


An Interview with BJD Instructor Carol Kloss

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 By Joyce Donahue, Religious Education Office, Diocese of Joliet

Tell us something about yourself.

I grew up in Chicago, in Immaculate Conception Parish in the northwest side neighborhood of Norwood Park.

I've always been interested in learning. As a girl, I used to check out as many books as I could carry from the local branch of the Chicago Public Library. I'd go through entire subjects, reading every book the library had. I especially remember learning about famous baseball players and oceanography in this way. In high school, my boyfriend and I took German lessons once a week with a nice old lady from Luxembourg who lived in the neighborhood. These are the kinds of things I thought were fun! And I still love reading and learning.

I've got a mix of interests in my education as well. At the University of Chicago, I got a B.A. in Art History,

but I also studied German and Italian to help me understand the songs my voice teacher gave me to sing. In the U.S. Army, I spent 48 weeks studying Russian six hours a day in order to become a Russian linguist. The M.A. in Economics I got from the University of South Carolina began transitioning into doctoral study in finance, until I realized I really didn't want to write a dissertation and I really didn't want to teach finance. I took writing and art classes to help me in my business in Colorado. When I came back to Chicago to enroll in Biblical Studies at Catholic Theological Union, I already had a reputation in my family of being a perpetual student, so they weren't surprised—even though they asked me at every party, "What going to *do* with this master's degree?"



Carol Kloss

What about your work experience?

I've been lucky enough to have many different work experiences. I was a budget analyst as a civilian with the U.S. Air Force and a Human Resources Manager at a medical center as an active duty officer in the U.S. Air Force. I taught computer courses, personal finance, and writing. For about ten years, I had my own business developing, writing, and designing business presentations,

training workshops, marketing materials, and employee handbooks. I've been on the board of directors for a Colorado hospice. What's amazing to me is that all these different experiences and all the aspects of my education in one way or another help me teach the Bible, even though I never knew I would eventually be doing this special kind of work.

How did you get involved with teaching the Bible?

In Colorado, when I had a real desire to learn the Bible better, I had the great blessing of being able to join the Denver Catholic Biblical School. It was run at that time by Sr. Macrina Scott, O.F.M., who is one of the pioneers of Catholic biblical study for adults. Sr. Macrina

had developed a four-year curriculum that covers all 73 books of the Catholic Bible. I was able to go through the program taught by the teachers who had helped Sr. Macrina fine-tune and publish the curriculum. When I began the Biblical School, I didn't know (p. 2)

How did you get involved with teaching the Bible? *(continued)*

if I would finish all four years, but by the time I graduated I knew I needed to learn more. That program truly led me to a deep connection with Scripture.

At C.T.U., I took as many Bible courses as I could from the great Scripture teachers there, as well as Hebrew and Greek, but I also filled in my education with theology, ethics, and spirituality. I really saw how Scripture is the foundation for almost every area of the Catholic faith. The pieces of the faith came together for me in a profound way. Just when I was feeling the need to share what I'd been learning, I quite unexpectedly

received an offer to teach a weekly class for the Chicago Catholic Scripture School of the Archdiocese of Chicago—using Sr. Macrina's curriculum! The next year I taught three weekly classes and then I was hired by the Archdiocese to run the program, which I did for a few years. During that time, I had the incredible opportunity of seeing students across the diocese be transformed by the study of Scripture. It was very special to me to realize these students were being changed by their encounter with God's word in this curriculum just as I had been.

What about the Biblical Institute of the Diocese of Joliet?

Tom Quinlan of the Religious Education Office of the Joliet Diocese knew about the Chicago Catholic Scripture School and he'd wanted to begin something similar in this diocese. When I left Chicago, we worked together with Notre Dame Parish in Clarendon Hills to begin the Biblical Institute in fall 2008. We didn't have enough time to promote BIDJ so we didn't get enough students to begin that year. Tom stayed committed to BIDJ,

and with the support of Fr. David Medow, we got a great class of about 30 students going at St. Mary Immaculate in Plainfield in fall 2009. We use the revised edition of Sr. Macrina Scott's curriculum, now called the Catholic Biblical School Program. The revised edition is even better than the first edition. With the current students entering Year 2, we hope to open a new Year 1 class at St. Petronille in Glen Ellyn.

How do you see your role as the BIDJ instructor?

Teaching Scripture is a ministry. Not long before I graduated from C.T.U., I was overwhelmed one afternoon with a sense of the responsibility I had as a person who would be teaching the Bible to Catholics. I'm very aware that no matter what I do in class, no matter what I prepare, no matter what I bring in to the students, it's the Holy Spirit that draws them into a relationship with the Word. So, in a way, I see myself as a facilitator for the actions of the Holy Spirit.

I also know students come to this program because they want to learn how to read and pray Scripture as modern Catholics. It's my job to know the Church guidance on interpreting the Bible and bring everything I've learned to help students understand the Catholic approach and get a sense of what texts mean today.

People come to classes like the Biblical Institute because they don't have time to learn such things on their own.

Over time, I've realized part of my role is to share my own love for Scripture and for everything related to the study of Scripture. I think being open about those things helps students look seriously at what their encounter with the Bible could be.

A big part of my job is to help the class form a healthy faith community centered on Scripture. I get to know the students quite well over the course of a year, from talking with them every week and reviewing their homework. Each group needs different things. My task is to keep the class on a good track. Most of the time, I just stand back and enjoy as students talk about the Bible and help each other learn. It's really beautiful.

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