

## On being co-creators with God

By Rev. Robert L. Kinast  
Catholic News Service

The first attribute the Book of Genesis ascribes to God is creativity.

In the beginning there was only a formless wasteland covered by darkness. Then God created light, separated the waters, brought forth vegetation, made all kinds of living creatures and finally fashioned human beings in God's own image.

Seeing that this creative output was indeed good, God entrusted it to us, not as a finished product to be preserved unaltered but as a boundless gift to nurture and develop.

We recognize this fact as an invitation to be co-creators with God, revealing 3 major implications, one about creation, one about God and one about us.

1. Co-creation implies that God's creation isn't finished. It is a continuing process with more to be discovered, learned, developed and produced.

For all we have learned about creation, there is so much more we don't know both in terms of the creation that already exists and the potential for new developments we cannot yet imagine. Viewed in this way, creation demands our respect even as it invites us to explore its reality and possibilities.

My nephew, a chemical engineer, lives this reality. As he studies the complex makeup of organic and inorganic substances, he searches for applications of this knowledge to medicines and other therapies that do not exist. His professional ambition is to contribute to a cure for a disease that currently afflicts innocent people. He is helping to co-create a better world.

2. Co-creation implies that God wishes to share creative power with us. This is part of what it means to be made in God's image. We are actual sharers in God's creative activity.

We are not just recipients of the gift of creation; we are participants in it. As we participate, we are drawn into God's life and we better understand who God is and what God wants.

When I watch music award shows, I always am struck by how many performers in their acceptance speeches give thanks and praise to God for their talent and the opportunities to express it. If their musical creativity is undertaken consciously in union with God, they are brought closer to an experience of God as co-creator.

3. Co-creation with God serves as a mirror that helps us see ourselves clearly. Two aspects of being human stand out: imagination and freedom.

—Creativity begins with imagination, the ability to perceive the given world in a different way. This is the impulse behind all human innovation from the arts and science to every other aspect of human life such as technology, business, education and medicine.

To be creative, however, imagination must be rooted in the novel achievements of those who have gone before us. Otherwise, it becomes fantasy and cannot contribute to the real world. When we learn from the experience of others, we are in a better position to add our own innovation.

My sister is an outstanding painter, but always is taking classes to learn new techniques and experiment with new styles and forms. Her artistic creativity draws upon the experience of others as she co-creates a more beautiful world.

—Creativity requires freedom, the ability to act upon what one imagines and turn it into reality. Exercising such freedom can involve a long-term struggle, as exemplified in the social world by the effort to replace tyranny



"Seeing that this creative output was indeed good, God entrusted it to us, not as a finished product to be preserved unaltered but as a boundless gift to nurture and develop," writes theologian Father Robert L. Kinast. CNS photo/Croslers

with democracy, slavery with equality, warfare with diplomacy. Often, an individual or group may need resources, encouragement and opportunity to translate vision into action.

The 2006 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Muhammad Yunus. Wasn't creativity at work when he pioneered the field of micro-lending, giving cash loans to individuals and groups whom no one else would help? Farmers, artists and small manufacturers around the world form co-ops to produce and market their goods independently of international companies.

The God of creation obviously delights in our exercise of creative imagination and values the ability to carry out our visions freely. The more we do both, the more we grow into the image of God and enter God's own way of being.

A humbling realization, it is a cause for recognizing how exalted God has made us, a little less than heavenly beings crowned with glory and honor, as the psalmist proclaims (Psalm 8:6).

The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to renew the desire and intention to live more creatively. Perhaps a resolution for all of us is to claim our role as co-creators with God. It need not be a daunting task. It can be as simple as the quotation from John Updike which I have taped to my computer monitor:

"Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right or doing it better."

Father Kinast is the director of the Center for Theological Reflection in Prairie Village, KS.

## Parents are co-creators with God

By Mary Jo Pederson  
Catholic News Service

It's a picture worth a thousand words. A young mom, wrapped in a sleeping bag on the floor between two cribs, dozing with her hand on the back of one tiny sleeping twin boy. The twins were preemies and had arrived home with their weary mom and dad only two nights before. The twins took turns crying all night, and their parents took turns sleeping on the floor between them.

The short nights and long days of feedings and diaper changes, temperature taking and pacing are some of the human ways parents participate with God in the creation of new life. The love that conceives a child is only the beginning of the creative process. Parents perform countless acts of selfless care for their children as they grow from infants into self-sufficient young adults.

The mundane work of teaching children to walk and talk, count and read, play fair and take turns, do chores, drive cars and form healthy relationships is the everyday work of creating human beings who can grow into their full potential.

Parents often don't recognize the sacred work of creation entrusted to them when a child is born. But parents understand what it means to give away part of themselves, to love a child beyond one's imaginings.

Most parents, with all their limitations and bad days, would give their lives for their children. They do that every day in ordinary ways by responsibly and faithfully taking care of their children. Parents share in the ongoing work of creating God's family when they love in this unselfish way, not just when their children respond with love but especially when they don't respond.

When a parent loves a child who doesn't love back, that parent's love most images God's love: unconditional, steadfast, forgiving.

The ongoing work of creating a human person includes feeding, clothing, shelter-



John Springer of Gary, Ind., shares hugs with his children, John Timothy and Velvetena. "A parent's unconditional love is the most effective way to convince a child of his or her true identity and dignity as God's unique creation," says family-life coordinator Mary Jo Pedersen. CNS photo

ing, setting limits, enforcing rules, affirming gifts and fostering creativity. All these life-serving tasks help shape a human person with a sense of self-worth and personal dignity.

Schools, churches and other social institutions can help shape children, but a parent's unconditional love is the most effective way to convince a child of his or her true identity and dignity as God's unique creation.

Catholic tradition holds that marrying and raising children is a vocation, a call from God. It is holy, but it is hard. Children are, as Mark Twain says, "a blessing

and an inestimable bother." They cause chaos, and there are many dark, turbulent times that accompany the happy times.

Many a parent has desperately called on his/her co-creator God for help in troubled times. Without an instruction manual or guarantees, with no return policy, parents co-create children and have to accept each child's gifts and limitations.

The challenge of parenthood is to give and nurture life, and then let it go. Like our divine creator, we provide what is necessary for children to grow into fullness of life while helping them develop their free will to choose their own destiny. This can be painful when they choose a path counter to our own.

Letting go of children does not mean abandoning them when they stray. It means loving them with unconditional, forgiving love that welcomes the prodigal child to return.

Imagine the Father who waits on the road for his wayward son to come home and then fattens the calf to celebrate. That's our model for parenthood. It's a picture worth a thousand words.

Pedersen is coordinator of the Leadership in Family Life Training Program for the Archdiocese of Omaha, Neb.

## Guidelines for using words co-creatively with God

By Chris Carstens, M.D.  
Catholic News Service

Speaking carefully considered words is a creative act.

Speaking is different from thinking. Spoken words enter the world and change it, even when nobody else hears them.

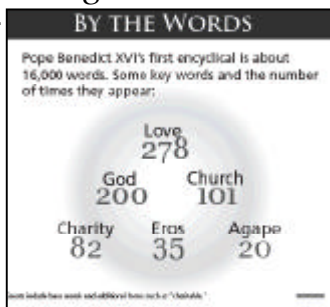
How can the words I speak play a role in God's work through me? Here are a few guidelines.

1. Use your own first spoken words of the day to set your dial. You might begin each morning with a simple, spoken act of commitment: "Lord, today use me as your instrument. Today I set myself to your work, for your purposes." Or, as in the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, ask, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

Having tuned your radio to God's channel, you are ready to follow him in the new day.

2. Your words can — should — reveal your concerns and commitments. Ask yourself, "If people listened to a tape of everything I said all day, would they know I am a Christian?"

Do Catholics seem especially reluctant to mention God outside of church, thinking that stuff is for fundamentalists? But mentioning God's name at every opportunity matters. Speaking God's name



reminds others — as well as you — that your eyes are on Jesus.

3. Ask God for words to name goodness when you see it. Going through the day, if you are tuned in, you will notice small acts of kindness, generosity and faithfulness.

This is an opportunity to do more than just smile and nod. Instead, speak out loud: "I admire the way you thought this through so that it would be fair to everybody," or, "Thank you for taking time for prayer before we started this meeting."

Spoken, public recognition encourages more of the same behavior in the future.

4. God may also give you opportunities for calling vice by name.

Our media are often sewers, pumping all sorts of filth into the atmosphere, and many of us find ourselves surrounded at work by small theft, small lies and small deceptions — all of which add up to big problems of deceit and dishonesty.

It is important to have the courage to speak aloud the words, "I won't do that, and I think you should not either."

5. Finally, it is common for people to talk about their difficulties. A well-known preacher advises Christians to stop talking

to God about how big their problems are and start talking to their problems about how big God is: "This will be hard, and if we are in God's will he will provide the tools we need."

Carstens is a psychologist in San Diego, Calif.

### In A Nutshell

- To be a co-creator with God means to be made in God's image. We are actual sharers in God's creative activity.
- God's created world around us demands our respect even as it invites us to explore its reality and possibilities.
- To realize that we are God's co-creators is humbling, but it is also a cause for recognizing how exalted God has made us.
- Each day in life we are challenged to assess the moral dimensions of social issues, personal situations.
- Making moral assessments calls for the ability to see rightly, understand what is at stake and know how our choice reflects our commitments and values.
- When teens raise moral issues, they want and need their parents' guidance. How should parents respond?

