

## How important it is to recognize and appreciate those we love

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"Women's Federation for World Peace is made up of giving women and men who gain strength from their connections with one another. The output from their efforts is always more than the sum of what each individual puts in. WFWP seeks to express a mother's nurturing love for her family by engaging in peaceful and encouraging outreach programs and dialogue, through community service and by recognizing and cheering on the efforts of those who volunteer and serve their community." I shared these words with a warm, embracing group of men and women leaders at the Billings Public Library on the Saturday after Mother's Day.

Participants responded by sharing the expressions of love they received on Mother's Day from their families. One woman, the wife of a pastor and a first-time WFWP attendee said, "Mother's Day isn't a day I just celebrate one time a year, and my children know this. The Bible says we need to honor our mother and father, and that's every day!" Another woman spoke about her mother-in-law, and how much she misses having her with the family on holidays since she passed away. She shared a moving recollection about her mother-in-law, who looked up into the sky and observed, looking at a large fluffy cloud, "I think that is a beautiful place and we should build our house there." Her daughter-in-law answered, "Well it may be hard to build a house there, but I believe Gramps (her deceased husband) is building a house (in Heaven) for you!" Wiping her eyes, another woman recalled how she misses her mother-in-law's love and zest for life.

How important it is to recognize and appreciate those we love! One way to practice this is to 'fill a bucket' by praising the good that someone we know does. During the week prior to Mother's Day, three of us went to lunch together and shared how we tell family members and close friends we appreciate them. Everything we discussed supported the statement: "Family is the School of Love."



*May 18th meeting at the Billings Public Library*

When I say, "Family is the School of Love," I mean that we learn how to love in our family and the lessons we learn are imprinted and fixed in our minds and hearts. In other words, what we learn in our early life with our family helps us develop warmth and receptivity towards family members and others, it helps us to develop expectations that relationships will meet our needs and it connects us to family

traditions that enrich our own unique family culture. This school of the heart enables a child to relate across generations with older family members. Because family is the school of love, it is necessary that as parents we respond to and act on the abiding need for compassion and tenderness within our family. Acceptance and encouraging words are doors to hope and self-esteem. We need to use these building blocks of acceptance constantly and unreservedly!

Being an avid gardener, I shared some home-grown 'Tips for Growing a Healthy Garden or a Healthy Child'. Two key elements are good soil (warm home life) and sun (cheerful atmosphere, smiles and approval, and gentle encouragement). Remove weeds and self-defeating behaviors gently, with no harsh or injurious criticism. Give children freedom to explore and grow in body, mind and spirit by empowering them with parental interest and involvement. Provide emotional and spiritual fertilizer through good structure at home, moral training, and regular service and help for others. Investing in wholesome recreation at home and warm family times makes families, friendships and gardens grow beautifully.



*Marguerite Felig and her son*

Each child is different, I explained. Some are like roses and they crave attention, some are like irises which seem to thrive on neglect, and some are like dandelions, because they go anywhere and everywhere and make mischief. In other words, they have different strengths and weaknesses. It's critical that we emphasize our children's gifts and not harp on perceived faults and weaknesses.

Who is meeting the need for love, if not a child's family? How do we instill resilience and self-respect in our children? Simply stated, "Living for the Sake of Others" is something we need to practice, and practice and practice more! It's the key spiritual practice that will transform our hurting world into a caring, considerate and embracing world. We may all practice love, but what will keep that love growing and make us better partners and parents?

Michelle, a lovely and kind school bus driver, shared this story at our gathering: "Last winter I saw a girl on my bus without any boots, and I told her mother about it. The next morning her mother came out to the school bus after her daughter got on and brought boots for her. Her daughter yelled, and told her to get away, because she didn't want them." Michelle said, "I let her know that wasn't the right way to receive a gift." That night the girl apologized to her mother. Michelle shared, "When I talked to her mother later she thanked me, and said her daughter never apologized for her behavior before." Living for the sake of others can heal people and make families come closer.

It was empowering to each of us to hear these positive life experiences. In an article for the Yellowstone Valley Woman, Billings local Karen Grosz wrote these words of wisdom: "You and I both know that there are people who need what we have to give: Love, Money, Time, Wisdom. We have something another person is praying for right now. Think about that. You are an answer to a prayer."

Through WFWP sources, I found a good book that offers practical ways to build family connections. I also joined a webinar series based on principles from that book, Parenting Teens with Love and Logic: Preparing Adolescents for Responsible Adulthood, by Foster Cline and Jim Fay. They are two recognized

authorities on raising children and teens using "natural consequences" rather than punishment to build independence and resilience in youth, while promoting healthy parent-child connections. Here are a few of the Love and Logic Principles (followed by my experiences with those principles):

- Responsible people feel good about themselves. (A parent knows how to find good in their child.)
- Both children and adults should own their problems and their solutions. (The value of doing something is learning how to improve on the first time, and grow every time.)
- Neutralizing arguing keeps the focus on the problem. (Arguing is a waste of time. Find common ground or compromise with the objective that the solution be a positive, responsible option.)
- We gain control through choices. (Everyone wants and needs to have some control.)
- Set limits through thinking words (not angry words). (Wait for a time when you're calm to set those limits.)
- Empathy plus consequences equals success. (Anytime I'm preoccupied or stressed, it's hard to sense what the "other" is feeling or experiencing.)
- Consequences don't have to be immediate. (Wait until you're calm when finding an appropriate way to "heal" an injury or give a consequence.)
- Build a lifelong relationship! (Families are forever, and the love I give unconditionally is the best, most lasting memory of family.)

The webinar I took on parenting gave me a few simple tools to identify my key responsibilities as a parent. Our primary responsibilities as parents are:

1. Love our children,
2. Teach them to love others,
3. Teach them to be responsible.

These three simple steps for self-reflection highlight the standards parents need to live by in order to be positive role models.

As mothers and as peace-lovers we each have a lot on our plate. That's another reason to find good role models and companions so we can reach our goals: that my family is the school of love, that I live for the sake of others and that my family gives our faith expression by taking the opportunity to serve! Finally, we celebrate peace that guides our hearts as well as our actions; truly, "Peace Starts With Me!" WFWP brings us together joyfully as we build strong, loving and peaceful families.