



# Pinewood Lutheran Church

24 Wilmington Rd.  
Burlington, Massachusetts 01803

Office Phone: (781) 273-1610  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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"You can pick your friends, but you can't pick your relatives." All of us have heard that saying. And sad to say, it's true. Most people have family members who bring heartache and sadness into the mix.—Family members who we really wouldn't pick for our friends if we had a choice. But with friends we do have a choice! So what qualities do you look for in a friend?

I can think of a few such qualities. Kindness, a spirit of generosity, and loyalty come quickly to mind. I think of my oldest friend whom I've known since kindergarten, Steve, and how he epitomizes all these things and more. My lovely wife has told me more than once: "You don't deserve a friend like Steve." (Usually this happens after I've neglected touching base with him and then he sends a delightful letter.) And she's right. He's more advanced in his friendship degree than I am. So, I'm going to discuss the three qualities listed above in order that all of us can foster better relationships with old friends and hopefully make new ones, too!

Possessing a kind heart might be # 1 on my list. I say that because kindness attracts others more than any other quality. Kindness is really love in action. It stems from knowing you're loved, being raised not to take advantage of others, and trying to put yourself in another's shoes. For some folks it seems innate. Others have to work on learning and practicing kindness. Kind people are always good listeners. They may see your faults and shortcomings, but they never manipulate you to take advantage of them. Instead, they gently seek to guide you toward a better pathway thereby bringing out even more of your potential. Kind people seldom are confrontational, although they are not push-overs, either. Instead, they employ St. Paul's blessed advice of: "Speaking the truth in love." It is for this reason and more that I tell my confirmands: "When looking for a spouse, always look for someone who possesses a kind heart." After all, a person's spouse should also be their best friend.

It's fun to be around people who have a spirit of generosity! I don't mean they have to be lavish spenders who throw money around. In fact, some of the least generous people I've known were financially wealthy, weren't afraid to spend it to build up their ego, and yet they really weren't generous because it was all about **them**. No, a truly generous person is one who takes delight in putting themselves out for another. Hallmarks of generosity include volunteerism. Personally, that's how I gauge whether another possesses it. I can think back over the years when I needed help with some project or the church needed something done and I asked for volunteers. The ones who answered the bell always had generous natures—even though I knew it was an imposition on their busy lives. Generous people never really complain about any of this, either. They just realize that God has blest them with countless gifts and life is about sharing those gifts. Moreover, when they do so they feel fulfilled

because those in need are helped. Since I'm a Pastor and know people's situations around the parish better than anyone else, sometimes I've had to also tell such generous people: "No, you're too busy right now." They know that too. But it never seems to quell their enthusiasm over wanting to assist. As a Pastor I pray that everyone would possess such a generous heart! It's one of the great joys of life.

That brings up loyalty. True friends take you as you are. They don't have hidden agendas or try to use you for a selfish purpose. Your truly loyal friends are those with whom you can pick up exactly where you left off the last time you got together. In the case of Steve, we're separated by about 1200 miles. Often months and even years go by without my physically being in the same room with him. And yet, when we meet there is no awkwardness over one of us trying to assert dominance. Loyal friends are at peace with themselves and bring that inner peace into the friendship. Knowing how the other person "ticks" helps this. That means true friends know each other's strengths, weaknesses, warts and all! And yet, they will be there for each other no matter what! When both of you know this, your friendship assumes the nature of a well-worn glove that you both easily slide on. I think of I Corinthians 13, the love chapter, of the New Testament. In it St. Paul describes the qualities of true Christian love. You remember those words: "Love is patient, love is kind,... love always perseveres, love never fails." I guess that sums up what true loyalty is, doesn't it? Loyal friends don't fail you.

Of course, our greatest friend is none other than our Savior, Jesus Christ. He was kind, generous in spirit, forgiving, and loyal to the death. Forgiving might be the key word in this whole "friendship equation." That's because without being able to forgive each other and get past the hurts of life, no human friendship will ever survive. Well, now that I've put this to paper and sorted out my thoughts on the matter, I'm going to call my friend Steve and once again solidify my inner self via our friendship. True friendship is too great a blessing to ever take for granted, isn't it?

PS: Maybe you should take this newsletter and share it with a special friend? Why not?