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

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

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

Mary Ligon: Yes, I give my full consent.

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

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

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

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

Megan Best: So, this is all in Dayton?

Mary Ligon: This was all in Dayton.

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

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

Megan Best: Okay.

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

Megan Best: Yeah.

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

Megan Best: But you felt liberated.

Mary Ligon: I felt liberated. I wasn't living under the shadow of a sibling, or the only one I had
was my brother. And he did not like school at all, so I was looking real good at this point.

Megan Best: Yeah.

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

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

Mary Ligon: Oh, absolutely.

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

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

Megan Best: Yeah.

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

Megan Best: Okay.

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

Megan Best: Right.

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

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

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

Megan Best: Really?

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

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

Mary Ligon: Um, I remember the math teacher um, that I had for a couple of years and she was very interactive. We would go up to the board and work things out and she would make us do it. But, um, the history teacher... is I loved history. I still do. But the history teacher I remember when
we were learning about the Civil War. And he would sit, and I remember this went on for a couple weeks, and he would sit and read letters that the doctors on the fields had written home and was telling them about what was going on. And then the wives writing back to tell them what was going on at home and the stresses they were involved. So you had this communication, and I remember he sat on a desk and read this and I just remember being like, "Oh, please do not let that bell ring," because it was fascinating to me that like they had the ability to reattach limbs but they didn't have the time at that point. And all you had time to do was just remove a limb and the next one had to come in.

**Megan Best:** Wow.

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

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

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

**Megan Best:** Okay.

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

**Megan Best:** Yeah.

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

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

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

**Megan Best:** Yeah.

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

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

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

**Megan Best:** Okay.

**Mary Ligon:** And they really foster. And then I had my dad who was bringing it in and we would I
would read he would tell me to read something and then we'd talk about it. Um, but you know I
love biology. I loved. I mean we would get the frogs and you know we would prepare them and
dissect. And it was fun. But my biology teachers were the football coaches and not to, but they
didn't really care too much.

Megan Best: Right.

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

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

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

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

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

Megan Best: Wow.

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

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

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

Megan Best: Yes, that opportunity right there!

Mary Ligon: That was really amazing, yes.

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

Mary Ligon: She connected with us. And she connected with me. Um, I had a boyfriend in high
school and things weren't going well. There was one day when I was crying. And she, she had a
costume dress dressing room and she grabbed me and pulled me in there. And she said, "What is
wrong?" And she said, "I need to know." And so, I told her my boyfriend liked this other girl. And
she just started talking to me that I was worth far more than that and I didn't need to put myself in
that position. And she just. I she was just amazing because she took me at a very low point and said
and kinda said, "Wake up! This isn't for the rest of your life."

Megan Best: Wow.

Mary Ligon: And I kind-of walked out after that like, "Okay." And I was she helped direct me. She
helped direct me. But I just did admired her in the way that she held a standard. There was one dress
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
on this because you did not do well on it." And I was kind-of like, "Wait a minute, I thought
you...Because you like me." But she's like, "You cannot turn in work like that."

Megan Best: Her standard of excellence was high.

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

Megan Best: I see.

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

Megan Best: Wow.

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

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

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

Megan Best: Parents were just above...

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

Megan Best: Okay.

Mary Ligon: At least in my intel.

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

Mary Ligon: I've always found myself in a teaching position ever since I was little. The earliest
time I can think of was, I was probably ten or eleven years old in our neighborhood. The...we did a
daycare in the summer for little kids so...that all the mothers would throw their, you know, 5 and 6-year-olds and so forth at us and we keep them for the whole morning. It was a Mother's Day Out thing. And so my friend and I did it and she would do games and I would say, "Okay, well I'm going to take the kids and we're going to go and walk through the woods and I'm going to teach them all the parts the trees and show them all the different moss and how it all works together." And it was funny because I don't know when I would have learned all that, but I certainly knew what I was doing. But we loved it and the kids loved it. We would go and collect acorns and make little people things that they...Oh, it was adorable. But.

Megan Best: How many kids?

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

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

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

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

Mary Ligon: Oh, yes.

Megan Best: Okay.

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

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

Mary Ligon: Oh, we made money. Oh, we made money. Yes.

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

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

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

Mary Ligon: Well I went in, out of high school I took a year off to find myself and then... So, after I was on my quest to find myself, which meant that I would go visit all my friends in college, I came back, and my mother had gotten me a job at a factory. Yeah, you never let your parents get you a job at a factory. So, my mother had gone there, pretty much ran the interview for me. Yes, it was unbelievable. I still wonder about that. How did that happen? That was real odd. Anyway so.
came back, she said, "Go up there." I went in, and the guy... And I wondered. He was kind-of smirking the whole time, so I knew my mother had been up there and I was not going to stay at home and be a couch potato. So, I worked in this factory putting cotton balls in catheter trays and for medical supplies. After about six months of that, I said I'm going to school. So, I went to nursing school. So, after I had gotten out of there, I found myself in my job, that I was constantly being placed in the training. I was constantly training new nurses, especially if they had just come out of a four-year college because those nurses had not really had much practical floor experience. So, I was always the one that, and they would come from all different floors in the hospital, and I would be the one to take them around and train them. So, I always found myself doing that. And I remember even thinking there, "Hmm, this seems to keep happening to me. No matter where I am." And I loved it. I mean I loved it.

Megan Best: So, you loved nursing. You loved...did you like nursing school?

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

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

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

Megan Best: Why did she say that?

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

Megan Best: Okay.

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

Megan Best: Yeah.
Mary Ligon: But they probably would have liked it more many of them. But I just saw. Wow you can draw these kids, and there is a way that they can learn this information you can do it and it be 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 about teaching doing that. It's a lot of work if you want to make it interesting.

Megan Best: Right.

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

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

Mary Ligon: Yes.

Megan Best: Okay so then did you...

Mary Ligon: So, then I came. Yes.

Megan Best: Okay.

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

Megan Best: Heavy load.

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

Megan Best: Yeah.

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

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

Mary Ligon: Nineteen years.

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

Mary Ligon: Yes.

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

Mary Ligon: Oh, my goodness.

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

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

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

Mary Ligon: Oh, that I keep emphasizing?

Megan Best: Yeah, academic or personal?

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

Megan Best: Right.

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

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

Mary Ligon: Oh, yes and I think any teacher especially now with the drugs and the things and you
see students and what they're going through, I would think most teachers, I mean just being a human being you'd see these students and you don't want them to go down this path of destruction.

Megan Best: Right.

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

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

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

Megan Best: Yeah, and you ask them questions.

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

Megan Best: Yeah.

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

Megan Best: So, wonder is what drives you?

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

Megan Best: Right.

Mary Ligon: And I keep telling the students, you know, 20 years from now what I'm teaching you may not be what's really what they really find things are going to change. So, you have to understand that I'm teaching you what we know now.
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.
Megan Best: Right. And what do you see, and it could be here at Coram Deo or just your experience with, um, meeting other teachers and knowing about other school situations. What do you think are like the biggest problems in the education world today?

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

Megan Best: Right.

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

Megan Best: Wow.

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

Megan Best: Staying current is really important.

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

Megan Best: Right, you have to be aware.

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

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

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

**Megan Best:** Right.

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

**Megan Best:** Right.

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

**Megan Best:** Right.

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

**Megan Best:** Yeah.

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

**Megan Best:** It spilled over.

**Mary Ligon:** He was willing.

**Megan Best:** Yeah.

**Mary Ligon:** He was willing to open himself up and I told him, "You know, you've got to open yourself up, and be willing to try new things." I tell them sometimes, "You're like old people, you...
don't like to try anything new." And they're like, "Yeah, we do." And I go, "No, you don't. Look at yourselves. And so, I tell them, "You got to try stuff."

Megan Best: Yeah.

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

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

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

Megan Best: Right.

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

Megan Best: Really?

Mary Ligon: No.

Megan Best: It was just kind-of...

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

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

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