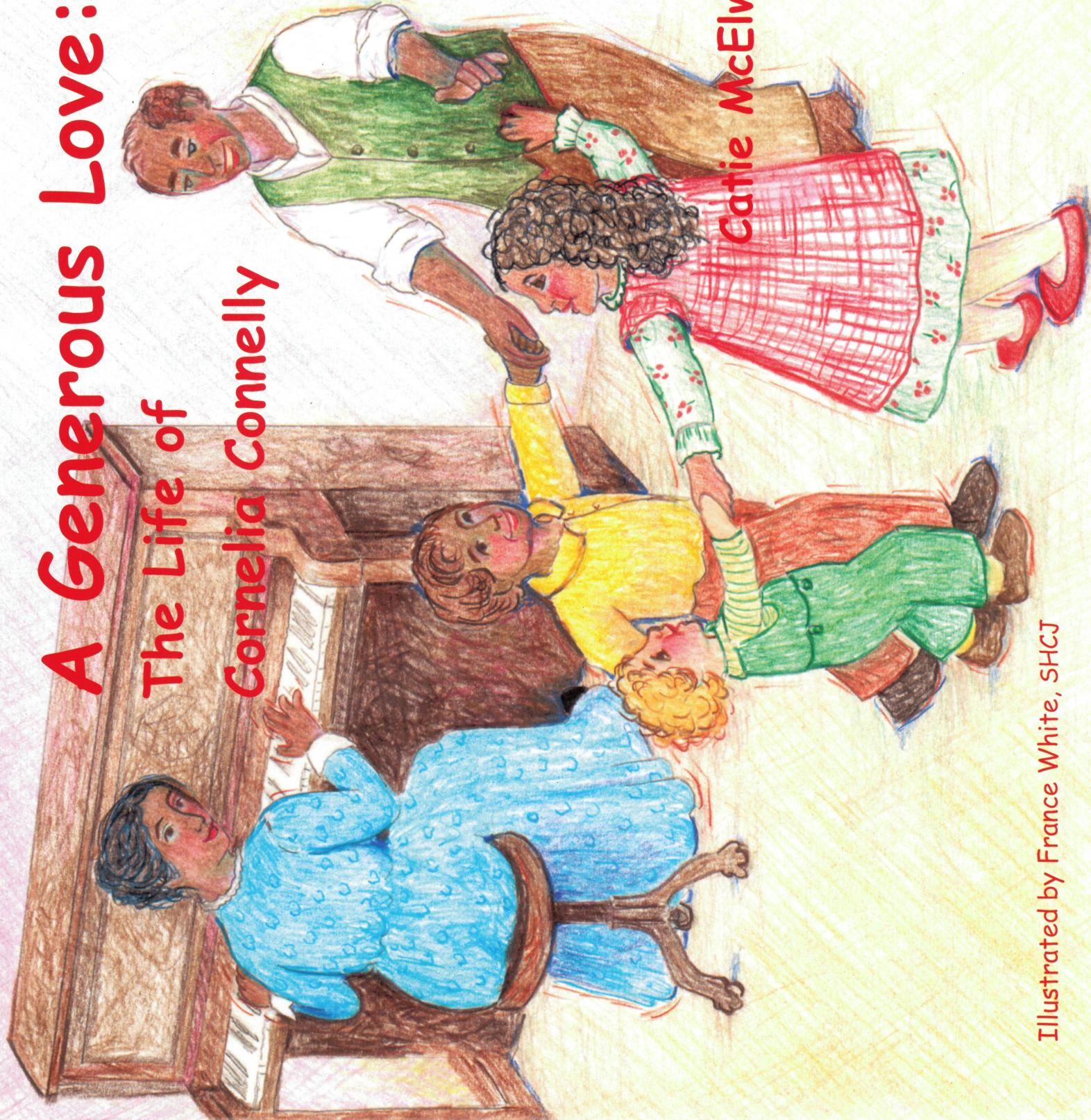


A Generous Love: The Life of Cornelia Connelly

Catie McElwee



Illustrated by France White, SHCJ

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Society of the Holy Child Jesus

www.shcj.org

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To all my sons and daughters in Batey Lechería
CM

With gratitude to the class of 2012
at Mayfield Junior School of the Holy Child Jesus
and their religion teacher
for their enthusiastic help by posing for the illustrations
in this life of Cornelia Connelly.
FW

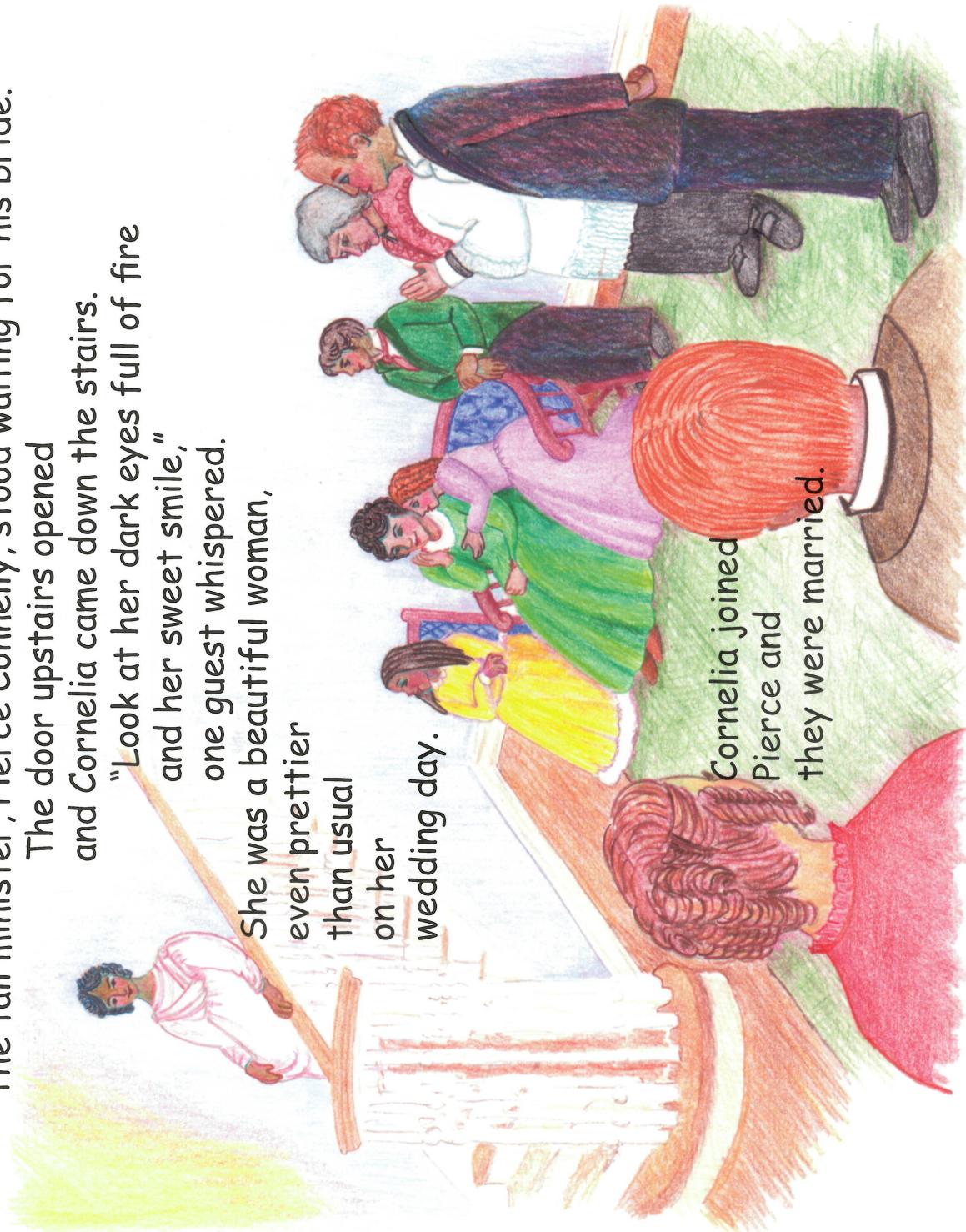
Pennsylvania, The United States 1831

It was a cold December day in 1831.

A room full of guests waited in a home in Philadelphia.
The tall minister, Pierce Connelly, stood waiting for his bride.
The door upstairs opened
and Cornelia came down the stairs.

"Look at her dark eyes full of fire
and her sweet smile,"
one guest whispered.

She was a beautiful woman,
even prettier
than usual
on her
wedding day.



Cornelia joined
Pierce and
they were married.

Have you ever been to a wedding? Do you want to get married, too?

Pennsylvania, The United States 1832

A month later, Pierce burst through the door,
a smile on his face.

"The bishop has asked me to be the minister
of an Episcopal Church in Mississippi!"

"Your own church!" Cornelia said,
but she thought that Mississippi
was far from her family.
She would miss Philadelphia

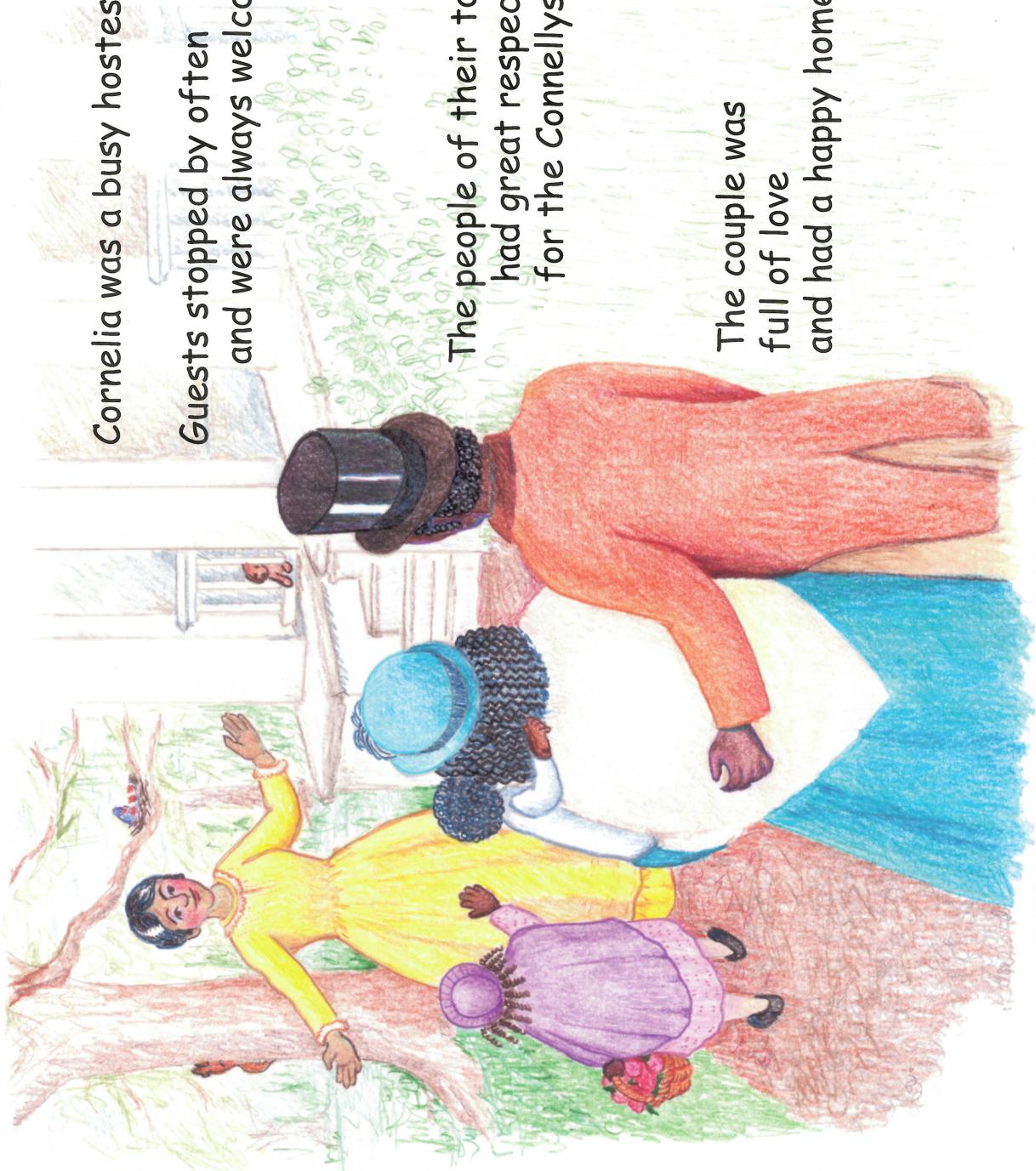
but it would be exciting
to do good work for God.

"How wonderful!" she said,
and her smile
grew as big as Pierce's.

Can you remember a wonderful thing that happened to you? Tell us about it.

Mississippi, The United States 1832

The couple settled into their new house in Natchez, Mississippi.



Cornelia was a busy hostess.

Guests stopped by often and were always welcome.

The people of their town had great respect for the Connelllys.

The couple was full of love and had a happy home.

Who lives in your house? Do you like it when people come to visit?

Mississippi, The United States 1832

When Cornelia was ready to have her first baby,
her sister Mary came to help.

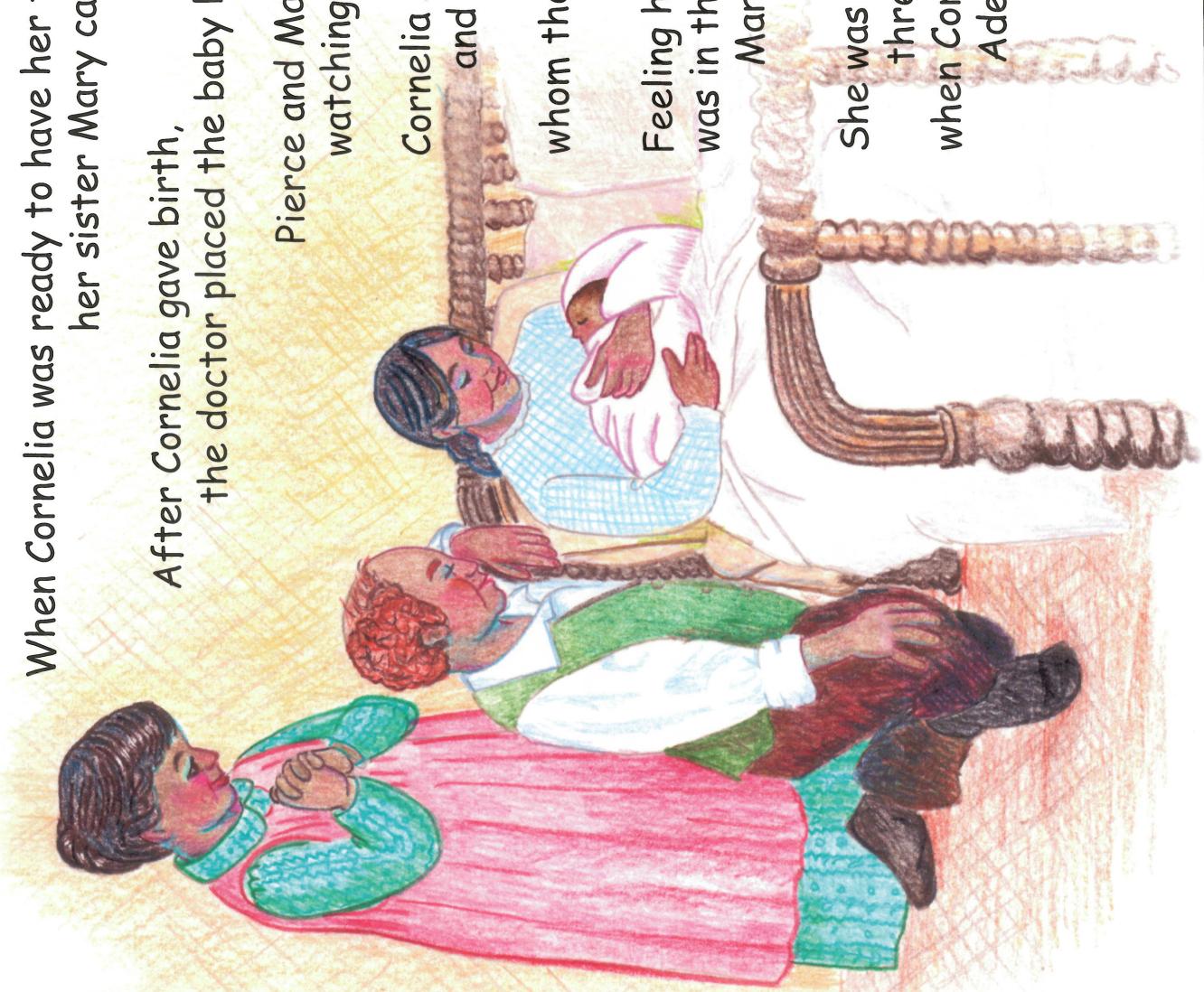
After Cornelia gave birth,
the doctor placed the baby boy in her arms.

Pierce and Mary stood by,
watching with joy.

Cornelia smiled
and thanked God
for the baby
whom they named Mercer.

Feeling how much love
was in the Connelly house,
Mary decided to stay.

She was still there
three years later
when Cornelia's daughter,
Adeline, was born.



What do you do to put love in your house? How do you show it?
Who puts love in your school?

Mississippi, The United States 1835

One day Pierce came home looking disappointed.

"What's wrong?" Cornelia asked.

"Protestants all over the country are attacking Catholics.
Do we want to belong to a church
that allows some of its members to be violent?"

They prayed and talked it over.

They decided to learn all they could
about Catholics
and this led them
to want to convert.



What would you have done if you were Cornelia or Pierce?

Mississippi and Louisiana, The United States 1835

Pierce stood at the pulpit in his church
and told the people that he was leaving.
His family was going to Rome, the center of the Catholic Church.

Everyone was sad that their minister
and friend was leaving.
Some of the women even cried.

The family headed for Louisiana
to board a ship to Rome.

Before sailing,
Cornelia
was received
into the
Catholic
Church.

Pierce waited
until
they arrived
in Rome.



How do you think that Cornelia and Pierce got to Rome –
they walked? they flew? they went in a boat?

Rome, Italy 1836

At a party in Rome, Princess Borghese noticed Cornelia.

"Who is that delightful woman?" she asked.

Her father,
an English earl, said,
"That is Cornelia Connelly."

I will introduce you."

The princess and Cornelia
became friends.

They were
very busy women,
often going to dinners
and parties.



Their favorite activities though,
were to explore the churches of Rome together
and to help the poor people.

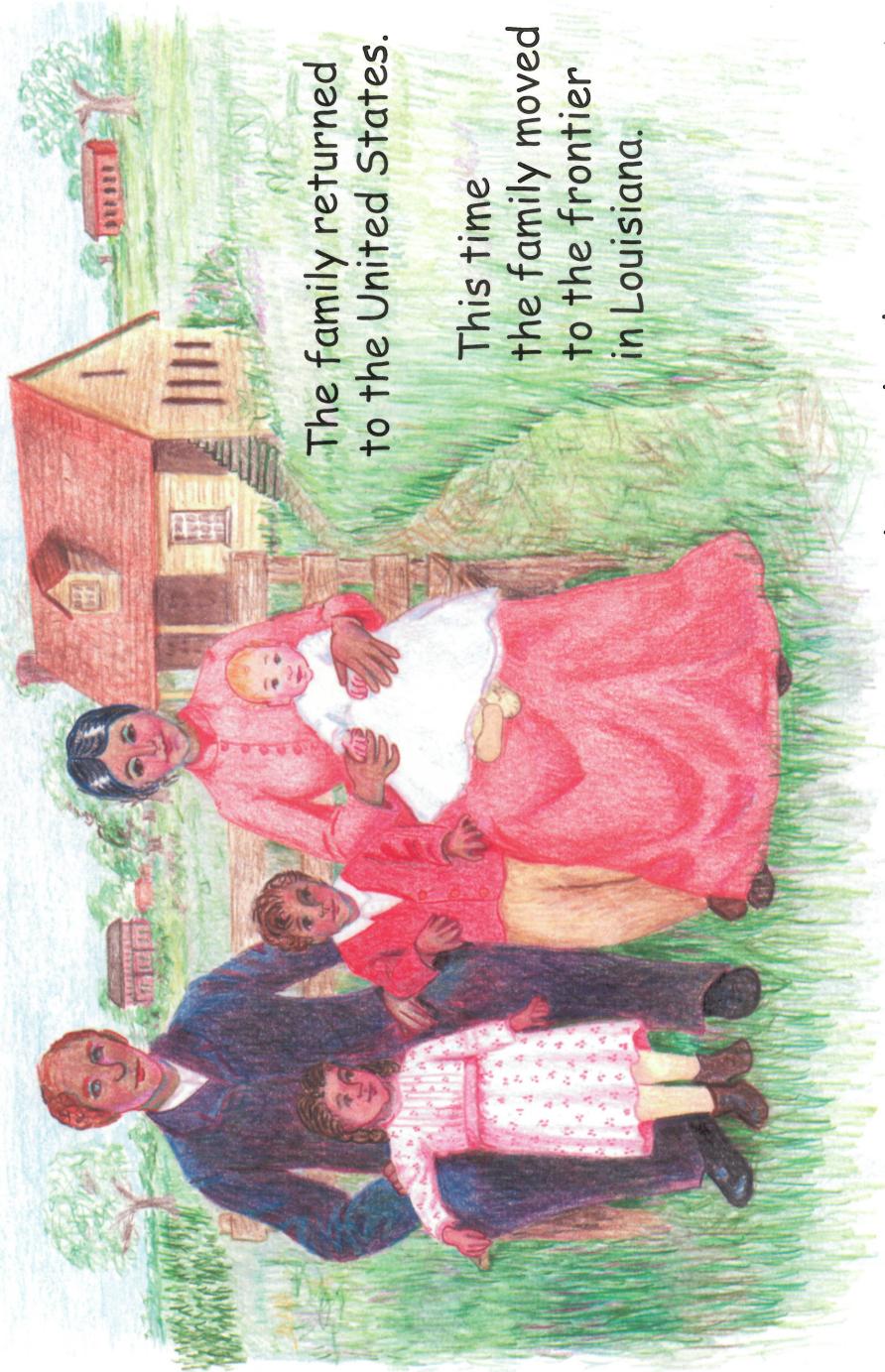
Can you think of someone you would especially like to help?

Europe and The United States 1837

After two years in Europe, Cornelia had a son named John Henry.

Pierce said, "We need to go back home so I can find a job,
now that we have three children to raise."

Cornelia jumped up and hugged him.
"Yes, let's go home. You know how much I miss it."



The family returned
to the United States.

This time
the family moved
to the frontier
in Louisiana.

Cornelia and Pierce taught in schools.

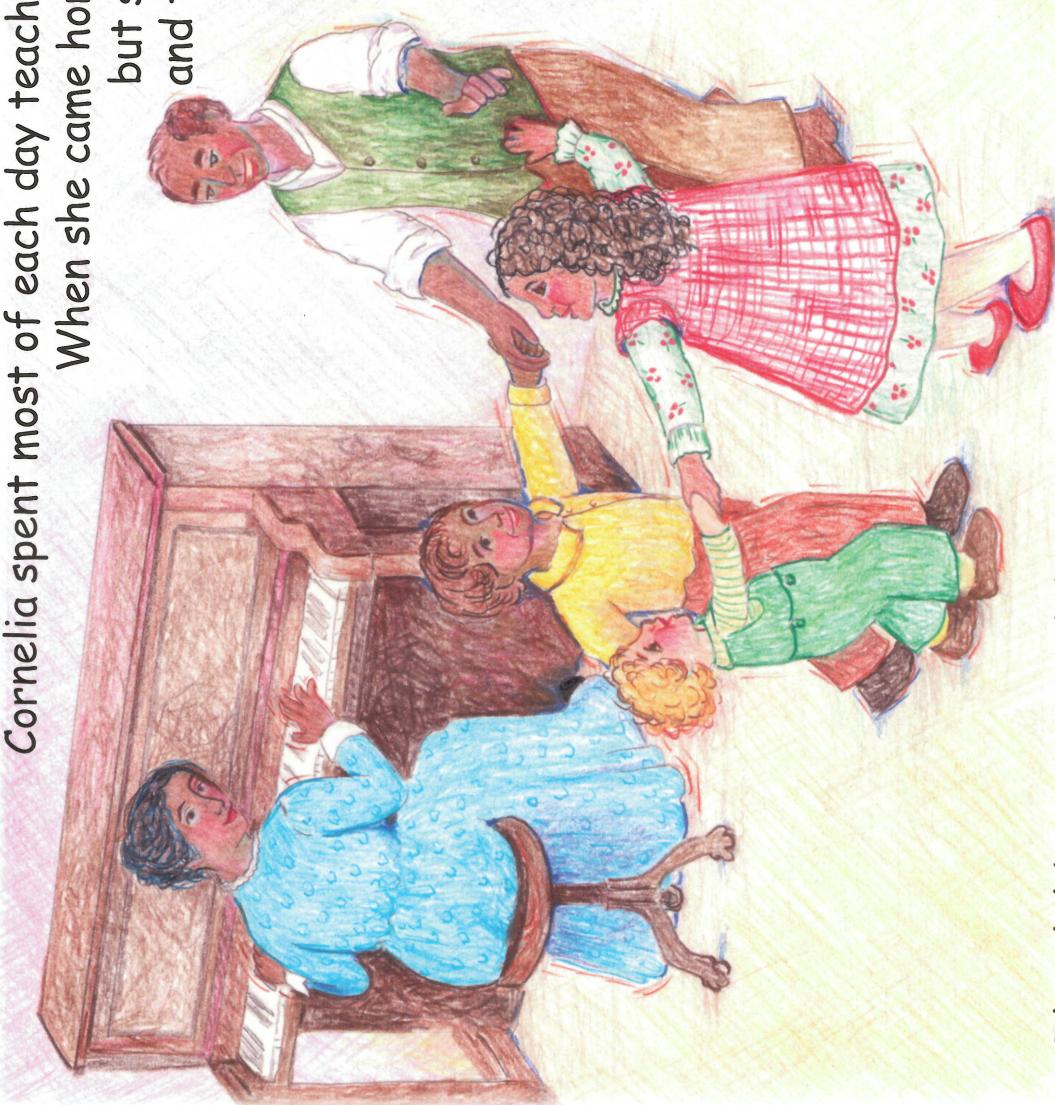
What kind of job do you want to do when you grow up?

Louisiana, The United States 1837

Cornelia spent most of each day teaching.
When she came home, she was tired
but she cooked dinner
and took care
of the house.

She and
the children
played outside
until it was dark.

Then she sat
at the piano
and played
the children's
favorite songs.



The children sang and danced
around the house.
They pulled their serious father into their dancing
until even he was laughing.

Do you have a favorite song? Can you sing it?

Louisiana, The United States 1840

Cornelia had never been happier.
She joyfully followed her new faith and loved her quiet family life.

One day, overcome with emotion, she said to God,
"If all this happiness is not for your glory,
take it from me."



She knew that God loved us
so much
that he had given Jesus,
his only child to us.

Now Cornelia, also out of love,
offered everything she had to God.

What would you like to give to God today?

One afternoon, Cornelia heard a scream and ran outside.

The dog had pushed little John Henry
into a large pot of boiling sugar
and the child was badly burned.

Cornelia held him in her arms
until he died
and went to his Father
in heaven.

Cornelia was
broken hearted.

After that she became very close
to Mary, the mother of God,
who also had lost her son.



Cornelia used her sorrow to bring her to a deeper faith.
Although she was very sad, Cornelia trusted that God had a plan for her.

What makes you sad? Who do you want next to you when you're sad?

Louisiana, The United States 1840

A few months later, Pierce told Cornelia that he wanted to become a Catholic priest.

That meant they would have to end their marriage. "Don't you think we are a happy family?" Cornelia asked him.

"I think we are about the happiest family on earth, but I want to spread the Gospel as a Catholic priest," he said.

Cornelia did not answer right away. The thought of separating her family hurt her, especially since she was expecting a new baby.

"If God asks me to make this sacrifice, I will make it with all my heart," she told Pierce.

She thought about becoming a nun.

What would you say to God if God asked you to do something hard?
How do you think God speaks to us?

Rome, Italy 1843-1845

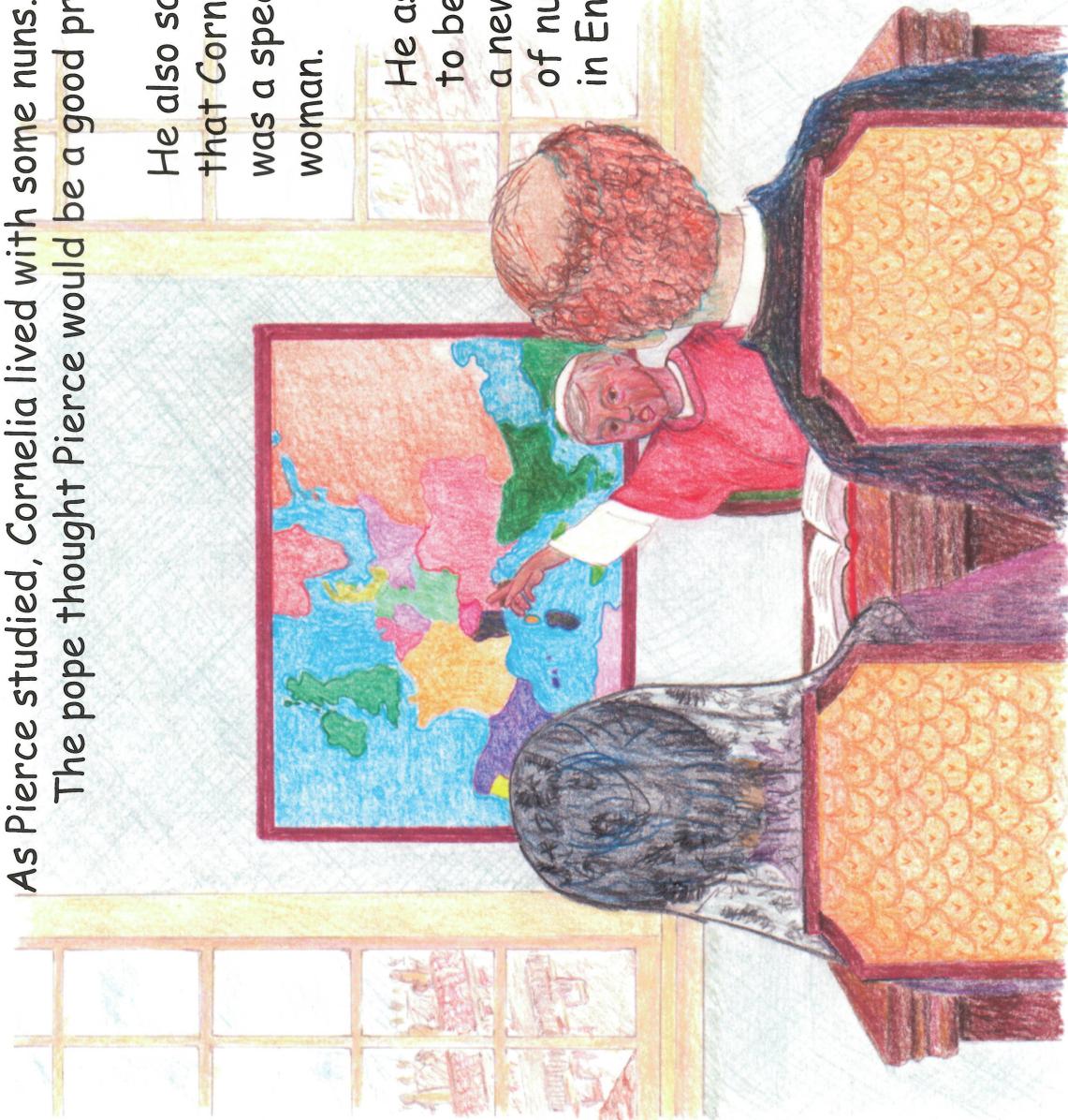
Three years later the family, including a new son named Frank, arrived in Rome.

As Pierce studied, Cornelia lived with some nuns.
The pope thought Pierce would be a good priest.

He also saw
that Cornelia
was a special
woman.

He asked her
to begin
a new order
of nuns
in England.

The order
would focus
on education.



Do you know any nuns? What do you think a nun is?

Rome, Italy 1845

Cornelia spent many days in the chapel praying.

She wanted to go back to the United States
and begin her work there.

However, she understood that the Church
needed her help
in England.



While praying, the words

"The Society of the Holy Child Jesus"
filled her mind.

She knew God was sending her a message.
He was giving her the name of the community.

Do you ever talk to God? What do you want to say to God today?

After the small Society had settled into a convent in England,
the sisters watched Cornelia out the window.

"Poor Mother Connelly,"
they said to each other.



Cornelia's children
were leaving
to go to boarding school.

The bishop wanted the children
to leave her for her first year as a nun.

As she gave each child one more kiss,
tears ran down her face.

The children climbed into a carriage.
Cornelia waved
until the carriage was out of sight.

She had one comfort;
Pierce was working in England too,
and could visit the children.



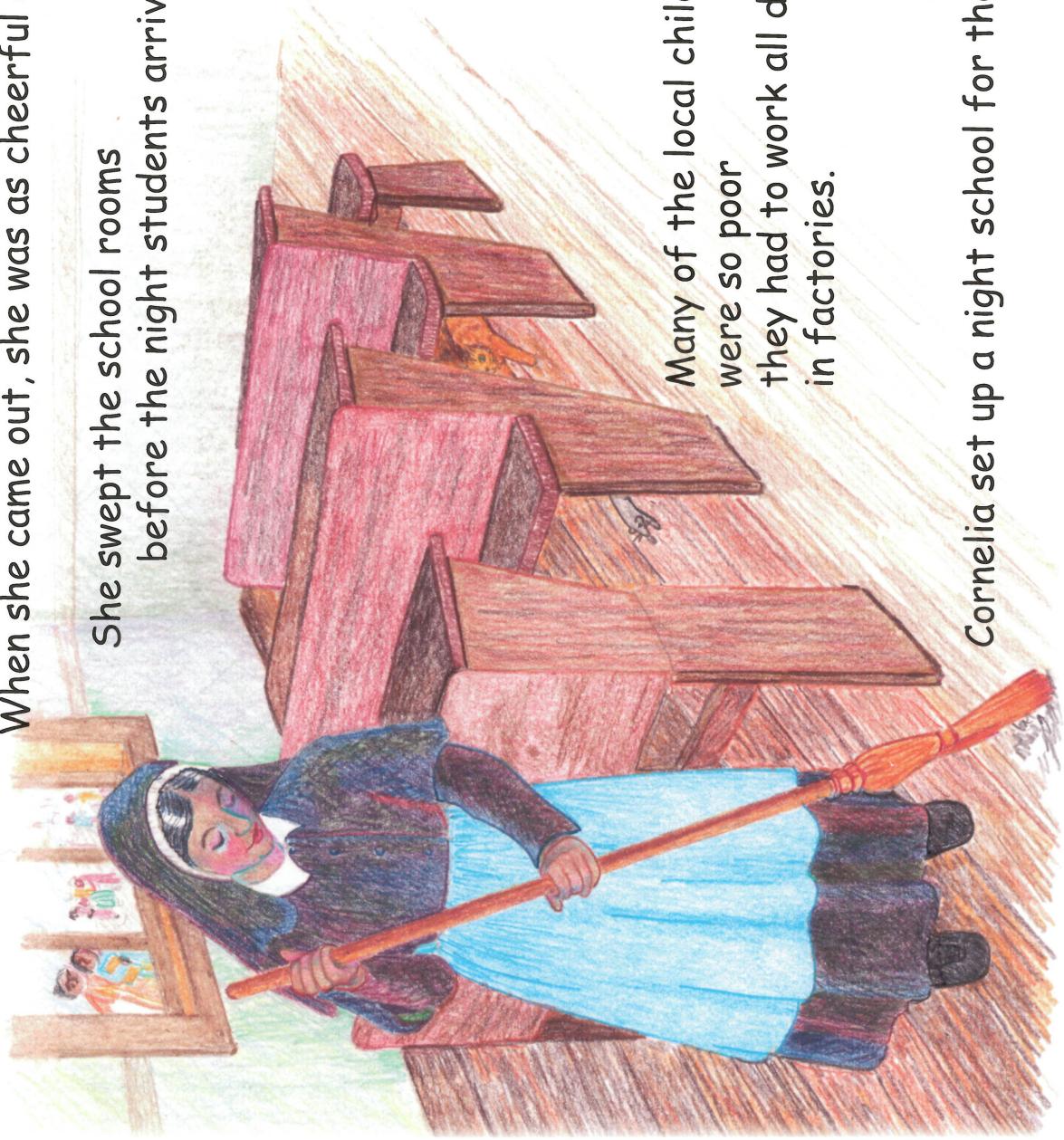
Cornelia missed her children. Is there someone you miss when they're not there?

England 1846

Cornelia knelt in the chapel in prayer after her children had left.

When she came out, she was as cheerful as ever.

She swept the school rooms
before the night students arrived.



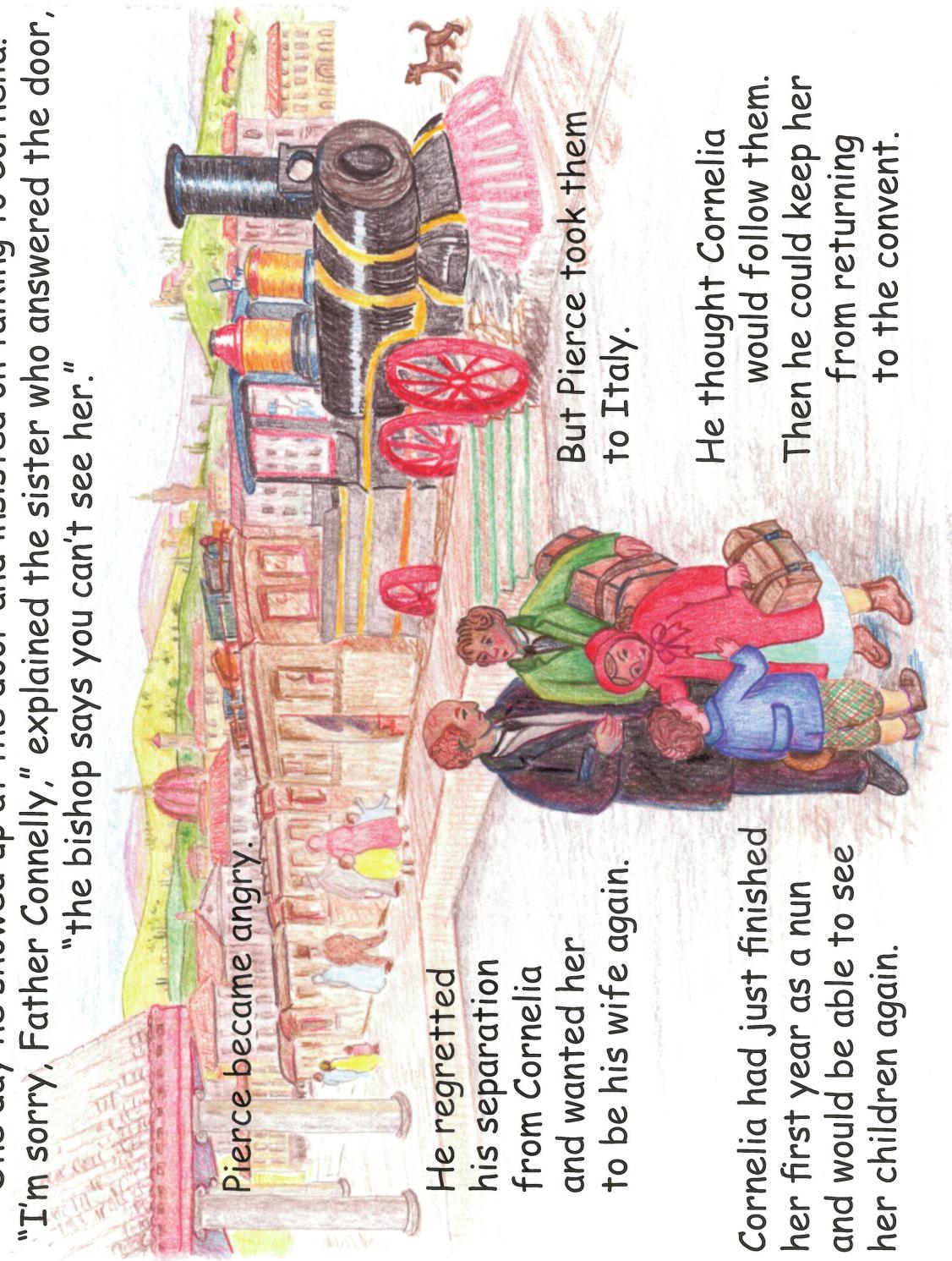
Many of the local children
were so poor
they had to work all day
in factories.

Cornelia set up a night school for them.

What do you like best about being in school?

While Cornelia was setting up her convent and school,
Pierce was having trouble.

One day he showed up at the door and insisted on talking to Cornelia.
"I'm sorry, Father Connell," explained the sister who answered the door,
"the bishop says you can't see her."



Pierce became angry.

He regretted
his separation
from Cornelia
and wanted her
to be his wife again.

But Pierce took them
to Italy.

Cornelia had just finished
her first year as a nun
and would be able to see
her children again.

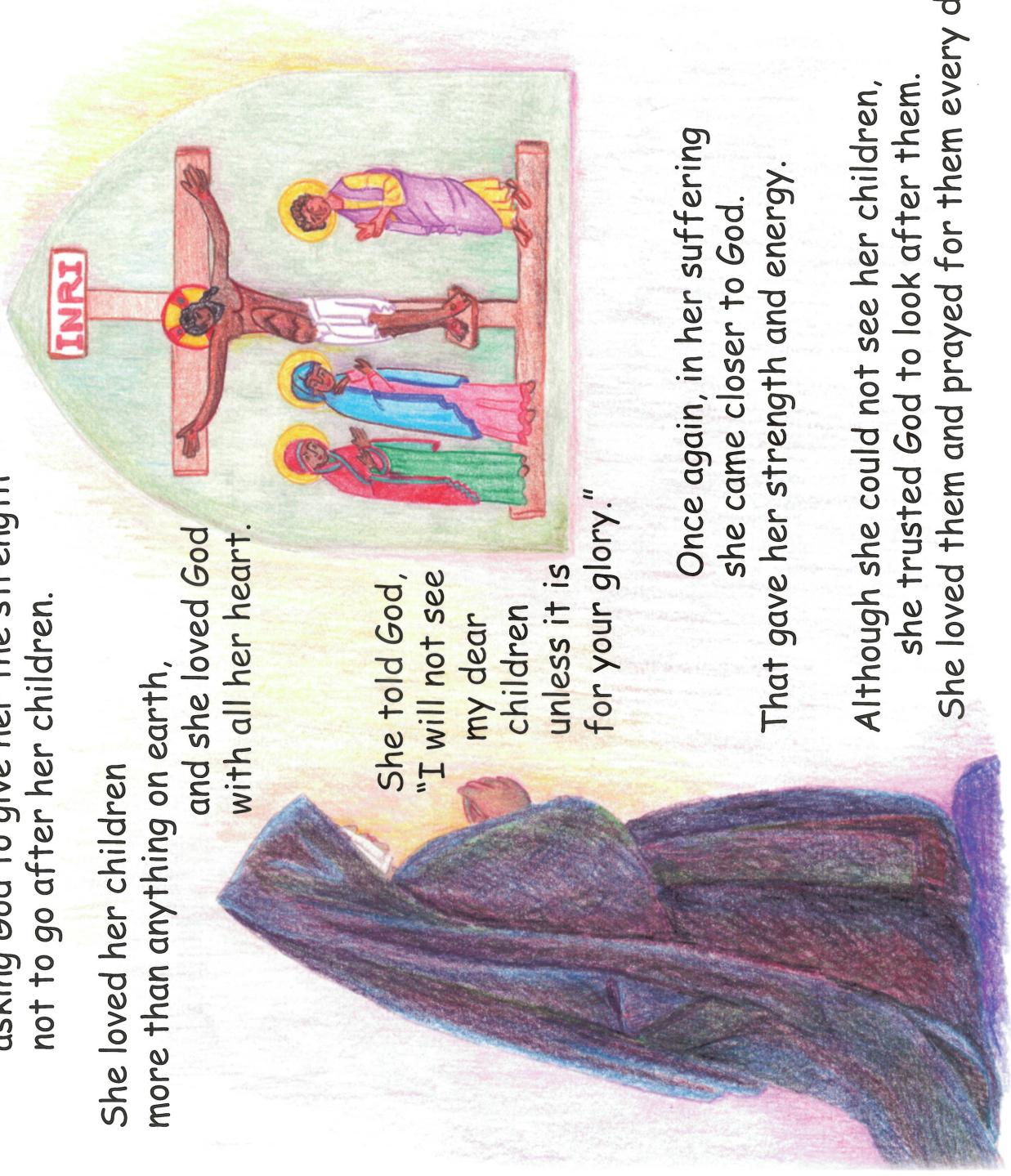
He thought Cornelia
would follow them.
Then he could keep her
from returning
to the convent.

If you could talk to Pierce, what would you say to him?

England 1848

Cornelia knelt in front of the crucifix,
asking God to give her the strength
not to go after her children.

She loved her children
more than anything on earth,
and she loved God
with all her heart.



She told God,
"I will not see
my dear
children
unless it is
for your glory."

Once again, in her suffering
she came closer to God.
That gave her strength and energy.

Although she could not see her children,
she trusted God to look after them.
She loved them and prayed for them every day.

Why do you think that Cornelia looked at Jesus on the cross?
Do you talk to God about your problems?

Cornelia showered her students with the love
she couldn't show her own children.

She saw the students as gifts from God
and cared for them as though each
was the child Jesus.

She helped them
to become
their best selves
and know
how much
God loved them.

Before,
she only had three -
Mercer,
Adeline, and
Frank.



Now Cornelia had hundreds of children.

Cornelia loved the truth.

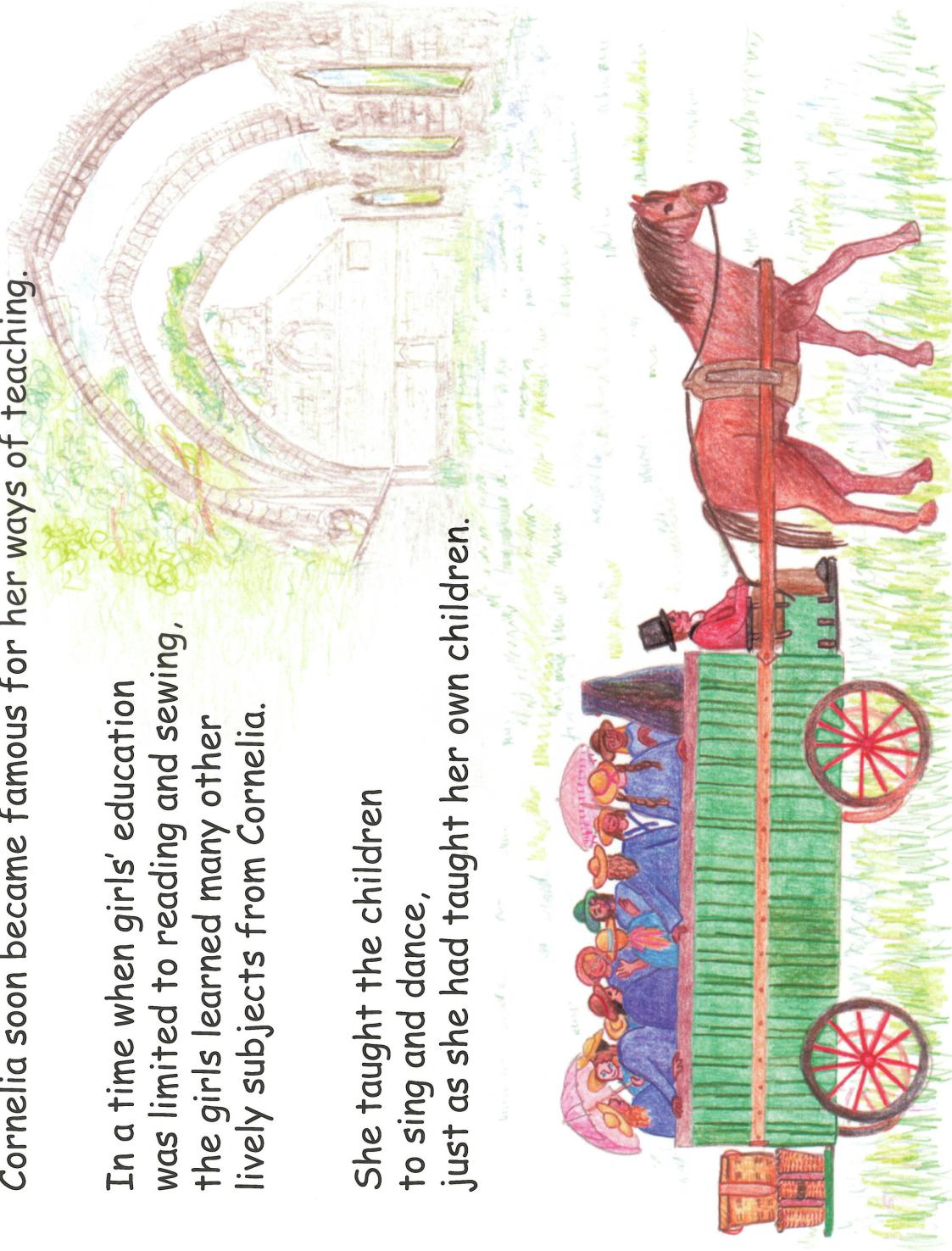
Can you think of a time when you told the truth even when it was hard to do?

England 1848

Cornelia soon became famous for her ways of teaching.

In a time when girls' education was limited to reading and sewing, the girls learned many other lively subjects from Cornelia.

She taught the children to sing and dance, just as she had taught her own children.

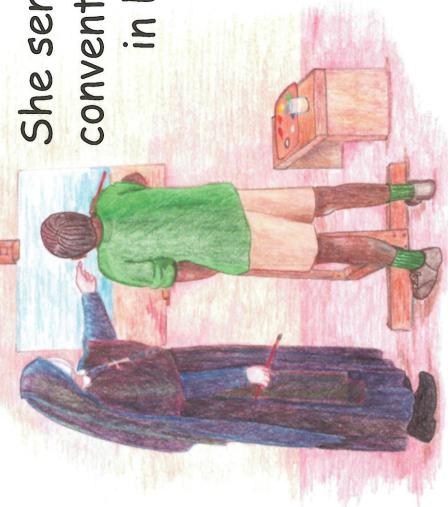


Together, Cornelia, the nuns, and the students explored the outdoors and took fieldtrips.

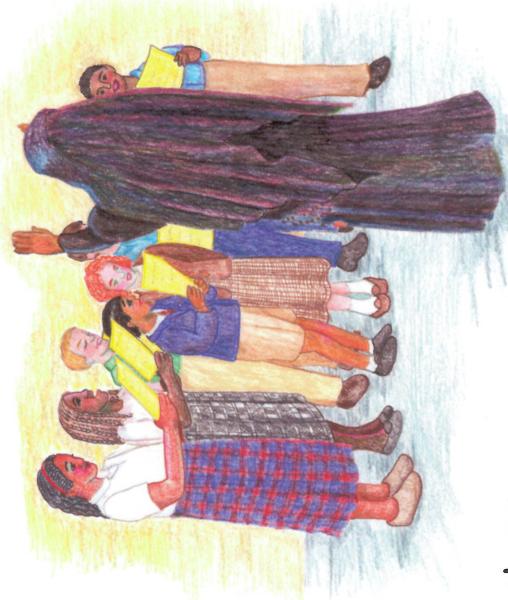
What's your favorite subject? What are you really good at in school?

England, France, and the United States 1861

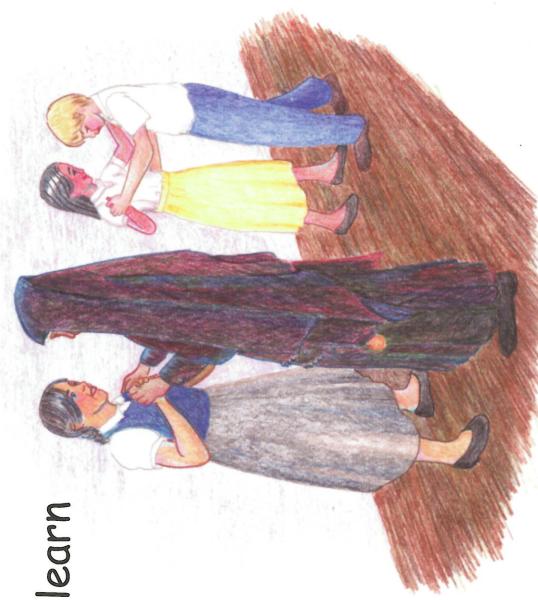
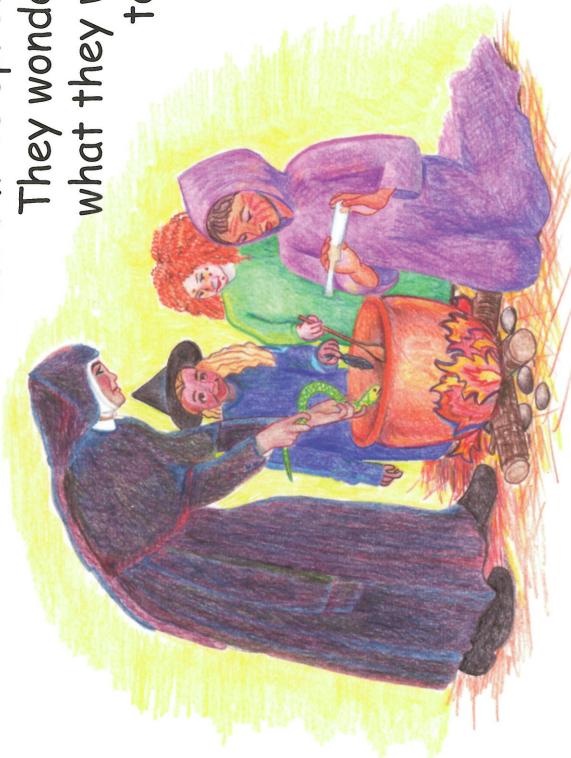
Many sisters joined Cornelia and the Society grew.



She sent sisters to start
convents and schools
in England,
France,
and her own city
of Philadelphia.



Whenever Cornelia or other Holy Child sisters
stepped into the classroom, the students became silent
and smiles spread on their faces.
They wondered
what they would learn
today.



Whom can you thank for your school?

Europe, Africa, the Americas

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus
continued to grow
even after Cornelia's
death.

Holy Child schools
are found
all around the world.

Even after all this time,
children in these schools
still find learning fun.

The teachers follow Cornelia's example
of loving the students.
They bring joy to the classroom
and into the lives of the students

and all the students know
that they are the loved children
of Cornelia Connelly.



Catie McElwee is a native of Connecticut and earned her Bachelor Degree in Literature and Spanish from the University of North Carolina, Asheville.

Catie worked with the Sisters of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus for two years in the Dominican Republic. She taught in a Holy Child school in a Haitian migrant worker camp through the Society's volunteer program, Response-Ability. There, where she taught in extreme poverty, she first encountered the spirit of Cornelia and shared in her mission by serving those who suffer.

