

## *From the Deacon's Wife . . . .*

What kind of traditions do you have in your home? What kind do you want to have? It is never too late to start traditions, but the younger your children are when you begin practicing them; the more likely they will feel that "We've always done it this way!" Atmosphere and traditions are what make a house a home. How do you feel when you walk into your home? How do your guests feel?

When I was growing up, we often visited my grandparents who lived on a farm near Pierce, NE. Even as a young child, I knew that the farm was filled with love. How did I know? Whenever you arrived, no matter the time of day, you were always greeted with big smiles. Grandma and Aunt Amy came out of the house to give everyone hugs before you even got to the house. And everyone got hugs and kisses – even if you were just a friend along for the ride. Inside, Grandpa and Uncle Jute lined up for hugs, too. The next order of business was to get everyone something to eat. If it wasn't mealtime, they spread out a snack of homemade bread, homemade butter, raw honey (produced by the neighboring farm) and "Grandpa's sausage" – a homemade German wurst. And, of course, that happened again when it was time to leave. No one ever left hungry, or without Grandma's blessing! She would grab her holy water, sprinkle us kids and the car, saying "In Gottes Namen" [Go in God's name]. That kind of hospitality made me feel both welcomed and loved!

How you greet guests, who you invite as guests, and your attention to hospitality is what gives each home its unique feel. People feel special by how you treat them, not by how grand or simple your house is. One of my favorite Thanksgiving celebrations was the first year we had moved into our current home. Our house is a basic ranch-style which at the time had a completely unfinished basement. We're talking cement floor, cinder block walls, and bare light bulbs in the ceiling. Since I'm one of ten kids, having just the family over for a meal can be quite a crowd. Not everyone was in Omaha that year, but we were expecting about 35 for Thanksgiving dinner! Remembering that it is the atmosphere you create that is important, I asked all my nieces and nephews to make Thanksgiving or fall decorations. They spent the morning putting them up on the walls in the basement to make a gallery for their artwork. They were proud to show-off their talent to everyone. When we sat down to eat, the focus was not on the unfinished basement, the mismatched chairs we had borrowed, or our inability to serve the group in a proper dining room setting. Everyone was commenting on the adorable decorations, catching up with one another, and enjoying the great food we all helped to prepare. Over the years, we have had many added guests for holiday dinners. Our sons and extended family know that they can bring anyone with them, as long as I have a headcount. We do have to make sure we have enough plates and chairs, after all. They know there will always be plenty of food! If anyone leaves hungry, it is their own fault!

Looking ahead, do you have an Advent wreath? Do you know how to use it? I'll cover Advent and Christmas traditions in a future column. In the meantime, think warm, hospitable thoughts as we head into the cooler weather of autumn. God bless you all!