



Marilyn Sharpe
Ministries, LLC

February 2013
Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
Marilyn Sharpe

GATHER AND CELEBRATE: MAKING JOYOUS MEMORIES

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Philippians 4:4

If we didn't get Paul's point the first time, he says it again: Rejoice! How many opportunities has your family taken to gather, to celebrate, to make memories, and to rejoice? Families are in the business of memory-making. It is one of the ways we create and live our unique identities.

There are so many opportunities: birthdays, weddings, graduations, house warmings, new job, college acceptance letter, baptismal anniversaries, first day of school, making a sports team, singing or playing an instrument in a concert, performing in a play. Then, there are the seasonal, annually repeated opportunities: the first days of each season, Martin Luther King's birthday, Presidents' Day, the 4th of July, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving ... and Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter. What are the opportunities your family takes to gather, to celebrate, to make memories?

Our family is known for our Christmas day tradition of staying in pajamas all day long. Just our family, savoring time together. We also are known as the family that goes to the cemetery where my parents are buried after worship on Easter morning, claiming our personal stake in Jesus' resurrection and telling stories of these two faithful saints to the next generation. We are also known as the family that never has the "right number" of candles on a birthday cake, because everyone in attendance inserts one candle, naming a quality of the birthday "kid" for which they thank God. And we are known as the family that has vacationed for 35 summers at Isle O'Dreams Lodge on Bad Axe Lake. (Yes, that IS why I taught my children and grandchildren to enunciate!) We

cherish the gatherings, the celebrations, the memories we make. They are a vitally important part of our family identity.

I have heard adults bemoan how busy they are, really too busy to create traditions. Really? That is why I shared ours. Nothing about them is elaborate or fussy or time consuming. This doesn't mean adding to your busy schedule, just naming and claiming what you already do and cherish. What are some of the things your family has already done and enjoyed? Do you go to the State Fair or go ice skating on New Year's Day? Do you celebrate birthdays or visit grandparents? Do you hike in one of the local parks or swim in one of our lakes or pack a picnic supper and feed the ducks?

Some of us have too many traditions and we feel trapped and overwhelmed. That is a perfect time to do a little house cleaning, eliminating those that no longer work for us. We all need to delete some of the things we have done in the past that no longer bring us joy.

Why? Because, you need space for new traditions that may surface. I have learned that if you do something once and a child likes it, it's your new family tradition. You thought you were stopping at the Dairy Queen just this once on your way home from church. Then, next Sunday, your child announces that you can't forget to go to the DQ, because, "That's what we always do!"

Living a life of intentional, mindful celebration will fill you all with joy and create a treasure trove of cherished memories. Rejoice. Again I will say, Rejoice!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. As a family, talk about the events and traditions and gatherings that bring you joy and shape your family identity. Make a list. Post it. If there are "holes" in the list, discuss what you might add.
2. Gather your neighbors for a mid-winter potluck, just to reconnect and share time together. Plan games that all of the generations can play or use conversation starters that include all ages.
3. Throw a Valentine's Day party for your family or extended family or chosen family. Provide materials to make valentines. Decorate a box to put them in, just like you had in grade school. Sing songs that include the word "love." Decorate heart-shaped cookies. Serve all red and pink food. For each person there, name one thing you love about them.
4. Tell your children the source of your favorite family traditions. Share the traditions you had in your family growing up. Let them know what you hope they will remember about growing up in the family you are raising.
5. Thank God for the gift of family and of the traditions that give you identity and joy!

