

Swipe here!

I celebrated Mass at a family home on Saturday afternoon. Some twenty family gathered for the occasion in honor of their mother who had died a year earlier and the family wanted to celebrate her birthday with a Mass in the family home.

Following the Mass, amid a selection of sandwiches, freshly buttered scones and homemade treats were served with cups of freshly brewed tea. Conversations erupted from all corners of the small living room.

I saw down to enjoy the treats with the youngest couple there. In fact, they had been married less than a year. Sarah was a pediatrician and studying in England to specialize in childhood lung diseases. Her husband, Stephn, was German and was both an attorney and a theologian. They have a commuting marriage. She is living in England and he is practicing law in Germany.

There is hope that the commuting rollercoaster marriage will settle down to a more tolerable level when Sarah finishes her specialty in medicine. Their hope is to make Germany their more permanent home. But, while Stephn is fluent in both German and English, Sarah isn't so lucky. She does not speak German.

She would love to be able to learn German and yet, the thought of trying to navigate through German grammar is a daunting task for her.

Specializing as a pediatrician, conversation turned to how much easier it is for children to learn another language than adults to learn it. She indicated that children have what is called an "elastic" brain that allows them the facility and flexibility to learn a new language at a young age.

She began to share stories from her professional work that highlighted the ability of children to learn a new language if provided with the right environment.

She said, "I remember working one of the evening shifts at a hospital and I was going down the corridor. I saw this young child standing up in its crib and the child had a book in its hand and was fascinated as it turned the pages and kept discovering new things. Seeing that, really touched me and brought a sense of hope and satisfaction to my life."

"On another occasion, " she continued, "I was on duty in a different hospital and was visiting a child's room. The child noticed my official badge and drew near to it; reached out their finger and began to swipe across my badge. It was so sad to see. The child thought it was a tablet that they could swipe across and it would entertain them."

"It is so sad in this day and age that parents don't have time for their children. Parents are so busy, so preoccupied, so stressed out that they just don't have time. Children are becoming YouTube children. Unless you can swipe it, it does no good. Parents just hand them a tablet or iPad and let that do the teaching. The same is true of giving kids phones rather than stimulating their brains in more wholesome ways, especially through language."

I have a sense that when it is time for Stephn and Sarah to start their own family, they will have the same outlook and approach to raising their children.

My niece is also married to a German and they are living in Germany with their three young children. Their oldest is eight years old and youngest is three years old. There are no iPads, no tablets, no YouTube available to the children. Instead, the conversations between young and old are in both German and English. When visiting Ireland, conversations are directed more toward English, except for an occasion need for an outburst of German language that is needed as a form of discipline as, audibly, it sounds more threatening and effective in German rather than English. I am always amazed at the ease with which the children can switch from German to English or visa versa.

Humorist, Erma Bombeck "I see children as kites. You spend a lifetime trying to get them off the ground. You run with them until you're both breathless...they crash...you add a longer tail...they hit the rooftop...you pluck them out of the spout. You patch and comfort, adjust and teach. You watch them lifted by the wind and assure them that someday they'll fly.

Finally, they are airborne, but they need more string and you keep letting it out. With each twist of the ball of twine, there is a sadness that goes with the joy because the kite becomes more distant, and somehow you know that it won't be long before that beautiful creature will snap the lifeline that bound

you together and will soar as it was meant to soar...free and alone. Only then do you know that you did your job."

Jesus said, "allow the children come to me; let them leave behind their tablets and iPads, their YouTubes, their swipe across here fingers. The kingdom of God is theirs, no matter what language they speak as long as it is the language of love.