



Marilyn Sharpe
Ministries, LLC

SAINTS IN DISGUISE: FAITH-FILLED GRANDPARENTS

Home Base, E-Newsletter of the LCMS October 2009

At the end of this month, we celebrate All Saints Day. This is our invitation to reflect on those saints of God (yes, we are Lutheran, and know that they are also sinners, redeemed by Jesus Christ, but declared saints, all the same) who have shaped us in the faith. Let's unpack one wondrous part of God's plan to nurture a vibrant, life-transforming faith in Jesus Christ, by using faith-filled grandparents.

WHO?

Some of us are blessed to count our grandparents among that "great ... cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) that surrounds and shapes and holds us in the faith. Some of us had faith grandparents, saints who were not related to us by birth or adoption or marriage, who chose to love us, to journey faithfully with us, and to leave the fingerprints of Jesus all over our lives. Both kinds of faith grandparents count!

Now, for many of us, it is our turn. Perhaps you have beloved grandchildren, who have arrived in your family by birth, adoption, foster care, or marriage. Maybe they live in your community, or maybe they live on the other side of the country or across an ocean. Or perhaps you don't yet or will never have grandchildren to whom you are related by legally recognized bonds. All of us, however, are called to pass on a vibrant and life-transforming faith in Jesus Christ to all of God's children. God is calling us to be faith grandparents to all God's children.

WHY ME? WHY NOW?

God is calling you to this holy ministry because you are a person of mature faith in Jesus Christ, a faith robust enough to pass on to children. Also, this is your time, your turn to leave a legacy. You probably have written a will, which will designate to whom you are leaving things of material value. Faith grandparenting is your opportunity to leave a living legacy of what you believe about the Triune God and the stories about God's faithfulness and redemption in your life. And you cannot choose an executor to do this work; it is yours to do, right now, today. "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24) Let us fill this day with the presence of God for all those whom we love, all those who need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. And, if not you, who? Whom can God send? Won't you answer, with the words of Isaiah 6:8, "Here I am; send me!" This is, without any doubt, the most important legacy you will leave, the one that endures forever.

WHERE? WHEN?

Keep these commandments in your heart. Recite them to your [grand]children and talk about them, when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

This makes it very clear: we are only to talk about God when we are at home and when we are not at home, when we are lying down or not lying down. Anyplace else, any other time, we can talk about whatever we want to talk about! So, God's plan is for faith talk to suffuse all of life, everywhere, all of the time.

But what if we live a long distance apart or if our lives are so busy we don't see one another very often. Living today, we are blessed with lots of ways to bridge distance and time apart. Use your phone. Call regularly and frequently to check in, to say "I love you," to ask for prayer requests, to catch up on one another's lives. Send a card or letter through the postal mail, declaring your love and telling the child you are heart-to-heart, even when you are not face-to-face. Send an email. If you don't know how to email, ask a younger person to teach you. You never know, that youth might well become one of your faith grandchildren! Learn to text. Send a care package, full of "faith groceries" – an age appropriate Bible, a devotional book, toys or Bible story books for young children that help them learn the stories, a simple prayer from your heart, a favorite Bible story, the candies with wrappers that contain a Bible verse. Tape record yourself telling a story of God's presence in your life or reading a favorite Bible story. Make being together a priority and make it happen at every possible opportunity.

If you live close by, spend time together and do all of the same things. Let the child know how much you cherish time together.

But what about those faith grandchildren? Where am I going to find them? In your congregation, they might hang out in the narthex or the youth room, in the library or the five year old Sunday school class. They might be in the pew in front of you in worship or sit next to you at a church supper. Smile at their parents. Say something kind and encouraging. Go where the kids are. Introduce yourself. Ask their name, and remember it, or ask again. Ask them what they are enjoying this year. Ask them what is a challenge about being a kid their age. Listen, listen, listen and remember. Talk to them, even if you need to go find them again next week.

But they might be in your neighborhood. Get to know the kids. Hang out with them. Talk to them and listen to them. They will eventually come to find you.

WHAT AND HOW? GETTING STARTED

At The Youth & Family Institute, we have identified four very simple, practical, doable faith practices that weave faith formation into our daily lives. They are the Four Keys, spiritual practices for faith formation:

CARING CONVERSATIONS: These are the floor under all of our close relationships and are the way we model and transmit Christian values and faith to the next generation. Listening deeply, respectfully and with great care and speaking with love and gentleness helps children experience the love of God. Responding to the daily concerns of our children give us their trust and the credibility to invite them to express God's love to others. Listen, listen, listen. Remember, remember, remember. Share yourself, too. Tell your faith stories. Share family history. Touch with great affection and gentleness.

DEVOTIONS: Turn up the "God language" under our caring conversations and you have family devotions. Adults need to learn the Christian message and the Biblical story, finding themselves in God's story and God in their story, in order to be able to pass on faith to their children and to other adults. Sometimes, devotions use scripture, a devotional text and prayer at a set time in a set place each day. Sometimes, it grows out of spontaneous conversation and wondering aloud how God might be present in the sunset or current events or a family celebration and what God might be calling us to do in response. Our Christian

faith shapes the whole of our lives and involves a lifetime of study, reflection and prayer. Pray with and for the child. Pray prayers of thanksgiving. Pray for God's presence and healing in the hurts of the world. Tell your stories of God's faithfulness in your life. Ask the child, "Where have you seen Jesus today?"

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS: We already have a multitude of rituals and traditions. How do we wake one another up, say goodbye for the day, welcome one another home, and say good night? How do we celebrate birthdays and holidays? What stories and recipes and activities and values shape our identity as a family? How might we pray for one another when leaving for the day, when facing a hard decision, when dealing with stress? Find God in the midst of these daily or seasonally repeated experiences and we will suffuse family life with God's presence. This makes it very clear what our family values, believes and promotes and how faith shapes us individually and as a family. Make the sign of the cross on a beloved forehead, reminding the child of his or her baptism and declaring that Jesus loves this child, and you do, too. Light a candle on the table, reminding both of you that Jesus is the light of the world, there all of the time, a light that darkness cannot overcome.

SERVICE: Why would we do service together? Isn't it enough to do it individually? Learning that "faith is caught more than it is taught", we understand that we need to be together as family or faith family, linking the generations, to serve as a loving response to what God has already done for us. Together, we have a chance to talk about what we have done, why we have done it, and what we have learned. This is the way to make service a joyous opportunity to love God back, to say "thank you", to be the light of Christ for others. Serving with children and youth makes it a habit, a spiritual practice, a faithful way of life. I would also challenge you to serve together, without also have caring conversations, a devotional time of claiming God's presence, and it becoming a favorite tradition.

God is with you in faith-full grandparenting. We all thank God for you saints in disguise!