

# Catholic mom turned author pens new novel to reach the preteen student reader

BY KATHLEEN MULDOON  
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Nancy Carabio Belanger of Rochester, Mich., remembers writing fiction when she was in elementary school, but she did not write for publication until she had her own children and perceived a lack of wholesome children's fiction espousing Catholic values.



Belanger

With an eye toward filling that gap, Belanger has authored what she hopes to be the first in a series of pre-teen novels.

Her first book, *Olivia and the Little Way*, was recently released, just in time for holiday giving. "I wanted to write something entertaining for the 'tween market, where they could learn

about God but not be preached at," she says.

In the book, title character Olivia strives to fit in as a new student at the fictional St. Michael's School. With the help of her grandmother, she develops a devotion to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and discovers that this saint's "little way" has application to her own life struggles.

"I think what makes St. Thérèse so appealing to children is her belief in being child-like," Belanger says. "She's very approachable, very sweet and small, yet very tough in many ways, too."

Belanger feels a special connection to St. Thérèse. Both she and her illustrator, Sandy LewAllen, sensed the guidance and blessing of this saint as they worked on *Olivia and the Little Way*.

Belanger's sons, Vincent, 11, and Paul, 8, helped her trans-



form from mom to author. "They peered over my shoulder as I typed, and it really helped me!" she says. "Vincent helped make Olivia more 'real' in a couple of

scenes. And Paul told me, 'Mom, I think you should make a whole series of books with a new saint for each book.' He verbalized my secret dream! How cool is that?"

When asked why Olivia's grandmother has such a prominent role in the book, Belanger says this is because grandparents are a tangible link to the past. "Olivia's grandma brought the past back to life for her. She had a special relationship with her. Olivia has awesome parents, but it's a gift to be able to unburden yourself like Olivia does to one special person, her grandma."

Belanger hopes that preteens will not only be entertained by her novel but will also see themselves in Olivia. "But mostly," she adds, "I would love for them to feel God calling them to a greater love for Him. Thérèse taught us that God loves us all, even with our many imperfec-

tions. God wants kids to talk to him, to take their worries and concerns, joys and sorrows to him. And making little sacrifices is something anybody can do, young or old."

Catholic author Marybeth Hicks and Sister Barbara Berg, SHSp, director of religious education at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Little Flower in San Antonio, are enthusiastic endorsers of *Olivia and the Little Way*.

It can be ordered from the Web at [www.littleflowerbook.com](http://www.littleflowerbook.com), or by sending a check or money order for \$15.75 (includes priority mail shipping) to: Harvey House Publishing, P.O. Box 81841, Rochester, MI 48308. Autographed copies are available on request.

The book is soft cover and 224 pages.

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