



*Catholic Digest* Editor-in-Chief Dan Connors with his wife, Deborah, a parish minister at St. Mary Star of the Sea in New London, Connecticut

## editor's notebook

BY DAN CONNORS

# Fred, Hugh, and the power of volunteers

*18 A B C... 19 A B C...* My friend Fred dragged his suitcase down the aisle of the plane wanting nothing more than to heave it into the overhead compartment, find his seat, click the belt, and forget the world.

Later, high over the Midwest, Fred finally began to relax. He noticed that the man beside him was reading a copy of a Sunday Mass booklet that I was editing at the time. Curious, Fred introduced himself to the man, whose name was Hugh. Fred told Hugh he knew the editor of the booklet and asked him where in the world he had gotten it. As the plane turned toward Denver, Hugh told Fred his story.

Hugh was a divorced father who, until recently, had had no interest in church or God. But it had been his weekend with the kids, and their mother has insisted they go to religious education classes, so Hugh had driven them to their parish, three towns away.

At the church a volunteer greeted them and mentioned that there was a parents lounge. Hugh headed to the lounge, poured a cup, picked up a free copy of the Mass readings booklet, and sat back to wait.

Another volunteer asked if any parents wanted to gather and talk about the Sunday readings, using the booklet. A few did, but most, like Hugh, said no.

But throughout that year, as Hugh waited for his children and listened to the weekly Scripture conversations,

he felt himself being drawn in. He started actually reading the booklet and joining the discussion. He started going back to his own parish for Sunday Mass, and now he himself is an active volunteer.

Three towns away, did the many volunteers who greeted him at the door, prepared the room, made the coffee, led the discussions, and taught his children have even a clue of what their simple but dedicated service had done for Hugh? Our parish volunteering often seems so simple, so lacking in glamour, but whether we're teaching religious ed or lecturing or pouring coffee or arranging chairs, we touch people's lives, plant seeds of faith, and till the soil for God's harvest. Whatever the gifts we have to offer, volunteering in our parishes is holy work. Your volunteering will make a tremendous difference to someone, but you may never know it - unless a friend happens to hear the story. Please write to me at Catholic Digest, P.O. Box 180, Mystic, CT 06355 or send e-mail to Don Connors  
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