



Volume 4 Number 2

A Newsletter of WIN - USA Ladies

Children are A Gift From God

Marianne Douge #mamaof5

“Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord.” declares Psalm 127:3 and being a mom of five kids, I am definitely “my-cup-runneth-over”-blessed. It’s rare to see large families these days and many have made assumptions as to why my husband and I allowed ourselves to be “burdened” with 5 kids. Even I am amazed, especially since I’ve known from the beginning that I was probably not going to be touted as the greatest mom nor was I the best example to raise children. But God has allowed it and I trust that since He chose to bless me with a child (over and over again), then He will provide for them everything, including the mom they need.

It was Saturday, January 5th, 2002, when I first found out I was going to be a mom. I was 23 years old. My boyfriend (Christian) and I were still in school pursuing our Associates Degree. We didn’t have real jobs, and we had just moved back home to patch our relationship with our parents after 2 years of living together. I dreaded telling them the news, as if they needed more heartache from me. But I stuck with the solid belief that children are a gift from God, swallowed my pride and humbly presented my situation to them. The pregnancy filled me with confusion as to who I was, who I should be and who I wanted to be to the child. I remember praying a lot, asking God for forgiveness, for guidance, and for some comfort that I made the right decision.

The first few months as a new mom was tough along with being a newlywed living in my in-laws’ house. The small blessings of giggles and cuddles here and there were grossly outweighed by the endless crying, the exhaustion from sleepless nights and the stress of being completely

dependent on my in-laws. My first born, Nina, was not an easy baby (we still claim her as the worst baby ever!). I started to second-guess our decision to get married and have a baby. Clearly, we were not ready. Then one night, while Christian was carrying the baby over his shoulders, pacing the floor to rock her to sleep, Nina looked up and saw me across the room. She beamed with excitement for me to get her and for the first time, I felt that I could do anything, and I would give everything for her to always look at me that way. That’s when I felt a little tug and heard God whisper at my core, “*This is how I feel every time you turn to look for me.*” I understood even more God’s love and His desire to have that intimate relationship with me. I got a glimpse of God’s delight when I look for Him, the depth of His love, and I was blessed.

My second daughter was born three years later and I was grateful to have an “easy” baby this time. Maya was sleeping 9 hours at 3 weeks old and burped herself (I’m not kidding... I fed her, put her down, and she would burp and fall asleep on her own). Yet my eldest grew more head strong, resilient, even defiant on many occasions. I remember driving around doing errands with my mom and talking to her about it, probably feeling guilty that I did not enjoy being Nina’s mom all the time. My mom said, “She’s your sandpaper. She’s sanding away all these parts of you and challenging you. It doesn’t feel nice and it can be really uncomfortable, but in the end you will be shaped into the kind of mom and woman God wants you to be. You and Jon (my brother) were my sandpapers. Except you’re the extra rough paper. Maybe Nina is yours.” I think I took her comment with a grain of salt at the time, but as always, I took her words to

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Children are a Gift . . .

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heart. I do remember praying that day, "Lord... sand away and shape me! I want to be who you want me to be!!!" I would like to believe that God blessed me with five children because of His generosity and not because I'm such a blockhead that I need five sandpapers to get me in shape. Regardless, the more sandpapers, the smoother I will be and closer to who He wants me to be. (Side note: By God's grace, Nina is now the best first born ever).

With more children came more mess, more needs, more food, more clothes, less time, less hair, and less patience. But more children also meant more hugs, more laughter, more memories, more moments. There are also more personalities. Yes, they clash often, but looking from a broad mommy point of view, they complement one another. Nina, now 14, is consistent, disciplined, resilient (we turned it for the good!) and runs the household cleaning schedule like a true "Ate." Maya at 11 is free spirited, with amazing people skills and charisma, and can properly direct everyone when to stay out of mommy's way and when to ask for chocolate ice cream. Marcus is 10 and is the brain, but he also has the fullest heart. Nathan, 4, is our class comedian. He is creative, a great storyteller and loves to bring everyone together to play. Mason at 21 months is a brute force of strength, but softens when it comes to cute animals. Their personalities can even bless each other! I always say that they're the perfect combination of employees for a start-up. God's plans are perfect and whole and I am blessed to witness His vision for these kids work together for good (Romans 8:2).

Their personalities are also a reflection of who I am. They're smart, driven, charming and overall really good kids... just like me! But I also see my shortcomings: impatient, quick tempered, indecisive, lacking in stamina, and (my mom's favorite description of me) "wishy-washy." Having five kids is like holding five mirrors at different angles of myself every day to remind me, "Hey! That's you! You should fix that before you can help them fix that!" Through my kids, I get a daily reminder of God's patience with me and faithfulness to me because

"He who began a good work in me will continue to perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6) or at least until He calls me Home.

God has also blessed me with three in heaven. The first 2 miscarried at 12 weeks and the third at 8 weeks old. I still count them as my babies and my blessings. The first time, I had gone through the DNC procedure and was pretty detached from the whole experience. The second miscarriage, however, was traumatic. I miscarried at work and physically saw and held the tiny fetus in my hands. But God comforted me and as I poured out my heart on Facebook, I hope I also blessed others. On March 28th, 2010 I wrote:

"Seeing that tiny baby made me realize how important EVERY child conceived is... whether born or miscarried. Isaiah 49:1 says, "The Lord called me before my birth; from within the womb He called me by name." And it hit me. I never acknowledged my first miscarriage as a real baby, created and called back to heaven. Wow. What a powerful revelation. And then I remembered Psalm 139:14 - 16 "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. "Not only did God know me in my mother's womb, but He knew my baby in my womb and HAS a purpose for his/her creation and calling."

At that time, I was flooded with questions and thankfully, God answered them all. I read a sermon about how no baby is "bad" and so wasn't good enough to survive. That would mean that God had nothing to do with the baby's creation and death. God has revealed to me earlier that our only purpose on this earth is to worship, glorify, praise, and honor our Heavenly Father. Nothing else. EVERYTHING we do must

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Children are a Gift . . .

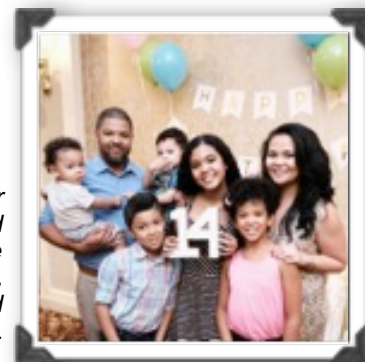
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point to worshiping and honoring God. When we do, we find fulfillment and purpose in our life. The emptiness is filled. So, if the purpose of this baby was to be conceived and be called to heaven with God to worship and glorify Him in eternity, then I am so grateful to have been a part of fulfilling God's plan. And since this trial has brought me humbly to my knees, to glorify Jesus for my salvation and to thank Him for using me as a vessel in bringing honor to His name, then this miscarriage and my previous one could not have served any greater purpose.

Yes, my unborn babies are a blessing too.

I could go on and on, page after page about how my children, born and unborn, have blessed me. I am blessed with the opportunity to serve and worship God through the responsibilities of raising five kids, from the mundane cooking or changing diapers to training up God-fearing citizens to serve in His kingdom. As a teenager, I was sure that God commissioned me to serve as a missionary in a third-world orphanage. Instead, God has blessed me with my own house full of Filipino-Haitian children to minister to. My sins as a young adult might have derailed me from His path for a while, but they did not derail God's commission for me to serve Him through His

children. Our Heavenly Father has entrusted me with His most precious creations to keep me grounded, humble, and fully dependent on Him for wisdom, provision, and protection. He has given me a glimpse of how much He knows and loves me as His child. I have been privileged to know the unconditional love of a parent to a child and gratefully acknowledge the sacrifice our Father made by sending His Son Jesus to die for me. I have felt the need to passionately pray for my children, just as Jesus prayed for me on that cross. And every night, I have been comforted by and reminded of the Holy Spirit's presence through the loving embrace of five sets of arms. **My children are my blessings**, not just because of the endless kisses I get nor the joy I receive from hearing them laugh, but ultimately **because they bring me closer to God.**



Marianne Douge (at far right), with husband Christian and their adorable kids, (from left) Mason, Marcus, Nathan, Nina and Maya.

Registration Fee:

Regular Fee - \$195

Early Bird Discounted Fee - \$185

if fully paid by April 9, 2017

For more information contact:

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THE CALL

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
Phil 3:14

LADIES RETREAT

May 5 - 7, 2017
Murrieta Hot Springs Christian Conference Center
Sponsored by WIN-LA Ladies Ministry



A Daughter's Prayer

Dear Lord,

Thank you for this day, thank you for your continuous grace.
I bring you my Mom's advice and admonition, so you can keep my heart in the proper place

Lord, when Mom asks why I don't have a boyfriend,
May it be because I am still looking for a man in your image.

When Mom asks what I'm doing with my life,
May I calmly reply, "Working so that you'll soon have an easier life."

When I'm driving and Mom says I'm not braking fast enough,
May I not speak my piece, while you fill her heart with peace.

When Mom comes to my apartment and sees something wrong with everything,
Lord, remind me that you are sharpening her critical thinking.

Lord, please help me be a daughter that Mom and Dad can be proud of,
(Even if they say I buy too much makeup and remind me that I crashed their car those two times)

Amen.



"Your children are the greatest gift God will give to you, and their souls the heaviest responsibility He will place in your hands. Take time with them, teach them to have faith in God. Be a person in whom they can have faith. When you are old, nothing else you've done will have mattered as much."

~ Lisa Wingate



His Gift His Time

Sonia Guce

When my son Brennan was 5 years old, he went on top of our fireplace mantle step, with both arms raised and blurted out “Jesus is my superhero.”

I said to myself “What a way to declare his faith.” When I asked him to explain what he just declared, he said “Jesus is powerful, He knows everything and He saves.” What a great testimony from a young child with a pure heart.

Brennan came into our lives after 10 years of waiting. Although my husband Edgar & I were involved in the children’s ministry before Brennan came, we longed to have a child of our own. Serving in the children’s ministry is always a joy but I have to admit that there were moments in our life when it hurt to serve in the children’s ministry and go home “empty handed.”

We believe the Lord uses children to bless us, bring smiles and excitement into our lives. Children are generally honest, humble, simple in their thinking and always grateful in small things you do for them, although at times they can also test your patience. There were so many things we learned from our Sunday school students. We felt the Lord has prepared us for the time when He will bless us with a child. Because of the wonderful blessings we receive from the children, we were convinced that children themselves, whether they are your own or not, are blessings from the Lord. So my husband and I agreed to go for adoption.

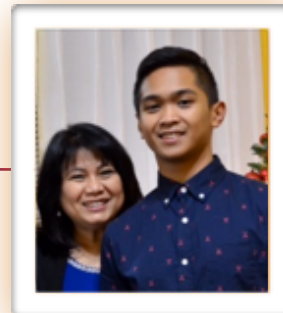
We found this couple from the Philippines, who was looking for someone to adopt their 4th child. We got so excited about the idea of adopting this baby. After months of preparation and much anticipation, the biological mother decided to keep her baby – a girl, who followed 3 boys. The Lord had closed the door of adoption for us.

We were deeply disappointed of course, but we were not without hope. We continued to trust in the Lord’s wonderful plan for us. A few years after, I gave birth to Brennan. What a surprise blessing from the Lord! I realized then that the reason God did not allow the adoption to happen is because He had another plan for us.

Brennan is a living testimony of God’s goodness and faithfulness and that nothing is impossible with Him. His gift to us came in His beautiful time.

Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.” Psalm 127:3

Sonia with Brennan. Edgar (her husband) and Sonia are committed to shaping the lives and hearts of our children and have headed the Children’s Ministry since the WCFI’s (WIN-NJ) inception.



Who Can I Trust?

Joan Mondragon

Last summer, my kids and I were in a situation that could have put us in grave danger. I drove out of state with my kids to meet up with cousins for a weekend getaway. Before reaching the place, I had battery trouble. It appeared that the battery was not charging even when the engine was on. I drove on to meet my cousins and told them about my car trouble but because it re-started without any problem, we quickly dismissed the issue.

When it was time to drive to the hotel, my real problems started. First, the speedometer froze, then the lights went out and eventually all power was lost from the dashboard. This happened while we were driving through a hilly and deserted part of the town. I called my cousins and asked to stop at the nearest gas station or a car shop.

In the meantime, my youngest son, Zachary started asking questions. "Why did the power go out?," "Did you check whether there are other things in the car that could bring the power back up?" Sensing anxiety and concern in his voice, I answered "Why don't you pray instead. Ask God to keep us safe and then put your trust in Him." He was silent and I knew then that he was praying. When we reached the bottom of the hill, lo and behold we saw a gas station next to a grocery store. We pulled into the station and by this time, the car had stalled. The engine would start, but the car refused to move.

While my cousins were trying to figure out what was happening, a stranger approached and asked if we needed help. Guess what? He was a mechanic. Although in the end he was not able to fix the car, he gave us a number for a towing company. His wife also happened to work at the nearby grocery shop and she agreed to keep watch over my car thru the store's camera.

I have to admit that although I was trying to be strong for my kids, I was worried and scared for the safety of my family especially since my husband was not with us. When I saw my own fear and worry reflected in Zachary's reaction, I was prompted to



Joan and Zachary

turn my full attention to God and give Him my trust 100%. At times when we are in trouble, we fail to give God our full attention. We worry and we lose our focus on God.

Worry never works, so why do we worry. It never solves a problem. We waste our time worrying and it gets us nowhere. We pour out all our energy and time on the problem and yet we are still in the same situation. Why do we even waste our time worrying? Luke 12:25 says, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?"

Trust God and let His Word reign in our hearts. Let us face worry armed with God's Word and let us turn our "What ifs" into "Why not" that will give God the glory He deserves. Let us give God our unconditional trust just as He gives His unconditional love to us.

Back to the story – My car was towed and fixed at the garage and we were able to drive back with no further hitches. In the safety of our home, I talked to Zachary about our experience and pointed out how God had answered his prayer. I recounted how God directed us to that gas station, sent His angel through the stranger who offered to help with the car, and even enlisted the man's wife to watch after our car. I read to him *Psalm 23*:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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Who Can I Trust?

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This psalm is probably the most popular among kids. It is short so they love to memorize and recite it. But more than that, it offers us comfort and talks about how God protects us and provides everything we need. It also reminds us that God is always with us even when we are afraid. It offers us a life long comfort knowing that God's love is with us wherever we go. When we find ourselves in difficult situations and we have to make difficult choices, who can we trust?

Joan Mondragon is married to Roy and mother to 2 sons, Joshua and Zachary. Joan is the Ladies Ministry Head of WCFI (WIN-NJ) and also sits as a member of the WCFI Board.

"The family should be a closely knit group. The home should be a self-contained shelter of security; a kind of school where life's basic lessons are taught; and a kind of church where God is honored; a place where wholesome recreation and simple pleasures are enjoyed."

~ Billy Graham



HEAVEN'S VERY SPECIAL CHILD

*A meeting was held quite far from Earth!
It's time again for another birth.
Said the Angels to the LORD above,
This Special Child will need much love.*

*His progress may be very slow,
Accomplishments he may not show.
And he'll require extra care
From the folks he meets down there.*

*He may not run or laugh or play,
His thoughts may seem quite far away,
In many ways he won't adapt,
And he'll be known as handicapped.*

*So let's be careful where he's sent,
We want his life to be content.
Please LORD, find the parents who
Will do a special job for you.*

*They will not realize right away
The leading role they're asked to play,
But with this child sent from above
Comes stronger faith and richer love.*

*And soon they'll know the privilege given
In caring for their gift from Heaven.
Their precious charge, so meek and mild,
Is HEAVEN'S VERY SPECIAL CHILD.*

*By Edna Massionilla
December 1981*

Children with special skills are called GIFTED. Children with special needs are God's special GIFTS. To all families out there who have received the gift of a special needs child, we celebrate you and your child!

ⁱ Different not Less ... is the title of a book by Temple Grandin featuring stories of adults with autism.

A Foster Mother's Heart

Tess Sarra

In this page we give you an insight into the mind and heart of the foster parent. All too often, media has depicted foster parents as abusive, mean and heartless opportunists – using the foster system as means to financial gain.

We interviewed a foster mom from WIN New Jersey. You will see a totally different picture. We believe that this is a truer picture of a foster parent, representing the greater majority of those who have decided to embrace this role.

1. Why did you decide to become a foster parent?

Seven years ago, we learned about a tragic event that happened to a family here in Somerset county, leaving 2 very young children homeless. My heart went out to these children but unfortunately our application to foster these children was not approved.

In 2015, a social worker called us about a potential child placement. We had already made the crucial step of applying as foster parents with the Department of Social Services but now we were faced with a real decision – of bringing home and caring for somebody else's child. I did not really make a list of the pros and cons of the choice. All that mattered at the time was the urgent need of the child for a home and the possibility that this child might be deprived of the care he needed. I could not live with the regret that I was given an opportunity to do the right thing and I did not act on it. I decided on what is best for that child.

2. How do you see your role as a foster parent?

I do not have a biological child so my parenting experience came from looking after nieces and nephews. Children do not come to their biological parents with a manual of instructions. My nephews and nieces certainly didn't. But our child did.

The state clearly enumerates our responsibilities. We are supposed to provide a safe, nurturing environment conducive to the development of the child. We are to ensure the physical safety, health and wellbeing of the child – including educational, medical and dental needs.

On top of all that are our emotional and psychological covenant with the child, to be his defender, guardian, protector, advocate, shield and most of all – to give him the love of a parent. Each day, I pray that I will be able to do what He said in His word about motherhood: being there for my child, being involved in his care, teaching and training him in His Word, disciplining, nurturing, modeling with integrity. These intangibles are just as important if not more so than our contractual obligations with the state.

3. How is foster parenting different than being a typical or natural parent?

The daily demands of a foster parent are no different from any other parent. However, the accountabilities seem to be greater. We are accountable not just to ourselves as parents but to the state. The state implements a rigorous process of vetting all potential foster parents for financial, emotional and mental suitability. They do records checks, references and thorough safety assessment of the house and our surroundings. After placement, there is regular monitoring to verify that we are doing our duties. We have a continuing responsibility to the birth parents to provide opportunities to be involved and engaged in their



Tess Sarra is married to Alvin (Bong). She is a member of the WCFI (WIN-NJ) Church Board.

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Leny Misiano

Craving for a pasta but not ready to commit to the carbs?

Try this hot (literally and figuratively) alternative that will leave you wanting a second serving!

Leny is a health and diet adviser/consultant specializing in recipes using natural and organic ingredients.

Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup coconut water
- 2 cups raw cashews crushed
- 1 large garlic clove
- 1/8 of a large avocado
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon red chili paste
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt
- 3-4 medium zucchinis
- 1 medium onion

Preparation:

1. Prepare the zucchini "noodles" Use a Cuisinart machine or buy prepared zucchini noodles from the store and put it on a serving bowl/plate



2. Crush the cashew nuts and cut the avocado into cubes, set aside.
3. In a saucepan, sauté onion, put in coconut water, mix cloves, cayenne, sea salt
4. Add the curry powder and chili paste and cook until the consistency is similar to your favorite pasta sauce
5. Pour the sauce over the zucchini noodles
6. Top with the avocado and crushed cashew
7. Serve and enjoy

*Each day of our lives
we make deposits in
the memory banks of
our children.*

~ Charles (Chuck)
Swindoll

NATIONAL LADIES ADVISORY TEAM

Nickie Paulate
Tess Cordero
Rosemarie Jose
Ana Miciano



A Foster Mother's Heart

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child's care and progress. There are also confidentiality and privacy requirements to protect the child from the social impact and stigma of foster care.

4. What do you see as the biggest challenge of being a foster parent?

From the very start, my husband and I understood that being foster parents is like running a 24/7 day care. We do our very best to take care of the child while he is under our care with the understanding that he may be taken from us any time. This is the biggest challenge.

While all parent-child relationships eventually lead to separation when the child matures and goes on with his own life, the foster parent-child relationship is much more tenuous. Foster parenting is a temporary arrangement that may or may not lead to adoption. There are no guarantees! We need to "prepare the child placed in my care for reunification or another permanence goal." Simply put, we need to prepare the child (and ourselves) to either be reunited with his birth parents – or for an alternative parenting arrangements that may not include us.

Will we ever be ready for the emotional pain **if and when** our foster child is taken away from us? We hope so. We pray that the joy and blessing we have been experiencing as parents will wipe away the tears of being separated from our child.

5. What are your reflections on your new role?

"God's design for motherhood is a divine calling with eternal purpose and spiritual blessing" that will always reflect God's unconditional love. Motherhood is a gift from the Lord. The child in my care is a gift from the Lord. But whether you are a biological or a foster mother, the definition of a mother's love remains unchanged – it means caring for the child, nurturing him, affectionately embracing him, and meeting all his needs to the best of your ability.

I thank God for this opportunity to experience the beauty of motherhood. I did not think I would be given this chance anymore. But God is gracious. Though my care for this child relies on things uncertain, there is certainty in the future that God holds for us. My endeavor with the Lord as a foster parent will always be treasured. I am truly grateful to God for letting me take care of this child. ... and let His will endure.