

INFORMATION AND INVITATION: About 10 years ago Dan and Shirley Rosien established the St. John's Charities account. Its purpose was to allow donations for charitable giving to be tax-deductible. Their *hope* was that when there was a need within our church family or our community, a fundraiser would be established and people outside the congregation would be invited to donate.

St. John has both a community tie and a family tie to Ray and Wendy (Bargender) Chojnowski, who lost everything in a house fire several weeks ago. I write this in the hope that someone from either congregation will step up to do some sort of fundraiser to help them out, using seed money from the Charities account. And you're all invited to make a contribution to them by writing a check to "St. John's Charities" designated to the Chojnowskis. Thank you in advance for taking this opportunity to help.

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Reflections: Today I want to share with you the story of my failed adoption of an adult son. Erven began coming to worship at Calvary Lutheran in Green Bay just before Christmas in 2007. He was a friend of our sound board operator, and he stayed in the back of the sanctuary. I always try to greet visitors after worship, but the first Sunday he was there I missed him. So the next week I literally ran down the aisle to "catch" him, and he literally ran away from me. I soon learned that he was afraid of almost everyone because of his history of abuse within his family.

Erven was born out of wedlock to two drug abusers. He had only one eye, probably the result of his mother's addiction. When he was about three his father took a video of him riding a trike, and I was horrified to hear him say, "Look at the little monster." That's the kind of upbringing he had.

I got to know Erven fairly well over the next four months, as I tried to help him feel welcome in the congregation, serving sometimes as a pastoral counselor, sometimes as a friend; he had no real friends. He was baptized in April, shortly after his 21st birthday. By that time I had grown very fond of him, and because of his dreadful home life, I asked if he'd like to be adopted. (He had never been able to live on his own due to lack of upbringing and education.)

The adoption was finalized on August 30, 2008. That night I had to take him to the crisis center because he was threatening suicide. Over the next four months that scenario was replayed several times. He'd go to a "friend's" house, or visit his uncle, and get drunk, then come home and go into a deep depression.

Erven was 3/16 Oneida and thus received all physical, dental, vision, and mental health care at no cost. We were fortunate that he had a very gifted counselor at the Oneida Health Clinic. We often saw her 2-3 times a week at the beginning; she worked with me trying to help him help himself, but we soon realized he wasn't capable of that. In addition to severe ADD he had some sort of psychotic disconnect with reality.

He was completely unable to make a commitment of any kind and keep it. This had been documented in elementary school, and his high school record (for the 2 years he attended) bore it out.

Before the adoption I fed Erven a lot. He was skin and bones. We went to Culvers, because it was close to Calvary and my house. He'd never been to a buffet before and had no idea how to sample new foods, or that he should take a little and go back for more; he wasted a lot of food. That was sort of a metaphor for his life: when he was given a lot, he couldn't handle it, couldn't use it, couldn't benefit from it.

The saddest (and most important) thing I learned from Erven came right at the beginning when he moved in with me. He had his own room in the basement, a brand new bed (he'd never had a bed before), and a new wardrobe (he'd rarely had new clothes). After he'd been with me about a week, I realized he was sleeping in his clothes. One morning I said, "We have to get you some PJs." He said, "What's PJs?" "Jammies." "What's jammies?" "Pajamas!" "What's pajamas?" That was when I realized how utterly different his life of deprivation had been. At age 21, he's *always* slept in his clothes, because he never knew when his father or one of his uncles or older brothers would come home drunk or stoned and he'd have to literally run for his life. – No wonder he had trouble living in my "real world."

By Christmas it was obvious that between his drinking, and his growing addiction to marijuana, he could no longer live with me. I'm not sure where he went. He stayed with various relatives, and sometimes with the "friend" who had brought him to Calvary (who turned out to be his dealer for pot). I saw him a few times before I left Green Bay to come to Edgar. He emails me occasionally, though there was a time he was in jail and had the chaplain email me to the effect that he never wanted to hear from me again.

This poem by Rama Muthukrishnan came to me yesterday (which is why I decided to write about Erven today).

*Pray don't find fault with the man who limps or stumbles along the road,
Unless you have worn the shoes he wears, or struggled beneath his load.
There may be tacks in his shoes that hurt, though hidden away from view,
Or the burden he bears, placed on your back, might cause you to stumble too.
Don't sneer at the man who's down today unless you have felt the blow
That caused his fall, or felt the shame that only the fallen know.
Don't be too harsh with the man who sins, or pelt him with word or stone,
Unless you are sure, yea, doubly sure, that you have no sins of your own.
For you know perhaps if the tempter's voice should whisper as softly to you
As it did to him when he went astray, it might cause you to stumble too.*