

Pilon's Quest for Keeping the Shine on Human Nature **By Mary Ann Dalton SSJ PhD**

One of Grace Pilon's most interesting ideas is to for teachers to strive to keep the shine on human nature of students. This came, I think, in large part because of an early experience in life at home. Grace was one of 14 children born in Southwest Detroit. She had a few brothers who never had a chance to have any shine on their human nature while they were in school! They were lost in their school. They were not interested in school and school was not interested in them. They did poorly in school. They knew it and so did everyone else, and school was something to go through until they were finished with it. But she knew that they were very intelligent persons. School had somehow failed to see this or do much about it.

In Grace's own first years of teaching, she tells us that she became so frustrated after five years of teaching in Detroit public schools that she quit teaching—"I didn't want to be so mean. I didn't think a good Christian woman would act that way."

What is meant by Grace's idea-- keep the "shine on human nature"—

The word —*shine*—suggests keeping something bright and beautiful-highlighted rather than lowlighted.

Human nature—here we have a great stretch between the most wonderful of everything in a person to the struggling, troubled, desperate! There is a sense of the tainted, the imperfect as distinct possibilities.

There is a lot of juggling for teachers to do when they have a classroom of students who, in part, fill the bill that you hope for in a student and those who are far from it. Classrooms have many students and there are apt to be those who are not yet part of the good order either in learning or in behavior. What's a teacher to do with only so much time, so many pressures, and so many?

What about those students who have learned that they are not intelligent, not as important, and can't manage in the classroom by the time they are in the 3rd grade? What about those students who are lost in school—couldn't read that well, "dumb in math" and "uninterested in science" because these subjects were not interested in them?

First of all I think Grace means that teachers can still treat students with dignity and feel their dignity and not shame when they are not perfect in behavior—, ie., that they do not read with fluency or they do not carry a bright outlook about themselves and their learning. Teachers have to find a way so that students can experience mini-successes every day, even when they do not know

much. It is the little things, adding up each day that introduce and make impressions last.

I can learn; I can think; I can manage.—I know because I have done it.