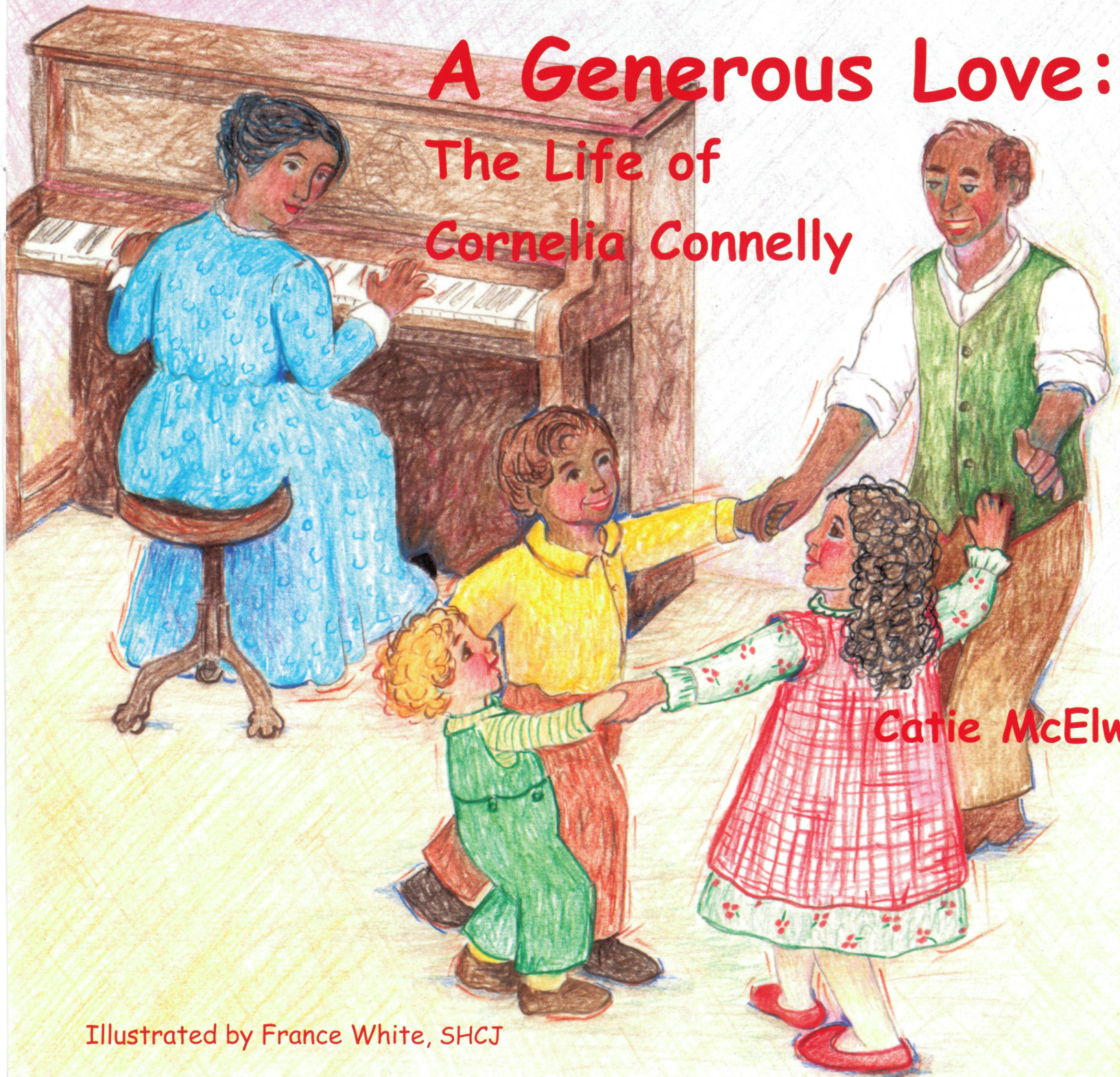


# A Generous Love: The Life of Cornelia Connelly



Catie McElwee

Illustrated by France White, SHCJ





# **A Generous Love:**

## The Life of Cornelia Connelly

**Catie McElwee**

Illustrated by France White, SHCJ

Casa Cornelia Publications, © 2009

Society of the Holy Child Jesus

[www.shcj.org](http://www.shcj.org)

[www.santoninoholychild.org](http://www.santoninoholychild.org)

[www.holychild200.org](http://www.holychild200.org)

To all my sons and daughters in Batey Lechería  
CM

With gratitude to the class of 2012  
at Mayfield Junior School of the Holy Child Jesus  
and their religion teacher  
for their enthusiastic help by posing for the illustrations  
in this life of Cornelia Connelly.  
FW



It was a cold December day in 1831.

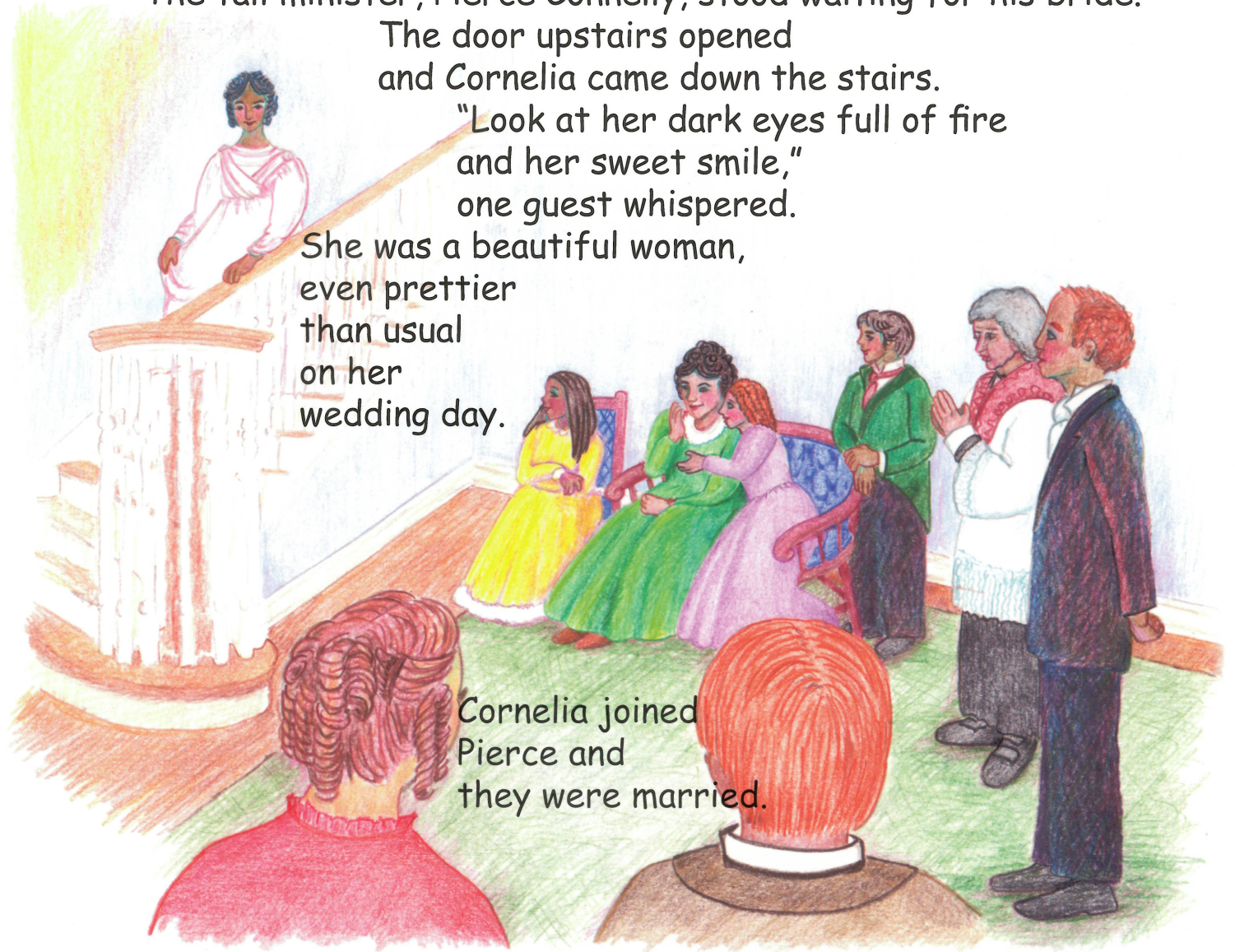
A room full of guests waited in a home in Philadelphia.  
The tall minister, Pierce Connelly, stood waiting for his bride.

The door upstairs opened  
and Cornelia came down the stairs.

"Look at her dark eyes full of fire  
and her sweet smile,"  
one guest whispered.

She was a beautiful woman,  
even prettier  
than usual  
on her  
wedding day.

Cornelia joined  
Pierce and  
they were married.



Have you ever been to a wedding? Do you want to get married, too?



## Pennsylvania, The United States 1832

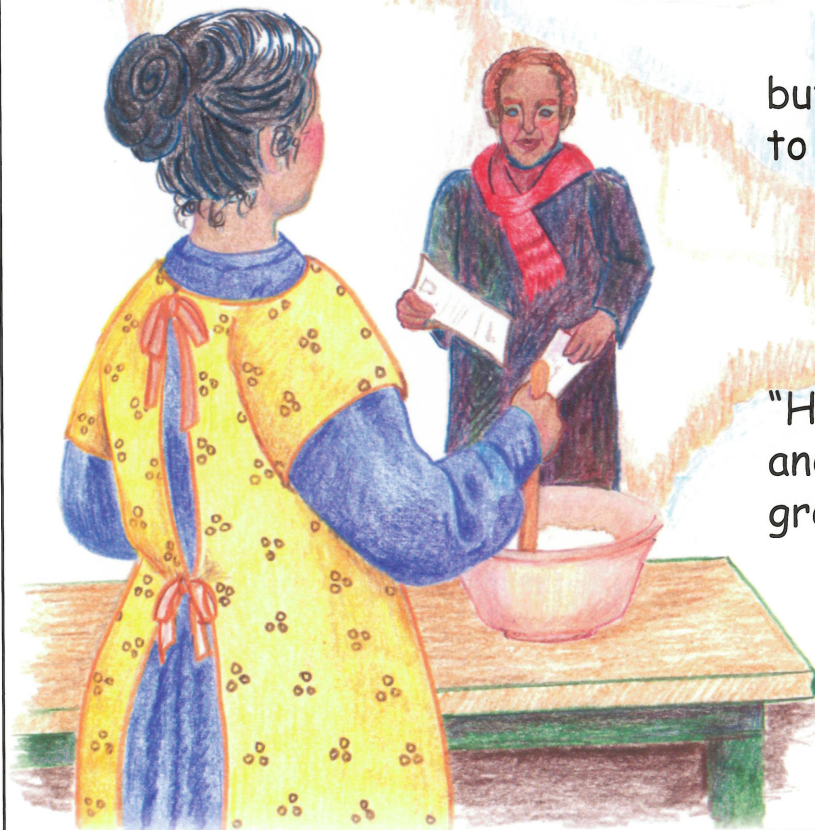
A month later, Pierce burst through the door,  
a smile on his face.

"The bishop has asked me to be the minister  
of an Episcopal Church in Mississippi!"

"Your own church!" Cornelia said,  
but she thought that Mississippi  
was far from her family.  
She would miss Philadelphia

but it would be exciting  
to do good work for God.

"How wonderful!" she said,  
and her smile  
grew as big as Pierce's.



Can you remember a wonderful thing that happened to you? Tell us about it.



## Mississippi, The United States 1832

The couple settled into their new house  
in Natchez, Mississippi.

Cornelia was a busy hostess.

Guests stopped by often  
and were always welcome.

The people of their town  
had great respect  
for the Connelys.

The couple was  
full of love  
and had a happy home.



Who lives in your house? Do you like it when people come to visit?



## Mississippi, The United States 1832

When Cornelia was ready to have her first baby,  
her sister Mary came to help.

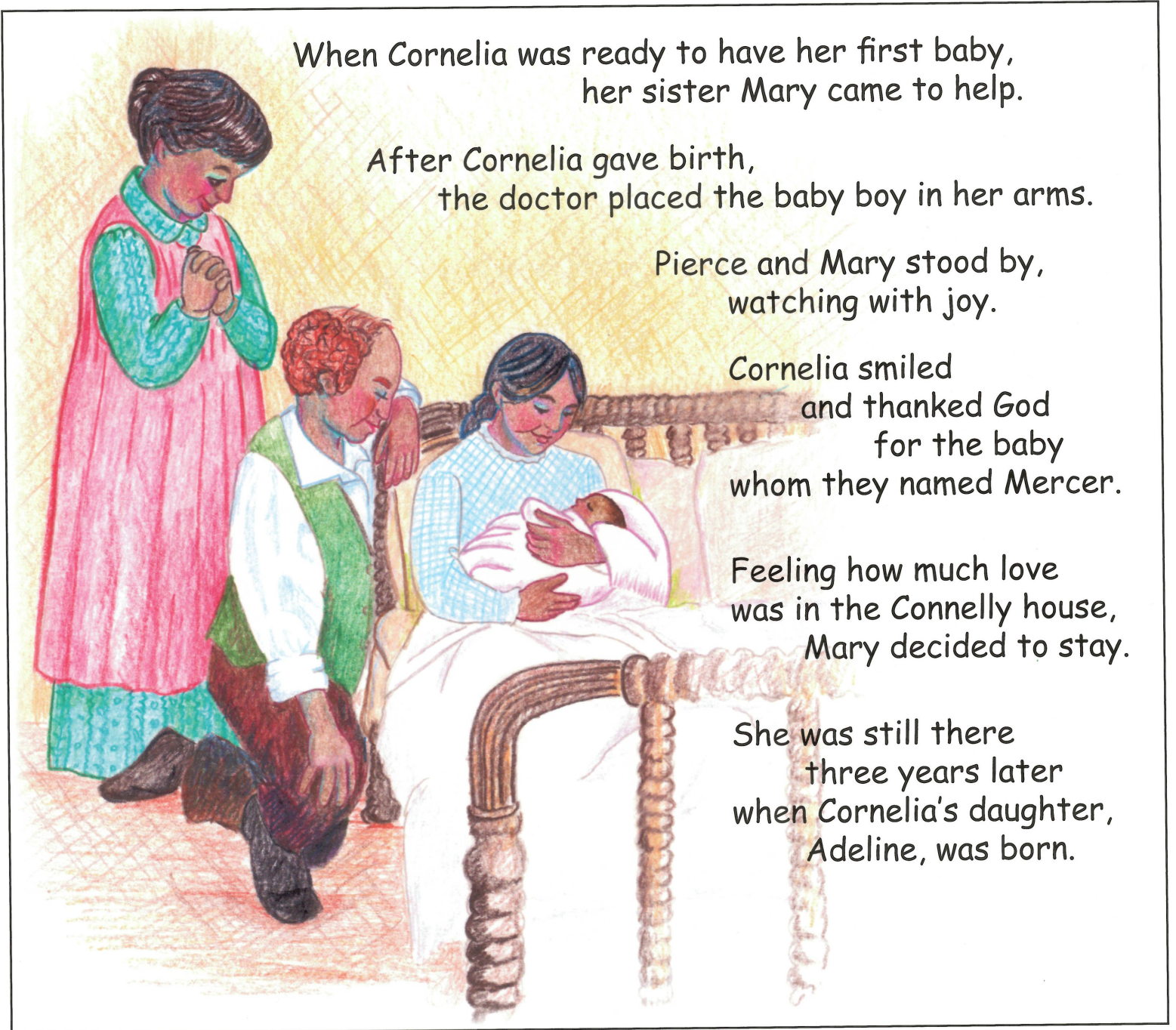
After Cornelia gave birth,  
the doctor placed the baby boy in her arms.

Pierce and Mary stood by,  
watching with joy.

Cornelia smiled  
and thanked God  
for the baby  
whom they named Mercer.

Feeling how much love  
was in the Connelly house,  
Mary decided to stay.

She was still there  
three years later  
when Cornelia's daughter,  
Adeline, was born.



What do you do to put love in your house? How do you show it?  
Who puts love in your school?



One day Pierce came home looking disappointed.

"What's wrong?" Cornelia asked.

"Protestants all over the country are attacking Catholics.

Do we want to belong to a church

that allows some of its members to be violent?"

They prayed and talked it over.

They decided to learn all they could  
about Catholics

and this led them  
to want to convert.



What would you have done if you were Cornelia or Pierce?



## Mississippi and Louisiana, The United States 1835

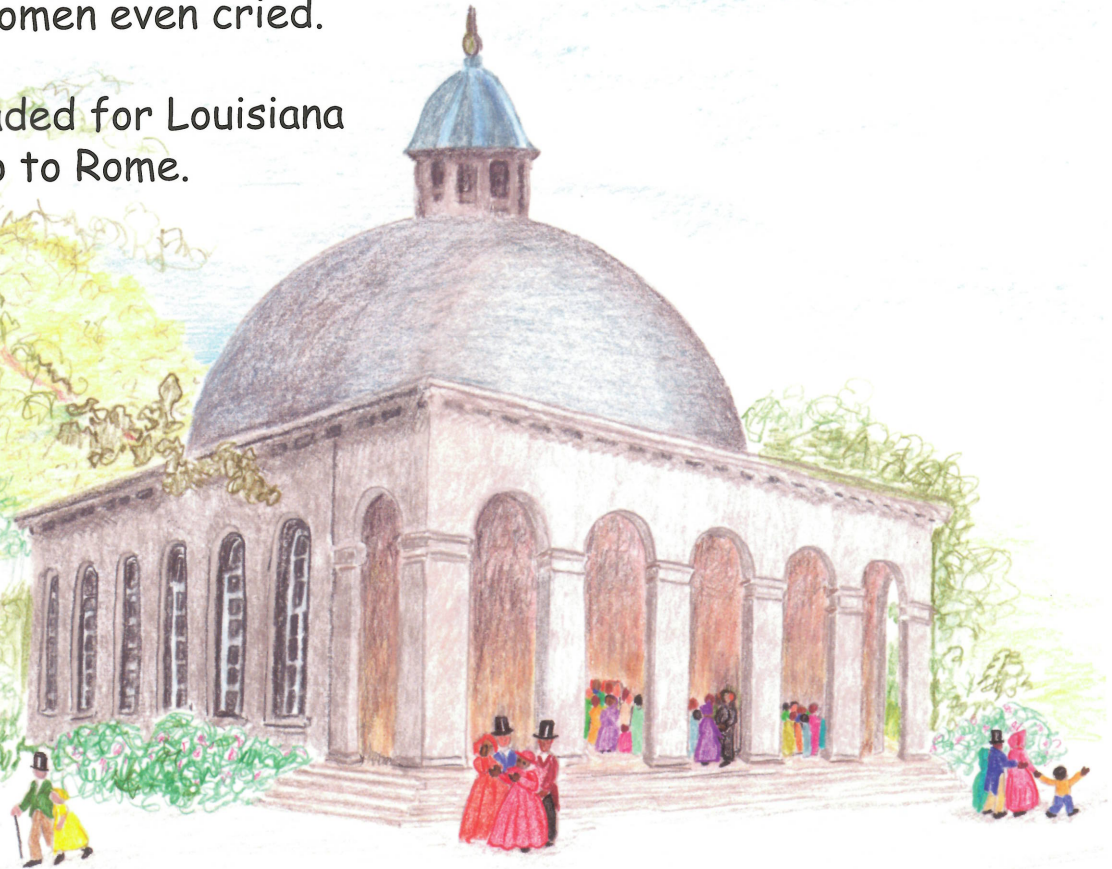
Pierce stood at the pulpit in his church  
and told the people that he was leaving.  
His family was going to Rome, the center of the Catholic Church.

Everyone was sad that their minister  
and friend was leaving.  
Some of the women even cried.

The family headed for Louisiana  
to board a ship to Rome.

Before sailing,  
Cornelia  
was received  
into the  
Catholic  
Church.

Pierce waited  
until  
they arrived  
in Rome.



How do you think that Cornelia and Pierce got to Rome -  
they walked? they flew? they went in a boat?



At a party in Rome, Princess Borghese noticed Cornelia.

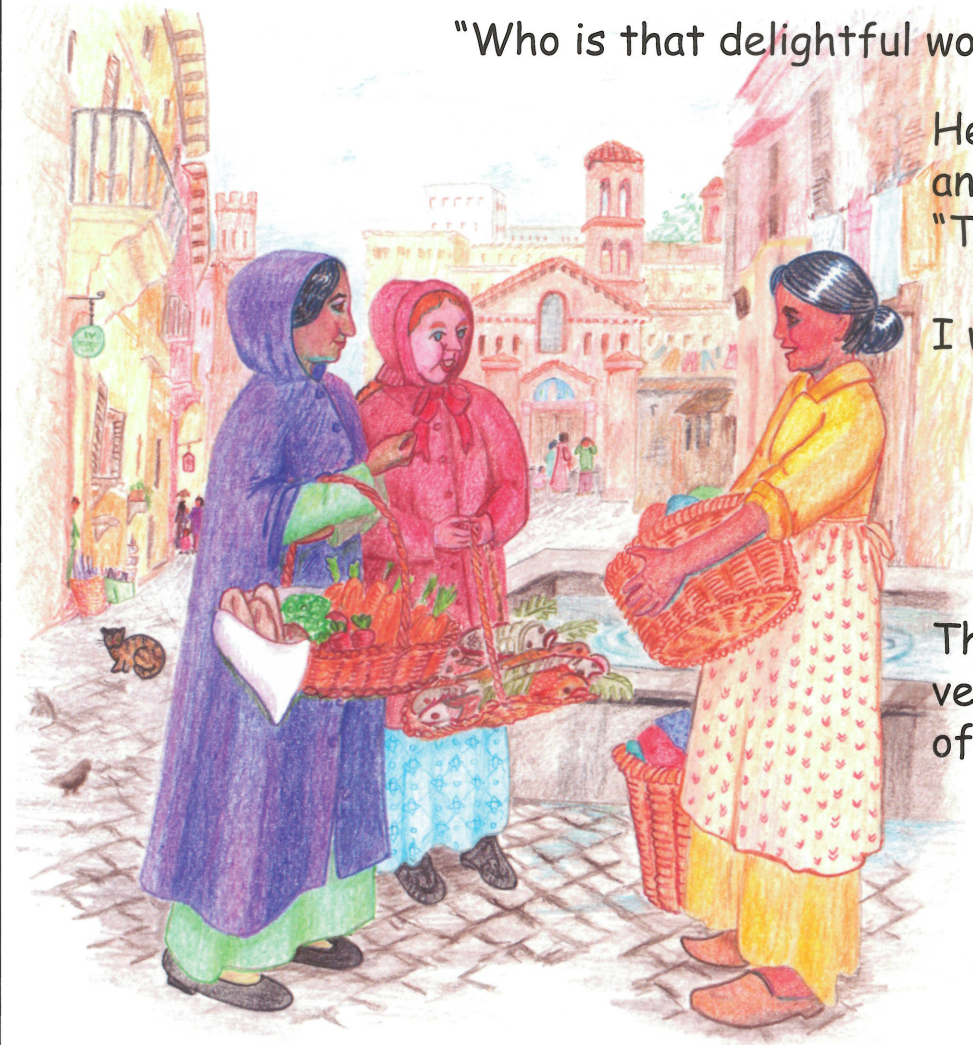
"Who is that delightful woman?" she asked.

Her father,  
an English earl, said,  
"That is Cornelia Connelly.

I will introduce you."

The princess and Cornelia  
became friends.

They were  
very busy women,  
often going to dinners  
and parties.



Their favorite activities though,  
were to explore the churches of Rome together  
and to help the poor people.

Can you think of someone you would especially like to help?



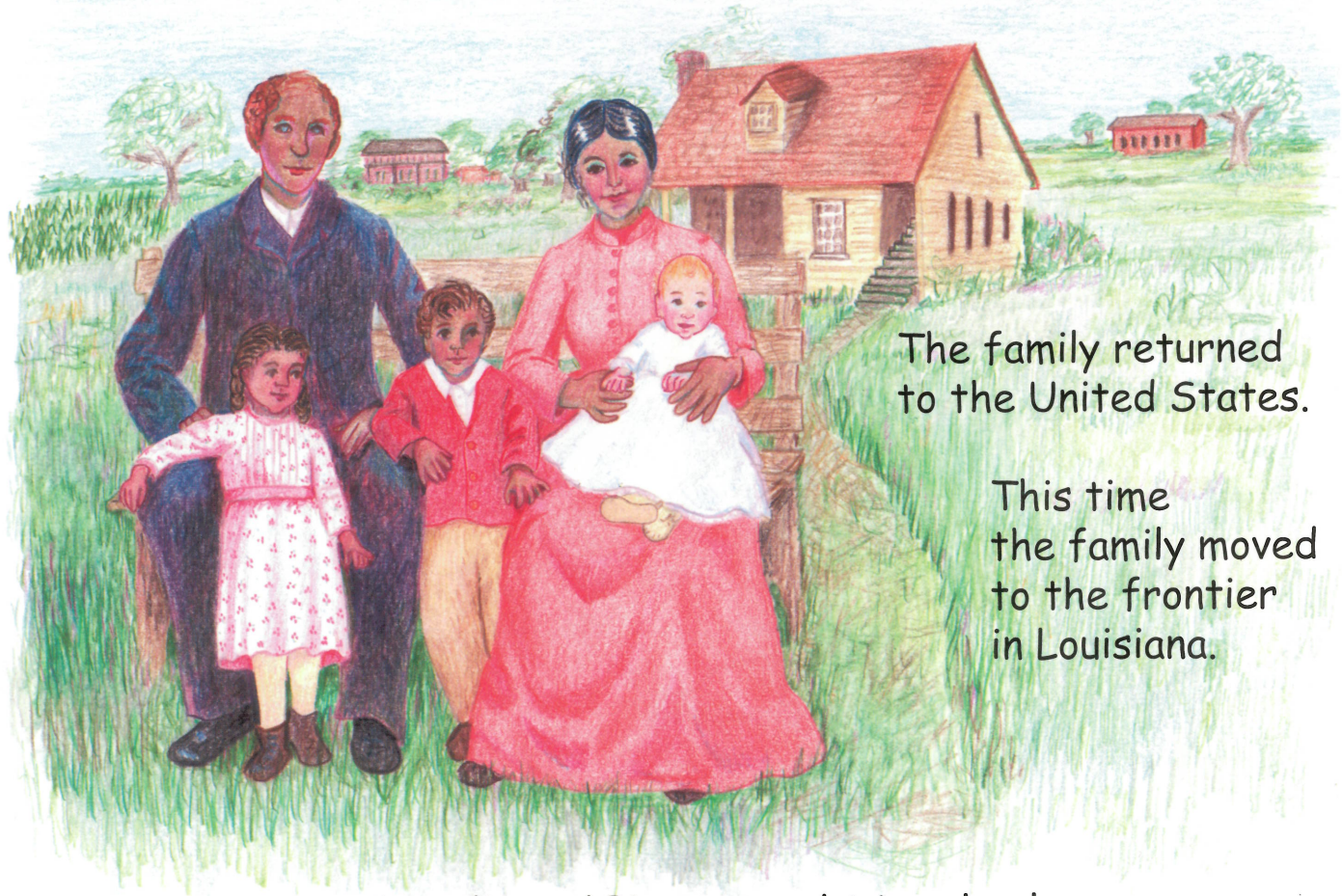
## Europe and The United States 1837

After two years in Europe, Cornelia had a son named John Henry.

Pierce said, "We need to go back home so I can find a job,  
now that we have three children to raise."

Cornelia jumped up and hugged him.

"Yes, let's go home. You know how much I miss it."



The family returned  
to the United States.

This time  
the family moved  
to the frontier  
in Louisiana.

Cornelia and Pierce taught in schools.

What kind of job do you want to do when you grow up?



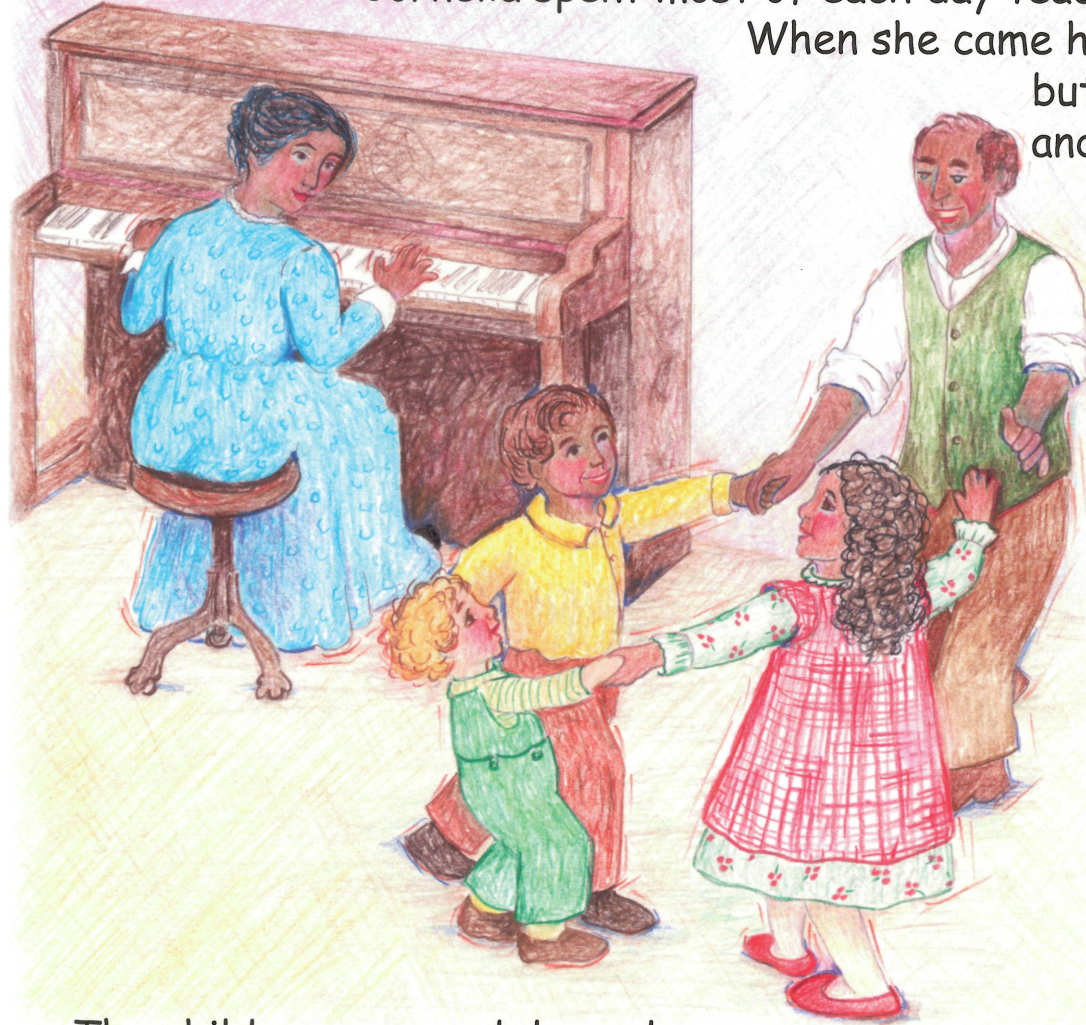
## Louisiana, The United States 1837

Cornelia spent most of each day teaching.

When she came home, she was tired  
but she cooked dinner  
and took care  
of the house.

She and  
the children  
played outside  
until it was dark.

Then she sat  
at the piano  
and played  
the children's  
favorite songs.



The children sang and danced  
around the house.

They pulled their serious father into their dancing  
until even he was laughing.

Do you have a favorite song? Can you sing it?



## Louisiana, The United States 1840

Cornelia had never been happier.

She joyfully followed her new faith and loved her quiet family life.

One day, overcome with emotion, she said to God,  
"If all this happiness is not for your glory,  
take it from me."



She knew that God loved us  
so much  
that he had given Jesus,  
his only child to us.

Now Cornelia, also out of love,  
offered everything she had to God.

What would you like to give to God today?



One afternoon, Cornelia heard a scream and ran outside.

The dog had pushed little John Henry  
into a large pot of boiling sugar  
and the child was badly burned.

Cornelia held him in her arms  
until he died  
and went to his Father  
in heaven.

Cornelia was  
broken hearted.

After that she became very close  
to Mary, the mother of God,  
who also had lost her son.

Cornelia used her sorrow to bring her to a deeper faith.  
Although she was very sad, Cornelia trusted that God had a plan for her.

What makes you sad? Who do you want next to you when you're sad?





## Louisiana, The United States 1840



A few months later, Pierce told Cornelia that he wanted to become a Catholic priest.

That meant they would have to end their marriage. "Don't you think we are a happy family?" Cornelia asked him.

"I think we are about the happiest family on earth, but I want to spread the Gospel as a Catholic priest," he said.

Cornelia did not answer right away. The thought of separating her family hurt her, especially since she was expecting a new baby.

"If God asks me to make this sacrifice, I will make it with all my heart," she told Pierce.

She thought about becoming a nun.

What would you say to God if God asked you to do something hard?  
How do you think God speaks to us?



Rome, Italy 1843-1845

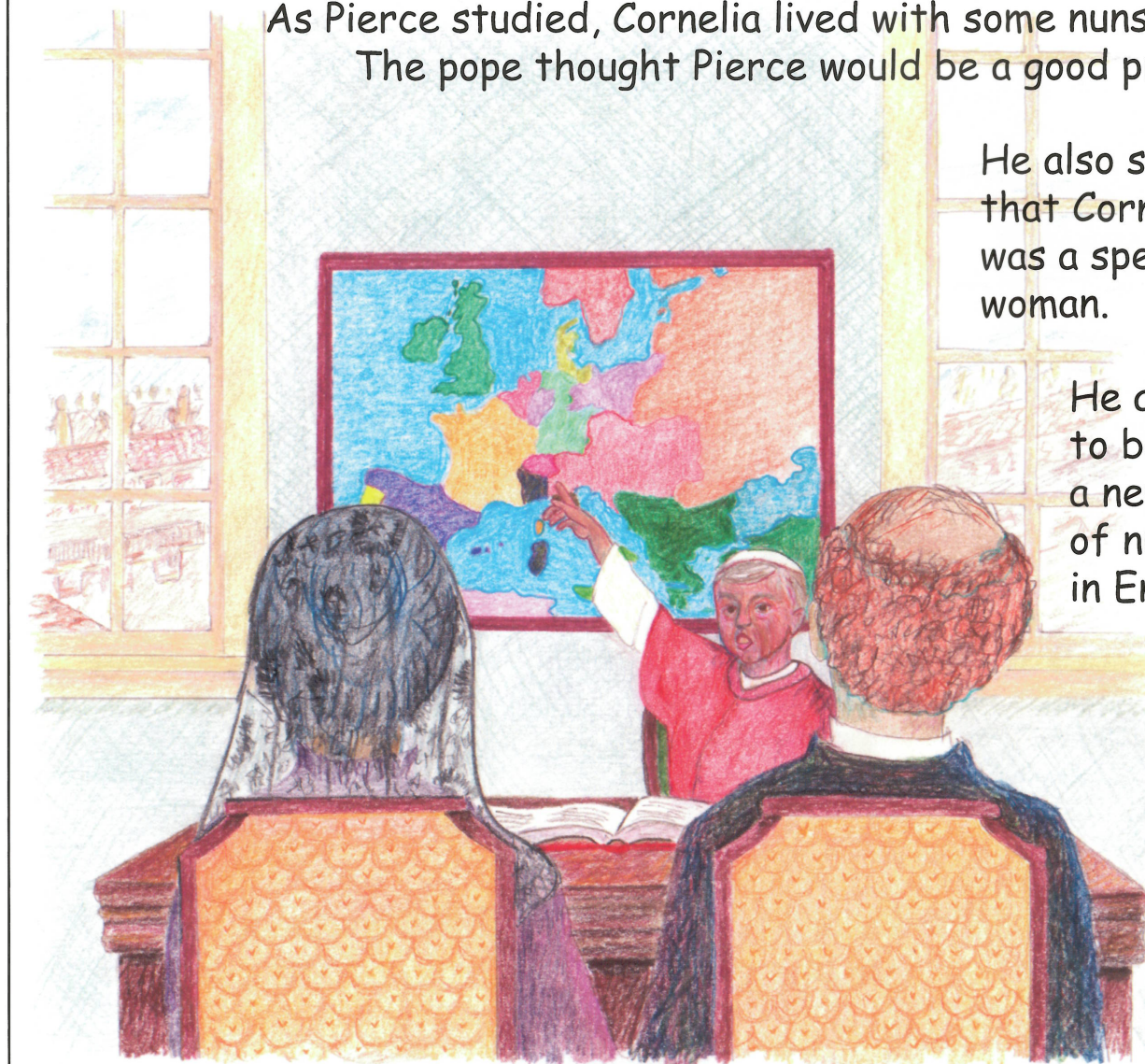
Three years later the family, including a new son named Frank, arrived in Rome.

As Pierce studied, Cornelia lived with some nuns.  
The pope thought Pierce would be a good priest.

He also saw  
that Cornelia  
was a special  
woman.

He asked her  
to begin  
a new order  
of nuns  
in England.

The order  
would focus  
on education.



Do you know any nuns? What do you think a nun is?



Rome, Italy 1845

Cornelia spent many days in the chapel praying.

She wanted to go back to the United States  
and begin her work there.

However, she understood that the Church  
needed her help  
in England.



While praying, the words

"The Society of the Holy Child Jesus"  
filled her mind.

She knew God was sending her a message.  
He was giving her the name of the community.

Do you ever talk to God? What do you want to say to God today?



After the small Society had settled into a convent in England,  
the sisters watched Cornelia out the window.

"Poor Mother Connelly,"  
they said to each other.

Cornelia's children  
were leaving  
to go to boarding school.

The bishop wanted the children  
to leave her for her first year as a nun.

As she gave each child one more kiss,  
tears ran down her face.

The children climbed into a carriage.  
Cornelia waved  
until the carriage was out of sight.

She had one comfort;  
Pierce was working in England too,  
and could visit the children.

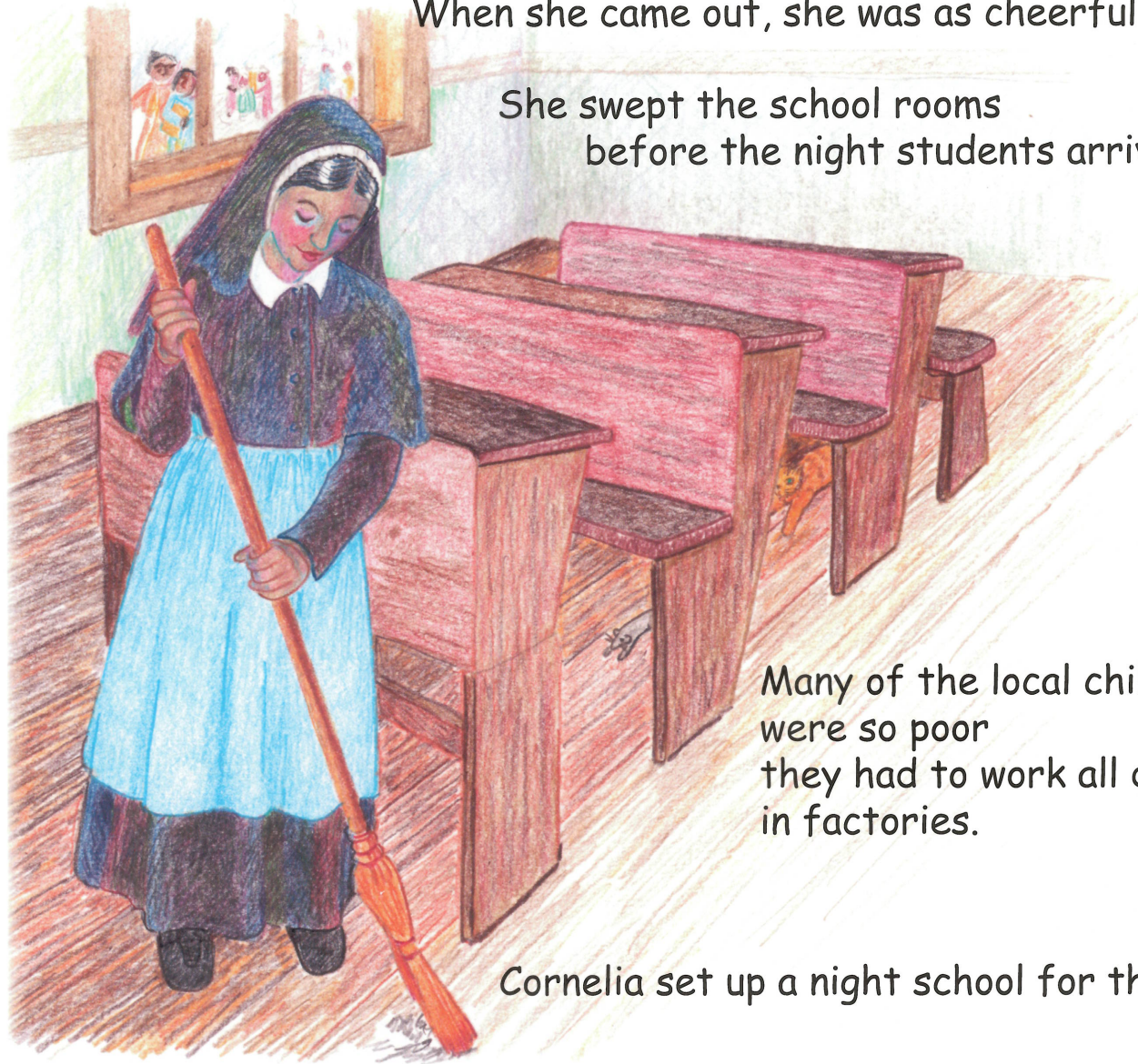
Cornelia missed her children. Is there someone you miss when they're not there?

England 1846

Cornelia knelt in the chapel in prayer after her children had left.

When she came out, she was as cheerful as ever.

She swept the school rooms  
before the night students arrived.



Many of the local children  
were so poor  
they had to work all day  
in factories.

Cornelia set up a night school for them.

What do you like best about being in school?



While Cornelia was setting up her convent and school,  
Pierce was having trouble.

One day he showed up at the door and insisted on talking to Cornelia.  
"I'm sorry, Father Connelly," explained the sister who answered the door,  
"the bishop says you can't see her."

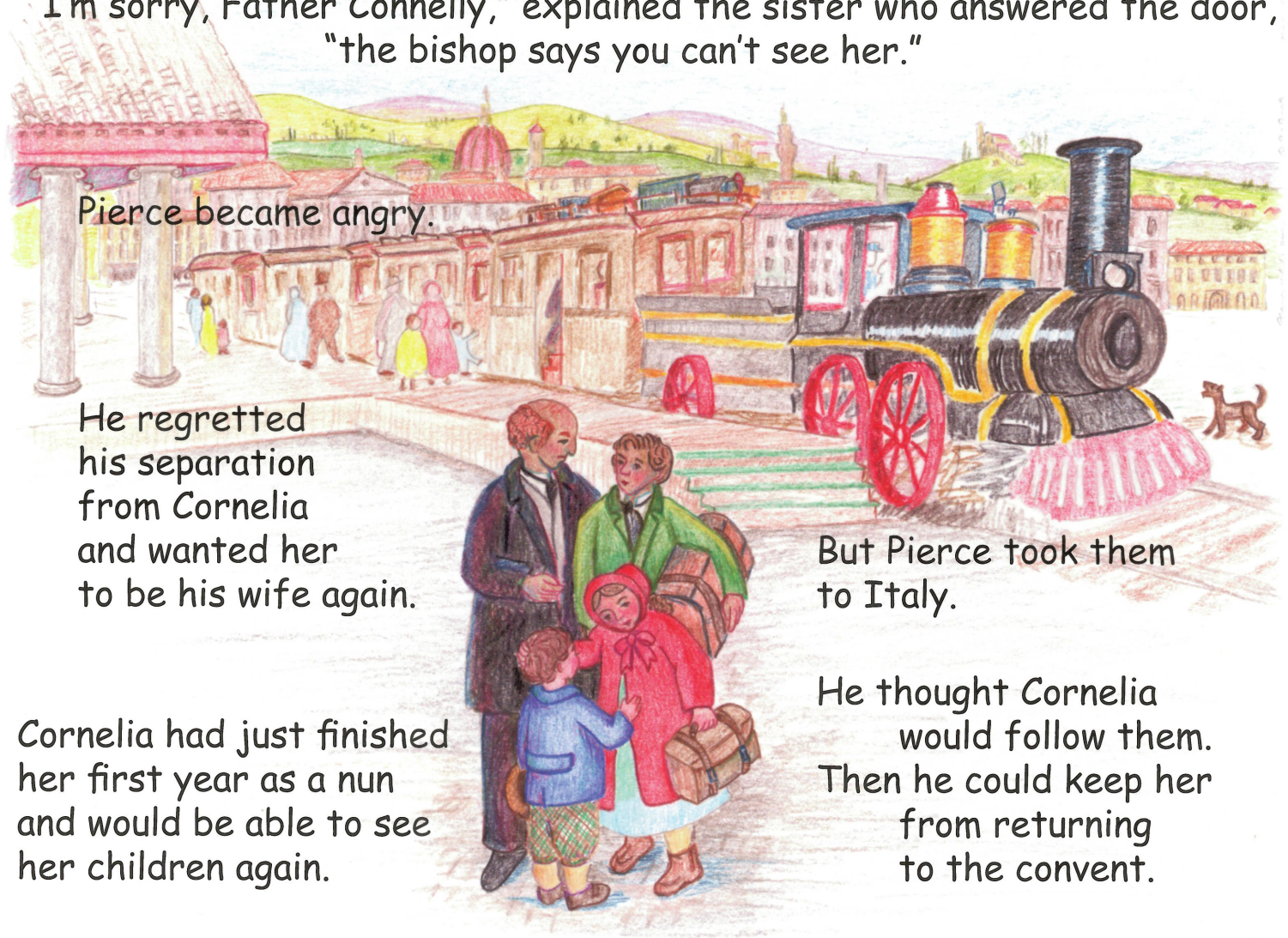
Pierce became angry.

He regretted  
his separation  
from Cornelia  
and wanted her  
to be his wife again.

Cornelia had just finished  
her first year as a nun  
and would be able to see  
her children again.

But Pierce took them  
to Italy.

He thought Cornelia  
would follow them.  
Then he could keep her  
from returning  
to the convent.



If you could talk to Pierce, what would you say to him?

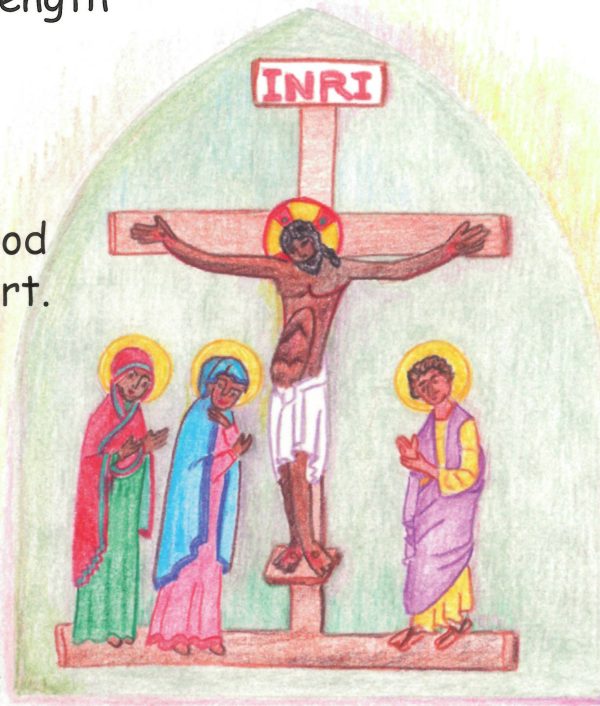


## England 1848

Cornelia knelt in front of the crucifix,  
asking God to give her the strength  
not to go after her children.

She loved her children  
more than anything on earth,  
and she loved God  
with all her heart.

She told God,  
"I will not see  
my dear  
children  
unless it is  
for your glory."



Once again, in her suffering  
she came closer to God.  
That gave her strength and energy.

Although she could not see her children,  
she trusted God to look after them.  
She loved them and prayed for them every day.

Why do you think that Cornelia looked at Jesus on the cross?  
Do you talk to God about your problems?

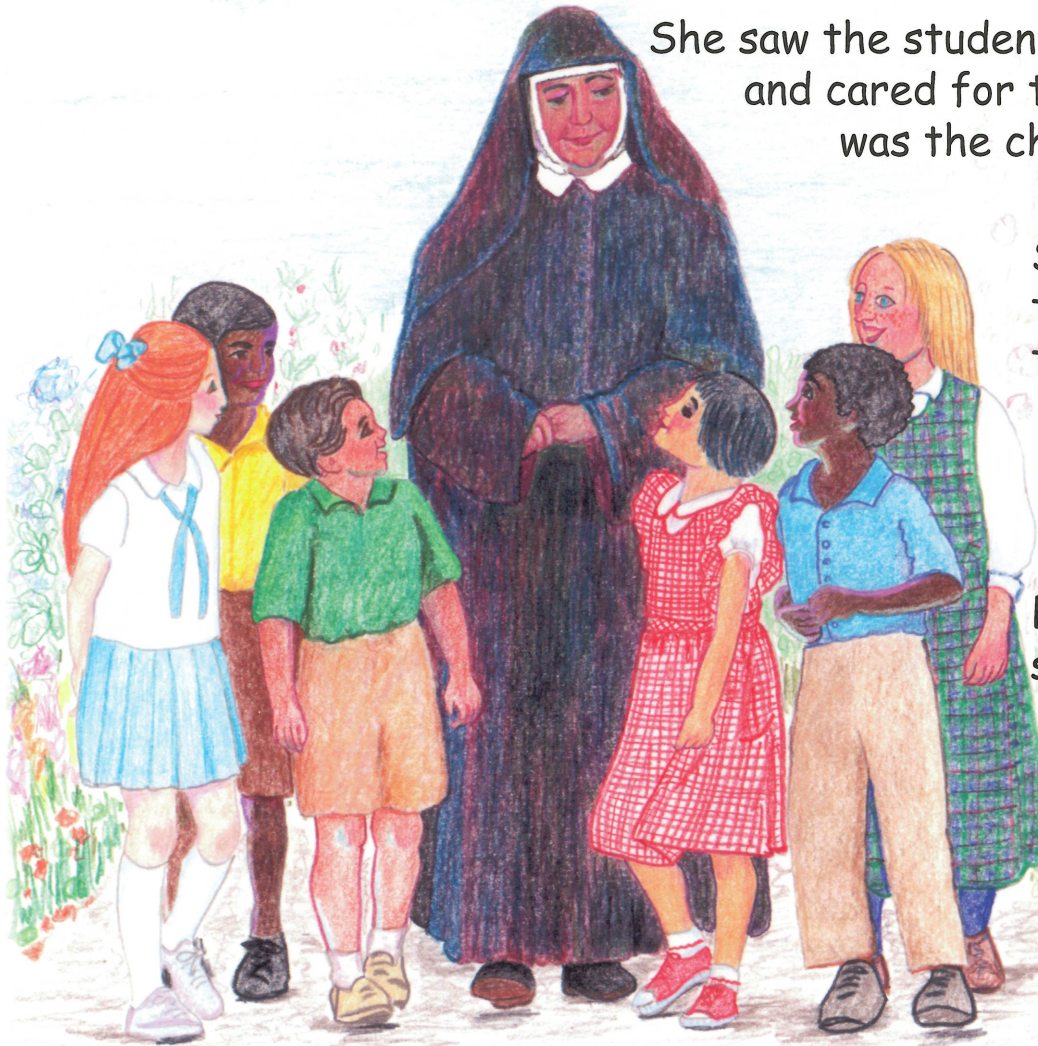


Cornelia showered her students with the love  
she couldn't show her own children.

She saw the students as gifts from God  
and cared for them as though each  
was the child Jesus.

She helped them  
to become  
their best selves  
and know  
how much  
God loved them.

Before,  
she only had three -  
Mercer,  
Adeline, and  
Frank.



Now Cornelia had hundreds of children.

Cornelia loved the truth.

Can you think of a time when you told the truth even when it was hard to do?

## England 1848

Cornelia soon became famous for her ways of teaching.

In a time when girls' education was limited to reading and sewing, the girls learned many other lively subjects from Cornelia.

She taught the children to sing and dance, just as she had taught her own children.



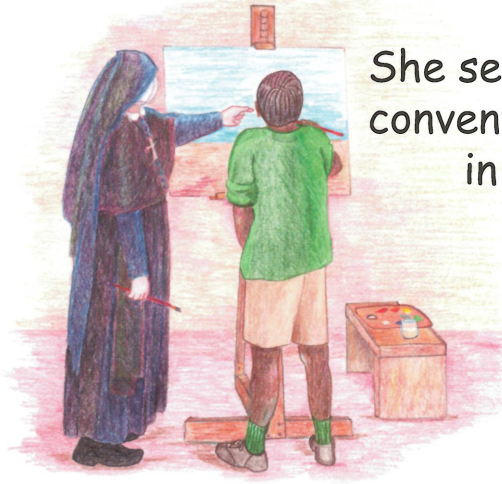
Together, Cornelia, the nuns, and the students explored the outdoors and took fieldtrips.

What's your favorite subject? What are you really good at in school?

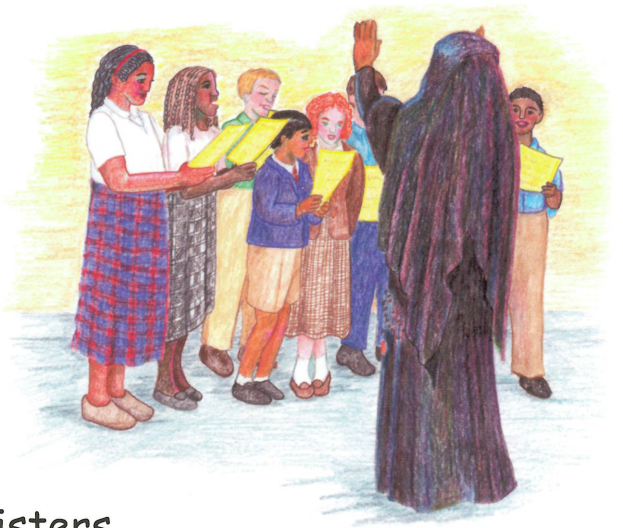


# England, France, and the United States 1861

Many sisters joined Cornelia and the Society grew.



She sent sisters to start  
convents and schools  
in England,  
France,  
and her own city  
of Philadelphia.



Whenever Cornelia or other Holy Child sisters  
stepped into the classroom, the students became silent  
and smiles spread on their faces.

They wondered  
what they would learn  
today.



Whom can you thank for your school?

## Europe, Africa, the Americas

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus  
continued to grow  
even after Cornelia's  
death.

Holy Child schools  
are found  
all around the world.

Even after all this time,  
children in these schools  
still find learning fun.

The teachers follow Cornelia's example  
of loving the students.  
They bring joy to the classroom  
and into the lives of the students

and all the students know  
that they are the loved children  
of Cornelia Connelly.











**Catie McElwee** is a native of Connecticut and earned her Bachelor Degree in Literature and Spanish from the University of North Carolina, Asheville.

Catie worked with the Sisters of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus for two years in the Dominican Republic. She taught in a Holy Child school in a Haitian migrant worker camp through the Society's

volunteer program, Response-Ability. There, where she taught in extreme poverty, she first encountered the spirit of Cornelia and shared in her mission by serving those who suffer.