

HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 3 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

In This Issue

We recognize the unique and powerful relationship between children and their grandparents. Grandmothers and grandfathers can offer wisdom, counsel, comfort, treats, guidance, and care to their grandchildren. At times a grandparent can venture deeper into the heart of a child or teen than a parent, empowering greater growth and maturity. They can also be a terrific influence on a child's faith growth. In this *HomeWord* issue, we encourage families to nurture their relationships with grandparents, and we invite grandparents to reflect on how they might gently and naturally share faith with their grandchildren.

Enjoy!

Bread for the Sandwich

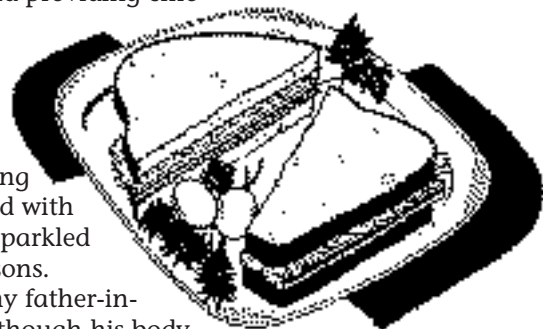
by Jean M. Buell

We are in the "sandwich generation." For the past nine years, my husband and I have been caregivers for aging parents as well as growing children. We are the meat and they are the bread. Far from bland, this sandwich has had a savory spiritual flavor.

Our "sandwiching" started when my grandfather-in-law fell and broke his hip. We were the nearest relatives capable and willing to assist him as he moved from independent living to a nursing home. My husband was like a son to him, managing his finances and providing emotional support beyond measure.

During this time Grandpa never feared death. Many times he questioned why he had outlived his daughter. He also frequently cited a Norwegian saying that roughly translates to "satiated with the days of old." Mostly stoic, he sparkled whenever he saw his great-grandsons.

Shortly after Grandpa died, my father-in-law moved to a nursing home. Although his body is immobilized by Parkinson's disease, his heart moves closer to God each day. The highlight of his week is to read the Scriptures at the Sunday worship service for residents. When we attend, my sons hear their grandpa read to a community of faith that sits in wheelchairs, not pews. They see living stories of the



Beatitudes. The residents are delighted by the boys because they see hope in them.

My mother-in-law also died several years ago. My oldest son barely remembers her, but he was the apple of her eye. Shortly before his first Communion I looked through her jewelry and found a brass enameled cross with her initial on it. My son's grandfather gave it to him and told him how proud his grandma would have been. My son was proud to wear her cross that day.

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Grandparents and Faith

by Leif Kehrwald

Grandparents enjoy a unique and privileged relationship with their grandchildren. They can bring them gifts for no special reason, feed them treats normally forbidden by Mom and Dad, allow them to stay up late, and offer a whole host of "spoilers" that endear the child(ren) to Grandma and Grandpa. As one grandparent said, "Now I finally get to enjoy the "grand" part of parenting."

Of course this romantic image isn't accurate for all children and their grandparents. Many are separated through miles or family strife, and can only develop a surface relationship with each other. Many children are being raised solely by their grandparents, leaving little or no time and energy for the "grand" part.

Still, the relationship between children and their grandparents can be special, particularly when it comes to their faith growth. As a teenager I recall the ease with which I could discuss "spiritual stuff" with both my grandmothers—a topic not easily broached with my parents. They listened carefully to my

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Grandloving Ideas

From their web site, (<http://world.std.com/~jcarlson/senior/visitlogic.html>), Sue Johnson and Julie Carlson offer ideas for grandparents to stay in touch with their grandchildren. They encourage grandparents to “toss aside your embarrassment about how you look playing in the sandbox or giving your special bear-hug, and revel in knowing that your grandchild only has eyes for the wonderful person you are inside. That’s the magic of the love between grandchild and grandparent.”

Stay Connected

If you don’t get to see your grandchildren very often, it’s important to stay connected with each child, especially as he or she grows older and individual interests emerge. Try these ideas:

- Send a note or postcard for no particular reason other than to just say, “Hi! How’s it going?”
- Place a phone call just to the grandchild. Talk to Mom or Dad at another time. Make this call a special one specifically for the child or teen.
- Send a simple gift to one grandchild at a time. Nothing expensive, but make it unique to that child’s interests, such as a book or a baseball cap.
- Ask the grandchild to pray for you on your feast day. Or ask the child when his baptismal day is so you can pray for her or him. Don’t ask the parents, let the child have that conversation.

Are you a grandparent now? Perhaps you will be someday soon. How will you establish a bond with your grandchildren? How will you nurture those special relationships? How can you be a model of faith for your grandchildren?

A Sunday school teacher suddenly stopped reading a passage in her Bible and asked her kindergarten pupils, “Why do you believe in God?” She got a variety of answers, but none so interesting as the one from the little boy who said, “I guess it just runs in our family.”

Faith does run in the family. Especially when “faith-full” grandparents offer all that God has given them in the way of love, courage, self-discipline, and power to their grandchildren.

(“Bread for the Sandwich,” continued from page 1)

Although my parents aren’t officially in the sandwich, these layers would seem incomplete without a few words about them. They are the quintessential volunteers of retirement. For several years at their church, my mother was in charge of funeral luncheons while my dad was in charge of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Now they take Communion to those who are homebound. They give rides through a local service organization, and they deliver meals-on-wheels.

My children don’t see all that their elders do for others, but they do see a tender side of Grandma and Papa’s faith. They know that Papa composes grace for Thanksgiving each year, and he can’t read it through without a few tears. They also know that Grandma has a cozy lap to sit on during Mass.

A family doesn’t have to be a “care-taking sandwich” to be “bread” for one another. Intergenerational faith sharing is a way for grandparents to teach grandchildren without lesson plans, lectures, or books. Grandparents teach by what they do and who they are.

There are no recipes for a “faith-sharing sandwich,” but these steps might be helpful. First, start to wonder how the grandparents and children in your family can be “bread” for one another. Second, look and listen carefully for the ways that they express their faith. Third, find a way for them to share those experiences with one another. Fourth, take a bite and do it!

(“Grandparents and Faith,” continued from page 1)

soul-searching questions and offered gentle insights that were rich with life experience.

Amid the bonds of family love there is a freedom of responsibility between children and grandparents that allows for connection, sharing, and spiritual growth. Even Saint Paul was aware of this as he wrote to Timothy:

I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and that I am confident lives also in you.

2 Timothy 1:5

Believe it or not, this is the only New Testament mention of a grandparent. Yet Paul was clearly aware that Timothy came from a family of faith, and that same faith would also blossom in Timothy.

Grandparents have a unique opportunity to offer genuine, lived faith to their grandchildren. This, of course, is the absolute best gift that grandparents can bring, not to spoil the child, but to empower the child with a gift that lasts a lifetime and beyond. It is a true gift of self. They can offer the same kind of faith that Lois passed on to Timothy, and that Timothy relied on in his moments of doubt and uncertainty.

What do you recall about your grandparents? Did they have an impact on your faith as a child? as a teen? as an adult?