

# Women of Grace On Fire in the California Desert

by Lisi Cave with Pat Doolittle



fter teaching CCD for over 10 years, I realized that I could make more of a difference in my students' lives if their parents were better informed about our faith. In addition, at Father Junipero Serra Parish which serves the California desert communities of Lancaster, Palmdale, and Quartz Hill, in northern Los Angeles County, women were looking to connect with other women parishioners, grow spiritually, and enrich their Catholic foundation. I prayed that the Lord would help me find the right program for my parish and He answered my prayers when He led me to The Women of Grace® Foundational Study Series!

When I investigated the materials on the Women of Grace® web site, I discovered that this was an excellent women's foundational study of our faith and a wonderful opportunity for women to learn how to use their unique feminine gifts to make a difference in their families and community. After I ordered the program, I was even more delighted! I realized that this was just what our Parish women . . . and I needed! The time had come for me to teach adults, especially women, and start a Women of Grace program at Fr Serra.

In late summer of 2006, eleven ladies responded to my announcement in the church bulletin and my first Women of Grace® group was launched! We met once-a-week in my home, and everyone loved the program!

We all wanted the meetings to continue, so after completing the Women of Grace® material, we started *Grace-Filled Moments* with its accompanying study guide. This series provided a

perfect add-on to the Foundational Study Series. After completion, one of the participants, Susan Allen, a lady truly on-fire for the Lord . . . and a woman of grace, volunteered to help me with a second Women of Grace® Group which began in October of 2007. Eight faithful "Women of Grace" completed the program in that second group six months later.

Susan has a story all her own. Before 9/11, she had been a nominal Catholic for most of her adult life, but the tragic events of that day started her on a journey home to the Catholic Church. Soon after, when her mother passed away, Susan turned to the Blessed Mother for comfort and it was Mary who brought her closer to home – and back to her Son.

Eager, to "catch-up" with "all-things-Catholic" Susan discovered EWTN and Johnette's program *Living His Life Abundantly*, as well as Women of Grace®. When she saw my announcement for the start of the first Women of Grace® group she called right away to sign-up.

"Women of Grace and the support of other Catholic women who loved the Lord was just what I needed," Susan said. At the end of the class, I eagerly offered to help Lisi with the next group, and the next, and the next! I look forward to the start of each new group to see what the Lord is going to show and teach me about being a Woman of Grace."

Pat Doolittle, a participant from the 2007 group, joined Susan and me for a third WOG group in October of 2008. "I'm a retired teacher, and a busy grandma," Pat said. "I was looking to fellowship with other women parishioners in a faith-based program when I saw Lisi's announcement. As a military wife for over 30 years, I had taught CCD at various locations and had thoroughly enjoyed a Catholic women's study entitled "Education for Parish Service" while living in northern Virginia. I was eager to continue my growth in the Catholic faith when I registered for Women of Grace®. I did not realize then the abundance of



From Left to Right: Pat Doolittle, Marilyn Elias, Carmen Luna, Michelle Hull, Isabel Alatorre, and Rae Barbuscia

blessings that WOG would bring to my life!”

Pat found not only fellowship and spiritual growth for herself, but she also found an unexpected mission - to help other women embrace their femininity and dignity as daughters of God with Women of Grace®.

It's great having Susan and Pat as co-facilitators! We complement each other with our own unique gifts and talents. Another former participant, Tina Manke, also from the 2007 group, joined us and agreed to substitute when needed. With four of us, there is no problem if one of us needs to miss a class. A substitute-facilitator arrangement is built right in!

Susan, Pat and I attended the 2008 Women of Grace® Leadership Institute and the Women of Grace® Conference in Sacramento before starting the third Women of Grace® group. What an awesome experience! The Institute confirmed the importance of our Women of Grace® mission; and the presentations at the Convention set all of our hearts on fire for the Lord!

We returned from Sacramento eager for women in our Parish to sign-up for Women of Grace®. We wanted to open their eyes and help them see the importance of their spiritual motherhood. In addition to announcements in the church bulletin, we also made announcements at all Masses. We had a great response!

Over 40 eager women initially registered for the 2008 group. With the support of our pastor, Fr. Leo Dechant, CSJ, this group met in the Parish Hall.

As the year progressed, illnesses, family problems, relocations, and working mom situations affected our enrollment. But, fourteen “Women of Grace” completed the program five months later and many others expressed a desire to try again.

We concluded this third group with a Day of Retreat to “Mt. Carmel in the Desert,” a near-by Carmelite convent and retreat center. The Sisters provided us with a wonderful day of prayer and



Left to right starting with back row lady in white top: Anne Townsend, (behind Anne) Susan Allen, Cathy Cristos (next to Anne), Becky Dillon, Electra Rodriguez, Rosanna Peppo, Karen Walters, Frances Fagan, Antonette Abatti, Elvira Burgo, Gloria Zavala, Fr Leo Dechant, C.S.J. **2<sup>nd</sup> row:** Mollie Pazienza, Edna Vallega, Diane Thomas, Paula Hopper, Rosemary Hull, Tina Manke, Vickie White. **Seated:** Nancy Zermeno, Graciela Sosa, Lisi Cave, Debra Frank, Diana Sipes

reflection. This was so successful that we plan to continue to provide a Retreat following the conclusion of each Women of Grace® group and invite all former participants as well.

We clearly see a need for a new approach for the fourth Women of Grace® group which began in the Fall 2009. The March/April 2009, *Canticle* article entitled “Our Treasure of Truth:” Women of Grace® from Kalispell, Montana provided some great ideas for our future groups. In order to better accommodate our working participants, we plan to slow the next group’s pace from six-months to nine-months. This will permit more time for our participant’s preparation time outside of class and more time for discussion and sharing during the class. This pace will also allow us to include some audio/visual materials and occasional speakers during the year. We purchased over 60 videos from Johnette’s program, *Living His Life Abundantly*. We plan to pair these videos with the study guide material and provide a lending library of videos and books for our participants.

In the meantime, Pat has initiated an email program to keep both current and former Women of Grace® participants up-to-date on our activities and to provide them with relevant information we receive. She will provide an on-line schedule of class topics, materials,

speaker’s schedule, and special events. And we hope that these on-going connections will lead to a big delegation from our area at The Women of Grace® Sacramento Conference 2010!

We are so honored to be a part of this important ministry for women. We have taken the Second Vatican Council Fathers’ challenge very seriously when they said “at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women impregnated with a spirit of the Gospel can do much to aid humanity in not falling.”

We plan to continue to do our part! We are women of faith, and we have our Lord Jesus Christ on our side. He will be with us each step of the way with His guidance and direction. We will not lose hope during these difficult times. “To him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine” (*Ephesians 3:20*).

