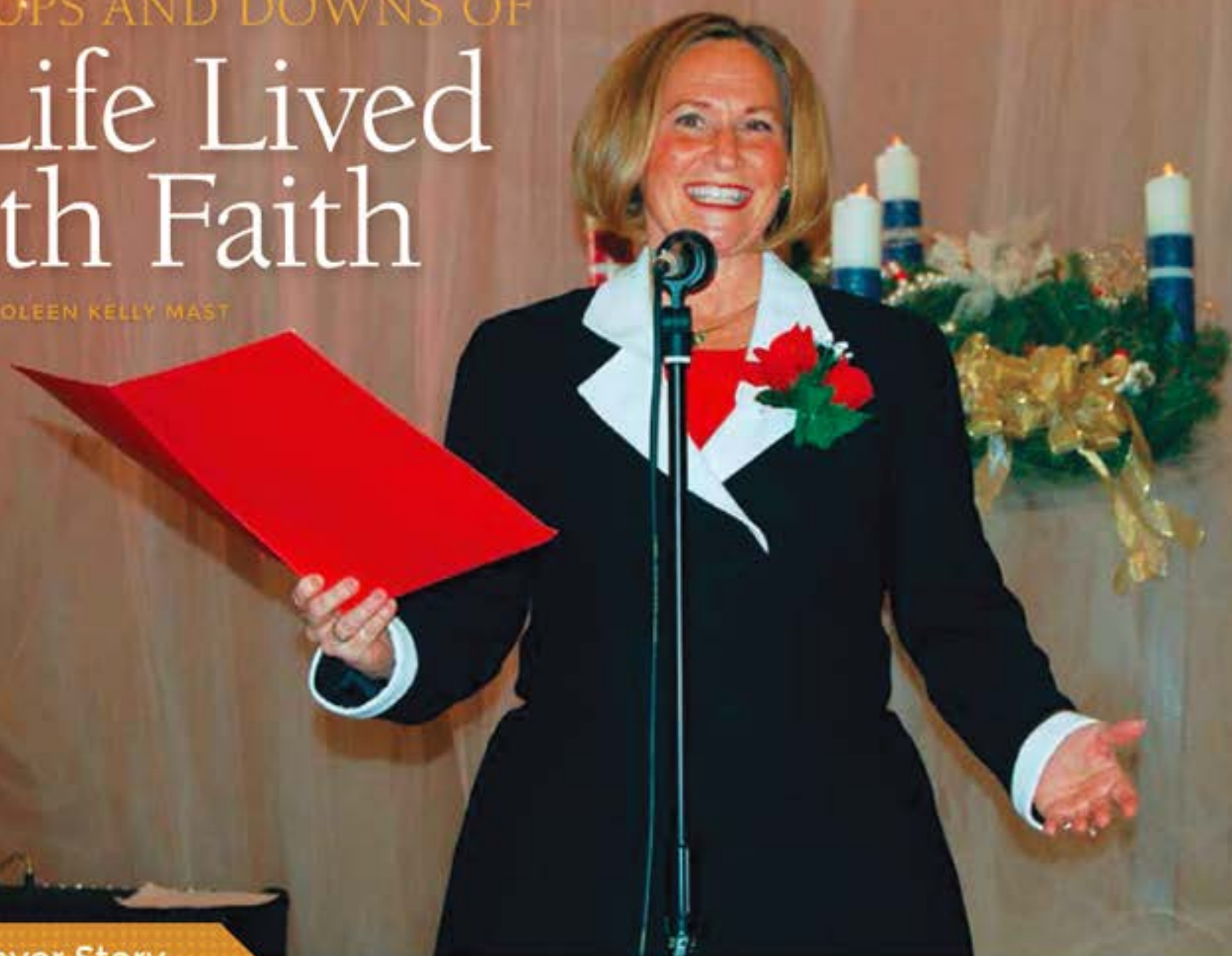


THE UPS AND DOWNS OF a Life Lived with Faith

BY GOLEEN KELLY MAST



Cover Story

“Mrs. Mast, let us go with you. We will tell your audience how much we appreciate learning about chastity – really!” These words joyfully rang from the mouths of high school juniors in a Christian sexual morality class at Bishop McNamara High School in the fall of 1983. The story of how I – a religion teacher who ended up traveling from Kankakee to Rome and ultimately having my own national radio show – is a story of what happens when one lives out your faith.

Becoming a world leader in chastity education was surely not my idea, nor had I ever aspired to be a national radio show host, nor an international speaker. It was God’s idea, and I set out to serve Him with all my talents. My peers who came of age in the 1970s did not even imagine that teaching chastity and training abstinence teachers around the globe was a possible career opportunity. It may even have been laughable at that time. It certainly was not on the list of careers back then, even in the Church. Yet, one step at a time, I said yes to what

God asked of me, sometimes willingly, sometimes questioning.

When those high school students said those words to me in the fall of 1983, I was their seventh period religion teacher at Bishop McNamara High School in Kankakee. My outgoing and sincere personality connected well with the teens, and I was able to help them understand the truth and meaning of human sexuality, using fun and creative methods. Little did I know that this experience would help launch an international movement in chastity, starting with my student team

called “The McNamara Ambassadors of Sexual Health.” The MASH Team traveled for three years in this diocese and surrounding ones, with some additional trips to national conferences in Denver and Pittsburgh. They inspired other youth groups throughout the country to start their own teams as well.

People would ask me, “How did you get your students to become enthusiastic about chastity?” My response: “I tell them the truth, with great love, and some fun and exciting methods.” Teachers would reply, “Could you write this down for

us so we can try it, too?" I completed my Master's Degree in health education from Western Illinois University, and my curriculum project ultimately became my Sex Respect program for public schools. I followed that by writing my Catholic curriculum for teens and parents, called "Love & Life: a Christian Sexual Morality Guide for Teens," which holds a 2005 imprimatur from Bishop Joseph Imesch.

These writings ultimately led me to appearances on television, such as being on "Oprah," "Geraldo," "60 Minutes," and "Mother Angelica Live," and appearing in a televised debate with the president of Planned Parenthood in Washington, D.C.; and led to teacher training seminars in Rome, Mexico City, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Trinidad.

A life lived with faith in God is a roller-coaster ride. It has not easy and includes hard work and many crosses to carry. The devil does not like anyone who does effective work in the pro-life movement, and he lets us know that. For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union sued some school districts that used my Sex Respect program. I have been on Planned Parenthood's "Top-10 to Avoid" list with their heavy anti-life criticism, and I have been in other lawsuits and business betrayals. I faced a life-threatening toxic pregnancy with my fifth child, financial struggles with my company, Respect Inc., and a number of hospitalizations and surgeries for my husband. Family tragedies ensued when a burglar murdered my brother; my younger sister suddenly died of pneumonia, and my oldest son had a massive heart attack while taking a nap and died instantly at the age of 29. I can't count the number of times that I have gone to my weekly hour of adoration before our Lord and asked Him, "Are you sure you need me to keep doing this?" or "What do you want of me now, Lord?"

Sometimes God tells me directly. Sometimes He speaks to me through other people, such as priests, bishops or people's needs. When I was going through a particularly difficult time, I unexpectedly received an invitation from the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family in Rome to present my Love and Life program to the council at their world meeting and participate in a week-long workshop in Rome as they released the document, "The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality."

The day I received that large invitation, I was jumping up and down with excitement – the Vatican – inviting me? I said to God, "OK, God, I see this is you. You have me on your track. Thank you for this affirmation; I needed that, and you came through, as always."

A few years ago, when Archbishop J. Peter Sartain was serving in the Diocese of Joliet as bishop, I received a related mission that built upon that conference in Rome. He asked me to create a program for parents and their pre-teens to replace the secular family life program that many of the Catholic school students had formerly attended. "Catholics deserve more," Bishop Sartain said. So I set out to develop the new "Growing Up with Health and Virtue" video/discussion programs that enable parents and pre-teens an opportunity and the sacred language to have conversations about the important science and theology of growing up in today's culture.

In order to follow the Church teachings regarding the age of modesty, I needed to produce a different program for fathers with their sons than we needed for mothers with their daughters. These programs take place at many schools and parishes throughout the Joliet diocese and other dioceses. (The next program for parents and their pre-teens is at St. Petronille Parish in Glen Ellyn on Oct. 16.)

And yet there were still more surprises in store. In the summer of 1999, I was at a point where the youngest of my five children had just entered school, and I was praying regularly for discernment as to what God wanted me to do. Unexpectedly, I received a phone call from Father Joseph Fessio, who had published my "Love & Life" books through Ignatius Press and was involved in starting up a national Catholic radio network. He asked if I would be willing to host "The Doctor Is In" radio show two days a week, offering personal advice from a Catholic perspective. While I thought I was going there for a job interview, they put me right on the air with live callers, and the rest ... Well, that was up to the Holy Spirit.

The first few years on the radio caused me to grow even more to trust in God, and that trust continues. I didn't know what questions were going to come in on our live show, and I didn't know what the answers would be, either. But I trusted that God had prepared me through the highs and lows and experiences of life, as well as through my educational background and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

My speaking opportunities broadened as my radio show spread throughout the country. I went from being a "specialist" in chastity education to many levels of evangelization of the faith, such as giving women's retreats, training parish staff, offering marriage seminars and keynote addresses. My husband, Kent, and I present both the Growing Up Pre-teen and Parent programs, in addition to monthly talks for the One in Christ marriage preparation program in the Archdiocese of Chicago. I also serve the U.S. bishops as a member of their

National Review Board. Most recently, this June, I was given my own radio advice show, entitled "Mast Appeal," a two-hour live call-in show on Saturday mornings syndicated by Ave Maria Radio and EWTN radio to 250 stations and available on Sirius Satellite Radio.

I've also been invited to speak at the 2015 World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, which Pope Francis is expected to attend.

I could not have planned a more fulfilling life on my own. Deep within my heart I believe that I have followed God's callings and sought to serve Him. I wanted to be a wife and mother; He gave me that, and He asked me for more. He knows I love Him, and He loves me back even more. He knows I love to travel, so He has me travel to work for Him. He knows I love young people and families, so He has me working to help people and families know and live His truth. He called me. I said "yes" with my life, and I still do not know what He has in store for the rest of it.



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