

From Mary Kosch, former Academic Dean, Connelly School of the Holy Child, Potomac, MD

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The plan for the next 90 minutes or so is this. First I'd like to talk to you about Cornelia Connelly's life, a fascinatingly complex one. After that and more important today, I will talk about her philosophy of education and her early schools. After about 40 minutes I'll ask you to spend a while thinking about this philosophy of education as it flourishes at Annunciation. We will end the session at least by 12:30 when, after all this heavy pondering of the ideas of Cornelia, you will all have worked up a giant appetite for lunch.

Cornelia Peacock was born in Philadelphia, the "Athens of America:", in 1809. Schools, libraries, a university, were flourishing there. Cornelia enjoyed a happy, secure early childhood in a fashionable section of the city, but when she was nine, her father died, leaving a large family and many debts. When Cornelia was 14 her mother died, giving her a sense of the realities of life well beyond her years. It was at that time that the family was broken up and Cornelia was sent to live with her half-sister, Isabella. Isabella and her husband were very generous, and they saw to it that Cornelia was (and I quote) "highly educated at home by Professors and Tutors - she conversed in several languages... and was an artist and musician". Acutually, extraordinary artistic talen ran throughout the family, a fact impt to our schools.

Pierce Connelly, who was to become Cornelia's husband, was born in 1804, also in Philadelphia. He was handsome, intelligent, and very eloquent. Cornelia had become an Episcopalian while living in her step-sister's house and so she moved in the same social circle as Pierce. When she decided to marry Pierce, by then an Episcopalian minister, Isabella strongly objected. Cornelia, always strong-willed, simply married him in another siter's home. Here is a description of her at the time of her marriage, ".. rather below than above the middle height; slight in figure, with a

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profusion of wavy black hair, her face singularly beautiful, her features finely chiselled, her eyes very dark and full of fire and sweetness, and they would quickly fill with tears on hearing of any trouble or sorrow. Her forehead was high and broad and her nose aquiline Her smile was very sweet..." in all, a beautiful young woman.

The two left Philadelphia in October of 1831 for Natchez, Mississippi, where Pierce was ~~going~~ to be incharge of Trinity Church. They were full of enthusiasm for their new life. After a trip of 5½ days over land to Pittsburgh, they traveled 1700 miles by steamboat to Natchez. Cornelia had her 23rd birthday on the way. Cornelia and Pierce's first child, Mercer, or Merty, was born in Natchez. But Pierce at that time was becoming deeply concerned about the strong anti-Catholic feeling in the country. He felt that something was seriously wrong in the churches when one group was singled out for such attacks. Rather inexplicably this concern led him to inquire into the teachings of the Catholic church and eventually to to decide to join the Church and even, *at* to ask a Bishop if it might be possible for him to become a Catholic priest.

almost the same time At this point Cornelia wrote, "I am ready at once to submit to whatever my loved husband believes to be the path of duty." Cornelia had never been known for her submissiveness, rather for her independence and strong will. But the nineteenth century required wives to be submissive to their husbands and the law and society backed up that requirement. Even her sister wrote to her, "Follow the path of duty strictly. He (Pierce) is your earthly guide". Having had her second child, Adeline, in Natchez, Cornelia had written of that time "I was never happier in my life". Clearly that situation would change.

Pierce resigned his ministry, and husband, wife and two children moved to New Orleans where they made many Catholic friends. Cornelia's inquiries into the faith led her to join the Church. Pierce, on the other hand, felt the need to inquire more deeply into the ~~faith~~ *religion* and the family left for Rome where he ~~might~~ *could* study. There they were introduced to many important lay people and Church leaders. Cornelia, always so warm and intelligent, attracted an elegant circle of friends to their home. Pierce at this time asked *privately* to be admitted to the Church and even to be considered for the priesthood. Cornelia said to a priest friend, "Is it necessary for Pierce Connelly to make this sacrifice and to sacrifice me? I love my husband and my darling children. Why must I give them up?"

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It was at this time that a certain Lord Shrewsbury, who had been introduced to them in Rome, invited Pierce to come to Britain for the summer. Cornelia was terribly lonely and when she finally received a letter from her sister she wrote back, "It, ^(the letter) was like ice cream on a summer day, except it lasted longer." Cornelia's third child, Johann, was born in Rome.

The family returned to New Orleans and Pierce was asked by the Jesuits to come to Grand Coteau in Louisiana to teach English. Cornelia was to teach music for the nearby school of the Sacred Heart. This was a time of great happiness for all the family, ~~surely~~ because of ^{her} cheery disposition and her sense of the futility of grieving over things in life that are inevitable. Here in Grand Coteau Cornelia had her first acquaintance with women's religious life at the Sacred Heart convent. Here too, her fourth child, Mary Magdalene, was born during an extremely hot summer. The baby was very sick and after seven weeks she died. Soon after that, a horrible accident happened that would forever influence this mother. Her youngest child, John Henry, whom she called "the delight of my heart", tumbled into a pan of boiling sugar water. Cornelia held him for 43 hours before he died.

On October 13, 1841, the feast of Saint Edward, and while Cornelia was pregnant with their fifth child, Pierce declared that he would "take Holy Orders in the Roman Catholic church". She begged him to reconsider, but, characteristically said, "If the good God asks the sacrifice I am prepared to make it with all my heart!" A Holy Child sister who knew Cornelia well said the feast of Saint Edward was the beginning of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and that it was founded on a breaking heart. On March 29, 1841, Cornelia had her fifth child, Frank.

At this point Pierce left the household with Merty and set sail for England, planning to join the Jesuit Order. Lord Shrewsbury, their friend who had been with them in Rome, had told him that he would see to Merty's education in England. But when he heard what Pierce was doing he told him to go back to America. Quote" W "What do you want - to give up your lovely wife and children? No such sacrifice is demanded of you. Stop at once and be a good Catholic husband and father."

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The Jesuits too told him to go home for three or four years until his children were old enough to enter boarding schools, quite a common practice for the young children of wealthy families. In fact, putting children into such schools at the age of seven or eight, away from their families and the "world" was considered the ideal thing to do. Characteristically, Pierce pressed on with his plans in spite of the opposition. Having placed Merty in school at Oscott, he traveled the continent as the tutor of a young student. Cornelia, Addy and Frank soon joined him in London. Together they traveled to Rome to begin their all-important business of making it possible for Pierce to enter the priesthood. Events proceeded and in 1844 both Cornelia and Pierce signed a Deed of Separation. They made promises, though not solemn vows, to live in chastity and to enter religious orders. Cornelia continued to beg Pierce to consider carefully what he was doing and what the result would be. Only when Cornelia would take a solemn vow of perpetual chastity could Pierce be ordained. During the 14 months before that happened, however, Cornelia saw her husband regularly. It was during this time also that Pierce decided not to be a Jesuit but rather to be ordained a non-order priest. Cornelia did make her solemn vow of chastity and the father of her ~~two~~ children was ordained a priest at the chapel of the Trinita. Three days later he celebrated his first Mass there. Finally the uncertainty was over. Addy and Frank were ~~still~~ *living at the Trinita* with their mother until they would be of school age. ~~What a time again of uncertainty. Cornelia must have had~~

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~~when her husband was once again changing the course of his life.~~ Cornelia left the Trinita nine months after her husband's ordination ~~and lived with her children~~. It was then that Cornelia was asked to go to England and from various accounts went with the Pope's approval to begin the ^{religious} Society in England.

Cornelia went to England during that period we call ^{the} Victorian ^{Age}. It conjures in our minds a time of peace and respectable society. In reality, with the Industrial Revolution in full bloom, living conditions and working conditions for laborers - men, women, and children - were abominable. Cornelia came into the England of that time and set out for Derby, a town then of slums and narrow, dirty streets. After she had arrived in England she learned that Ady could not remain with her. A fierce anti-Catholic feeling was everywhere in Britain and the Church leaders feared scandal if a child should remain with her mother, a nun. Ady was sent off to school, a terrible affliction for Cornelia.

The history of the founding of schools in England continues. Cornelia and her increasing band of sisters served the daughters of the nobility, the factory workers and the children of the slums. The nuns taught factory girls at night and on Sundays when they were not working. On the fifteenth of October, the feast of St. Teresa of Avila, the first liturgy was celebrated ^{at the convent} at Derby. One of the people there wrote "we were told that joyful obedience, simplicity and zeal were to be the distinguishing marks and spirit of our little Society".

From these humble beginnings the work of Cornelia spread, always with great difficulty. On the 21st of December 1847 Cornelia was allowed to make her public vows of poverty and obedience. From then on she would ^{act} "effectively, juridically and irrevocably as mother of a new religious family in the church, and was 'morally bound to fend for it, keep it in being, to nurture its growth'".

~~Let's pause for a minute and then shift to the schools of Cornelia.~~ As you have seen, the founding of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus had not been an easy one. Surely a less capable or less determined foundress would never had ^{persisted} lasted. But let's take a look now at the underlying philosophy of education held firmly

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by Cornelia from the beginning. I've taken this time to give you the ~~amazing~~ story of this heroic woman as the context into which to fit her subsequent philosophy^{for the educ. of young people}. Her motherhood, the death of her children, the deaths of her parents in her childhood, the joy and pain of her marriage - all contributed to the spirit that guides our schools today. More than that, Cornelia's constant view of the inevitability of certain events in life, one's inability to change them, the desire to accept hardships, and the happy, warm personality she had - all form a foundation on which she established the rules for her schools. ~~Let's skip over Pierce's leaving the priesthood, returning to the Episcopal ministry,~~ ^{and} ~~turning her children against her.~~ These tragic events can be studied ~~at a later date.~~ ^{at a later date.} ~~The~~ Book of Studies for the Society of the Holy Child Jesus gives us tremendous insight into Cornelia as an educator and her legacy to us today.

This little book, dated 1863, contains the wisdom of Mother Cornelia Connelly as she sought to guide her schools and to make them the institutions she knew they should be. Cornelia said that it was the duty of the teacher to make children happy. ~~While that may sound a little fluffy to present day educators.~~ That belief was based on her thought of the Child who was God. I quote - "It was not just that happy children work better but rather that love was creative, and all was to be seen in the light of Christ who was the love of God made visible. He provided the pattern for the person, the school and society at large." The Child Jesus was the focal point of Cornelia's schools. The nuns, too, modeled this love to their pupils. The girls were invited to go on picnics with the sisters. They had parties with them and sang in the choir together. To the horror of Victorian England sisters and students danced to lively music on Sunday afternoons. The girls sat in the fields in the summertime doing their needlework. "Creative, loving trust was their experience". A central belief in the schools was that all students needed freedom and responsibility. Therefore, they must be trusted.

The atmosphere in the first schools ^{as in others} was one of joy and contentment. They said that there was no spying on the pupils; that there was a sense of freedom and broad-mindedness that was delightful. That spirit remains as a hallmark of every Holy Child school I've visited.

An early pupil at St. Leonard's where there were a poor school, a middle school, a highest school and a training college wrote of her days there: "~~Our lives were made happy~~ (read p. 238) Cornelia was a mother and she made her school a home.

Watching her own children grow, I'm sure, made Cornelia write in her Book of Studies, "Though we so well know that great things are achieved only by untiring labour and suffering, we sometimes forget that in training and teaching children it is absolutely necessary to walk step by step, to teach line by line, to practice virtue little by little, in act after act, and only by such acts of virtue as are suited to the age and stage of moral and intellectual development of those we are guiding". She goes on to say, "Let us not want to fly by ourselves lest we leave our pupils behind to be lost in a mist. (Have you ever presented a lesson and gotten annoyed that the class wasn't with you?) Line by line, step by step, in all learning and all virtues, form the whole educational system."

Another line from the book has a particularly apt simile. "See the little birds how they carry insect after insect to the nestlings, just so must we give moral and intellectual food to our dear pupils". Those little drops of information, lovingly and repeatedly administered by us, are the ones that nourish the minds and hearts of our own students.

Cornelia told her teachers that they should never allow the students to memorize anything until they understood it fully. Many of the schools, particularly for girls, in her time, simply gave the girls bits of information to be memorized and then they were tested on that information. Cornelia's approach was revolutionary. "The explanation of every lesson to be learnt is to be given fully before the memory is taxed. Let the mistresses in all their lessons go repeatedly over the same ground, always making use of the black board, that the memory may be assisted by the eye." "The explanation should be given in a clear concise manner, and it should be made as amusing and interesting as possible." for teaching handwriting Cornelia told her teachers, "Great care must be taken with the pupils that they may acquire a good style of handwriting. It must be regular legible and neat". "In the higher classes, let each one form her own style, the mistresses exacting only legibility, neatness and good taste". There we have her prevailing appreciation for the uniqueness of the individual.

On teaching art, we hear that, "In our schools we are not to consider drawing as an extra or superlative... but on the contrary, as a Christian Art and one of the most important branches of education, second only to the art of speaking and writing, and in some respects even beyond the language, as it is in itself a universal language, addressing itself to the ignorant as well as to the most refined."

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The teaching of Religion to the very young is ~~also~~ an excellent example of Cornelia's educational philosophy. I quote: "The first lessons should be given to them in the form of simple tales - to excite their curiosity and arouse their imaginations - placing Almighty God before them in the light of a tender and loving Father - a kind and good Creator - who made us all and created everything who has bestowed upon us all we possess, thus leading their young hearts to a sincere love of His goodness." How extraordinary that such a loving Creator would be presented to little ones in the midst of a God-fearing, Victorian England. And how imp. it was to Cornelia that all learning be grounded in the familiar.

As for discipline, a word we don't use at Potomac, Cornelia wrote for the Mistresses, "Let them remember that more can be successfully done by exciting a desire of honour, hope of reward ... than by fear of punishment, and let them generally lead their pupils by love rather than fear." "The pupils must be watched over and spoken to with the greatest sweetness and charity."

We all have a ~~mental~~ picture now of the pupil and the teacher whom Cornelia envisioned in her schools. Her ideas, while embraced in our schools, would be considered frivolous in most. *Uttering love, a spirit of trust, rewards rather than punishment, Christ centeredness, a belief in the goodness of the woman, the wife, the mother and the foundress of our schools. It seems to be one huge, beautiful tapestry of a life.* Maybe now we can begin to sort out Cornelia *potential of each student and a respect for the uniqueness of each - person - all were, and are, hallmarks of the educational systems of a remarkable woman, Cornelia Connelly.*

Before we move on to the next activity I'd be delighted to try to answer any of your questions, with Sister Joan's help. Are there questions?

Before a well-deserved break, let me bring you up to date on how Holy Child in the '90s is responding to Cornelia's directives. I think she would love the variety of schools she has spawned. At Saint Elizabeth's elementary school in a particularly rough part of New York, *with a loving Sr. Nancy Carr* little ones are brought in and fed and loved, away from the guns and violence of the neighborhood. At Mayfield in California the girls preparing for college are given an outstanding preparation also for serving their community. In Nigeria, Sister Mary not only teaches the young ones in classrooms made of shipping crates (She, incidentally asks for any discarded text books *you can* send for her work), but she also teaches in the local prison where, like Mother Connelly, she encourages her pupils to take part in plays where they can express themselves, and in native dances.

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each group. Are there any questions?

(10 minutes)

May I hear from group one?

Summary

Thanks.

In conclusion I'd like to say a prayer I have for your faculty this year which was composed by Cornelia Connelly in London in 1851. I'll leave a copy with Sister Joan, though I'm sure she has it already. This is my prayer for you and with you this year:

Let us love one another and pray.

Let us love one another and be faithful.

Let us love one another and be humble,
and filled with the charity of God.

Let us love one another with God, in God and for God, and we
shall thus be one with Him for all eternity.

Have a wonderful school year bringing the love and spirit of Cornelia to your students.