

[Opinion](#)

[News](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



A child watches his father pray inside the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Providence, Rhode Island. (CNS/Bob Mullen)



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In March 2020, the world was turned upside down.

As we headed into quarantine, my wife and I found out that we would be embarking on a journey traveled by many before us, only now in a wholly (and holy) unfamiliar way: We were having our first child.

From watching friends and family, preparing for a child seemed like an emotional roller coaster, but there would be plenty of books and apps to cover everything, we initially hoped. Yet when you add a once in a lifetime global pandemic, the advice and many of those "must do's" while you are expecting, (e.g., take [a babymoon](#), plan a couples' massage, throw a baby shower) are no longer relevant or safe to do.

By the time we reached the second trimester, being allowed to be present for the birth seemed to be a fading dream. As someone wanting to get this dad gig off to a good start, I was already disheartened when I was not permitted to accompany my wife to her appointments, including the one where I would hear the baby's first heartbeat.

Despite the disappointment, I knew this all paled in comparison to what so many others were going through and had already lost at that point. Rooted in my daily Ignatian practice of trying to "[find God in all things](#)," I slowly came to recognize that, unlike many who lost jobs, homes and health care during the pandemic, we still had privileges and resources we would offer our baby, including shelter and access to good health care.

Our son was born in November, a week after the tense election cycle, and during [another surge of COVID-19](#). In the joy-filled moments following his birth, I vividly recall one of the attending medical staff taking me aside to tell me, "Remember, this child is going to learn everything about what it means to be a man from you." As a Latino male who continues to heal from a complicated relationship with my own father, these words echoed a truth I had known all my life. We named our son, Micah, after one of our favorite verses from the Hebrew Scriptures in which the prophet says, "He has told you, O Mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" ([Micah 6:8](#)).

These three things are what we hope to model for him using just parenting, which is to approach every encounter and decision from a place of love rather than fear.

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For us, this begins by teaching Micah to challenge the patriarchal norms accepted in many immigrant communities, including the usage of corporal punishment, such as spanking, or [\*la chancla\*](#), to discipline children. As parents, we hope to contextualize how these norms have caused intergenerational trauma in many U.S. immigrant communities. For Latinx parents, I believe we have an incredible opportunity (and responsibility) to end intergenerational trauma and destructive narratives through and with intentional dialogue with the generations that come after us.

As an interracial couple, the last 18 months, and our own lived experiences, have also forced us to integrate anti-racist practices into our parenting.

Months into the pregnancy, on May 25, [George Floyd, a child of God, was killed](#). As someone who identifies as a Latino male who will never fully understand the pain and suffering of our Black community, I stand committed to learning, advocating and acknowledging that their [\*lucha is our lucha\*](#). Their liberation is our liberation. This anti-racist commitment I will also instill in our biracial son, who, despite being fully loved and supported by us, will also experience his own racial trauma. As part of my just parenting, I will encourage our son to learn and understand how all our struggles for liberation are intertwined.



A depiction of St. Joseph cradling the infant Jesus while Mary sleeps is seen in a stained-glass window at St. Patrick Church in Smithtown, New York. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

As a Catholic parent, I am contemplating the Incarnation of God more deeply. I reflect upon the humility and trust of an all-powerful God who chose to meet humanity in the helplessness, innocence and *ternura* of an infant child. As first-time parents, we are also contemplating theological parental challenges. For example, as we plan for his baptism, I now find myself wrestling more with the doctrine of original sin. It is difficult for me to comprehend, let alone accept that our beautiful child or any child could have inherited or been born with any sin at all. If anything, his only fault is being directly related to me, a [sinner](#).

Every other month, I write Micah a letter, which I share on social media. I started writing on our fifth wedding anniversary to announce his name in lieu of a gender reveal and was inspired by Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. So far I have written ten letters, in which I share my hopes, concerns and affection for his mother. Through these letters, I share my own journey and evolution as a father, husband, Catholic, one committed to responding to the signs of the world we are in. Through these letters, I share my heart and hope that one day they will help Micah in his own just parenting journey.

In my letter on Mother's Day, I wrote to him:

*Any day now, you will begin crawling. I've relished watching you for weeks trying your best to break free, you are so close! I find it fascinating that from that moment onwards, you will, as long as God permits, forever be in motion. Although like many parents before us who wish their child would stop growing so quickly, please don't ever stop growing in love and reaching for your dreams (siempre adelante).*

A version of this story appeared in the **Nov 12-25, 2021** print issue under the headline: As a Latino father, I will raise my son using 'just parenting'.