

Leading in Faith

From Rockstar to Religious Musician

How a music teacher uses music to bring students closer to God



by **Adriana Viras**
Grade 8

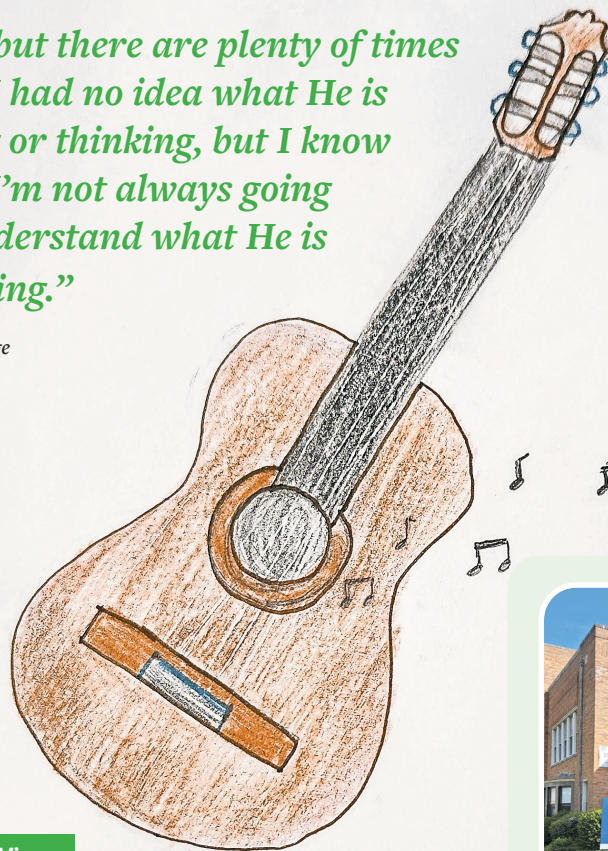
John Strange always loved music but only imagined he would be a teacher once he was in college. Mr. Strange was inspired to become a religious musician by his aunt, a sister at St. Anthony's Padua in East Northport. She was a Catholic school teacher, and teaching looked like a stable job for him because being a rockstar was not. Mr. Strange has been the music teacher at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Academy since last year. He is very passionate about his work and enjoys music and guitar playing.

In a recent interview, I asked Mr. Strange how he came to be on this path and how it made him feel. He always wanted to play guitar and was in a band when he was younger. He explained how he could have been better but enjoyed being in the band. There was a camping director named Fitz who was funny. He remembers how Fitz played guitar and realizes he has become like him. I also asked Mr. Strange how he prepared to become a music teacher in a Catholic school. He explained that it is different for everyone and can depend on the situation, and having a degree and training in leadership can be helpful.

According to Mr. Strange, his first experience with religious music was at Our Lady of Wisdom in Port Jefferson, NY. This was the first time he

"No, but there are plenty of times that I had no idea what He is doing or thinking, but I know that I'm not always going to understand what He is thinking."

Mr. Strange



Adriana Viras

was in control, and he learned everything he needed to know to lead others through his music. One of Mr. Strange's several responsibilities is that he has to choose the music that is appropriate for the reading. He always hopes that others, especially the kids, will like his selected songs and participate in singing with him. When asked if there was ever a time that he had turned away from God, Mr. Strange shared, "No, but there are plenty of times that I had no idea what He is doing or thinking, but I know that I'm not always going to understand what He is thinking." Mr. Strange explained that when his grandfather passed away,



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he felt confused. He eventually accepted that everything God does is for a reason, and he does not always have to understand that reason.

John Strange is inspirational; he teaches the students about different musicians and songs and helps bring them closer to God through religious songs.



Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry

Deacon Ernesto's inspirational journey in becoming a leader in faith



by Omar Martinez
Grade 8

Deacon Ernesto Avallone is a deacon of the Diocese of Brooklyn and has served at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament for 12 years. Before becoming a deacon, he attended Holy Cross High School, studied at St. John's University, and became an oncology pharmacist.

As a kid, Deacon Ernesto grew up in a very religious Italian family and "always wanted to be a priest, but God had other plans." He married and had eight children, but his calling to be involved in the church never ceased. He says, "Going to my parents in the morning every day, I came across a car parked in the same place every day, in which the license plate read man of God." This led him to the diaconate, and at the age of 45, he started his diaconate formation and got ordained as a deacon

at 50. As a deacon, he can lead the faithful by assisting at Mass, preaching, and reading the gospel. He also administers the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony, is involved in the RCIA program, and is very involved in the parish.

Throughout his life, he has encountered God and gone on sacred journeys, strengthening and developing his relationship with the Lord. For example, while beginning his journey, God talked to him with signs and symbols, which he said discerned his vocation to become a deacon. He also has been on many retreats and visited many shrines, which he says have "increased my spiritual well-being." But like every relationship, including with God's, there are ups and downs, and for Deacon Ernesto, these downs occurred in his college years. He says, "During my college years, my time spent was timid and lukewarm." After getting married, he claimed God's presence became more vivid and pronounced. He believes God never abandoned anyone and called him to the diaconate, the "icing on the cake." Ernesto grew up with many positive influences, like his parents and grandparents. He says they started with the priests, brothers, and



Omar Martinez

religious sisters in school and paved the way for who he is today. And throughout his spiritual experience, he learned that "You can do nothing without God." His advice to all the young people who want to become a deacon is to go for it because God has a plan for everyone.

Other people still guide Deacon Ernesto and continue to guide the church members. He spreads faith among the community, and as he says, "Pray, hope, and don't worry," by following these words, we will help shape our future community with faith and love.

Art on the Walls



Alessandro Paradiso
Grade 8



Livia Savino
Grade 8



Laura Whyte
Grade 8



Graelon Astorga
Grade 8



Arianna DiFillippo
Grade 8

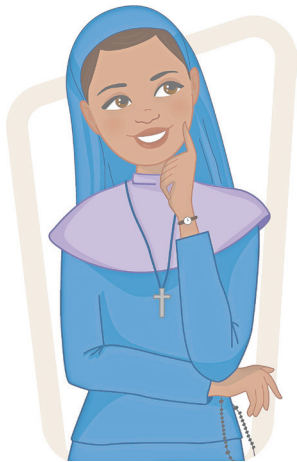


Robert Shalhoub
Grade 8



Jessica Peterson
Grade 8

ASK Sister Elizabeth



How did you become a sister?

Aphrodite E. Sbirakis, Grade 4

Thank you, Aphrodite, for your interest in my vocation story. My family's upbringing influenced my decision to become a nun - we prayed together as a family, and my parent encouraged me to participate in parish activities. My siblings and I were part of the children's ministry known as the "Block Rosary Crusade." In this group, children come together every evening to recite the rosary in imitation of the three children of Fatima. We were taught to imitate the Virgin Mary in her humility, simplicity, and prayer. I was inspired by the work and sacrifices of the nuns working in my parish. I wrote to join the Daughters of Divine Love sisters when I completed high school. I had prayed before making this decision. To the glory of God, I was among the 22 admitted among the 78 aspirants interviewed. I went through four years of training, learning about the religious life and after which I professed my religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. To God be the glory for the grace to answer the call - He is the one who calls.

How do we lead with faith if people aren't faithful and don't have confidence in us?

Mika Peguero, Grade 4

Mika, for a 4th grader, this question shows how strong your faith is. Catholic Catechism states, "Faith is the virtue by which we believe in God and all that He has said and revealed to us." We believe that all is true because Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and, "Whoever believes in me believes in the One who sent me." (John 12:44). Faith enables us to take God's words and live by them. When people don't have faith in God, they don't have a strong relationship with Him, and it's tough to convince them that what God said is true. Faith is a gift from God that helps you follow His words and ways. It takes a lot of patience and prayer to get those who don't believe to see the "light" and be where they are. The more someone reads scripture, attends mass, and prays, the more they will trust God and feel the strong bond with Him that we call faith.

How is the pope picked?

Savir Mehta, Grade 4

Savir, this is a very involved process. Catholics consider the pope the successor of St. Peter, "the rock upon which I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18). When a pope dies or resigns, the governance of the Catholic Church passes to the College of Cardinals. When the College of Cardinals gathers to elect a pope in Rome, their gathering is called a conclave. They attend Mass at St. Peter's Basilica, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to choose the right person. The conclave process to the Sistine Chapel, where they take an oath of secrecy and are locked in the room until a cardinal receives a 2/3 of the vote. The cardinals vote by secret paper ballots which must be burned after reading aloud. Large crowds wait in St. Peter's Square, watching and praying for a white smoke signal showing a new pope has been elected. If no one is chosen, a chemical is added to the paper to have black smoke rise from the room.

Open Your Hearts and Listen to God

The inspirational story of Sister Donna



*by Iris Cho and
Lucas Costello
Grade 8*

Sister Donna was born in a small town in Pennsylvania's coal region. She grew up in a Catholic household, so she learned about and prayed to Jesus very early. Her mother most influenced her because of her kindness and deep faith in God. Growing up, she wondered about the lifestyle, but she considered becoming one in 9th grade. After high school, she started to work for Catholic charities. This was when she found out about the Daughters of Charity and decided to join them. She felt happy about her decision and thought God had called her to do this. As a sister, her prayer life is extremely

important, so she takes time to talk, pray, and thank God for his blessings.

Sister Donna entered the Daughters of Charity as a postulant, which is the first step to becoming a sister. She then continued taking the necessary steps until the last one: committing yourself to the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and service of the poor. As a member of the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Donna serves others in many different areas, such as education, health care, social care, and prison ministry. Over the years, she has served as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Sister Donna stated, "I love working in schools because we learn so much from the children." She continued, "They emulate a sense of joy, laughter, openness, forgiveness, compassion, and love every day."

As a member of the Daughters of Charity, she has moved to many different places but says she experienced her most significant encounter with

God in Paris each time she entered a chapel. In a recent interview, Sr. Donna recalls, "Each time I went into the temple, and I felt a presence that God was there." In those moments, she felt very close to God and that he gave her strength and guidance whenever she needed it most. Her advice to those thinking of following a spiritual path is to "Reach out to see what is being offered in your church and get involved, appreciate being with others and learning from them, and don't be afraid to share your faith and to try something new."

Sister Donna continuously displays how inspirational leaders in faith are. From being a child who just admired sisters to living out the mission she was called to, she has shown us that if we open our hearts and listen to God, we can be our little leaders of faith.

TEACHER GUIDES

Instructional Resource Guides are available for each issue of the Tablet Jr. You can find the supplemental lessons on [CTNBQ.ORG/TABLETJR](https://ctnbq.org/tabletjr)

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Diocesan History Corner

by Joseph Coen



Our Lady of Consolation Home for the Aged, 1944.

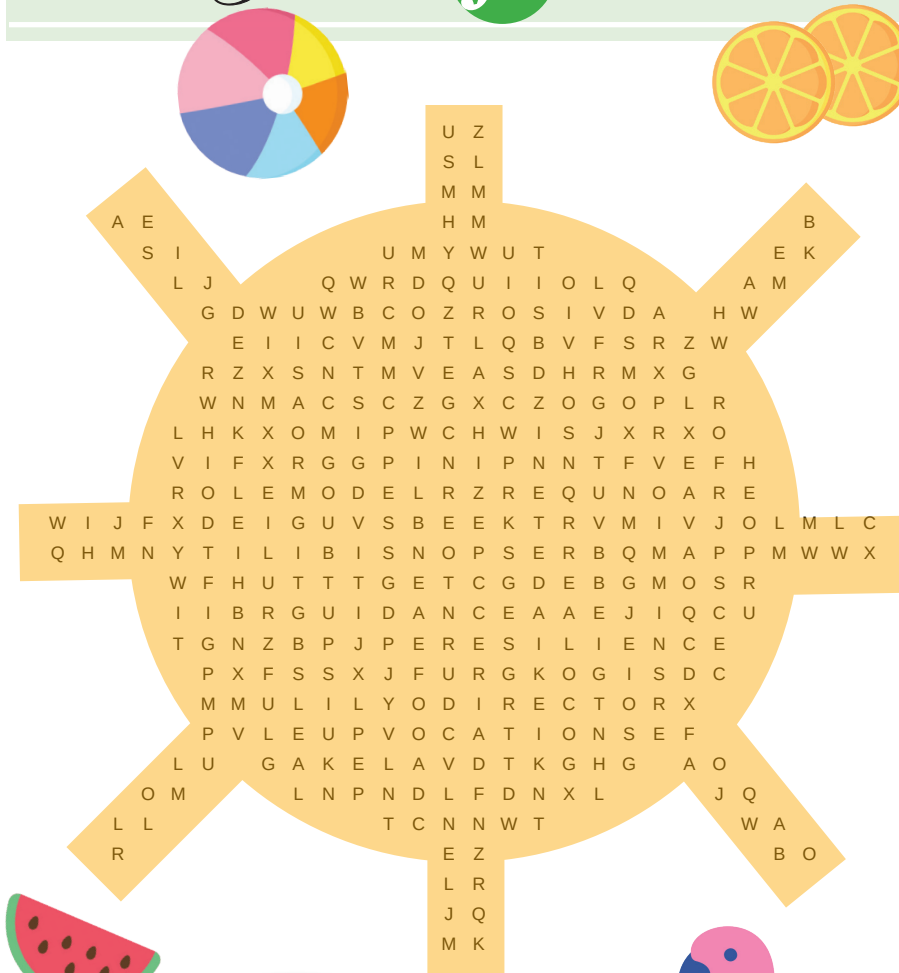
A Legacy of Leadership

As a young man growing up in the Austrian area of Tyrol, Johann Raffener (1785-1861) wanted to become a priest. His studies took him to Rome, but was closed the seminary. Seeing a need caused by the war, he studied medicine and became a doctor in the Austrian army. Later he finished his studies and was ordained a priest in 1825. Again looking where the need was, he went to Cincinnati, Ohio to help the local bishop serve the growing number of German-speaking immigrants. Bishop John Dubois of New York persuaded him to help in our area in 1833. He organized New York City's first German parish, St. Nicholas, on Manhattan's lower East Side. Brooklyn was part of the New York diocese then and in 1841 he came to Brooklyn where he established Most Holy Trinity, the first German parish on Long Island.

Fr. Raffener was named the first

Vicar General for German Catholics in our diocese. As a result of his faith filled leadership, he founded two other parishes in Brooklyn, and was involved in starting thirty German parishes overall. When German Dominican Sisters from Bavaria arrived in New York in 1853 and found no one to greet them Fr. Raffener came from Brooklyn to offer them a place to stay. He persuaded them to stay at Most Holy Trinity parish where they took over the parish school. Over time their faith filled leadership led them to found a hospital, a home for the Aged, a system of orphanages and run many schools in our diocese and elsewhere.

Joseph Coen, C.A., is the archivist of the Diocese of Brooklyn.



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 Have you ever heard of Blessed Carlo Acutis?
 Like you, Carlo had a cellphone. He was always on the computer. He defended children who were picked on, particularly the disabled. He even built a website that cataloged and promoted miracles.
 Carlo did all of this – and more – before he died at the young age of 15. That's just like you – he tried to help others and enjoy each day as much as he could.

And, like many of you, his favorite outfit was Nikes, jeans, and a sweatshirt.
 Research what you can about this extraordinary teen and why he is on the road to sainthood. While the thought of becoming a saint may sound out of reach for you, Saint John Paul II reminds us that "what really matters in life is that we are loved by Christ, and that we love him in return."
 St. Theresa of Calcutta said "If we pray, we will believe; If we



believe, we will love; If we love, we will serve."

Lead by faith with your family:
 The Works of Mercy are acts of love that help us care for the needs of others, and an opportunity for Catholics to give witness to Christ. As a family, download and play The Works of Mercy game using the QR code below.

