

FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

## Loved ones never ‘removed’

I have never understood what it means to be “once removed.” Born into a large family, I know about cousins and second cousins; beyond that, I am easily confused. But apparently I have many more cousins “once or twice removed” than I ever dreamed.

Just before leaving Arkansas in 2006, I met a daughter of my second cousin for the first time. Arriving in Illinois that same year, I met someone who shares the name Sartain with me, but we never determined if we are related. A distant relative of my mother later wrote to say she lives in the Diocese of Joliet, and through my aunts I discovered that we have a second cousin living there. During my four-plus years there, he and I had regular contact and enjoyed discovering how strong our familial connection actually is.

Since arriving in Western Washington, I have learned that our family name reaches even to the Pacific Northwest, and someone approached me last year with her well-researched theory about our cultural heritage. Mostly, I tell people, I’m Tennessean.

A few years ago, a man distantly related by marriage contacted my sister in Memphis hoping to find some genealogical data from our side of the family. He had already developed an extensive family tree for his side which shows where the Sartains joined them in the early 1900s. Of real surprise was that on the Internet he found an old newspaper photograph of our grandmother holding our great-uncle, Charles, who died as an infant.

I have no idea how the photograph made its way to the Internet or who owns the original, but apparently someone “out there” wanted to make the beautiful photo available to the rest of



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us. Since we never knew our grandmother — she died in 1914 — it was wonderful to see her face appear on the computer screen. Almost 100 years later, she is still my grandmother, Jo Reilly Sartain.

### Lengthening branches

Our father died in 1972, our mother in 2005. After both parents die, every family undergoes a variety of transitions, and my family has realized how important it is to keep ties strong as the years go by. Every family grows and moves forward, lengthening the branches of the family tree; but remaining attached to the trunk is vital!

Family ties are important to everyone, and that is why we are fascinated by genealogical research. It is captivating to see our branch of the tree, our place in the flow of generations. But it seems to me that this fascination has its origin in something much deeper, a foundational truth that marks every human person.

We have an instinctive need to find out “where we belong” and “to whom we belong” because we do belong — and to Someone. Our interest in genealogy is a glimpse of and is inspired by our participation in the communion of saints, because we are first and foremost related to and in God, the Father and origin of all.

Those who have been disciples of Jesus through the ages are what St. Paul called the “holy ones” — the saints — who share a unique bond in and through him.

The Catholic appreciation of our communion in Jesus Christ is fundamental to our understanding of our relation-



ships in the Church, in our communities, and in our families.

First, since in Christ we are destined for eternal life, we have a common mission and a common destiny. Next, since we love God and recognize our origin in him, we worship him and pray together as his family. Next, he shares his love for us with us, and our love for one another comes directly from him.

### A source of consolation

Finally, just as God’s love does not distinguish between those who are alive in this world or in the next, so we continue to love those who have died — and they continue to love us. Their love is now perfected in Christ and thus what they once knew as family love has expanded to include everyone.

We recognize that our communion with all those who follow Jesus is real, a source of great consolation. Those who have gone before us still love us and pray for us; so do we love and pray for them.

Just as we sought their help and prayers when they were with us, so do we continue now that they are with the Lord. They have not left the family tree. They have not forgotten us. They have not stopped looking after us because we are intimately related through our Father and in our discipleship of Jesus.

Though our loved ones pass from this life to the next, they are never “removed” from us, for as St. John Chrysostom once wrote, “They whom we love and lose are no longer where they were before. They are now wherever we are.”

#### DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN’S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain’s Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.