



***"On the Job Training" to Touch Children's Hearts***

*By Denise Allard, Colombe Fafard Chartier and Guy Ferraton*

***March 15, 2020: half of the faithful of the St. Boniface Cathedral Parish did not show up at the church and the holy water fonts were emptied. Then came the public health COVID-19 restrictions. How then, could one offer the children's liturgy to the young people of the parish? Testimony of Denise Allard, Colombe Fafard Chartier and Guy Ferraton.***



**Colombe Fafard Chartier, Denise Allard and Guy Ferraton**

**Each month, on the parish's YouTube channel, you download a children's video explaining a passage from the Gospel. Was this a challenge to set up?**

**Guy Ferraton:** Absolutely! Brenda Arakaza, the pastoral and faith education officer, and the parish liturgy committee both wanted to ensure a continued presence of the children's liturgy. For all involved, it was uncharted territory. I had

just joined the team, having only participated in leading a single session before the churches closed. Our team had just made a very first presentation with puppets, freshly built, but we were not particularly well-trained. But our next presentation was scheduled for mid-April. We had time to get ready.

When we shot our first video, I played Saint John! Brenda was behind the camera, Denise sang, and Colombe made new puppets. It was all so new, so strange. But lots of fun, too! The final result was a bit low tech, but that's okay. Kids accept that.



**Colombe Fafard Chartier:** We had to learn on the job, as we were doing it. We had to learn how to shoot and edit video to have a quality product. We had to learn how to integrate singing and music into our explicating the Gospel reading. In the beginning, we had to find the right equipment. There were so many unknowns, so many challenges and many, many headaches along the way. But we had the support of about thirty parishioners, who worked behind the scenes. Some eventually became actors, screenwriters, musicians, editors and set designers. Father Marcel

Carrière was even an actor and singer in one of our videos. He also worked a puppet!

My specialty, having a visual arts bent, is to make and animate the puppets. The characters change every month, except Jesus, of course. So there was, and still

is, a lot of paper mache involved. Now I even have two Jesus puppets. One I work with strings, the other is a hand puppet.



**Denise Allard:** I've been leading music at St. Boniface Cathedral since 1999, so I know the repertoire pretty thoroughly. The other musicians and I choose songs that highlight the theme of the given Gospel reading and that are also known by the kids. And to

properly represent the cultural diversity of the parish, African songs were included from time to time. Sister Justina Olaniyi has helped us a lot in this area.

### **Any comments from the children?**

**Denise Allard:** Great enthusiasm. They love puppets, of course, but also the fact that we've had kids in our videos, and have participated in the recording of the songs. There have been some positive echoes from other French-speaking and bilingual parishes. I imagine that mixed families in English parishes might also appreciate our efforts.

### **Do you plan to continue after the pandemic?**

**Guy Ferraton:** It's important to learn from this time of COVID-19. I think it would be a good idea to retain anything that might work well when things go back to normal. For instance, we're already thinking of adding a livestream component to our children's liturgies. At any rate, it's something to think about.

Throughout 2020 and now in 2021, we've also filmed and offered some musical concerts. We'll most likely continue, at least as an adjunct of a live concert. Why not have a visual souvenir of a really good concert?



One thing is certain: our team of volunteers has certainly become quite expert at what it does. In the beginning, it was frustrating just getting up to speed. We now have a couple of University of St. Boniface students who really know how to use video. They're studying video in school and it gives them an opportunity to hone their skills. One of them isn't even Catholic, but he's a committed Christian. He wants to help and I think it's a wonderful thing, a beautiful ecumenical gesture.

So for our parish team, it's been an amazing ride. More than ever before, I realize that we are all in this together.

*Interview by Daniel Bahuaud, Communications Coordinator at the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface*