MARY NEUROHR

Coordinator of National TEC Annual Conference for 1978

National TEC Coordinator 1978-1980

Executive Director of the National TEC Conference 1981-1983

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From 1971 to 1975, I taught English at Gibault Catholic High School in Waterloo, Illinois, while I was a member of the religious congregation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ at Red Bud (Ruma), Illinois. I had finished my Bachelor's Degree in English at St. Louis University a semester earlier and taught eighth grade for one semester in Fairview Heights. It was during my time at Gibault High School that I first began participating in TEC weekends and eventually became a member of the Belleville Diocesan TEC Board as well as serving on diocesan youth ministry committees. While attending a national TEC conference in 1977, the diocesan TEC board bid for the 1978 annual TEC Conference in 1978 in the Belleville Diocese, and I served as coordinator of the event. The 1978 conference was a rousing success with hundreds of participants from throughout the country. This conference represented a growing coalition of TEC with other national youth ministry efforts throughout the church.

At the 1978 conference, I was elected the National TEC Coordinator for the next two years. In 1975 I began teaching English and chairing the English Department at Assumption Catholic High School in East St. Louis, Illinois. Therefore, I was National TEC Coordinator while I was a full time English teacher and English Department chair and had the full cooperation and support of the administration of the high school and my religious order. During these two years, I found myself traveling in all directions in the country, from California to New York, meeting with both existing and prospective TEC centers, collaborating with other youth ministry groups, and speaking to a wide variety of audiences for the purposes of providing information, seeking funds, and establishing youth ministry partnerships. There were also two National TEC Conferences, in Worcester, Massachusetts, and in Denver, Colorado, both of which I keynoted and both of which had numbers of participants not seen since.

During this time there was very lively conversation about the relationship of TEC with the "vision of youth ministry" proclaimed by the church. There was talk about the "TEC movement," about its place in the diocesan and national church structure, about its role in diocesan and national youth ministry. There was discussion about the gathering of those who had participated in a TEC weekend as forming "a TEC family" and becoming an exclusive group rather than participating in the TEC process as an experience by which one becomes a more vital part of the local church community. There was exchange about the TEC weekend and all its surrounding activities as "a TEC program" rather than as a process for youth ministry within the local church. There was exchange about whether the framework of TEC should be "standardized" throughout the centers or whether it should be allowed to be "adapted" and "individualized" from center to center. There were even lengthy discussions about whether the cross and the New Testament received on a TEC weekend should be

required to be the same from center to center, as well as the menu for meals and the content of prayer services. I was even invited to a California TEC center to investigate the fears of diocesan youth ministry personnel about TEC having vestiges of a cult.

In the early months of my two-year tenure, I spent most of my time ordering and sending out crosses and New Testaments, maintaining a mailing list, and managing very meager finances. Francis Schaefer of Belleville became the active fundraiser and support for all things TEC and the moral support for this National TEC Coordinator. As time went on and more connections were formed, there was more communication through mail and phone with interested individuals and groups. I remember several months into my tenure receiving a phone call from a woman in another state who had heard about TEC and who wanted to know what she had to do to have a TEC the next weekend. It became clear to me that coordinating this thing called TEC had to be more than warehousing materials and fielding calls about how to start TEC. There needed to be a greater understanding of its place in the larger scheme of youth ministry and in the local and diocesan church, about the theology of the process and its current relevance, about its not becoming a haven for "TEC groupies," about examining both the roots and the evolution of TEC, and about responsibly understanding the experience, training the leaders, and providing the aftercare that was as important, if not more so, as the actual TEC weekend. Very gradually TEC began to take on newer and much larger parameters, and it needed a stronger structure to support the dialogue and the process within the larger vision of youth ministry. I remember at the 1978 National TEC Conference some participants becoming very irate because not every workshop was strictly related to TEC. (Oh my! We were having workshops on liturgy and on social justice and on service through the local church community.) Some participants were upset because "non-TEC people" were participants, as though TEC were some secret society and those "secrets" about the TEC weekend might be revealed. (I remember some of those participants never came back to another National TEC Conference.)

TEC was clearly going through some growing pains. It had been created and initiated some years previously, and we were not even sure by whom or when. Gradually through research, we discovered Father Matthew Fedewa, and he introduced us to Dorothy Gereke. We were trying to discover where TEC had come from so we could understand where it needed to go. We were trying to understand the current structure of the National TEC Conference, the appropriate representation, and the responsibility that it had to a coalition of TEC centers. While there were many points of view at this time, they essentially settled into two camps: one wanted to maintain TEC in a detached manner, unto itself, in museum quality as it always was, and separate from all other youth ministry efforts; the other was willing to explore the confluence and interrelatedness between TEC as a transformative religious experience and all the other components of the vision of youth ministry. What we did not have at this time was a stronger vehicle to facilitate the dialogue. After two years we came up with a national region system, a sustained method for funding, and a constitution by which we could operate as a conference.

At the end of my two-year term in 1980, I left East St. Louis and went to the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, to complete a Master's Degree in Religion and Culture (a cross of theology and literature). This was a wonderful time of

reflection and study, and a front row seat to the United States process of government and all the symbolism of our government. Washington, DC, remains one of my favorite cities. In my studies I had time to examine the RCIA process, the sacraments of initiation, and their relationship to youth ministry and, specifically, TEC. In one paper that I submitted about the interrelatedness of RCIA and TEC, my professor who was head of a national evangelization society, recommended that I edit my paper as a first chapter in a larger book on the same topic. I did disseminate that paper to various groups, but it never became a book. Even before I finished my Master's Degree in 1981, I got several calls from Bishop Maurice Dingman of Des Moines, Iowa, who asked if I would consider becoming the first full time Executive Director of the National TEC Conference. He served as the Episcopal Moderator of the National Conference and had already been in communication with my religious order about this request. After some reflection, I did tell him, "Yes, but only for two years." So it was that I became the first full time Executive Director of the National TEC Conference. Bishop Dingman was one of the most pastoral persons I have ever met. I would go to Des Moines and meet with him several times a year about TEC. The meetings were always at his residence (the bishop's mansion), but the place was always teeming with soup kitchen activities and homeless people on one floor, Vietnamese refugees and quilting and sewing on another; it was hardly "his" house. Bishop Dingman would always stress the necessity of aftercare, likening the TEC experience to teaching young people how to swim, but that if we did not provide aftercare, it was like not providing water in the pool even as they came off the diving board.

The National TEC Conference office was set up in the diocesan pastoral office in Belleville through the generosity of the Belleville Diocese. There was little money, but Francis Schaefer was determined in his fundraising efforts. He became like a second dad to me. Both my dad and Francis found a reliable used car that my dad would fix and service. I traveled throughout the United States for weeks at a time, visiting TEC centers, meeting with diocesan youth ministry personnel and the occasional bishop, participating in youth ministry events, giving speeches, setting up regional meetings, going to fundraising meetings, and living on the hospitality of wonderful people in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Louisiana. There were so many cultures, so many vibrant youth, so many dedicated adults, so many experiences, and yet all reflections of the one universal church.

During this time, the National TEC Conference newsletter was begun, a brochure was developed, training tapes were created from workshops presented at the annual conference, and other materials were developed for information and training. There were meeting with Serra International, national youth ministry organizations, and national vocation groups. There were TEC exhibits at youth conferences, presentations to youth ministers and clergy, speeches to any interested groups, and interviews on the radio and in newspapers. In the Belleville Diocese, friends would tease me about being in the diocesan newspaper every week.

During this time, we also became aware that TEC had been adapted for use in various prisons and known as REC (Residents Encounter Christ). REC was begun at a

prison in the Belleville Diocese, and I participated in a number of those weekends. More and more information was solicited about REC, and so I organized the first and only National REC Symposium in the Belleville Diocese which drew more than a hundred participants nationwide. This event opened even further the arena of various adaptations of TEC and considerations of what population TEC best served. There was TREC (Teen Residents Encounter Christ) in juvenile locked facilities. There was TEC (To Encounter Christ) where the participants were older than teens. There was TAEC (Teens and Adults Encounter Christ). As I traveled around, I had opportunity to participate in REC at various prisons in Illinois, New York, and Missouri, and to meet with inmates who had experienced a weekend. Once I invited the provincial assembly of my religious order to the local maximum security prison for a Friday evening meeting and prayer service. It was truly interesting to witness a group of about 100 nuns and inmates of various ages (and stages of fear!) meet, dialogue, and pray together.

The governing structure became more solid, as did the provision of more ongoing training for adult and youth leaders. Money and a reliable vehicle were always a problem. I had no credit card, carried enough (?) cash for several weeks on the road, and usually wondered how I had enough money for gas to get home. Of course, there was no GPS or cell phone, so I was often at the side of the road perusing a map. At the time, I was living with a local community of my religious order in inner city East St. Louis which was always supportive of my activities with TEC. As I traveled, my safety was often more luck than sense. Once I was traveling in New York in the winter, snowing and dark, and found myself on the questionable New Jersey side of a toll way. I pulled over, lost, and had a kind policeman direct me to my destination in New York, and toll free. Throughout the two years, I also visited all the military academies where TEC was active. In addition, I also visited Covenant House in New York, since we had initiated a fund raising event, a 10K run, by TEC centers for Covenant House. Some of the REC participants also completed the 10K run. I remember getting a letter from Menard Correctional Center Condemned Unit from John Wayne Gacy and a $25 inmate trust fund check as a donation to Covenant House. Father Bruce Ritter, whom I had met with previously and who had his own demise later, said it was the only check he had ever received that he refused to cash.

Throughout my two years as Executive Director of the National TEC Conference, the governing body of the conference laid groundwork for its manner of operation. However, I remembered what I had said to Bishop Dingman about “only two years.” In the summer of 1983, I took the position of Diocesan Youth Ministry Director for the Diocese of Memphis, Tennessee, where I would stay until summer 1984. During this year in Memphis, I experienced the dedication of many adults in youth ministry, reached out to many disenfranchised youth in the inner city and in detention, and coordinated the largest youth ministry conference ever held in the diocese. However, there was a difference of viewpoint in the diocesan administration about which youth should most be served. I could not reconcile that viewpoint with what I knew of youth ministry and with what I believe I was called to do in Memphis, and, therefore, resigned my position. I became vocation director for my religious order until May 1985. By then I had made the decision to leave my religious order, a decision which had been coming for some time. The Adorers of the Blood of Christ was a community in which I grew, to which I continue to be grateful, which I continue to admire, and in which I continue to have friends.

In the summers of 1985 and 1986, I moderated a youth ministry training program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1985 I began teaching and chairing the Theology Department and serving as senior class moderator at Ursuline Academy in St. Louis, an all girls' high school where I would stay until1989. During my first year at Ursuline, I also managed forty apartments and a grocery store in the Missouri Botanical Gardens neighborhood in St. Louis where I also lived; many of these apartments were Section 8 housing and served immigrants from the International Institute. For my remaining years at Ursuline, I lived in my home town of Columbia, Illinois. In addition, I taught English for Belleville Area College, now SWIC (Southwestern Illinois College).

By this time, I had met Gene Funk who would become my husband. Gene had his own floor covering business in both sales and service. He was an ordained deacon and the contractual chaplain at Menard Correctional Center. I had served as a team member on RECs and as a volunteer in the chaplaincy activities. In the summer of 1989, I moved to southern Illinois where I began a doctoral program in special education, with a specialization in the area of behavior disorders, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). Gene had already founded the Hospitality House in Chester, Illinois, where Menard Correctional Center is located. As he came for his chaplaincy duties at Menard, he noticed women and children sleeping in their cars along the Mississippi River because they had no place to stay. People could not afford to stay in the local hotels and bigotry was rampant. He purchased a two-story house along the river, formed a not-for-profit corporation, refurbished the house (He is a skilled carpenter! He built our 4000 square foot house!), established the management procedures, and formed a board of directors on which I served for two years. In 1989, Gene and I formed a similar not-for-profit corporation and bought an old two-story hotel for the Hospitality House of Vienna serving correctional centers and a work camp in the area. Again Gene got volunteers in September 1989 and renovated the hotel, all the while living there and serving as manager of the house. There were separate sections of the hotel for those who were visiting at the prisons and for those who were homeless and destitute.

Gene and I married in December 1990. I moved into the Hospitality House of Vienna, and we lived there until April 1991. We realized that perhaps our role was to begin these institutions but not necessarily to continue running them. Gene continued his chaplaincy duties at Menard Correctional Center throughout this time. We eventually moved to the house in rural Elkville which he had built. We have a small farm of 135 acres with a small river, several ponds, woods, and fenced and unfenced fields for CRP and wildlife habitat. Gene is retired from chaplaincy and from his floor covering sales and service business. He has a daughter Sarah Imhoff who is principal of Red Bud High School. She and her husband Eric who works for the Illinois Department of Human Services have a nine-year-old son Jakob adopted from Guatemala. Jakob is Gene's tight buddy and sidekick. Gene also has a son Josh who works at Lowe's in Carbondale, owns a home in Elkville, and loves the outdoors.

I completed all doctoral work for the Ph.D. except the dissertation. Life and work intervened. In 1991 I began work as an advisor and instructor for Roosevelt University at Shawnee Correctional Center and as an instructor at Vienna Correctional Center and Menard Correctional Center. In addition, I taught in the Continuing Education Division of

Southern Illinois University Carbondale: GRE (Graduate Record Exam) preparation, GMAT (Graduate Management Assessment Test), and LSAT (Law School Assessment Test). In 1994 I began as a special education teacher at Chester Mental Health Center, the only maximum security mental health center in Illinois with the Department of Human Services. At the time there was a youth wing of all males who were unfit to stand trial, severely self-injurious and suicidal, extremely mentally ill and behaviorally and emotionally disordered.

In 1998 I transferred from state employment there to the Illinois Department of Corrections at IYC (Illinois Youth Center) Murphysboro, then the only juvenile boot camp in the State of Illinois. In 2006, the Youth Division split off from the Illinois Department of Corrections and became a separate agency, the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. It is comprised of eight agencies throughout the state that houses adjudicated youth through the age of 21. There are two female facilities and six male facilities. IYC-Murphysboro is a male facility, and it is there that I initially served as a teacher and since then have served as principal of the school. The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice comprises a separate school district in the State of Illinois, School District # 428. While it is a specialized school district in the state, it is on a par with all school districts in terms of granting credits, diplomas, and GEDs. The youth at IYC-Murphysboro are all male and range in age from 13 to 19, though they may turn 21 there. As of May 2010, the facility is no longer a juvenile boot camp, but a therapeutic facility in which youth receive education, substance abuse therapy, behavioral treatment, and other individualized treatment as necessary through their stay which can range from four months to a year. Our capacity population is 105, though we are operating with a lesser population. All the youth are civilly detained and adjudicated with all sorts of offenses short of sexual offenses and murder. We have youth who have firearms offenses, assaults (sometimes of school personnel), burglary, home invasion, car thefts, drug possession and sale, destruction of state property (some have vandalized schools), and other offenses. I supervise twelve educational staff and work in partnership with other departments in the facility and with other facilities in the state. IDJJ is no longer associated with adult corrections and we are no longer a boot camp because research and evidence-based practices have determined that youth need to be treated differently from adults in the area of crime and detention since youth make decisions differently from adults, that the moral development of youth is impaired and not complete, and that behavior change in youth needs to be approached differently in youth than in adults. I wholeheartedly espouse this direction in the state and champion its efforts. For whatever they have done, these youth are still kids who have not had the parenting and mentoring that would have helped them make good choices. Often these kids have been in foster care, homeless, most are heavily gang-involved and drug and alcohol influenced. These are kids who have needed the basics of food, shelter, safety, and adult guidance, and they have not received them. Their moral judgment is impaired as are their cognitive abilities. The average functioning level in math and reading is at the 6th grade equivalency. Many have not been to school for year because of truancy. Many have been suspended and/or expelled from their schools and are in alternative and safe schools programs. Upon release, it is often difficult to place them in school because of their having been suspended or expelled. Once a kid arrives in IDJJ, it is an indication that all other efforts, community-based programs and regional detention, have failed,

and this is the end of the road. If they were adult, they would be in adult prisons. Many of our youth who turn 17 and violate probation or parole or commit a crime for a new case do go to adult prison either state or federal. We are trying to lessen the recidivism rate. Some of our kids return one, two, and three times. Special education students comprise one third to one half of our population, and about one third of our youth have children themselves.

After my doctoral studies at SIUC, I obtained a Type 75 certificate, Principal certification; certification as a supervisor of students with behavior disorders; and endorsement as a Director of Special Education. In addition, for twelve years I have served as adjunct faculty within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction for the Teacher Education Preparation. Initially for years I taught on campus at SIUC, but now with the establishment of cohort groups at Kaskaskia College, Rend College, and Southwestern Illinois College, I teach prospective regular education teachers about special education law, practices, terminology, assessment, accommodations, and collaboration and it applies to the inclusion of special education students into their regular education classes. I usually teach one to two sections a semester at one or more of the various sites, all through SIUC. Students need to complete a fifty-hour internship with students with disabilities as well as various projects that demonstrate they know how to adapt and accommodate learning for various functioning levels, methods of learning, and behaviors. Typically the off-campus students are non-traditional students: teacher aides who have worked in the field for a while, single parents who have decided to go on in education, laid off workers who are pursuing an education degree through retraining grants, older individuals who have decided to go back to school in the area of education.

In 2000-2001, I was nominated by the superintendent of School District #428 as the Those Who Excel Teacher to represent the district. At the time SD #428 included both adult and juvenile facilities, totaling about 31 facilities. After review at the state level, I was selected as one of ten teacher finalists from then 900 school districts in the State of Illinois. After further scrutiny and interviewing at the state level, I was runner up for Illinois State Teacher of the Year (TOY). I will never know why I was not chosen as Illinois State Teacher of the Year, but the general consensus is that it was not politically correct at the time to choose a correctional teacher to represent all 900 school districts in the state. The TOY received a one year paid sabbatical to speak throughout the state, the use of a car through the year for travel along with all travel expenses, and free tuition for life at any state college or university. I received a plaque at a wonderful statewide recognition dinner. Subsequently I was invited as one of two teacher representatives from Illinois (there were two from each state, one from Guam and one from Puerto Rico) to participate in the National Teacher Forum in Washington, DC, with all expenses paid. A number of national leaders in education were in attendance as was the Secretary of Education. In addition, there were a number of invitations from various education organizations, such as the Illinois State Boards of Education. I enjoy the youth, though I do not always enjoy the culture of the state employee. These are good jobs and can tend to foster a sense of entitlement, especially under union protections. I am not used to working that way, instead working as a team member to always do what is best for the youth. These kids know that I am advocating for them, and part of that advocacy means being firm, fair, and consistent. While I could retire

now, I plan on working yet for several more years. I love and understand these kids though I do not always like what they do. They trust me and know that they can talk with me. I want them to walk out of our facility knowing a little bit more than when they came in, having a few more skills than when they began, understanding their choices a little more than they previous ones they have made, and having gained something while they were with us, like credits, and eighth grade diploma, a high school diploma, a GED, a high school constitution test passed, a certificate for anger management or cyber-safety or co-teaching, or substance therapy.

I have a wonderful life, a wonderful husband, great step-children, a great grandson, a wonderful home and land, two great jobs, and a sense of a life well lived. There have been great friends along the way and wonderful mentors who have showed me the way. God has been great and good, and I am grateful.