



Joan Gorski

# An Interview with BIDJ Instructor and Coordinator, Joan Gorski

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Religion Education Office

## *Tell us something about yourself*

I grew up in Naperville and attended Ss. Peter & Paul Parish first and then St. Raphael Parish. The new Parish was built in the area where we lived, so we transferred there. My family had moved to Naperville from Wisconsin when I was a baby. I have five sisters and am second youngest. My interests include educational travel, poetry and reading, and, of course, religion. I must have gotten my interest in the written word from my mother, an avid reader. Near as I can recall, I've always had a stack of books on a table or my nightstand, ready for me to open or on the schedule of my list of things to do. Mom took us to church with her every Sunday, and that exposure, along with daily prayer, opened me to a faith life that grew as I got older.

After I got my B.A. in Education from Benedictine University and a Master's Degree in Religious Studies in scripture, I merged the two by becoming an educator in Catholic schools. I began to take students with me on trips overseas and noticed immediately how that immersion experience changed their perspectives about the world and people in it. The experiential learning from travel is indescribable. I decided to expand my background by more travel and enrolling at The University of St. Mary of the Lake in their Doctor of Ministry program. Transformations in people became an interest of mine.

## *How did you get involved with teaching the Bible?*

Over the years, I have taught High School and College classes. I have also been involved with various parishes training catechists and DRE's about scripture along with my own catechist work in faith formation programs. At one point, I taught in the diaconate program, an experience similar to what I now do when I teach in The Biblical Institute, our diocesan scripture school. Chicago has a sister program to The Biblical Institute, and I also taught there previously for Carol Kloss. She was its coordinator at the time and brought the curriculum here to the Joliet diocese. Carol created The Biblical Institute for the area and later brought me along with her to teach in it here before she retired.

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Carol Kloss relocated to our diocese, and the Director of Religious Education, Tom Quinlan, asked her about starting a scripture program here. They began The Biblical Institute with the support of Fr. David Medow at St. Mary Immaculate Parish in Plainfield during the fall of 2009. Prior to being hired by Carol to teach in the Chicago program, I was unaware that any diocese had formal scripture programs beyond diaconate training or University programs. I discovered that the program she was using had been designed by Sr. Macrina Scott, O.F.M. one of the pioneers of Catholic biblical study for adults. Sr. Macrina developed a four year curriculum that includes the study of all 73 books of the Catholic bible. The revised edition of Sr. Macrina's curriculum, now called The Catholic Biblical School Program, is what The Biblical Institute uses and is even better than the first edition.

The Bible became my focus in graduate school. My professors were some of the leading scholars in scripture and that had a huge impact on me. Growing up, I always liked hearing the Bible read in Mass and seeing biblical movies on television. I thought I knew the stories fairly well, but my continuing education helped me grow in faith along with teaching me how to read the books. Once I decided to be a teacher, the Bible became a major focus for me. I wanted to share with others what had been opened for me. Over the years, I have considered myself to be especially blessed because my life's work focuses on what I love most – God, teaching and the Bible. To me, Religion is the most important subject I can ever study or teach because it's all about the meaning of life and our relation to God, the Creator. Teaching this has been an absolute privilege, and I have been amazed and inspired to see how God's word has transformed people. It has transformed me too.

### *What about the biblical Institute and your role as an instructor?*

My role in teaching scripture and coordinating this program is a ministry. This is a tremendous responsibility that I can only accomplish with the help of the Holy Spirit. I also see myself as a facilitator to help people encounter God by developing a relationship with the Bible.

Teachers in this program know that students in this program come to it because they want to learn how to read and pray scripture as modern Catholic adults. It's our role to know the Church guidance for interpreting the Bible in order to help students understand the Catholic approach and get a sense of what the texts teach today. People come to The Biblical Institute because they don't have time to learn such things on their own.

I've taught for over 30 years and discovered that part of my role is to share with students my own experiences with and love for scripture. I am in awe frequently by the work of the Holy Spirit in the classroom when I interact with students or see them interact with one another. They connect spiritually with each other in the new small faith communities that develop through their study groups. They see new possibilities in the ideas of others as they share answers to the homework questions they do before class or when they pray the scriptures together. September through May, our academic year, students become aware of their own transformations too, and as their teacher, I am blessed to be part of this. We are only in our 5<sup>th</sup> year and had our first class graduate May of 2013. With God's help, we'll be graduating several more classes in the years to come as we expand biblical literacy throughout our diocese. I certainly pray for it!