

Prater books offer faith-based perks

► Written by **Carol Baass Sowa**, for Today's Catholic

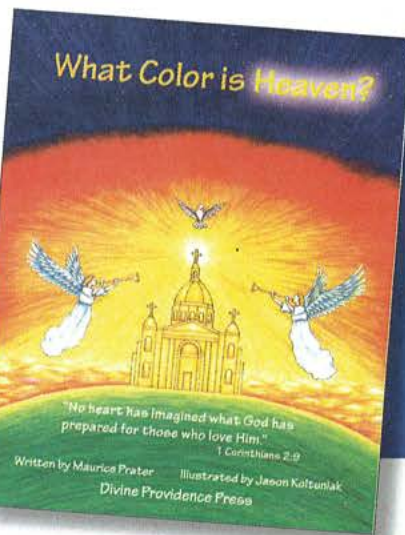
There's more than meets the eye in Maurice Prater's children's picture books and more to Prater himself than many may be aware of when picking up one of his little gems. Prater, advancement director for the Missionaries of the Holy Family's North American Province, based in St. Louis, has a new book out, *What Color is Heaven?* Like his previous books, *Saved by the Alphabet* and *Counting on Faith*, it is another milestone in a life journey that led him where he needed to be.

The seeds for his future were planted growing up in the small Missouri town of Meta, nestled in the Ozarks, where one of his favorite child-

hood memories is of his mother reading to him and his siblings at bedtime. They were stories of the saints, and he was particularly taken with one of St. Francis of Assisi, drawn to it by its picture of the saint helping Christ down from the cross, symbolic of receiving the stigmata. "I remember it literally to this day," he relates.

He attended Catholic schools in Washington, Mo., after his father's railroad job moved the family there, then earned a bachelor of science in marketing at Franciscan Quincy University in Illinois, where he graduated summa cum laude. His heart set on a career in advertising, his next step was attending Washington University in St. Louis for a master's in business administration with emphasis in marketing, followed by an internship at a St. Louis advertising agency.

Prater was delighted to be hired by May Department Stores, working at the corporate offices for Payless Shoes in Topeka, Kan., but later found himself drawn to a job opening posted on the Archdiocese of St. Paul website, after returning to the church. He applied and was accepted for the position of



"What Color is Heaven?" by Maurice Prater; illustrations by Jason Koltuniak, Divine Providence Press, 2020; soft cover, 24 full-color pages; \$10.99; ages up to 7 years. Available at Amazon.com, DivineProvidencePress.com, 608-358-6563 or ask at local bookstores.

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development director and doing communications work for a parish that had a consolidated school with other parishes. He went on to do work for the archdiocese in several different positions.

Eventually, he found himself looking for a job back in Missouri, where his mother was now a widow and needed his help. Fortuitously, this coincided with the Missionaries of the Holy Family seeking an advancement director, a job he happily accepted, going to work for them ten years ago on the Feast of the Holy Family, Dec. 26, 2010. A worldwide men's congregation of over 1,000 priests and brothers, the order's special focus is on emphasizing the Holy Family as the standard of holiness for all families.

Prater stays busy handling their fundraising and communications, which includes social media, web-

site, magazines and direct mail. Mass requests are received through the website and shared with missionary priests all over the world. At times, he arranges for missionary priests in the United States to make mission appeals at parishes in various dioceses, with the proceeds shared with international provinces. Working with immigration lawyers to bring over their international priests to work in the United States can be time-consuming, as Homeland Security is involved and the order has missionaries in 22 countries.

Locally, Missionaries of the Holy Family work in the parishes of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and Holy Family in New Braunfels; Our Lady of Guadalupe in Seguin; and the missions of St. John in Hunter and St. Joseph in Redwood.

Above, Maurice Prater's new book and right, the author with his previous books.



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Another pivotal moment in Prater's life came in May 2011, when he made a pilgrimage to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, Wis., where the first Marian apparition in the United States took place in 1859. It was here that Our Lady appeared to Belgian immigrant Adele Brise, instructing her to, "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they need to know for salvation." Thus, she began a lifelong legacy of catechetical mission work, traveling within a 50-mile radius of where the shrine stands today.

Its first miraculous incident occurred in 1871 when terrible fires, described as a mile high, five miles wide and with hurricane-force winds, raged through the drought-stricken region and local families gathered together at the chapel built on the apparition site to pray the rosary, asking for Our Lady's intercession. They were spared when rain began to fall, extinguish-



ing the blazing inferno. In 2010, Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay determined the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Adele Brise "worthy of belief," leading to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declaring the site a national shrine in 2016.

"It was there that I got inspired to write," says Prater, "because in the apparition to Sister Adele, Our Lady said to teach children the basics of the Faith. I wrote *What Color is Heaven?* as the third in a trilogy of children's books based on Sacred Scripture. While learning about their colors from this book, children will also learn about their Catholic faith." Enhancing the experience are vividly colored illustrations by Jason Koltuniak that make the text come alive.

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ARTWORK BY TRACY L. CHRISTIANSON

Above, Our Lady of Good Help, Maurice Prater's inspiration. Left, Prater with his mother, Marie. A favorite childhood memory is his mother reading bedtime stories of the saints to him and his siblings.

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