

From the Editor's Desk:

Why Teaching Is So Important

In my first year of college, I was studying computer science. I wanted to be a writer, but I figured I would never actually be able to make a living doing that. Then, in my English 102 class, the professor, to whom I had never mentioned my desire to be a writer, wrote a comment on one of my papers: "You have a very definite talent for writing. You should pursue this." That comment, which she could have just as easily left unmade, changed my life. Ultimately, I changed my major to English, studied journalism, and, about seven years after that comment was made, I became the editor of *The Stained Glass Quarterly*. That would never have happened if I had not been encouraged to pursue something that I desperately wanted to do but did not have enough faith in myself or my ability to actually pursue it.

There are key points in my life where a teacher said something or pointed me in a new direction, and I would not be who I am today if not for those moments. I have had many teachers over the years, some good and some bad. However, beyond that huge group there is a smaller group of teachers — not all of whom held the title but all of whom filled the function — who were truly excellent and who helped make me who I am today.

Over the years, I have even found myself fulfilling the role of teacher. The hardest thing about teaching on Wednesday nights is waking up and going to work on Thursday morning. I get home at around 10:00 pm on Wednesdays and am absolutely wired for the next hour and a half. Five-thirty comes mighty early in the morning on Thursday. And now, as I sit here on Thursday morning looking at a blank page and wondering what in the world I should write about, the answer seems suddenly very clear: *Teaching*.

I cannot claim vast experience as a teacher, and, certainly there are many people who know far more about it than I do.



Richard H. Gross, MTS

But, as I've watched the SGAA Stained Glass School develop, I've had the opportunity to think a lot about the role of the teacher. Besides, what I want to write about is not advice on how to teach but rather some brief thoughts on why teaching is so important and how it can benefit the teacher as well as the student. There is also a very definite way in which it benefits the entire craft of stained glass when people teach others craft skills.

When I'm not being the editor of *The Stained Glass Quarterly*, one of the other things I do is act as RCIA Director for my parish. This means that I organize and, with quite a bit of help, teach classes for those who are coming into full communion with the Catholic Church. It is a nine-month program of education that seeks to offer adults the information they need to make an informed decision about the future of their spiritual life. It's a lot of work, and it is very rewarding work.

I have also had the pleasure of teaching seminars at SGAA Annual Summer Conferences. The effect on me as a teacher is very much the same whether I am teaching about, say, the Four Marks of the Church on Wednesday or teaching stained glass artists how to be better photographers of their own work at a pre-

Conference seminar. The feeling that I get from knowing that I can share the knowledge and skill that I have to help others grow in their own knowledge and ability is beyond words. It is one of the finest feelings that I know.

It is very satisfying to watch others grow and to know that you've played some role in that. It is also very personally satisfying to teach, in a way similar to the runner's high; that's why I come home on Wednesday nights unable to get to sleep until after midnight. I don't know how many times I have remarked to my wife that I wonder if that feeling will ever end. I hope it won't.

It is very satisfying to know that I can volunteer my time as a teacher to organizations like my parish and the Stained Glass Association of America and, in whatever way I can, help advance the very worthwhile causes toward which those organizations are working. Whether you look at a church community, an organization like the SGAA, or at any other worthwhile cause, there is a lot of work that needs to be done, and some of it is best done by volunteers.

Teachers also offer their students something very valuable. They are witnesses to the fact that it *can* be done... that the skills *can* be mastered, the techniques *can* be learned, and the information *can* become a very real part of the student who seeks to learn it.

Teachers make the individual a better person, and, by helping people become all they can be, they make the world a better place. Where would any of us be if not for the teachers who made us all who we are today?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard H. Gross". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard H. Gross, MTS