

When I joined the Church, the bishop of the ward seemed a little distant to me. Perhaps years of law enforcement in a large metropolitan area had taken their toll, but he always struck me as a bit gruff.

My son, Jordan, was a rambunctious three-year-old at the time. Since we were new to the Church, he wasn't used to sitting still for sacrament meeting. Sometimes he would slip away and run around the chapel before returning to our seat.

One fast Sunday I went up to bear my testimony, and Jordan came with me. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him as he was about to start running up and down the choir steps. Just then the bishop pulled Jordan into his lap and began whispering into his ear. I could tell Jordan was taking in every word. After concluding my testimony, I retrieved him from the bishop's lap, and Jordan shyly waved goodbye as we returned to our seats.

At the end of testimony meeting, the bishop stood to give his closing remarks. He began to reprimand the congregation for not reaching out to moms, especially single moms, when their little ones give them a hard time. I wished the floor would open and swallow me; I was so embarrassed.

On following Sundays the bishop made a point to greet Jordan and whisper a few words of encouragement to him

as we entered the chapel. Jordan was getting used to sacrament meeting and had started to behave better.

Several months later, we were about to get a new bishop. Jordan was chattering away, so I whispered, "Shhh, we need to listen. We are going to get a new bishop today."

Jordan's eyes grew big. "Oh Mommy, a new bishop," he said. "He will love me too!" My heart softened as I realized my little son only saw love in the man I perceived as stern. What a wonderful lesson for him to learn at that tender age.

I never could have imagined that in just a few weeks my Jordan would be gone. He was killed by a drunk driver. At Jordan's viewing, our former bishop came to pay his respects. He stood next to the tiny coffin, a tear sliding down his cheek. He gently removed the Moroni tie tack from his own tie and pinned it on Jordan's.

As I watched this kind gesture, I could again hear Jordan's words, "Oh Mommy, a new bishop. He will love me too!" Finally I could see what my little son saw. This man, like all great men carrying the responsibility of being bishop, was filled with the love of the Lord.

It has been nearly 20 years and many bishops since that time, yet the whispers of a small child still echo in my mind to remind me the word "bishop" will always mean love. ■



A Friend in the Bishop

By Bonnie Sprinkel Bell Nielson