



The Beacon

News from St. John's Children's Ministries

Volume 5, Issue 2

November / December 2011

Bishop Rickel Visits

Sunday, October 30th Bishop Greg Rickel will be visiting both services at St. John's. The Blue Angels and the Chancel Choir are preparing special pieces to perform at the 10:00 am service.

Bishop Rickel was elected the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Olympia on May 12, 2007, ordained bishop on Sept. 15, 2007 and installed on Sept. 16, 2007, at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle. He has served the wider church as a stewardship consultant for the Stewardship Office of the Episcopal Church and for the Episcopal Network for Stewardship. He also served on the Resolution B004 Mission Funding Task Force and as an Episcopal representative to the Earth Charter meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Bishop Rickel embraces radical hospitality that welcomes all, no matter where they find themselves on their journey of faith. He envisions a church that is a safe and authentic community in which to explore God's infinite goodness and grace as revealed in the life and continuing revelation of Jesus Christ. As Bishop of Olympia he has articulated a vision with three main mission foci: congregational development, concentration on those 35 years of age and under, and stewardship of all creation. Follow his blog at www.bishoprickel.com.



Photo courtesy of The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia Website

REMINDER

Upcoming Family Ministries Events

- Oct 30th Bishop Rickel visits both services
- Nov 6th All Saints Parade in 10 am service
- Nov 13th Pageant Committee meet 11:30 am
- Nov 27th Labyrinth Walk at 2 pm
- Dec 9th Lessons & Carols at 7:30 pm
- Dec 11th Pageant rehearsal at 11:30 am
- Dec 17th Pageant rehearsal at 10 am
- Dec 18th Christmas Pageant at 4 pm
- Dec 24th Family Christmas Eve Service at 4 pm
- Dec 25th NO Sunday School
- Jan 1st NO Sunday School
- Jan 8th Epiphany party after 10 am service

Advent Celebrations at St. John's

Advent is a wonderful time of year where we prepare our hearts for Christmas. This year there are several ways you and your family can enjoy this time at St. John's, so mark your calendars.

On Friday, December 9th, come join the Chancel Choir for St. John's annual **Lessons & Carols**. This century old tradition tells the Biblical story of man leading up to the birth of Christ through scripture and song. The service begins at 7:30 p.m.

On Sunday, December 19th join us for the **Children's Christmas Pageant**. This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to see Christ through the eyes of our children. The performance starts at 4 pm. It is followed by the **All-Church Christmas Potluck** at 6:30 p.m. in the Great Hall. Enjoy an evening with your church family.

For more information, or if you would like to help with any event, please contact the church office at 452.827.3077.



2011 Christmas Pageant

Our annual Christmas Pageant, **Away in a Manger** is coming up on Sunday, December 18th at 4:00 p.m. in the church nave.

Following the performance there will be an all-church potluck. A sign-up sheet is in the Narthex, or email or call Cathy Christensen in the office. The pageant is presented by the children and youth from St. John's Sunday school classes.

After the pageant our families be able to participate in a tradition that is coming back to St. John's - the Greening of the Church! The children will have an opportunity to decorate trees in the Narthex, while the adults help with more difficult tasks. The event is open to the public, and is a wonderful occasion for family and friends to share in a time-honored tradition. As we wait and prepare for the birth of Christ, we can wait as a community and share in this tangible celebration of the love and wonder of Christmas.



The Giving Tree

Our Rite 13 / J2A classes are volunteering with Eastside Baby Corner in December. As part of this work, the youth are setting up a giving tree to collect items needed by this charity.

All donations need to be brought to the church **unwrapped** no later than December 11th. Our youth will be taking all items collected to the Eastside Baby Corner during the week of December 12th. While there, they will help sort and distribute items to the families served by this organization.

Some of the items needed are:

Similac formula	Coats (Child size 3-14)
Diapers	Kids Shoes (esp. 12 & 13)
Jeans (Child 5-14)	Blanket Sleepers (3-12 mo)
Bike helmets	Books for ages 5-8

Please take a tag from the giving tree and return it by December 11th. If you would like to be more involved in this youth mission, contact Cathy Christiansen at the church office.



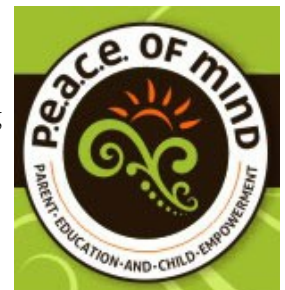
All Saints Parade

In honor of All Saints Day, on **Sunday, November 6th** the Sunday School classes participate in the procession with a "Parade of Saints" during the 10 a.m. service. Each class will choose a particular saint to celebrate. They will be making banners in class to honor the saint they choose. After the procession, students in preschool through 6th grade will return to their Sunday School classrooms.



P.E.A.C.E. of Mind Class

St. John's Preschool is sponsoring a presentation by P.E.A.C.E. of Mind. (Parent Education and Child Empowerment). They will be offering the program "**Keeping Kids Safe and Grown-ups Sane**" on Tuesday, November 15th at 7:00 pm in Marsh Hall. This class is for parents whose children are from 2-15 years of age.



This class teaches proactive prevention strategies to help parents protect their children from predators, sexual abuse, and how you can teach your children personal safety without scaring them. You can find more information at <http://pomwa.org/childsafetyworkshopsforparents.aspx> or contact Joan Sullivan 425.822.5079.

Epiphany Party in January

St. John's annual Epiphany Party will be in the Marsh Hall on Sunday, January 8 following the 10 a.m. service.

Families who would like to make a King's Cake to bring to church for the Epiphany Party. Recipes for a King's Cake can be found at the following web sites: www.gumbopages.com/food/dessert/king-cake.html <http://www.holidays.net/mardigras/cake.htm>.

We will crown a few kings and queens during the party, so we need at least 4 cakes. If you would like to help or need more information, contact Cathy Christensen in the church office.



What Is Advent?

The journey from Advent 1 to Epiphany unfolds as all good stories should, step by step, so we don't get *too* stunned by the awesome truth it bears. There's enough direct truth there to keep us on track and focused on it, and enough mystery and open room to fire the imagination -- from ordinary imaginations like mine, to great imaginations like T.S. Eliot and Dr. Seuss, to transcendent imaginations like your average 6-year old. And in 2011, **Advent starts on Sunday, November 27**. That means Advent 2 is on December 4, Advent 3 is on December 11, and Advent 4 is on December 18. (The number means the week, thus Advent 2 is shorthand for "Second Sunday in Advent" or "Second Week of Advent", etc.) Epiphany would be on Friday 06 January 2012, but will be celebrated in most places on the next Sunday, 08 January 2012.

The word '**advent**' is Latin for 'a coming or arrival'. The idea behind it is that God came to earthly life and lived among us, which is news to stop the presses for. It's something to celebrate, rejoice, because just by being in it, God was giving the supreme blessing to the created world. But this birth led to an execution of this same God, by us on behalf of us, and then the greatest news that death will not end it all. So it's not something you just go rushing into. We need to take stock of what that baby Jesus was here for. When we go all goo-goo over the baby and the birth, the adult Jesus and His execution are also in sight.

Advent is a season of preparation. So's Lent, but it is a different kind of preparation. In Lent, each of us prepares for what happened on Good Friday (execution) and Easter (resurrection). Lent is very adult and serious, because it

leads to a death; originally, Lent readied new Christian adults for baptism. In **Advent**, we thank God for Christ's first coming, prepare for his final coming at the end of time, and celebrate Christ's presence among us today through the Spirit. God loved us and wanted to share that love. But this existence isn't well-suited for a god; it's too broken, evil, painful, unjust. So, to rescue the created world from this evil, God chose to come here and walk the earth, to grow up, to live the truth, and to die. The only way to start such a thing is as a baby, and the only way to be a baby is to be born. Hence **Christmas**. Because Christmas is centered in the new hope brought by a baby, it's very much a holiday for children, and became all the more so with the development of toys as Christmas gifts. Because Advent leads us up to that baby, Advent is also child-oriented.

There's a time to get ready by focusing on your own sinfulness and wrongdoing, a time for personal transformation and following Christ to the cross. That's Lent. There's a time to get ready by rejoicing that our God is not far away and unfamiliar with the struggles of human life, that Christ is here right now among His followers, that God has already begun to bring in the Kingdom, and that Christ will come again to make it clear who really runs the place.

That's Advent.

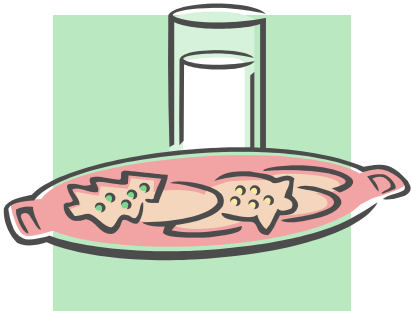
"Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the age", says Jesus.

SOURCE: <http://www.spirithome.com/advent.html>
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Celebrating Advent and Christmas

Because Christmas has become the most important holiday of all in the traditionally-Christian countries, Advent has become a preparation not just for the Christ child but also for everything else that happens Christmas day. Most people spend all four weeks of Advent (and then some!) buying or making gifts to give out for Christmas, scheduling Christmas travel, and setting up the bounties of the big Christmas meal. By the time it's over, we need a vacation from the holiday! In colder, wintry countries, Christmastide is when we celebrate what winter holds in store -- snow, skis, sleds, warm drink, icicles, glittering ice-covered trees, fireplaces, snowmen, snowball fights, skating, and a refreshing nip in the air.

Advent and Christmas Foods. Everyone has their favorite holiday foods. Good old-fashioned puddings are made in advance with sweet soft fruit such as raisins, currants, citrus peels, figs, pomegranates, and prunes, plus brandy, and then jarred and chilled to age several days to a week, so that the flavors meld. Mince pies are made of a dried fruit mix, and sometimes finely chopped lamb or venison. (The meatless, low-fat varieties are most common today.)



A Gaelic custom is to bake cakes during the last week of Advent, store them, then take them out just before Christmas to spread on almond paste and/or a sweet goo such as cake frosting or honey. On the

days before Christmas, Europeans bake plaited breads in a long oval shape, to look like a well-wrapped Christ child. Just as Lent is a fast, Christmas is a feast.

In some traditions, such as in the Phillipines, families start the Christmas feast right after returning from the late-night or midnight Christ's Mass. The typical fare is some form of ham, cheese balls, and hot cocoa.

Christmas Caroling. Quite possibly the most fun during Advent is found when *caroling*. Most caroling today is done between Advent 2 and Advent 4, far enough away from Christmas day so that people still have time for their Christmas preparations but not so far away as to miss the feel of the season. Carols are about Christmas more than Advent, and include mainly well-known hymns and popular-style songs, some of which are not at all religious (in Advent history, *it's always been that way*), and a few of which aren't all that merry (especially the medieval songs). Caroling also involves cheery greetings, comradie, a lot of walking, meeting strangers and shut-ins, and simple old-style dances. It's a great way to get to know each other, learn your neighborhood, and do a lot of blissful singing. Even bad singers can carol! Just remember, it's a *no-grump zone*. Caroling became popular in the Northern Hemisphere's cold-weather areas, so the traditions reflect the needs of shivering carolers. Somewhere near (or at) the end, the carolers often receive a cup of cheer - hot liquid refreshment such as apple cider with cinnamon, or cocoa with whipped cream or marshmallows, warm egg nog (spiked with rum or whiskey and spiced with vanilla, nutmeg, and/or ginger), glögg (a warm spiced wine drink from Scandinavia), or espresso cappucino coffee. Or, a warm root beer mixed with 20% Dr. Pepper, cinnamon, and a small amount of fruit punch. I'm partial to an alcohol-free hot cider drink amply spiced with ginger, cinnamon, and a dash of nutmeg. Usually there's finger-food and cake to go with it. That way, there are warmed bodies to go with the warm spirits and the cold weather.



Advent Wreaths and Candles. A common Advent tradition is that of the Advent wreath. The wreath is made of evergreen branches with four candleholders and candles, often hung from the ceiling. Since in Advent we're waiting for the Christ child, there needs to be a ceremonial way to mark the time

and make us aware of the wait. Lighting a candle reminds us of Christ as light of the world. As the candle is lit, it's customary to sing a verse or two of "O Come O Come Emmanuel". One candle is lit for each Sunday in Advent: one on the first Sunday, two on the second, and so on. Some in high-church circles frown on Advent wreaths in the sanctuary and lighting ceremonies during worship. Where that happens, those ceremonies can still be a part of how your Advent worship at home. The kids can have lots of fun making the wreath. For fire safety at home, it's usually better to put the candles on a separate candle-holder instead of on the wreath, putting the holder where it is kept away from flammables. (We moderns are *much* clumsier with candles than our ancestors, for whom candles were a part of everyday life.) Use a five-candle holder with a place for a middle candle, then put in four red candles (one for each Sunday in Advent) and one white candle (for lighting on Christmas day), lit in the same pattern as for the wreath. On Christmas day, all four red ones are lit, and then the Christmas candle.

More Advent Traditions. In Latino countries, the days before Christmas are marked by the *posada*, the journey of Mary and Joseph to find shelter in the days before Jesus' birth. The people playing the roles go from house to house, being turned away at each, until a house takes them in -- with a party ready to start upon their arrival.

Another common tradition is that of decorating and blessing their Christmas tree. The Sundays before Christmas (Advent 3 or 4) are often set aside for this task. Decorations include colored lights, balls (originally used to reflect a tree's candlelight in a dazzling way), tinsel (resembling the glittering icicles found on fir trees in icy lands), *chrismons* (wood, foam, or embroidered symbols and monograms for Christ), and on top, a star. Traditionally, the house decorations stay up



until Epiphany, 12 days after Christmas. The tree may have to come down slightly earlier if it dries out. The fragrance released when the tree is removed is memorably refreshing. The tar from the fallen needles may prove hard to remove from a shag rug. Korean Christians often put cotton 'snow' on their decorations.

The use of trees and decorations are definitely rooted in Europe's pre-Christian religions. The pagan customs were transformed by the early missionaries so that they express some aspect of Christian belief. Sometimes, the meaning was much the same as the pagans treasured, but drawn through Christ. In other cases, the old meaning was deliberately turned inside-out to bring further honor to God and more cause for the people to celebrate. In any case, the tradition of trees, lights, and decorations has caught on everywhere, even among some non-Christian Asians who found that they really enjoy decorating for the season.

Advent is also when many families start making their own *creche* or manger scene. Francis of Assisi is said to have popularized the creche. In Poland, there is a yearly competition on building the best one.

In one modern turn on the old tradition, a family does not make the creche all at once, but piece by piece, with each family member adding a piece, one a day in front of the family, telling the significance of each piece, until only the Christ Child and manger are missing. Then the manger is added - but with no baby & no straw. The baby needs a bed of straw, so the children are asked to do good things for others. For each such deed, they would get a straw to add to the manger. Hopefully, by Christmas eve, there would be a bed of straw to lay the baby Jesus figurine into.

The Moravians created the **Advent star**, which symbolizes the star that led the Wise Men to Jesus, who is "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). This star first started in the 1850s near the traditional Moravian home area of Herrnhut.



Children's Spiritual Development

By Ross A. Thompson and Brandy Randall

Definition of Spiritual Development.

The terms “*spiritual development*”, “*faith development*” and “*development of religious understanding*” have different meanings, but are often used interchangeably.

Thompson and Randall say that **spiritual development** “concerns the broad search for transcendental meaning that may be as simple as a young child’s inquiries into how the world came into being or as complex as a theologian’s metaphysical analysis.”ⁱ “**Faith development**” is the development of a belief in a divinity.

The **development of religious understanding** “involves an individual’s progressive adherence to a propositional network of values, creeds, and practices of organized religion.”ⁱⁱ Spiritual development may be associated with or incorporated with faith development and religious understanding.

“**Spiritual development** invites reflections on the transcendental and the metaphysical, on values that arise from fundamental propositions concerning human character and existence, as well as on specific religious practices and symbols.”ⁱⁱⁱ

There is no necessary or inevitable process of spiritual growth as is found in the maturational phases of physical, emotional, or cognitive development.^{iv}

Spiritual growth is tied to reflective thought and concerns about questions such as:

- What is the meaning of and purpose of my life?
- Who am I? Why am I here?
- What is my future?
- What defines the differences between right and wrong?
Why should I act rightly? Why is there so much wrong in the world?^v

“**Spiritual development** is connected to children’s efforts to understand the meaning & causes of life experience.”^{vi}

Stages of Faith Development.

The following list of stages of faith development is quoted from Thompson’s and Randall’s chapter.^{vii}

Their list is adapted from J. W. Fowler. (1981), *Stages of faith*. New York: HarperCollins; J. W. Fowler. (1991), *Stages in faith consciousness*. In F. K. Oser & W. G. Scarlett (Eds.), *Religious development in childhood and adolescence: New directions for child development* (W. Damon, Editor-in-Chief) (27-45). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Stage 0: Undifferentiated (Primal) Faith (Infancy). The earliest faith is the fund of basic trust and hope in the care of others. Undifferentiated faith experience of infancy is built upon secure attachments. A caregiver’s nurturance, protection, & availability provide the basis for the earliest grasp of divine care.

Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith (Preschool years). A preschooler’s experience of faith is rooted in the young child’s imagination, intuitive, and conceptual qualities. Faith is magical, imaginative, intuitive, and illogical, filled with fantasy and fascinated by stories of the power and omnipotence of God and the mysteries of birth and death. These stories are internalized in terms of the concerns of children of this age (e.g., protection from threat, dependability of adults, sickness and health), thus the understandings constructed by children from religious lessons may be much different from those intended by their adult tutors.

Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith (Early school years). Faith is captured in the stories that children hear and tell about God, and the meanings that their literal but logical interpretations of these stories provide about human relations with the divine. Participation in the symbols and observances of the religious community also fosters the initial appropriation of religious beliefs in oneself.

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Late school years, early adolescence). Faith is encompassed in a fairly uncritical, tacit acceptance of the conventional religious values taught by others, centered on feelings of what is right and wrong, especially in interpersonal relationships.

Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith (Late adolescence, early adult years). Faith is forged from personal reflection and experiences (sometimes entailing critical life transitions) that may cause the adolescent or adult to question prior assumptions and to reconstruct new and different beliefs and commitments that are more personally meaningful, individualized, & depend less on the guidance of authorities.

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith (Adulthood). Faith confronts but also accepts the paradoxes & contradictions of religious life: the irrational mysteries of prayer and worship, but also the rational reflections of belief and values, for example.

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith (Adulthood). Faith is grounded in comprehensive truths – concerning justice, love, and compassion – that may cause individuals to take unusual (sometimes radical) steps to live out their faith, such as selfless devotion to the poor (as with Mother Teresa) or non-violent (as with Gandhi) or even violent (as with Dietrich Bonhoeffer) resistance to political wrong. This level of faith development is rarely found.

Conditions That Foster Spiritual Growth in Children, Adolescents, and Adults

(The following are quoted directly from Thompson & Randall's chapter 8)

1. Respect for the ways that spiritual reflection changes with age and growth in thinking, judgment, and personality. This means that the ways that children interpret religious matters are accepted as suitable for their age.
2. Opportunities to participate in religious observances that are calibrated to a child's capacities for understanding and involvement. This means that children and adolescents have roles that are meaningful to them and respected and recognized by adults within the community.
3. Opportunities for intergenerational involvement in religious activity, as well as activities that are oriented to the interests and needs of children alone.
4. The growth and maintenance of relationships – particularly within the family – that inspire trust, security, and empathic human understanding.
5. Respect for individuality in spiritual understanding and its development. This means that pathways for growth of faith are individualized based on life experience, individual personality, and how persons interpret their own spirituality.
6. Human support to individuals of all ages during periods of difficulty or crisis, personal despair, or transition during which familiar beliefs may be tested and reconsidered.
7. Acceptance of personal searching as part of the process of spiritual development. This means the willingness by others to engage constructively with the child or adolescent in questioning and exploring more deeply the fundamental beliefs that are socialized by parents and others in the majority culture, without inspiring fear of rejection, denigration, or expulsion from the family or community.

FOOTNOTES:

- i Thompson, R. A. & Randall, B. (1999). A standard of living adequate for children's spiritual development. In A. B. Andrews & N. Kaufman, (Eds.). *Implementing the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- ii Thompson & Randall, p. 89.
- iii Thompson & Randall, p. 91.
- iv Thompson & Randall, p. 89.
- v Thompson & Randall, p. 91.
- vi Thompson & Randall, p. 91.
- vii Thompson & Randall, p. 98-99.

By Ross A. Thompson and Brandy Randall Source: "Implementing the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. A Standard of Living for Development," edited by Arlene Andrews and Natalie Kaufman.

Emotional Intelligence: How to Solve Problems

By Dr. Brad Schwall

When children understand that their actions have consequences, that others have feelings, and that there is more than one way to solve a problem, they:

- Are more patient
- Have more self-control

The inability to solve problems leads to aggressiveness, impatience, and loss of self-control which are all predictors of substance abuse, violence, poor decision-making in adolescence, and withdrawn behavior which can be a sign of possible future depression.

Problem-solving is key to emotional intelligence, healthy relationships, politics, law, medicine, engineering, creative disciplines, leadership, business, and to many other careers and endeavors.

Cool Kids teaches the "Cool Rule"- "Work it Out" to help youth problem-solve. When your child has a problem to solve or a decision to make or when you need to find a solution or compromise in your own life and relationships, follow these steps.

1. **Think about the problem.** *Defining the problem helps in focusing on the problem rather than personality or the past.*
2. **Brainstorm solutions.** *It is easier to find a compromise or positive solution when we think of as many alternative solutions as possible.*
3. **Choose the best solution.** *Choose the solution that provides the best compromise or has the most positive consequences.*

Examples of Problem-Solving:

Preschoolers taking turns with a toy, playing together, finding another toy, or doing something else

Elementary students deciding who gets to go first in a game or who will do what portion of a group project

Middle school students deciding how to handle a bullying situation or deal with peer pressure

High school students deciding what extra-curricular activities they will focus on or where they would like to go to college

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13 Natural Ways to Help Children Grow Spiritually

By Kieth Johnson

Here are specific activities to help parents build their children's faith at home.

1. Worship Preparation. Prepare for formal "at church" worship before you leave home. Wake up earlier than your kids so you're not rushed. My mom diffused the Sunday-morning-rush stress by waking us up to the soft sounds of Christian music. Music sets an emotional tone wherever it's heard. It worked for King Saul, and it worked in our madhouse also.

2. Prayer. Have you ever passed by someone broken down on the side of the road but you just couldn't stop? Why not pray aloud for that person? Or when you spot an ambulance or squad car speeding to the scene of a problem, pray for the people involved, their



safety, and their relationship with God. You'll find that children fight over who gets to pray. Another time for prayer is just before kids run off to school. My wife commits our children to the Lord and challenges them to stand up for the things that are right and against the things that are wrong.

3. Bible Reading / Study.

Read a key verse at breakfast. Read or tell a Bible story in your words before bedtime. Bible reading should be a social, bonding opportunity, not a dry discipline devoid of purpose. Remember: Short passages for "short people," long passages for "long people."

4. Meals Together. Mealtime is family together-time. Even if you regularly don't eat meals together, you can still create activities that nurture faith during mealtime. Assign table-setting chores and the before-dinner prayer to different family members. My daughter loves to have everyone pray with her when she prays. Encourage conversation. I like to ask open-ended questions at the table. Ask each person, "What's the best thing that happened to you today? The worst?" Instead of asking, "What did you do at school today?" get spe-



cific: "Who did you play with at recess? Who did you sit with at lunch and what did you talk about? Who was your friend today at school?"

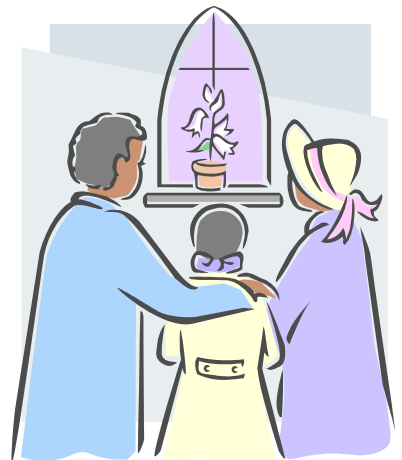


5. Family Fun. Television, the newspaper, Nintendo, shopping, and the telephone can interrupt or effectively eliminate opportunities to build faith. Pull the plug on these things. I like to join my daughter in cleaning up her room. She and I have a great time singing the cleanup song and

sharing. Or set up craft or coloring books on the kitchen table as kids get home from school. This will give them an opportunity to be creative and will give you an opportunity to talk with them. Board games have become one of our family's favorite activities. Around the Monopoly board, we dream about what our homes will look like someday on the inside and outside.

6. Celebrations. Birthdays in our home are all-day events. One child is special, and we emphasize that. On holidays we try to focus on giving to others. We encourage each child to learn the value of giving by picking out a gift for siblings. On Easter we decorate together and invite another family to help. We tell the stories that make the holidays meaningful and focus on others in practical ways. Traditions are powerful ways to bond and cement what's important. My grandfather would tell the story "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" each Christmas morning. Before packages are opened, we read the Bible's account of Jesus' birth.

7. Vacations. The best part of a vacation is the memories it gives family members. Planning, packing, sitting in a car for hours on end, sleeping in a strange bed, and having unexpected breakdowns produce stress and conflict. But no sooner have we returned from a vacation than we're planning the next one. Why? Because of the intense togetherness of these excursions, my wife and I were surprised to learn that our children prefer driving to fly-



ing. Our children (11, 8, and 5) prefer driving because they have our undivided attention for hundreds of miles. To a child those dull stretches of highway look great when you have your parents all to yourselves. We play road games, stop for treats (a.k.a. potty stops), and have crazy conversations. Prayer for the journey is standard, but what about prayer at the restaurant so others will know that God is important? What do you do on Sunday away from your home? Try sitting together in a different church for the first time.



8. Service Projects. It's been wonderful to hear my kids pray each night for the last four years for Mariamu in Zimbabwe. We sponsor this little girl and pray specifically for her food, water, education, and family. We feature her

picture prominently in our home. She has literally grown up with us. Visiting convalescents' homes as a family, helping a new neighbor move in, bringing lunch to Habitat for Humanity workers, or assisting in a park cleanup gives kids the valuable experience of seeing faith with works.

9. Sacrificial Giving. Allowance time is a perfect opportunity to demonstrate sacrifice and giving. Set up three cups: one for God, one for saving, and one with your child's picture on it. Allow children to determine who gets what, and help them stick to it. Let their savings be for a specific project. Turn in their "God" cup once a month at church (once a week for younger kids).

10. Rest. Spiritual nap-time? Sometimes a busy family needs a break. God knew we would fill our time with busyness and commitments. Rest doesn't come naturally, so God had to command that we take a break. A family pause is an ideal time to regroup, reconnect, and recharge.

11. Family Mission Statement. Stephen Covey introduces an important concept in the life of a family by encouraging families to come up with mission statements. Covey writes that there's a "supreme value in the process of long-term thinking and planning in building strong families. Deciding as a family what your worthy purposes, worthy visions, and worthy values are will unite your family in ways you've only dreamed of. Your mission statement will embody principles everyone has participated in choosing and that everyone has committed to live, both publicly and privately." In the process of writing your statement, everyone gives input

into the "big picture" of your family. God is placed at the center of your home not by chance, but because you've purposed it to be that way

12. Family Conference. We have family night every Saturday. We take turns planning an activity. If it costs money, then Dad has to be consulted to see if it's in the budget. We also have three or four family conferences each year to assess our assigned chores and responsibilities, to evaluate family nights, and just to connect in a formal way.

13. Conflict Resolvers. Sometimes siblings can get on each other's nerves. What better way to redirect tension than to think about the good qualities of one another. Whenever someone in our family is mean-spirited to another family member, the offender has to say or write four things he or she appreciates about the other person. This makes us thankful for one another and tenderhearted. It's also fun to watch the other person take in the compliments. We conclude with all of us chiming in a good quality we appreciate. Times when we have to discipline our children become great opportunities to share God's forgiveness and unconditional love. Last night my two boys had a water fight in the basement with their friends. They were in their rooms awaiting the punishment, and their contrite hearts melted my wife and me. They were truly sorry and said, "I wish I could take it back." What a wonderful time to share the forgiveness that resembles God's forgiveness. Conflicts, as with all family situations, provide clear opportunities to put flesh to Jesus, put teaching into practice, and make Christ the center of our homes and therefore our lives.



by Keith Johnson, children's pastor in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.
<http://www.olathebible.org>

Balancing Work and Home Life

By Dr. Brad Schwall

Are you a workaholic? Your family could be suffering because of it. Working parents must devote time and energy to their jobs and careers, yet not committing to family can have serious consequences. How can parents balance work and home life without sacrificing one or the other?

Work and family life are both demanding - they require time and energy.

How can parents stay committed to their work, but still devote energy to their families?

Prioritize. The first step to balancing work life and home life is to grant that work is important, but recognize that committing to family life is of crucial importance to your marriage relationship, the future of your children and their relationships, and your own personal well-being.

As a working parent, you may have the responsibility of earning an income for your family, yet that is never your only job. Having money to take care of needs is not what builds the character and emotional strength of your children.

Work smart and set boundaries - *What about those who must work long hours or even those who have extra obligations such as dinner meetings? What do parents need to do to protect time with family?*

Long working hours may be necessary at times. Fulfilling extra obligations may be helpful in establishing your

career. But, watch out for work patterns that are burdensome on your family.

Any time you must work outside your normal working hours ask yourself:

- Is it necessary?
- How much does it help me advance?
- Can this work be done during normal working hours?
- What limits do I need to set?

Be creative and firm when it comes to protecting time with your family.

Stay connected - *What about parents who have to travel? What are some tips for handling being away?*

Business travel does not excuse you for being clueless about what is happening in your child's life.

Talk and/or e-mail with your child each day. Pay attention to what your child is doing. Ask specific questions about what is happening. Understand that your child may not be able to recap everything that happened or do so just to make you feel better about being away. Stay tuned-in to your child and your child will know you care even when you're away.

Focus on the moment - *What is the best way to find balance?*

When you are with your family, be focused on your family. Leave work at work. Step away from the cell phone, computer, iPhone, and Blackberry.

Important Safety Issue

As some of you may know, St. John's outside play structure is over 10 years old and designed for children who weigh less than 50 lbs. For the safety of everyone, please monitor your children and only let children who weigh less than 50 lbs. play on the play structure. We appreciate your care in this matter.



In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

Hope your Thanksgiving is full of blessings and praise.

