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Olivia's Gift

Nancy Carabio Belanger
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Olivia Thomas is twelve years old during the time *Olivia's Gift* takes place in the summer before 7th grade, when she spends a month on the North Carolina coast with her family and best friend Hayley. Olivia, a strong Catholic, has recently developed a special feeling for St. Therese of Lisieux, a saint her grandmother introduced her to for inspiration and guidance.

Olivia's family consists of mom, dad, and baby sister Lucy, plus Grandma, who comes along on the trip, which includes a stay at an exquisite summer home at the beach. Hayley, one of Olivia's new friends since her family moved to Michigan from Texas, is delighted to go along.

But the month doesn't exactly turn out the way either girl expects. During the vacation, Hayley and Olivia meet other early teens who introduce them to temptations that Olivia's parents disapprove of. A strain is put on the girls' relationship, even as they are having fun with their new friends and having new experiences. Olivia learns just how important her faith is and how she can gain strength from the Little Way, as written by St. Therese in the late 1800s to avoid temptation.

Olivia is also trying to save money to sponsor a child in a poor family, after she reads about helping a child in a third-world country. How she earns the money she needs, how she copes with growing into her teens, and how she finds strength amid temptation is all part of the story.

Author Nancy Carabio Belanger previously wrote about Olivia in *Olivia and the Little Way*, which was a winner in the 2009 Catholic Press Association Book Awards. Belanger is a graduate of Michigan State University. She founded Harvey House Publishing in 2008 with a mission to provide books for youths that celebrate the Catholic faith, modesty, and a wholesome childhood.

Olivia's Gift is a story well told, but with a tendency to be preachy in places. Catholic parents, plus teachers of pre-teens will certainly want to add this book to their reading list.
PENNY HASTINGS (January 3, 2011)

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