

RULES – 2012 ELCA YOUTH GATHERING

Within the past month and a half, we celebrated Mother's Day. A day set aside for us to thank our moms for their thoughtfulness, never ending love and direction. It has been a few years since my mom passed away and there isn't a day that doesn't go by that I don't think about the insight and unconditional love that she shared with me.

Growing up in a small town up north, we didn't have much. I can remember days when mom watered down the ketchup so we would have enough for our hamburgers. Mom used to get so mad at us because we always drank milk. She told us that water was free. It wasn't because she didn't want us to drink milk. It was because sometimes money was scarce.

You see, mom worked as a nurse's aide at the local hospital. She would often be up at 4 am doing her daily devotions, picking up dirty clothes that I left around, did the dishes and would walk to work, which started at 6 am. She did this so that she would be home early enough so that she was able to catch a ride to attend my school activities. When she worked on the weekends, she often told me to attend church. My usual reply was "why?" She always responded by saying, "just bring me a bulletin so I can read it." Mom was smart. Smart in that in order for me to bring home a bulletin, I had to attend worship. As an outside of the box thinking person, I tried to find all possible ways to get a bulletin without going to worship. I tried going to the church really early and late. I tried looking in the garbage cans and dumpster to find that bulletin. I usually put more effort into getting that bulletin and not attending worship than I would have if I would have attended the 45 minute service. Finally, I gave in and attended, just to bring home that bulletin. It was easier. Believe it or not, I got something out of it.

The reason why I am writing this, is because the past few months I have been asked why I have put in place requirements for attending the national youth gathering. It has made me think. Having worked in the church, I saw families bring their children to the baptismal font, making the promise that they would bring their child to church and place in their hands the word of God. Then a few years later, each child made the same promise that they would continue building their relationship with God. Can this relationship be built if we do not attend, or if we attend maybe 2 or 4 times a year? The way that I see it, my requirements are supporting promises the parents have already made.

I can honestly say that without my mom asking me to pick up the bulletin, I may not have been a Bible camp counselor, worked as a youth director, presently work in a food shelf, be married to a wonderful wife who has blessed me with two great boys, and be surrounded by a terrific group of friends. Everything that I am and will become is because of the grace of God and His direction. So often we think that we can make it through this world by ourselves, and that we do not need the church. I truly find it hard to believe. It is by our faith, trust and knowing that God is present that we can overcome. I believe that God brings people into our lives that gives us a boost, a pat on the back or comforting words that we can hang on too.

When I was in elementary school I was involved in an accident. Driving on a road of ice, mom lost control of the vehicle. During the spinning and turning, I rolled out. I remember lying in the ditch and being picked up by a fellow who had seen the accident. Looking at my mom I

said, "I forgive you." Her reply was "for what?" "For driving over me." "I didn't drive over you," "Look." Across my chest on the coat that I was wearing were the tires prints. During my junior year of high school, I attended the national youth gathering in San Antonio, only because somebody paid my way. In college, struggling, I went home to my church. My pastor noticed that I was struggling. Not able to tell him what was wrong, he said that the Camp Minne-Wa-Kan Bible Camp was looking for counselors. He suggested that I apply. So I did. It was this camp that I met Eric Ose. I also met pastor Glen from Golden Valley. I told him of the accident. Looking at me, he said "you realize that God has special plans for you." During my work at camp, I met my future boss at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead. She asked me to start up a 4th-6th grade program. Working with the youth, I attended a junior high youth gathering in Bemidji. Finishing up my last days in college, I met Candy Jacobson. I had a class with her three years earlier. She asked me what I was doing. "Not sure," I replied. She said, "my church is looking for a youth director, here's the number." I called them up, this is when I met Pastor Rich. During my first few years, I thought it would be great to get a junior high youth gathering started in our synod. I shared this with a few others, low and behold, the junior high youth gathering has been going strong for years and believe it or not, it was at the first junior high youth gathering in Marshall that I met a person by the name of Jill. Wanting to teach youth what it means to serve, I heard of a lady by the name of Mary Jo Copeland at Sharing & Caring Hands Homeless Shelter. It was on these yearly visits with youth that really made me appreciate the work that she did. She served people unconditionally. Working for the church for 16 years, the opportunity to work in a food shelf opened up for me. Do you see the pattern? I am sure your life is similar. We can't explain all of the details. If you look back, you can see a pattern coming into your life, which I believe is directed by God.

Getting that bulletin has made a difference for me. It wasn't the paper or the ink, it was the influence that I received from being in a place that worships, and prays to a God that cares about people. It is the understanding that God's grace and forgiveness are free gifts. More importantly, Mom worked real hard to fulfill her promise on the day that I was baptized. Mom knew that building this relationship started with a promise. It is this promise that has made the biggest difference in a life that has been truly blessed.

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