



Relationships with our siblings can't be taken for granted, as God has put each of us with our brothers and sisters for a reason

During a recent father-daughter mission trip to St. Michael's Special Needs School in New Orleans, Louisiana, our faith-based business group from New York and Washington, D.C., dedicated a significant amount of time to homeless ministry. One of our ventures consisted of sharing some of our leftover food from our dinners with the homeless in the French Quarter.

The girls from our group put the extra food in small boxes and wrote little messages on the top of the boxes, with words like "God bless you," or "Jesus cares about you."

Her name was Freddie (we never knew her full or real name), and she had two beautiful and playful dogs that surrounded her on the sidewalk. She was articulate, happy to see us, appreciative of the food we shared with her — and very open to spending time with our parishioners.

One of the dads stayed behind to talk a little more with Freddie. After he asked her a few questions, she told him she was from White Plains, New York (about 40 minutes north of midtown Manhattan), and that she'd attended Catholic schools as a young woman living in Westchester County.

She was concerned she was estranged from her sister — and she felt bad about this separation. The gentleman asked for her sister's name, and quickly proceeded to find the woman on Facebook. Her sister responded to his personal message a few days later — and asked Freddie to please call her on her cell phone.

A group of dads and daughters found Freddie the next day — and she was grateful and told our group she would call her sister. Here was God's providence in action!

As a spiritual director, I have discovered in many souls the deep pain of tension in their relationships with their siblings. Past hurts, jealousies, rivalries, a lack of appreciation —

there are so many issues that can threaten to blow up this all-important relationship. **The sad thing is that a small infraction or misunderstanding can lead to a lifetime of separation if people aren't careful.**

Every summer, I look forward to being with my entire family for vacation in Oscoda, Michigan, on Lake Huron. We love being around each other, and at times we're laughing so hard it hurts. My older brother, Tom, and my big sister, Debbie, are a continual inspiration for me on so many levels.

There is a bond that is deeper than any other human relationship — and I know they care about me and love me unconditionally. Family ties should be a good thing, but we all need to get over small bumps and bruises along the way and exert a real effort to make it work.

God has chosen this team. He decided, in His infinite wisdom, to put each of us together with our particular siblings — and this pairing, with the healthy differences in temperament, can produce an incredible result. Parents need to be careful to avoid favoritism that can add to sibling rivalries, and they should be proactive forces in making this unity even tighter.

Family unity needs to be a priority in this tough world today. I believe when God's grace and prayer are driving a family, they naturally become a bright light and a tremendous inspiration for everyone around them.