

THE REWARDS OF BEING A FOSTER PARENT

By Sister Michael Delores Allegri

A reward, according to Webster is:

Something given for a special service. To give a gift for a good performance or deed.

So how does a reward relate to foster care? I can't speak for every foster parent, but I think I have similar experiences to many, and I think most would agree with me.

What is it about foster care that is so compelling? It's "stepping up to the plate" to help out a child who is forced into a situation that is beyond comprehension. It's an acknowledgment that we are all one family – and sometimes we need to be there for others who are having a difficult time. It's being willing to put your life at the disposal of a child, and/or family, who has no one else to turn to.

So where/what are the rewards? They're all non-monetary and, for the most part, unrecognized by those not involved in foster care, social services or child advocacy. But for us, as foster parents, we are rewarded with hugs, smiles and all the other great gifts children so freely share. And, if you can imagine something greater than that, foster parents get it.

We witness (and sometimes get to help) bio-parents growing in parenting skills, learning how to show their child love. We see the sorrow at their past mistakes and willingness to "change their ways" for the sake of their child. If the bio-family can't make it, we get to be the strong force, the glue, the stabilizer who helps the child deal with termination and move into a new phase of his/her life. We get to participate in the meeting between child and adoptive parent – we get to assist in the "birthing" of a new family. How gratifying to watch a child bond with his/her new parents!

What greater reward could there be than to give new life to a child; especially to a child who has been hurt or damaged by mistakes of adults who were supposed to be the child's love and support system. To be able to help a child learn to trust and love again is quite a reward in itself.

Foster parents have the privilege of giving the child his/her life back. We have the privilege and reward of knowing that by my life, another's will be better!