

Tim Sullivan Family Life Director

Too many sports activities can untie family bonds

Because large families are increasingly rare these days, my wife and I have received some interesting comments from people who meet us for the first time and find out we have six children.



Quite often, they will look at Connie, my wife, and say, "You don't look old enough to have six kids." So far, no one has looked at me and made the same comment. Connie does look great. Perhaps keeping up with six children prolongs a person's youth.

Another comment people regularly make is, "Gosh, I don't know how you could raise six kids. I have my hands full with two," or whatever the number might be. To be honest, I'm not sure I can explain how we did it. Most of our children are now adults. It all went so fast that the details are a little hazy.

I know that it helped that the children were smarter than we were. For example, our children were actively engaged in a wide range of sporting activities. We were always running to football, basketball, baseball and soccer games. Then there were tennis lessons.

Well, one spring, the three of our children who were of the right age to play baseball or soccer decided on their own not to participate in a spring sport. It was a miracle. That spring, as other parents drove all over northeast Oklahoma to attend athletic events, we relaxed at home. The kids played

with each other, with the neighbors and with us. We shared a family meal virtually every night.

Recently, according to a recent article in USA Today, a movement has begun to reduce the demands on children's time and to allow children to relax and to play spontaneously. The early returns indicate that family relationships are enhanced, an atmosphere of peace prevails in the home, the children are learning to use their imaginations, homework isn't such a burden and the children feel rested.

One of the new organizations is Putting Family First (www.familyfirst.org), which began in Minnesota. William Doherty, co-author of the book, "Putting Family First," says that the group hopes to reclaim family time, dinners together, bedtime talks, visits to relatives and time to just hang out.

Another author, Alvin Rosenfeld, who wrote "The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap," describes himself as a "hyper-parent in partial recovery." He has help from the National Family Night Organization (www.nationalfamilynight.org) which, among other goals, encourages families to set aside at least one night a month for relaxed family time.

An outfit called Turn Off TV, Turn on Life! encourages families to turn off the television and focus on one another for an entire week each spring. The TV-Turnoff Week for this year is April 21-27, the week after Easter. I doubt that the group intended to link the turning off of televisions with the

Resurrection, but there could be a connection if you think about it.

Last spring, an entire town in New Jersey organized a family night, for which the local school system canceled all extra-curricular events and homework. A related initiative is Take Back Your Time Day (www.timeday.org). This organization has designated Oct. 24, 2003 as a day to say "no to the overwork, over-scheduling and overstress that threaten to overwhelm our lives," according to the group's web site.

The strength of a family flows from the bonds between family members. The development of these bonds requires time together, time for prayer, time for play, time for conversation, time for chores, time for quiet and for just being together.

Our own children appreciate the sports and other activities they were engaged in as kids, but they appreciate even more the times that we were all together. Now, at our family gatherings, they are more than content just being with one another and with us as their parents, reliving the past, finding joy in the present and dreaming together of the future.

Our closing verse is from Psalm 128: "Like olive plants, your children around your table. Just so will they be blessed who fear the Lord."