

Mother Caroline: Case Study in Courage

Facilitator Directions

1. Family of Origins
2. Little Caroline
3. Education of Little Caroline
4. Remembering Her First Holy Communion

Facilitator's Directions

Materials needed.

1. Family of Origins
2. Little Caroline
3. Education of Young Caroline
4. Remembering Her First Holy Communion

Controlling Purpose: To reflect on the uniqueness of Mother Caroline's family of origins.

How: To study several vignettes that describe Mother Caroline's early childhood and youth in order to understand her resourceful spirit.

Goal: To realize how her early life shaped her ability to adapt to life in America.

The FACILITATOR distributes each of the four sections and says: Today we'll look at Mother Caroline Friess, the American foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Her family of origins and education as a child may help us understand her gift of adaptability. We'll look at each vignette beginning with her Family of Origins. I'll be inviting questions and comments throughout our discussion. We'll begin by reading each of the four vignettes, one at a time, and discuss them.

Begin by reading Family of Origins. Follow the same format for each of the sections. Questions follow each segment.

1. Consider Josepha Friess' family of origins. How would you describe the future Mother Caroline's family?
2. Little Josepha was left behind by her parents: what does this say to you about her family?
3. Do you understand some of the anger felt by Josepha's (Mother Caroline's) mother?

4. Do you recall the story about Mother Theresa's decision to stop in Eichstaedt to say good-bye to Mother Caroline's family before coming to America? (Her mother refused to see her and she left for the United States without her blessing.)
5. What else does this summary of her family of origins tell you about Mother Caroline and her love for children, especially orphans?
6. Do you think she may have seen Mother Theresa as her 'mother'?
7. Is there any significance that she came from a multicultural background, where French was probably spoken in her German home? Did this experience help her adapt to the United States?

The FACILITATOR says: Next we'll look at Little Caroline (2), reading it together. Now let's consider what this vignette tells us about little Josepha who eventually became Mother Caroline.

1. What do these memories tell you about Mother Caroline?
2. How would you describe her family of origins?
3. What significance might be found in Mother Caroline being raised in a "rectory?"

As you continue The FACILITATOR says: Are you beginning to see the relationship between this young girl's family of origins and the development of her personality? We'll continue by looking at The Education of Young Caroline (3) Let's read it together.

1. What impresses you about her early education?
2. What seems abrasive or abusive about it?
3. Do you think Mother Caroline in her wisdom years was appreciative of her training?
4. Is there anything else you'd like to say?
5. Did her education prepare her for the vowed life?

The FACILITATOR continues: We conclude this segment with our final vignette, entitled Remembering Her First Communion (4) As we read it together notice the role her Reverend Uncle played in her formation.

1. What does this story tell you about our future Mother Caroline?

2. How did her Rev. Uncle consistently prepare her for life?
3. Does it surprise you that she chose the name, Mother Caroline, after Bishop Carl Reisach who had been her mentor?
4. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was very important to Mother Caroline and Mother Theresa. Did this flowering of devotion have its origin in her First Communion?

The FACILITATOR says: In order to understand the mature Mother Caroline it is important to situate her in the context of American life in the 19th century.

A noted historian, Anne Butler, has written an essay on Mother Caroline, entitled *Adapting the Vision: Caroline in 19th Century America*. In it she explores the social, political, and religious context of American life in which Mother Caroline founded the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In her outstanding research the reader will find evidence of the extraordinary gifts Mother Caroline brought to the parochial school system and the Church of North America. Ms. Butler has added some excellent questions as a way to harvest the richness of her research. Consider reading the essay and discussing the questions as part of a class assignment or as a book club segment.

The FACILITATOR adds: The unpublished personal correspondence of Mother Margaret of Cortona Wiedemann to Mother Caroline is another topic available in this research. As the successor to Mother Theresa, Mother Margaret expresses her concern and love for Mother Caroline. This correspondence gives an insight into the relationship of two community leaders after Mother Theresa's death.

The FACILITATOR concludes: A final segment under this topic identifies the "real Mother Caroline" in photographs. This article appeared in 1991. In it we find why there has been some question as to "the real" Mother Caroline as portrayed in photographs. I want to express a special word of gratitude to S. Barbara Brumleve, SSND and S. Marjorie Myers, SSND for their persistence in solving this mystery, and their work in collecting the Letters of Mother Caroline.

The FACILITATOR asks: Do you think Mother Caroline's life does portray a "Case Study in Courage?" If so what stands out for you about her courageous spirit?

As we remember her fidelity under extraordinary circumstances let's conclude by praying the final blessing that School Sisters of Notre Dame recited at the dismissal time of their students. The FACILITATOR states: This blessing is taken from the Holy Rule of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, 1865. "My dear students (sisters, friends, etc) I commend you to the Holy Spirit through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and I entrust you forever to her blessed hands." Amen.