sewing, and the like. I had been lamenting the lack of Christian formation programming for children in

our small parish, and wondering what I would do once my son arrived and was ready for such programming. It seemed like an answer to a prayer! I filled out the survey, and, after not hearing anything back for several weeks, decided to find out more on my own.

The original plan was to form a centralized CGS program between the Episcopal Cathedral of St. James, Church of the Ascension (where I worshipped), and Church of Our Savior. (There may have been some conversations with St. Chrysostom's too.) I attended a planning meeting at St. James Cathedral, where I met Maryanne Rusinak, who had studied with Sofia up in Toronto. Needless to say, I fell in love with the work, attending the 3-6 training with Tina Lillig and her team in Glen Ellyn. After my son was born, Maryanne and I continued to attend trainings together, bringing my infant son along (something we saw a lot of those days with other moms and dads) until he was too old to participate 'peaceably'. Maryanne had been hired as lead catechist at the Cathedral, and we grew the program, with her husband and parishioners making many of the materials. Having studied sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago with Eldon Danhausen, I was enlisted to make the 3-D infancy narrative and cenacle materials.

Tina then asked me to make them for her parish, St. Giles, in Oak Park, too, even bringing them to trainings. As word spread, I made a lot of those apostles and infancy narrative figures for parishes (and even one for Sofia). My son Ian grew up as the years passed, helping in the atrium for a while, then eventually assisting with the older children when he was in his teens, even having his own nameplate on the classroom door! He also helped me make the 2-D wooden figures and maps for other parishes, using our small basement wood shop.

But probably my most thrilling moment as a CGS mom was when I was asked by Pat Sauerman to do the artwork for the long-awaited Little Gospels. Photos had been brought back from Rome of the early Italian versions - could I replicate those for publication for an English-speaking (and later other languages') audience? There were maps to re-render, headers, frontispieces, illustrations, and designs at the ends of the books. There was text to re-set. By this time, computers were ubiquitous, and I was getting up to speed on the latest software: QuarkXpress, InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator. First, we needed for Sofia to give her blessing to this work. Then Pat and her committee gave me photos of all the images from the Italian editions. From that I had to render all-new artwork.

It was a time-consuming process: I had to redraw the images, because the photos taken were seldom square to the page, showing a somewhat distorted, trapezoidal image that had to be corrected. Then I had to trace the images manually and transfer them to the hot-press illustration board using graphite transfer paper. Then, I had to ink the images with my technical pens. (Keeping those from clogging was another story). Then they were colored in, scanned, and cleaned up (taking out the background texture of the paper) for printing. Each illustration took many hours. One day, my son walked by while I was doing this, and said 'Mom, I have a better way.' Christmas was just a week away, so I didn't get much work done on those in the interim. But imagine my astonishment when I unwrapped my present on Christmas morning - a brand new Wacom Tablet! This new computer tool eliminated at least half of the time I had been spending mechanically transferring the images, and it was much easier to correct mistakes. With about 50 illustrations in front of me, I was beyond grateful.

When the new edition of The Good Shepherd and the Child - a Joyful Journey was being considered for republication, I was again asked to help, because the original drawings had been lost. All the original illustrations by Julie Coulter-English were lovingly re-rendered at high resolution.

There was one more gift that my partnership with the CGS offered: several years before the Little Gospels adventure, a flier arrived in my mailbox announcing the Masters program at Loyola University's Institute of Pastoral Studies. When I pulled the flier out of the mailbox I physically felt a shock going down my arm, making me wonder 'What does this mean?' When I opened the flier, the Spirit seemed to urge me to do this. 'But I don't have time! I'm a single mom! I'm working two jobs already! The logistics would

be crazy! And how will I possibly afford this?? Just no.' Little did I know how much that moment would change my life - and others. So I made the call anyway.

When they found out I was involved with CGS they were thrilled - they'd wanted to offer CGS to their students on a college-credit level for some time. Would I like to help coordinate a national 3-6 training? Say what???? I reached out to local catechists. Turns out they were in discussions with Catholic Theological Union in Hyde Park about the same thing. No, they weren't interested, couldn't help, sorry. So I reached out to Catherine Maresca, who graciously flew in, and over the course of two summers, offered the first ever National Training for college credit. At this point I wasn't even formally enrolled in the IPS program and I was doing all this work for them. But, true to their word, they offered me a generous number of hours of advanced graduate standing for my three levels of training in CGS, a graduate assistant position to cover much of my first two years' tuition, and a tuition fellowship to help out with the remainder. (Oh, and I bought a table saw and learned more advanced woodworking skills, because we needed more materials for the training than we had in our atrium!)

The letter of advanced standing was used by Tina Lillig to argue a case with other universities to do the same for trained CGS leaders wanting to attain a degree, and eventually some colleges started offering trainings on their own that dovetailed into a formal CGS program.

Despite all my fears, the Spirit has seen me through, and, gratefully, friends and family have stepped up to help in many ways. My son and his grandmother were there at my graduation in 1999. Starting as a volunteer in 1987, I've been a paid catechist for over 21 years, a DRE for two, and have since volunteered at two other local parishes offering the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Sometimes you can't even imagine where the Holy Spirit will lead you, but it's always Wisdom to listen and follow.

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