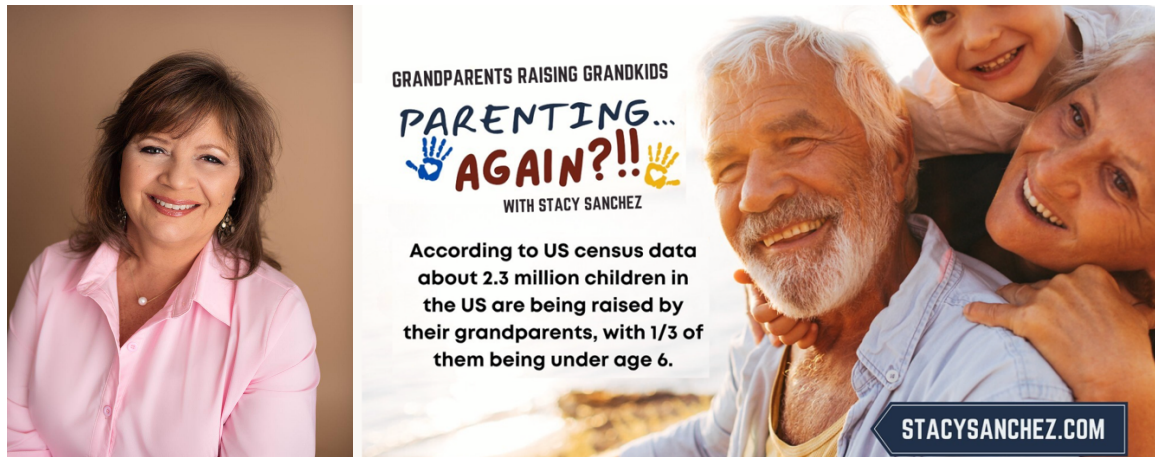


## Teen Mom to Grandma Guardian: Stacy Sanchez's Unexpected Journey Back to Parenthood

### On a Mission to Empower 'Grandfamilies' Parenting, Again?!! Through Faith, Community, and Resilience



**STACY SANCHEZ** is an author, advocate, and unexpected parenting expert who has journeyed from teen mom to grandmother raising her grandson. It was at age 52, that Stacy found her retirement plans upended when she and her husband John took in their grandchild, forcing them to navigate the challenges of parenting once again. They are part of one of the fastest growing family units in the United States. In fact, they are among the 2.7 million grandparents raising their grandchildren. Stacy's unique perspective bridges generations of parenting experiences, offering insights into the complexities of family dynamics in today's world and how the church can respond to meet the needs of grandfamilies.

#### Stacy's Journey—

- Started as a teen mom, raised in the Church, with the experience of early parenthood challenges
- Raised an adopted daughter
- At 52, became a guardian to her grandson
- Founded the "Parenting, Again?!!" Facebook community

#### Key Experiences—

- Navigating the emotional turmoil of unexpected grandparent caregiving
- Dealing with depression and anger while parenting a grandchild
- Balancing personal needs with the demands of raising a traumatized child
- Advocating for support and resources for "grandfamilies"

Stacy is a contributor to *Leading Hearts* magazine and *Arise Daily* devotionals. She shares her parenting journey on her blog at [stacysanchez.com](http://stacysanchez.com), offering wit, wisdom, and support to others in similar situations.

## Potential Interview Questions:

1. How did your experience as a teen mom prepare you for becoming a guardian to your grandson later in life?
2. What were the most significant challenges in transitioning from grandparent to primary caregiver?
3. How has your faith helped you navigate the unexpected turns in your parenting journey?
4. What advice would you give to other grandparents suddenly thrust into a parenting role?
5. How can communities, especially churches, better support grandfamilies?
6. What inspired you to start the "Parenting, Again?!!" Facebook community, and how has it impacted grandfamilies?
7. How did you balance self-care with the demands of raising a grandchild?
8. What resources have you found most helpful in your journey as a grandparent caregiver?

## ABOUT STACY SANCHEZ—

Stacy is a freelance writer for the multi-award-winning Leading Hearts magazine ([leadinghearts.com](http://leadinghearts.com)). She is also a regular contributor for Arise Daily ([arisedaily.com](http://arisedaily.com)), an online devotional from the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association ([awsa.com](http://awsa.com)). Using wit and wisdom, Stacy shares her parenting journey, from teen mom to raising her grandson, on her Parenting Again?!! blog at [stacysanchez.com](http://stacysanchez.com).

*As an author, Stacy has contributed to many anthologies. Including:*

- Life in the Estrogen-Free Zone: Humor and Heartfelt Wisdom From Boy Moms
- Trusting God: 31 Days - 31 Women - 31 Stories - One God
- Mother: What My Mother Taught Me About Life, Love, and Faith
- Experiencing God's Presence, True Stories of Miraculous Moments with God
- Love, Joy & Peace, A 12-Week Devotional to Shine the Light on God's Word

She is currently writing a book for Elk Lake Publishing, entitled, "Diamond Dust: Life Lessons from the Ball Field." As an avid Yankees fan, Stacy enjoys coaching and playing baseball. Using the lessons she's learned through the years on the baseball diamond, Stacy applies them to spiritual life.

Stacy is a former pastor in the Vineyard Church. Dedicated to spiritual growth, she leads a Women's Bible study and mentors women to become all they are created to be in Christ. Stacy is passionate about exploring Christianity's Jewish roots, especially the sacrament of communion.

Stacy cherishes family time, especially with her nine grandchildren. In her spare time, you will find her playing with her grandcherubs on the beach or the ball field.



**FIND MORE OF HER STORY AND INTERVIEWS AT  
STACYSANCHEZ.COM**

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## PARENTING ... AGAIN?!!



### Grandparents to the Rescue

AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY INTERVIEWS STACY SANCHEZ



“When you’re buying Depends for yourself and diapers for the baby, where do you fit in?” asks Stacy Sanchez, author and advocate for grandparents raising their grandchildren. She knows firsthand just how isolating life can be for grandfamilies.

At age 52, Stacy and her husband, John, found their retirement plans upended when they had to take in their grandson. “Our plans had to change, our dreams had to change, our marriage had to change,” she says.

#### The Crushing Burden on Grandfamilies

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the statistics are staggering. An estimated 2.7 million grandparents in the U.S. are raising grandchildren, often due to pandemic deaths, the opioid crisis, mental illness, or incarceration of the parents. Yet they receive little support.

##### **Stacy and her husband know grandfamilies like them have to deal with:**

- No financial assistance like foster families receive
- No preparation or parenting classes for traumatized children
- Low priority for getting kids into counseling
- Kids missing out on sports/activities due to tight funds
- Navigating new school curriculum, social media, legal and countless other issues

##### **Some grandparents on fixed incomes can’t afford services their grandkids need to cope such as:**

- Understanding their grandchild’s trauma and how to deal when they act out
- Battling guilt and anger over the situation, including their child’s poor choices

- Grinding loneliness and depression and an inability to fit in social circles

- Increasing demands of busier schedules

Stacy started the “Parenting, Again?!!” Facebook community to create awareness and connection. “I want these grandparents a safe community with others like them and know they are not alone.”

#### A Heavy Blanket of Guilt and Anger

“I wanted to be a grandmother, not a parent,” she says. “I had to die to myself and my dreams and expectations”

After taking in her grandson, Stacy went into a “deep depression,” feeling enraged that after the difficulty of raising her adopted daughter, she now had to parent the son her daughter abused, neglected and abandoned.

“It’s okay to need Jesus and a therapist.”

Along with a licensed counselor, two friends helped pull Stacy through this emotionally dark time. They simply listened without judgment as she vented, and gave her respite by spending time with her grandson. A friend’s daughter even volunteered to tutor Stacy’s grandson after school to help him with homework.

#### What Churches Can Do

Stacy believes churches are uniquely positioned to support grandfamilies, if aware of their needs:

“Churches are great at giving care and love. They just need awareness and tools to help the grandfamilies,” she says.

##### **Her suggestions include:**

- Make grandfamilies an official “mission field,” including senior adult ministry activities catering to these families
- Bring in social workers to educate the congregation and connect grandfamilies with resources to thrive.
- Build respite care, tutoring and mentoring teams
- Allow a safe space to share, vent and find community

“These grandparents are missionaries to the next generation,” Stacy says. By supporting them, churches can embrace the often-overlooked segments of the congregation, while giving traumatized kids godly, loving guidance.”

As she imagines a future church curriculum, Stacy shares a story about a grandmother who contacted her through her Facebook Community. “She is raising six grandchildren and is desperately lonely. She doesn’t have a community. We can change that.”

Churches have a rare opportunity to provide precisely that community—a place of deep understanding, renewed purpose, and most of all, hope. ❤️

To find out more, join Stacy Sanchez’s *Parenting... Again?!! Community* on Facebook or visit her website at [stacysanchez.com](http://stacysanchez.com).







## Leading Hearts — May 2024 Issue

### Parenting...Again?!!

### “Just When We Thought We Were Empty Nesters God Asked Us to Parent Our Grandchild

by Stacy Sanchez



“God, You want us to do this again?” I cried. “Dealing with his mother’s issues almost ruined our marriage, tore our family apart and destroyed our finances. I don’t know if I can do this again. Would you hate me if I said ‘no?’”

Just when I thought I was entering the wonderful season of life as an empty nester, my dreams came crashing down. My daughter’s poor choices led to her losing custody of her son. Suddenly, my husband and I became full-time parents again—this time to a traumatized little boy. Sadly, my story is all too common.

That day, we became statistics in an ever-increasing crisis. Approximately 2.7 million grandparents in the United States, including 64,000 in my home state of Arizona alone, have taken on the task of raising their grandchildren.

The opioid epidemic, parental mental illness, incarceration, and deaths caused by COVID-19 have contributed to 13 million children losing their parents and living with grandparents or great-grandparents. For every child in foster care, there are around 25 children in the care of grandparents.

Many grandparents volunteer to take in grandchildren to avoid the foster system. However, this prevents access to resources tailored for children separated from parents due to abuse, neglect, or dependency. One-fifth of grandparents have incomes below the poverty line and cannot afford the expensive treatment these children need.

### A New Opportunity to Be Hands & Feet

The need is huge and it’s right under our noses—these grandfamilies need extra support, especially from the church. The Bible says in James 1:27, the kind of religion God wants involves helping the orphans and widows.

#### **Here are 5 ways a church can support grandfamilies:**

#### 1. Start a Grandfamily Mission

Add Grandfamilies as a missions category. Budget funds to support them like other missionaries. Offer scholarships to grandchildren for church activities. Donate gift cards for school expenses. Sponsor grandchildren’s extracurricular activities.

Grandparents raising grandchildren are missionaries to the next generation. These traumatized children need the church’s help and often feel unloved. The church can show them the unconditional love of Jesus.

#### 2. Learn What Grandfamilies Need

Grandparents need financial support and legal guidance.

Invite a social worker experienced with grandfamilies to speak to church leadership about their special needs. Make the social worker available to guide grandfamilies to resources. Ask a legal aid group to answer grandparents’ questions on rights and navigating the legal system. Many states have grandfamily support services to help grandparents—partner with these groups. In Arizona, Duet: Partners in Health and Aging is a resource.

Give grace to grandparents who drop off grandkids at Sunday School without volunteering. They are already in the trenches of ministry and sometimes need to sit at Jesus’ feet awhile.

#### 3. Start a Grandfamily Support Group

The grandparents who have started parenting again have had a big lifestyle change and may not easily fit into their social groups anymore. Their friends may have fallen away because they are no longer as free as they once were. These grandparents often cannot relate to the younger parents but also no longer relate to their peers. They may feel like outsiders everywhere.

Although they love their grandchildren, grandparents may be angry at having to raise them. They may also be dealing with the grief of losing a child or blaming themselves for their child’s actions. A support group will provide others who understand what they are experiencing and give an opportunity to address their feelings without judgment.

#### 4. Form Family Networks

So much has changed since the grandparents raised their children. It might seem like a completely different world to them and may be overwhelming. Connect them with another family with a child in the same school as the grandchildren attend. They can lovingly guide the grandparents on how to maneuver the ins and outs of raising a child in today’s society.

#### 5. Provide Technology Classes

Technology may come naturally to some, but it is not instinctive to the generation of grandparents who are faced with living in this brave new world. Offer classes to teach the grandparents what they need to know about technology so they will be aware of the good and bad aspects of it. Give them the resources they need to protect their grandchildren from those who wish to cause harm on the Internet. Once victimized, children often are more easily revictimized.

To all the grandparents doing the hard work of parenting again, you are not alone. I see you, and I’m cheering you on as a fellow traveler on this unexpected journey.

Although our call isn’t easy, we can be sure we are doing the Lord’s work by caring for the children He dearly loves. Well done, good and faithful servant. 🙏

*Read the full article with even more ideas of how you can care for grandfamilies at [leadinghearts.com](http://leadinghearts.com) and [stacysanchez.com](http://stacysanchez.com).*





stacy.sanchez | stacysanchez.com

I was a “good Christian girl,” and now I was pregnant.  
Instead of gossiping and shaming me, my church loved me ...

## Choosing Hope

Hope Ashley will be her name!” I decided then and there as the ultrasound tech wiped the gel from my pregnant belly. It was a girl, or so she informed me. Despite the technician’s confident proclamation, she was wrong. And, it would turn out, I was wrong in harboring fears about this unexpected child. I would come to learn that there would also be unexpected blessings.

This story doesn’t solely revolve around the gender mix-up as much as it offers my testimony of resilience, faith, and the transformative power of the church community, for me and other teens facing unplanned pregnancies. Without Christ and His people, this story may have ended much differently. Four months earlier, I sat alone in a doctor’s office, waiting to hear the results of my pregnancy test. As the doctor entered the exam room, I could see the answer on his face. Emotionless, he confirmed what I feared, “You’re pregnant.”

The doctor announced his prescription.  
“Don’t make this into a bigger problem.  
Get an abortion and get on with your life.  
Schedule it at the front desk.”

Across my chart, he scribbled in large red letters: ABORTION and exited the room. Alone, I hung my head.

At 19, I was nowhere near ready to become a mother. A recent high school graduate, I lived with my parents. I couldn’t support a baby. Although my boyfriend and I had planned to marry someday, those dreams disappeared when he walked out the door, leaving me to sort this out alone.

As a “good Christian girl” from a respected family, the shame

felt insurmountable. I wrestled with the fear of societal judgment and the weight of my family's reputation in our church.

During a moment of despair, I sat on the edge of the bed sobbing. If I had the abortion, no one would ever have to know, I reasoned. I could go on with my life free of embarrassment. That was tempting. But I would know—God would know. Lord! I don't want to have an abortion! What have I done? Forgive me, but I don't know what else to do. I'm desperate.

Suddenly, I was overcome by a profound sense of presence that surrounded and embraced me. It brought indescribable comfort. Although no one was physically in the room, Jesus was there. I was not alone.

**"I will choose hope," I whispered, determined to navigate this unexpected journey with faith as my compass. "Please, God, bring hope from these ashes."**

My story is all too familiar. Many other young women have found themselves in the same demoralizing situation. Statistics reveal that 14% of girls will give birth in the U.S. before the age of eighteen. Although there's been a commendable 73% reduction in teen birth rates since its high point in 1991, the issue persists.

Teen pregnancy rates have dropped for various reasons, but the United States is still nine times higher than other Western industrial countries.

**Our churches play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges teen parents face.**

**Here are five easy and intentional actions a church can take to truly support teens coping with unplanned pregnancy.**

### 1. Be Proactive

Initiate open dialogues with teens about sensitive topics, including sex. They have questions. Sex is all around them: at school, on television, and social media. It's not enough to tell them not to have premarital sex because the Bible says so. There are many others with louder voices telling them why it's okay. Teens want to talk about issues. They want to discuss the reasons for God's instruction. Help them make healthy decisions based on biblical principles.

### 2. Give Teens a Purpose

Teenagers are essential members of God's family and need compassion, love, inspiration, and acceptance. Foster a sense of belonging and purpose within the church community. Establish platforms for youth voices to be heard and acted upon. With the guidance of a godly person, start a youth council. Let the young people tell the congregation what

issues are important to them. Then, provide the biblical tools and opportunity to address the issues. Studies show that when a teen feels valued, suicide and pregnancy rates drop.

### 3. Come Alongside

Replace judgment with compassion. Trust me. You cannot judge an unwed, pregnant teen more than she's judged herself. Many teen moms walk away from the church to avoid the stigma of being a "sinner" and don't want to be the focus of gossip. Young mothers need understanding and support, not condemnation. Let's not forget the father. Teen fathers are often overlooked. He will need as much compassion as the mother. Find a godly man to walk with him and teach him how to become the man God intended him to be.

### 4. Pledge Support & Stick With Them

Both teen parents will need support. Provide mentorship from spiritually mature individuals. Offer guidance and love without preaching. Let them know they are deeply loved by God and by the church.

**A teen parent has many needs, financial, physical, and emotional. Demonstrate the love of Jesus tangibly.**

Find volunteers to drive them to doctor's appointments. Many teen parents don't graduate high school. Help with homework. Babysit so they can study. Assist with any paperwork. Offer childcare during youth group. Sometimes, older women in the church are looking for opportunities to volunteer. Connect them with the new parents. It's a win-win.

### 5. Support the Grandparents

Minister to the parents of the pregnant teen. They will need judgment-free support. They've been blind-sided. An unexpected responsibility has been placed on their shoulders. Find a spiritually mature couple to walk alongside them.

**Fortunately, my family offered unwavering support, guiding me into motherhood. Initially a source of concern, the church community became a pillar of strength. They were "Jesus with skin on" for me.**

They made it their mission to love me, which helped me love myself again. The congregation showered me with support, hosted numerous baby showers, and welcomed my son into the family of God.

My story is a testament to the power of hope, community support, and the transformative influence of a church willing to embrace and uplift those in need. It's a reminder that amidst struggles, there's always room for redemption and joy, ultimately leading to a life filled with unexpected blessings.☺