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Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
Marilyn Sharpe

REAL FAMILY

With permission, I am sharing a letter sent to me recently by a good friend. This, I believe, reflects what it is to be a “real family.” As you begin this new year, may you see and appreciate all of the family that you have and make room for those who need you to be family.

Dear Marilyn,

I have to share some good news in my life. I was in Chicago last weekend and closed on a condo. My son S.J. and I are partners in this venture. He will live there now and I will join him in a few years when I retire.

I don't know if I told you about S.J. He is a son by Spirit not by blood. He was found by our youth group when I was in Chicago. His father, who had physically abused him, threw him out of the house. He was living in a warehouse.

I took him in when he was 14. He completed high school and college and is now the Human Resources Director at an Embassy Suites Hotel. We have grown close over the last few years. It was not always that way. You know parenting!!! He had street sense and could be very manipulative to defend himself. I stuck it out through all the deceptions. That's what love does, you know.

He surprised me three years ago by coming to a surprise party my congregations had for the 30th anniversary of my ordination. My brother flew him East, although we had only been in touch with occasionally. SJ announced to everyone that I was his dad. (Thankfully, he explained that I was his foster dad. What trouble he could have made for such a pious, single pastor!!!)

From then on, I have had an "organic" sense of connection to him. I never felt this way before. He has felt the same way. We talk on the phone, share e-mails, and are always sure to say "I love you." A friend said, "Frank, you may not have done diapers, but you have parented."

Here are words he sent me recently.

I may not have said this enough, and you know how letting honest emotion come out gives me a stomach ache, but I have to say it. You will never really know the way that I feel about you. It is more than the title “Father” could ever describe.

Unfortunately, there is no word that encompasses the things that you have done for me. It's about repairing a broken human being, healing a damaged heart. It's about letting go, laughing, loving, and, yes, even the daily spoonfuls of faith in God that have truly made me who I am. I owe you the very person that I am because of what you have given, sacrificed, and had faith in. If "I love you" were enough, I would say it to you more often, but society has really watered down that phrase. So please know that, even in my silence, I love you more than you will ever truly know.

It is time now to take some Maalox. I will talk to you soon.

*Your son,
SJ*

I am sharing all this with you, Marilyn, because I know you collect stories; also, because I am very proud. Christ has brought us together and continues to sustain us.

I feel so blessed. The faith is passing on. SJ is now parenting a young man, shunned by his family. So I guess I am a grandfather! We are all going to get together for Thanksgiving in the new house. Included will be a retired Episcopal priest and his wife, former colleagues of mine in Chicago. They had three children, but now tragically have none. I am their adopted son; so now we have great grandparents! None are legal adoptions, but adoptions by the Spirit.

*Peace, joy and love,
Frank*

Thank you, Frank, for sharing your story and your family. God's blessing on you all.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Thank God for all of the people that you call family.
2. Make a photo collage of all of those people and hang it for all to see.
3. At the dinner table, light a votive candle in honor of each one. See how it brings the light of Christ into your home.
4. Call, email, or write a note that expresses your love and appreciation of all they mean to you.
5. As a family, discuss who is someone that needs you to be their family right now. Invite them to a family dinner.