

My Life as a Father

One of the things that can be a bit jarring as I travel so much, is when people in the wider Church think of me as a Bishop apart from my being a Husband, Dad, Grandfather and a Son. I must confess that I sometimes miss my “Son” status, on a natural level, on Father’s Day and Mother’s Day. I never knew my grandparents, since all four died before I was born, but I always asked any question I could about them, so that they would be more than a name on a genealogy chart. Therefore, when Father’s Day comes each year I have memories of stories about my Swedish grandfather - who had a fascination with languages, was a tool and die specialist, and could take apart engines and rebuild them. I have memories of stories regarding my Welsh grandfather, who spoke two languages, who worked his way up in the Tin Mills to be a Superintendent and who traded in his automobile every year for a new one.

My own father had humble beginnings, and eventually worked his way up from a 16-year-old mill worker into being the Supervisor of Accounting in the Pay Roll division at a Steel Mill. My father was a gentle man, who never used profanity, rarely raised his voice and didn’t like conflict. He thought that problems should be resolved, and even though some of his siblings seemed to like conflict, my father would suffer in silence over strained relationships. My father and I had the kind of relationship that many fathers and sons have dreamed that they could have. We didn’t have arguments, but we could have discussions of disagreements. I was told that I once receive a spanking as a child for stepping out into the street unattended. At 54 years old he was still my “off the field” catcher, and in spite of his trifocal glasses, his semi-pro basketball career injured knees, and his oft broken ribs, he caught the curve balls, the forkballs and the “in the dirt” pitches.

My dear wife has brought into this world three children whom we adore, and they in turn have brought into this world our four grandchildren whom we also adore. Jo and I look carefully at our marriage vows, and particularly at the two words “love” and “cherish.” Many marriages are fragile because those two terms are not operative, nor are they grounded in a total commitment to Jesus Christ who must be the “third Person” in a healthy marriage. My wife has always provided a safe and calm haven for us in our home, where our children could enjoy stability and emotional support, and I could sit down at supper each night knowing that all of the conversations would make us stronger. The test of a good marriage and also good friendships is to ask the question: “Does he/she make me a better, more positive productive, and spiritually more faithful person than I would be without him/her?” Happy families and happy marriages are where we see healthy teamwork, and where we do not see people trying to “get their own way” by manipulation, bullying, verbal/physical threats and offering the

“silent treatment.” God has blessed me in being in such a home environment, which has made it possible for me to have a ministry where what I do is supported by my family, and where passion and compassion are shown for the ministry we all do together - when we were all together in a church for 20 marvelous years, and now collectively. To put it differently, my wife and I are partners in many endeavors, and our children love the Church and more particularly the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ.

Some people are shocked when I say that my children and I have never had an argument. We have never exchanged harsh words with one another, and we enjoy every moment we are together. Likewise, I cannot remember any problems with my grandchildren, other than the usual kinds of guidance that grandparents need to offer around a swimming pool or a crowded Mall.

One of the motivating factors in moving from Illinois, after being apart from two of our children for 15 years, and another one for 5 years, was the recognition that we are better Christians - better people - when are together. **Each one of us becomes a better person when we celebrate the gift that God has given us in being a family. I simply cannot thank God enough.**