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One Caring and Connected Thread: An Interview with Educator Mrs. Mary Ligon

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1 **Interview Transcription: Mary Ligon (interviewee) and Megan Best (interviewer)**

2

3 **Megan Best:** Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. I am Megan Best and it is
4 3:15 P.M. on September 24, 2018. I'm with Mary Ligon at Coram Deo Academy in Flower Mound,
5 Texas. I just want to clarify that I'm going to record this interview and it will be uploaded to the
6 University of Dallas Oral History Repository. Is that alright?

7

8 **Mary Ligon:** Yes, I give my full consent.

9

10 **Megan Best:** Thank you. Now, Mary, I would like to start with a question first about your
11 childhood. Where did you grow up?

12

13 **Mary Ligon:** I was born in Dayton, Ohio. I lived there until I was going into the eighth grade when
14 my father got transferred to New Jersey (which was quite a culture shock). And then I lived in New
15 Providence, New Jersey through high school.

16

17 **Megan Best:** What was your K-12 school experience like? Are there parts that stick out to you?

18

19 **Mary Ligon:** Yes. There was a very big difference between Dayton and New Jersey. I went from...
20 it was a good school in Dayton. I remember maybe 20 children in a class, but I lived in the shadow
21 of my siblings. So, I was the fifth. Under four less-than-academically stellar people. So, when I
22 came in I remember coming into Mr. Neff's class in seventh grade. And him beginning to tell me
23 what I had better not do on my first day. And from that point on, through that whole year, I
24 remember that being more strongly with every teacher...was...telling me that I "could not do this
25 because my siblings" and I "better not act like my siblings" and assuming I was going to be like my
26 siblings. You know my brothers used to get hauled in and spanked with that...the big, you know,
27 story was... the big spanking thing with nails in it. Of course, I found out later, there were no nails,
28 but they, my brothers said there were. But they used to get spanked with them. And then of course,
29 that next couple days it would kind-of come back on me. "You better not, you know, disobey or
30 you'd better not do that like your brothers did." Yeah.

31

32 **Megan Best:** So, this is all in Dayton?

33

34 **Mary Ligon:** This was all in Dayton.

35

36 **Megan Best:** And then what was it like when you went to New Jersey?

37

38 **Mary Ligon:** Well, New Jersey, I'm brand new.

39

40 **Megan Best:** Okay.

41

42 **Mary Ligon:** Brand new. That was wonderful because I felt like there was this weight off of me in
43 New Jersey, um, it was a very wealthy area. These schools were well-equipped. Um, I mean you
44 had every sport in the world there that anyone could do. I remember I liked field hockey.

45

46 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

47

48 **Mary Ligon:** Just doing that and that was odd because in Dayton I wouldn't have done that.

49

50 **Megan Best:** But you felt liberated.

51

52 **Mary Ligon:** I felt liberated. I wasn't living under the shadow of a sibling, or the only one I had

53 was my brother. And he did not like school at all, so I was looking real good at this point.
54

55 **Megan Best:** Yeah.
56

57 **Mary Ligon:** And I felt better because I didn't have to hear that all the time.
58

59 **Megan Best:** So do you think that you liked school more than all of your siblings?
60

61 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, absolutely.
62

63 **Megan Best:** What is it that you looked forward to when you went to school?
64

65 **Mary Ligon:** I think I love to learn. But my parents were not...I was the fifth child. My parents
66 were tired at this point, plus I had a younger sister who...they were... she was making them very
67 tired. So we... I wasn't pushed, I wasn't watched after, if I got a bad grade on my card... it
68 was...report card... it was more like, "you better straighten up."
69

70 **Megan Best:** Yeah.
71

72 **Mary Ligon:** But there wasn't the involvement with the parents and the students the way like
73 Coram Deo is.
74

75 **Megan Best:** Okay.
76

77 **Mary Ligon:** Like, the parents at that point weren't informed. We didn't have internet, we didn't
78 have all that. I imagine now we would be on daily as it is in all education.
79

80 **Megan Best:** Right.
81

82 **Mary Ligon:** Parents can see what their grades are, and they can keep up. But at that point, my
83 parents didn't really keep up, didn't push me, there was not this push to. So, anything I did became
84 on my own which sometimes was a little lacking.
85

86 **Megan Best:** In New Jersey, what was the teacher to student ratio? What do you think was it most
87 big classes or?
88

89 **Mary Ligon:** No. No not in that school. Like I said, the school I was in was a wealthy area, very
90 wealthy northern New Jersey, a very wealthy area. I think there were some classes I took, there
91 were 12 of us.
92

93 **Megan Best:** Really?
94

95 **Mary Ligon:** Yeah. And then some of them there may have been 20 but that would be the most.
96 They weren't large.
97

98 **Megan Best:** Wow. What was the classroom experience? Was it mostly the teacher talking at you
99 and you taking notes? Or do you remember, and this is more in high school. Do you remember it
100 being interactive?
101

102 **Mary Ligon:** Um, I remember the math teacher um, that I had for a couple of years and she was
103 very interactive. We would go up to the board and work things out and she would make us do it.
104 But, um, the history teacher... is I loved history. I still do. But the history teacher I remember when

105 we were learning about the Civil War. And he would sit, and I remember this went on for a couple
106 weeks, and he would sit and read letters that the doctors on the fields had written home and was
107 telling them about what was going on. And then the wives writing back to tell them what was going
108 on at home and the stresses they were involved. So you had this communication, and I remember he
109 sat on a desk and read this and I just remember being like, "Oh, please do not let that bell ring,"
110 because it was fascinating to me that like they had the ability to reattach limbs but they didn't have
111 the time at that point. And all you had time to do was just remove a limb and the next one had to
112 come in.

113
114 **Megan Best:** Wow.

115
116 **Mary Ligon:** And but he made it so real, he took the Civil War...and my father was a history buff,
117 so that really began an opened-up dialogue with me, with my dad and I. That I became very
118 interested in the Civil War in history and then we began to do really got into quite an interesting
119 period in our lives where I connected with my dad because of that. So, it really fostered that with in
120 the spilled over into my life with my dad.

121
122 **Megan Best:** So, it was like your dad's passion for learning spilled over into your passion for
123 learning or do you would you say that you had that already?

124
125 **Mary Ligon:** Um, I don't you know it's funny I don't remember that much about my dad until we
126 really started connecting. He wasn't close with with all six. He wasn't close with us.

127
128 **Megan Best:** Okay.

129
130 **Mary Ligon:** But that began a time period when now it was like I woke up and said, "Oh, my dad's
131 here and he's like a real person and he's really interesting. He, he actually knows about the Civil
132 War and World War II." He served in World War II. He went over to France. So, then I began this
133 "what did you do over there?" "what were you doing?" You know?

134
135 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

136
137 **Mary Ligon:** Where the other, my other siblings I know never really asked him.

138
139 **Megan Best:** And they missed out.

140
141 **Mary Ligon:** And they missed out.

142
143 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

144
145 **Mary Ligon:** I think later on right before he died, I think he had talked a little bit about it. But he
146 and I but he would have me read books and stuff and I would read those you know instead of doing
147 homework. So, it didn't work out so well.

148
149 **Megan Best:** But you were interested in learning new material. And what would you say was your
150 favorite subject? Would it have been history in high school or science?

151
152 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, gosh, I loved the history, but I think that was more of the teachers.

153
154 **Megan Best:** Okay.

155
156 **Mary Ligon:** And they really foster. And then I had my dad who was bringing it in and we would I

157 would read he would tell me to read something and then we'd talk about it. Um, but you know I
158 love biology. I loved. I mean we would get the frogs and you know we would prepare them and
159 dissect them. And it was fun. But my biology teachers were the football coaches and not to, but they
160 didn't really care too much.

161
162 **Megan Best:** Right.

163
164 **Mary Ligon:** But it didn't matter. I loved it. I mean I loved it all about biology, I love.

165
166 **Megan Best:** You love the subject even if the teacher wasn't...

167
168 **Mary Ligon:** Yeah, I was totally 100 percent in.

169
170 **Megan Best:** Would you say that your history teacher was your favorite teacher of all high school
171 and K through 12? Or would there be another one that sticks out?

172
173 **Mary Ligon:** No, my favorite teacher was my home economics teacher, Mrs. Paul. And Mrs. Paul.
174 I began to take sewing classes and took Home Economics I which really was sewing. And we also
175 did cooking then. But I would say get me other cooking classes I want to get back sewing class. So,
176 and my grandmother had me, I mean she had me sewing from the time I was little I was four years
177 old. I was running stitches through fabric. So, by the time I hit high school I could sew fairly well,
178 but Mrs. Paul was just an incredible seamstress, and she took my rudimentary skills and just
179 transformed them. So, I had her for three years and then there was no fourth-year class. So, she
180 designed one for us, for my friend and I. And we would. We did upholstery, we reupholstered
181 couches. I mean, we, she helped she allowed us to help make the curriculum up. And then she went
182 and sold it.

183
184 **Megan Best:** Wow.

185
186 **Mary Ligon:** To the administrators and they were like "yeah, that sounds great."

187
188 **Megan Best:** So, she let the students have a say?

189
190 **Mary Ligon:** Yes, she let us to say you know but she said it has to be challenging. I remember
191 going through this whole criteria that has to be challenging. "You all really have to be able to
192 stretch yourselves in this." So, we reupholstered a chair from my house and then my friend's couch
193 and then we learned how to work with different kinds of fabrics, very expensive Jaccard fabrics. We
194 went into New York to see how they were made. I mean it was fascinating. Yeah, we were only an
195 hour outside in New York City so that was amazing.

196
197 **Megan Best:** Yes, that opportunity right there!

198
199 **Mary Ligon:** That was really amazing, yes.

200
201 **Megan Best:** So what else about her really was inspirational for you? Because those are some
202 amazing...

203
204 **Mary Ligon:** She connected with us. And she connected with me. Um, I had a boyfriend in high
205 school and things weren't going well. There was one day when I was crying. And she, she had a
206 costume dress dressing room and she grabbed me and pulled me in there. And she said, "What is
207 wrong?" And she said, "I need to know." And so, I told her my boyfriend liked this other girl. And
208 she just started talking to me that I was worth far more than that and I didn't need to put myself in

209 that position. And she just. I she was just amazing because she took me at a very low point and said
210 and kinda said, "Wake up! This isn't for the rest of your life."
211

212 **Megan Best:** Wow.
213

214 **Mary Ligon:** And I kind-of walked out after that like, "Okay." And I was she helped direct me. She
215 helped direct me. But I just did admired her in the way that she held a standard. There was one dress
216 I made, and it was, I didn't do a very good job on it. And she told me, she said, "I'm giving you a C
217 on this because you did not do well on it." And I was kind-of like, "Wait a minute, I thought
218 you...Because you like me." But she's like, "You cannot turn in work like that."
219

220 **Megan Best:** Her standard of excellence was high.
221

222 **Mary Ligon:** Yes. And she also when we would grade something that we would make, we would
223 lay out everybody else's and we would leave the room and people would the other students would
224 also be grading and critiquing our work because they would learn from it.
225

226 **Megan Best:** I see.
227

228 **Mary Ligon:** They would learn from it. So even though then I would come back in. And then she
229 would talk about it. And but we... I went through and everything was fair, I knew it wasn't that
230 good. I just hadn't done a very good job. But we would do that for all of the the work that people
231 would bring in.
232

233 **Megan Best:** Wow.
234

235 **Mary Ligon:** And we weren't vicious, she did not allow us to be vicious, but she let us say,
236 "Critique it. What has been done well, what has not been done well? And what should she have
237 done? What should she have not have done? Why do you think she took that?" You know my hand
238 stitching I think on a hem was not up to par.
239

240 **Megan Best:** I see. What were some challenges that you encountered, and it could be K through 12
241 educational or academic, um, in the school setting? What were some things that set you back or...
242

243 **Mary Ligon:** I think I talked about the sibling, living under the shadow of my siblings I think was
244 tough. I think also my parents not being involved in pushing and checking on me. Um, but you
245 know what's funny because that seems like that was the norm at that time. The late 60s, 70s that was
246 kind of the norm.
247

248 **Megan Best:** Parents were just above...
249

250 **Mary Ligon:** Were just kind-of I don't know what's the word, um, disconnected.
251

252 **Megan Best:** Okay.
253

254 **Mary Ligon:** At least in my intel.
255

256 **Megan Best:** Okay. Um, now, we've talked about your educational experience at least K through
257 12. I know that obviously you went to university, um, but why did you become a teacher?
258

259 **Mary Ligon:** I've always found myself in a teaching position ever since I was little. The earliest
260 time I can think of was, I was probably ten or eleven years old in our neighborhood. The...we did a

261 daycare in the summer for little kids so...that all the mothers would throw their, you know, 5 and 6-
262 year-olds and so forth at us and we keep them for the whole morning. It was a Mother's Day Out
263 thing. And so my friend and I did it and she would do games and I would say, "Okay, well I'm
264 going to take the kids and we're going to go and walk through the woods and I'm going to teach
265 them all the parts the trees and show them all the different moss and how it all works together." And
266 it was funny because I don't know when I would have learned all that, but I certainly knew what I
267 was doing. But we loved it and the kids loved it. We would go and collect acorns and make little
268 people things that they...Oh, it was adorable. But.

269
270 **Megan Best:** How many kids?

271
272 **Mary Ligon:** We would have, we would have like eight or nine children.

273
274 **Megan Best:** Between you and your friend and you were how old?

275
276 **Mary Ligon:** We were probably 10 or 11 years old. That was the first time. Then every summer
277 you know they want us to do that. And I did it in while I was doing, I lived in New Jersey too, I
278 picked it up in New Jersey and did it.

279
280 **Megan Best:** So, in Ohio and in New Jersey, you were teaching little kids, going through the
281 woods. Was it mostly outdoors?

282
283 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, yes.

284
285 **Megan Best:** Okay.

286
287 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, yes. I don't. I mean I don't..if I could be outdoors, I'm outdoors. But yes because
288 it was a little summer camp. Because the parents were, you know they were getting a little tired of
289 school being out. So, when we did this and I think we charged. I think we charged 50 cents an hour.
290 Which the parents thought was a little much, but we got we made like a \$1.50 for each child.

291
292 **Megan Best:** Wow. It was like a business, but you were enjoying it!

293
294 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, we made money. Oh, we made money. Yes.

295
296 **Megan Best:** So, you realized that you liked teaching, but you kind-of just fell into it when you
297 were younger, or did you like really think about it in an elaborate way?

298
299 **Mary Ligon:** No, I just. It's I always had myself in that position. Now my brother was always
300 teaching me. He taught me plumbing. He taught me repair. I mean I can put in any toilet, fix any
301 toilet, I can fix pretty much any appliance except refrigerators. I want to. But he taught me all of
302 that. And I was very young, and I followed him everywhere I went, and he was it seemed like he
303 was always teaching me something.

304
305 **Megan Best:** When did you realize that you wanted teaching to be a career or to be something you
306 wanted to do in your adult life?

307
308 **Mary Ligon:** Well I went in, out of high school I took a year off to find myself and then... So, after
309 I was on my quest to find myself, which meant that I would go visit all my friends in college, I
310 came back, and my mother had gotten me a job at a factory. Yeah, you never let your parents get
311 you a job at a factory. So, my mother had gone there, pretty much ran the interview for me. Yes, it
312 was unbelievable. I still wonder about that. How did that happen? That was real odd. Anyway so. I

313 came back, she said, "Go up there." I went in, and the guy... And I wondered. He was kind- of
314 smirking the whole time, so I knew my mother had been up there and I was not going to stay at
315 home and be a couch potato. So, I worked in this factory putting cotton balls in catheter trays and
316 for medical supplies. After about six months of that, I said I'm going to school. So, I went to nursing
317 school. So, after I had gotten out of there, I found myself in my job, that I was constantly being
318 placed in the training. I was constantly training new nurses, especially if they had just come out of a
319 four-year college because those nurses had not really had much practical floor experience. So, I was
320 always the one that, and they would come from all different floors in the hospital, and I would be
321 the one to take them around and train them. So, I always found myself doing that. And I remember
322 even thinking there, "Hmm, this seems to keep happening to me. No matter where I am." And I
323 loved it. I mean I loved it.

324
325 **Megan Best:** So, you loved nursing. You loved...did you like nursing school?
326

327 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. I loved nursing school. I. I also, you know, saw this opportunity to
328 help people, you know, in their darkest hours. You know, and I wasn't afraid to face anything like
329 that. And so, I think that, um. And also, you're teaching the patients, too, how to live their lives,
330 how do they live with this disease or condition or whatever. So, there was a lot of teaching with
331 that. And I love that, because I learned from them, and that would just help me in teaching other
332 people.
333

334 **Megan Best:** So, you got more teaching experience at the nurse level. And then what made you
335 come work at Coram Deo Academy in Flower Mound which is a classical school?
336

337 **Mary Ligon:** Yes, that was that. That was many years. So, I had worked in nursing for five years
338 and then I had my first child. And I wanted to stay home with her. So then became I had her and
339 then three years later I had twins. And then by that time, you know, you got these three kids there's
340 no going back to work. And so, I raised my kids and then I placed them in school. And we've had
341 rough, rough, rough time with it, especially with my oldest one. So, I took her out. In effect a
342 teacher at the school said, "You need to take this child out and homeschool her."
343

344 **Megan Best:** Why did she say that?
345

346 **Mary Ligon:** Because she was having such a difficult time in school. And. She was very passive-
347 aggressive. And so, when the teacher would ask her you know take out your your papers she would
348 do it very slowly and she had some little interesting quirks. Anyway. So, so I took her out and
349 brought her back and really started to evaluate. We, um, fortunately I knew a lot of people with the
350 homeschooling because my friends were doing it and they were kind-of encouraging me after the
351 teacher told me that I said, "Okay." So, it was really a good move for us. I got my daughter back re-
352 established and then we joined a co-op of homeschoolers. So, on Fridays we would meet with them.
353 And in order to have a child in the co-op, you had to teach. So, here I am again.
354

355 **Megan Best:** Okay.
356

357 **Mary Ligon:** So, what did I teach there? I taught biology. I taught different sciences. My favorite
358 one that they are they had me do every year was I taught in astronomy, it was really on the planets.
359 And it was for all different ages and we did kind of all different ages but for the younger ones I
360 would come and dress like a different planet each week. It was, oh, it was so much fun. And these
361 kids and even the middle schoolers loved it. And I didn't do so much with the high schoolers,
362 probably should have.
363

364 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

365

366 **Mary Ligon:** But they probably would have liked it more many of them. But I just saw. Wow you
367 can draw these kids, and there is a way that they can learn this information you can do it and it be
368 interesting, but, boy it's a lot of work to do it that way. And that's one of the things I've found out
369 about teaching doing that. It's a lot of work if you want to make it interesting.

370

371 **Megan Best:** Right.

372

373 **Mary Ligon:** That's the catch. That's where the problem comes in. And that's why the energy and
374 all that took. But I loved it there. My kids, my youngest one came along six years later, and I
375 homeschooled her and then finally the older ones graduated. They're gone. And the younger one... I
376 got a call one day from someone starting this school, and saying, you know, "Mary, we need you to
377 put Anna (that was my daughter) into this school. We're starting this school." And I'm like, "Okay,
378 well, what kind of school is it?" And they go, "it's a classical Christian school." And I go, "what
379 does that mean?" And they go, "well, you know, it's it's classical we're going to deal go back and
380 deal with like classic literature and then I'm like, "Okay, it sounds good, I'll sign her up." So, I did, I
381 put her in. And that's when, and then a year later... Well, during that year they came to me and said,
382 "We're ready to do..." (because the first year they were just doing simple English, Math) "We need
383 to start the sciences. Would you come in and teach biology?" And I said, "Sure. But you know, you,
384 don't you need to see me, and they went, "No, we've already seen you teach." Which meant that
385 they had watched me at the home schooling. Which I thought, "Wow." That was kind-of interesting
386 because I kept thinking: when were they there? But evidently, they had come.

387

388 **Megan Best:** And these were the leaders of the school here?

389

390 **Mary Ligon:** Yes.

391

392 **Megan Best:** Okay so then did you...

393

394 **Mary Ligon:** So, then I came. Yes.

395

396 **Megan Best:** Okay.

397

398 **Mary Ligon:** Then I started teaching here and it was very low budget. We were working in a
399 [church]. I mean they did I think they did English in the nursery. But I'm telling you it was amazing
400 education she got. I mean how much work we used to put at those kids then. It was, ugh.

401

402 **Megan Best:** Heavy load.

403

404 **Mary Ligon:** Heavy load, and we've since pulled back.

405

406 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

407

408 **Mary Ligon:** Reflects the...wow. I'm telling you what: they're a successful bunch, those first- year
409 graduates but, um, yeah. And then once I started teaching here it was...there were times at the
410 beginning where everything I had was in bins, little, you know, plastic tubs, those big bins. And
411 every Friday we would do... So, I told them, I said, "Okay, I'll only do this if I have an hour, you
412 know, Monday and an hour on Wednesday, and then Friday they come to the lab." Because we're
413 on the university model. And so, I had two hours then. But there was no place to put my equipment.
414 So, for quite a few years every Friday I'd have to bring in seven tubs and set it up. And then at the
415 end of the day, put that all back and take it home. But it was worth it. It was a lot of work, and it
416 was worth it. And I could see the vision you know, coming. And now look at that, I have my own

417 room, I got junk upstairs up here. It's everywhere. It's all there, I'm spilling out everywhere.

418

419 **Megan Best:** What, so how many years now have you been at Coram Deo?

420

421 **Mary Ligon:** Nineteen years.

422

423 **Megan Best:** Nineteen years. So that's pretty much as long as Coram Deo has been around, right?

424

425 **Mary Ligon:** Yes.

426

427 **Megan Best:** From the, from the beginning. So, what are some things that you always find every
428 year that you keep emphasizing as a teacher academically or personally to the students.

429

430 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, my goodness.

431

432 **Megan Best:** And I guess we could also back up a minute and say what classes you teach in what
433 grade levels.

434

435 **Mary Ligon:** I teach biology and currently I teach biology for ninth graders and AP Environmental
436 Science for 11th graders. I've taught all sciences here. Um, yeah mainly just sticking to the sciences.
437 Um.

438

439 **Megan Best:** What are some, I guess...

440

441 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, that I keep emphasizing?

442

443 **Megan Best:** Yeah, academic or personal?

444

445 **Mary Ligon:** Well, first of all, I think this is an opportunity to help them. Because they don't have
446 the whole picture. And now especially. I'm 64 I'm looking back at my life. And I'm seeing them,
447 and I'm like, "You guys don't know, you don't get it, but I'm going to help you help you walk
448 through this and help you understand what's important in life." And this is a Christian school.

449

450 **Megan Best:** Right.

451

452 **Megan Best:** And I'm a Christian. And so as...teaching them. Like this year, it's become probably
453 more than other years is: "this is the way we walk in truth. This is the way you walk as a Christian.
454 This is the way we should look." And we're going through devotionals that they've set up with the
455 school. And, you know, we can tweak it how we feel need. But I think as far as being... the... ('cause
456 where we start every day with devotions) is telling the children, the students that there is a way to
457 walk to avoid being caught in snares and being caught and finding yourself in situations where
458 you're making very bad decisions that influence you for the rest of your life. And so, this year I feel
459 like, and even with my biology students we've talked about this in class, about decisions you make
460 influencing you and kind-of chasing after you your whole rest of your life. Especially when you
461 think about the drugs and all that is so and now, they're talking about the vaping and all that, which
462 is just sending me spiraling because the amount of nicotine and all that the carcinogens are finding
463 even in the vaping.

464

465 **Megan Best:** So, in emphasizing the influences that students face I guess you find yourself caring
466 about them as a whole person from a Christian perspective.

467

468 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, yes and I think any teacher especially now with the drugs and the things and you

469 see students and what they're going through, I would think most teachers, I mean just being a
470 human being you'd see these students and you don't want them to go down this path of destruction.

471
472 **Megan Best:** Right.

473
474 **Mary Ligon:** I mean whether you're Christian or not you don't want to see that. But as a Christian I
475 can tell them, you know, they serve a God who loves them and cares for them and has made a way
476 for them to not be caught in that. But if they will just listen and turn. And.

477
478 **Megan Best:** Good, so, I get the sense that you care about these students at a spiritual level and for
479 their well-being here on this earth and then academically, how does that play out in the classroom?

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481 **Mary Ligon:** I think if there is an opportunity that students will ask questions will come up where
482 they'll ask well, "What do you think about this, Mrs. Ligon?" And I'll say, "Well, let me ask you."
483 And so, I might go back and ask them and find out what they're really asking me because
484 sometimes those can be two far different things. And then, um, and then I'll address it I'll give my
485 opinion on what I think I see happening with students getting caught up in things. I've had students
486 ask me where "do you think it's bad that I'm going to these parties my friends are going to and
487 there's drugs there but I'm not going to get caught up in it?" And I said, "You will eventually
488 because that's kind-of the plan." My husband and I deal with drug addicts and drug dealers and
489 stuff. And so...in ministry ways... and I said, "You will. Don't continue do that." I said, "What
490 would your parents think?" "Oh, they wouldn't want me there."

491
492 **Megan Best:** Yeah, and you ask them questions.

493
494 **Mary Ligon:** So, I ask them questions and I kind-of, but see then that's part of that reflective thing
495 from nursing that I did.

496
497 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

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499 **Mary Ligon:** That all plays together all these experiences you have in your life, they all weave
500 together to end up where you are and you, you, teach from that perspective all these things that are
501 woven in, but yeah, I do care very deeply about them. I wouldn't be here if I didn't. But
502 academically speaking in biology, I think my emphasis is always the wonder of the world around
503 them. "This is an amazing thing. You all have no idea when you're going to look down." See I get
504 goosebumps thinking about looking under a microscope. I keep saying when I have not in awe of
505 looking under a microscope, I'm I'm finished. And I just need to go retire somewhere far away
506 because I... but every year I keep thinking maybe this is the year and it just seems to get worse. Like
507 I get more excited, screaming and students are like, "Why are you screaming?" I'm going, "Did you
508 look at that microscope!" So, I became...

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510 **Megan Best:** So, wonder is what drives you?

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512 **Mary Ligon:** Wonder. Yes. And it's a beautiful thing to look in and see how complex everything is,
513 and we don't even know everything we don't. You know it's kind-of the more you know the more
514 you realize you don't know.

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516 **Megan Best:** Right.

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518 **Mary Ligon:** And I keep telling the students, you know, 20 years from now what I'm teaching you
519 may not be what's really what they really find things are going to change. So, you have to
520 understand that I'm teaching you what we know now.

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Megan Best: That's humbling.

Mary Ligon: It is. It is. I mean I remember being taught in high school with cystic fibrosis like we weren't really sure what was going on. Now we know where the mutation is, and they're trying to work on gene therapies for it. It's very different, yeah. Very different.

Megan Best: When it comes to the classroom, you're caring about the people, the students at the individual level you're caring. You have a lot of reverence and awe for your subject. Are there techniques you can, like, encourage other teachers when it comes to inspiring that wonder?

Mary Ligon: I would say you get an arsenal of weird information and you've got to be able to pull that out because students connect with weird funny, they just connect with it and they don't want to hear the blah blah. And you could see on their faces when I bring out some my weird arsenal they'll just sit and go, "Are you kidding me?" And I'm like, "No, and wait till we get to this." And I think that and making sure that they, um, they understand it. I think that's the hardest part of teaching is how do you make sure in check that they're teaching it. And there's all kinds of devices you can use now to check that they are learning it. You know you do boards they have buzzers now and all kinds of things. But it's not so much that is you've got to get them to want to know it. So, it has to be applicable to them. You've got to make it connect with them.

Megan Best: Right.

Mary Ligon: And if you can't do that you need to cut it. You need to cut it and go.

Megan Best: Yeah.

Mary Ligon: Because you have got to make it connect with them because they're just they can get bored very easily and they're tired. These kids are sitting. Go back if you don't and sometime sit for an hour and watch a show on TV without interacting or saying anything and then take a five-minute break and then go back and watch another one. It's difficult. So sometimes I feel like teachers need to go back and realize that.

Megan Best: Right.

Mary Ligon: These students are sitting there for 50 minutes or whatever and they're doing this hour after hour after hour. And you've got to be able to read your class. Like today, I could see this class that I had before lunch. They just looked like they were just spent, so I said, "Are you Okay?" And they said, "Well, we're a little hungry." So, I found a box of these goldfish cracker things. They were called Whales or something, it was a cheaper brand. It was something I use for my AP class. And I said, "Let's eat those." So, as I'm talking and going around, I'm feeding them. Now they're going to be more willing to listen to me.

Megan Best: Yeah.

Mary Ligon: And buy in. Because why? I'm showing them I care. I'm not just here just about them just about their... I want to grade out of them. They're tired. And you have to be able to read your class if you don't. I mean you're just, it's like talking to a wall.

Megan Best: Right.

Mary Ligon: And you know that, too.

573

574 **Megan Best:** Right. And what do you see, and it could be here at Coram Deo or just your
575 experience with, um, meeting other teachers and knowing about other school situations. What do
576 you think are like the biggest problems in the education world today?

577

578 **Mary Ligon:** Well, first of all, I just have to say, see I've been working in Utopia for 19 years. And
579 I have had many people [say to me]: "You need to go work down in the where they're in the public
580 schools down in Dallas where the kids see because you have this passion." I've enjoyed my little
581 wonderfulness right here because I have an administration that backs me. Where I'm wrong, they
582 call me on the carpet. Where I'm right, they back me. Another key thing that happens here at Coram
583 Deo, which is unique, which is why you don't have the student teachers leave. We just don't have
584 that happen. It's because the administration is also teaching classes. And my daughter who was
585 taught... And my daughter went on to be a teacher. She went to Baylor University and became a
586 teacher. They churn out wonderful teachers, and she's taught in public schools all around here. And
587 she said that if the public-school system were to adopt this idea of administration coming in to teach
588 in a class maybe every few years they would not have the issues they have because they would be
589 on top of what's really going on in the classroom. And this is also what I've heard from other
590 teachers who have asked me, you know, "What do you do when your administration doesn't back
591 you?" And I went, "I've never had that happen."

592

593 **Megan Best:** Right.

594

595 **Mary Ligon:** I mean we just don't have that happen. Do I come up with ideas that they go, "No,
596 Mary, you don't get to do that." And I go, "Okay, thank you." And then we move on. "No, you don't
597 get to. You can't do that." Um, And I but I can go to them about any issues I have, my frustrations, I
598 can go to my administration and they helped me while, I'll tell them, "Talk me off the roof." "Okay,
599 sit down. Let's talk this out."

600

601 **Megan Best:** Wow.

602

603 **Mary Ligon:** And they give me advice, and I've been doing this a long time. But they give me
604 advice and help me walk it through it. Um, it doesn't seem with my daughter that the administration
605 that's way up high. They're disconnected. And I've had other teachers tell me this. Teachers that
606 have come to Coram Deo because they're so disconnected. And that they teachers don't, you know,
607 the teachers will say, "How do we get the students to do their homework?" "Well, you make them
608 do it." "Well, how do you make them do it?" "I don't know. You just make them do it." Well, we
609 need practical helping teachers to walk through. But you also need to have people that have
610 currently been in a classroom and know the flavor, the essence of the kids that are there, what
611 they're facing. Because what worked 10 years ago is not going to work, may not work right now.

612

613 **Megan Best:** Staying current is really important.

614

615 **Mary Ligon:** Is really important especially when you're talking about the students and what they're
616 facing. I mean I think about things that I was faced with I was a child and what students are facing
617 now. There's things that are better, but there's things that are worse.

618

619 **Megan Best:** Right, you have to be aware.

620

621 **Mary Ligon:** And you have to be aware, and you have to be willing to adjust things for that.

622

623 **Megan Best:** I see. If there is a new teacher approaching you, asking for advice, what are some
624 things you would tell them? I think you, you've talked a lot about the wonder. You would probably

625 tell them to work at Coram Deo. What are some...

626

627 **Mary Ligon:** Well, I think you need to work where you feel called to work. Doesn't mean you need
628 to be here at Coram Deo. It may mean you're in the inner cities.

629

630 **Megan Best:** Right.

631

632 **Mary Ligon:** Um, you know you there's this isn't the fit for every child in the world. You know
633 someone asked me, "Well, you think every person should go to Coram Deo Academy?" And I said,
634 "No. I think there's a fit for every child. For many children, it just fits here, it's a good fit, for some
635 it won't be."

636

637 **Megan Best:** Right.

638

639 **Mary Ligon:** Um, for a new teacher I would say: Make sure you love what you're going to teach
640 because you're going to speak that. And kids will spot a phony a mile away. And they're going to
641 know you don't even like this. Very, very quickly they're going to catch on. So, unless you're really
642 sold out and love it then don't do this. Find something else. There's a lot of good jobs out there.

643

644 **Megan Best:** Right.

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646 **Mary Ligon:** But teaching shouldn't be one. And you have. You must. You must love the kids.
647 You've got to be able to find worth in a child no matter how much they frustrate you, no matter how
648 horrible they have been, you need to be able to see in them something good and you've got to
649 connect that's a fact. That's. When I had a new teacher one year and I said that I said, "No matter
650 how frustrated you get, you have to turn it around." So, if you get a student who is absolutely
651 driving you bonkers and you're like, this, this is bad in all levels. Then I said, "Make a point to find
652 out about it. Go up to him." And I and I had that, and I was that year I showed this teacher and I
653 said, "Okay, what, I'll talk to this student." And so, I went up, "What do you like to do in your spare
654 time? I know you just love being here, and the kid was like, "No, I don't." Then I go, "Okay, so
655 what do you like to do at home?" Right, you start finding out that you have this entire thing, they're
656 in a band, well, you know my nephew plays, and he is in a band and so I started, and this kid knows
657 my nephew, you know.

658

659 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

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661 **Mary Ligon:** And once we start going, now guess what? We've connected. Sometimes you have to
662 dig a little further to get but there is going to be a connection. And now, you've made a connection
663 with that child, and now you're going to be able to encourage them in. And if you love what you do,
664 then they've never...I had a student write me a note last year and said, "Dear Mrs. Ligon, you know,
665 thank you for the year. The fetal pig dissection was interesting. I didn't really think I'd like it and
666 I'm not sure I really do but you were so interested in it that it made it fun." So, it didn't matter, the
667 child didn't even...because I liked it and found it fascinating...

668

669 **Megan Best:** It spilled over.

670

671 **Mary Ligon:** He was willing.

672

673 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

674

675 **Mary Ligon:** He was willing to open himself up and I told him, "You know, you've got to open
676 yourself up, and be willing to try new things." I tell them sometimes, "You're like old people, you

677 don't like to try anything new." And they're like, "Yeah, we do." And I go, "No, you don't. Look at
678 yourselves. And so, I tell them, "You got to try stuff."

679
680 **Megan Best:** Yeah.

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682 **Mary Ligon:** You just never know where life is going to take you. You have no idea. Did I ever
683 think I'd be right here? Working here for 19 years? I just realized that the other day when the
684 students asked me, and then I about fell over when I realized.

685
686 **Megan Best:** Wow. Well, I've learned so much. My last question for the interview is kind-of open-
687 ended. Is there anything you'd like to add that wasn't said?

688
689 **Mary Ligon:** One thing I will say is back in 8th grade and Mr. Stoddard when I had moved to New
690 Jersey. Eighth grade. Mr. Stoddard was the history teacher. I'd liked history before then, too, early
691 on, but I don't remember why I had such a love for it, I guess the teacher, they must have done... Put
692 something in me with it. So, in eighth grade Mr. Stoddard. My parents were moving into this new
693 place, the freedom of I don't have my siblings over me, I'm my own person, and my parents don't
694 care, nobody's bugging me... So, we would, you know, take our history tests or whatever. And I was
695 not scoring well, and I didn't study. 'Course, isn't it funny now? That's one of my big, main points in
696 trying to teach children here at Coram Deo: how to study. Interesting how that's all come back on
697 me. But I remember one time I said, "You know what? I'm going to do this for Mr. Stoddard, I'm
698 going to study." So, I studied. I wrote out the information. I didn't know how to really study, but I
699 decided I'd write it all out. I take the history test, I make a 100. He comes down the aisle giving
700 back the tests and he like slams the test down in front of me. And he said, "And what have you been
701 doing the whole part of this year when you could produce this?" And he said, "What did you do
702 different?" I said, "I studied." And he said, "Wow. Okay." So, after that I kind-of made a point of
703 studying a little bit more. And then comes the end of eighth grade, you know, and they back in New
704 Jersey now everything's a big deal, eighth grade graduation, (it was not like that in Dayton), but I
705 look, and I see there's a whole profiles on teachers and their pet peeves. And his pet peeve was
706 students who don't study, and I went, "oh, that's why he was so upset and so passionate about the
707 whole thing." I thought. So, after that, I thought, oh, okay, so I know that I can try to study. Now,
708 did that spur me on in high school to do really well? No, because my parents still weren't...

709
710 **Megan Best:** Right.

711
712 **Mary Ligon:** And there wasn't the communication between the schools and the parents and
713 everything as there is now. And I don't even remember like taking SATs and them being any kind
714 of big deal.

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716 **Megan Best:** Really?

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718 **Mary Ligon:** No.

719
720 **Megan Best:** It was just kind-of...

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722 **Mary Ligon:** I just, I don't remember any of that like because my friend and I were talking the
723 other day and like, "Was it ever a big deal like, where you finished in your class?" And we were
724 like, "No, I don't remember it being that big a deal."

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726 **Megan Best:** Now it seems ratcheted up like...

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728 **Mary Ligon:** Oh, it's just on steroids.

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Megan Best: Yeah.

Mary Ligon: I mean it's unbelievable. You know, how well you have to do. It was a different world then.

Megan Best: Right.

Mary Ligon: But that was the thing I look back now and I think, "Ugh, I disappointed him." I must have frustrated the snot out of that poor man.

Megan Best: Yeah.

Mary Ligon: And I even now, today, I feel bad about that. I think, I felt bad about it at the time and I think if I had had the guts I would have gone back and said, "I'm really sorry." But there were times when in high school when I would a test would come up and I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to study because I never know when another Mr. Stoddard is going to be there."

Megan Best: Wow.

Mary Ligon: So it did help a little bit but still the, the pressure wasn't there that I think should have been there.

Megan Best: Yeah.

Mary Ligon: Because I would have risen to the occasion. But it's funny but I think he probably was a little forceful in the way how frustrated he was, but I understand it now. Now, I'm on the other side of, okay, I'm going to get them to study and I'm going to bring them in like, today, coming on Wednesday and Thursday they're going to have a test and 20 percent of their grade on their test is their study notes that they'll have to write out on three different days and have them signed and dated by their parents.

Megan Best: Wow.

Mary Ligon: So poor Mr. Stoddard. Even though, I let him down then, look what I'm doing! And this is in memory of Mr. Stoddard.

Megan Best: Wow.

Mary Ligon: Getting them to do that. So sometimes things will happen to you years later and then it comes back and you're like, "Okay I get it now."

Megan Best: Well, it just seems like your whole story has just been woven together.

Mary Ligon: Absolutely.

Megan Best: Like a beautiful tapestry. So, I really appreciate you sharing this with me and with the University of Dallas. So, that concludes our interview.