

## Outline and Notes for NWCHS talk: Prioritizing with Blinders On given by Robin Betz

### Panel discussion for Northwest Catholic Home School Conference May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009

#### Books/speakers I recommend:

**Spiritual:** Fr. Emmerich Vogt: 12 steps to Spirituality and Dethatching with love

**Marriage:** Dr. Laura: Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands and Fascinating Womanhood – Helen Andelin

**Parenting:** Barbara Coloroso: Discipline – kids are worth it and James Stenson – all of his works

**Home and Mind:** Andrew Pudua: Effects of music on living things part 1 and 2 and Don Aslett: cleaning tips

-Prioritize: thinking: once a day, once a week, once a month, once a year' - keeping blinders on from distractions

#### **Mom: spiritual**

- seeking objective direction and setting goals for the season vs. for the year (too long) or for the month (too short)

-simple doable commitments/ small nuggets of prayer totaling one hour a day(including family time),one hour a week, one hour a month and one day a year.

#### **Mom's Spiritual commitments:**

-10 min prayers upon waking, 30 minutes at 3pm, 20 minutes at night. Rote prayers, scripture, bible study.

- Holy hour a week. This is NOT always at the chapel, just 'be'! The saints got distracted too. A saint gets distracted 1,000 times. But a saint returns to their prayers 1,000 times. It is rare that one has a time of ecstasy with our Lord; just be, trusting He is transforming us.

- Once a month confession and once a year retreat for day or weekend brining your list of priorities before God!

#### **Mom's physical commitments**

**Daily exercise:** hour of exercise and eating whole foods –

. - Cardio 2-3 times a week for 45 minutes with 15 minutes of stretching, stretching and walking a few days and weight lifting a few days. Some of this with my children, especially my teens.

**Postpartum exercise:** I'd now step this up as a priority focusing on Cardio for an hour 5-6 days a week with or without my children until I'm strong, fit and prepared to keep up with the demands. At this stage, it means giving to my children and teens in other ways it is important that I sent these goals annually and monthly for it is very easy to become subjective and question if I'm doing the right thing. If one's inspiration is solely from the perspective of vanity, the outcome will not produce strength and joy and reach the goals I'm seeking; one will feel defeated.

**Weekly health:** make it a priority to make nutritious foods each week: Below are some suggestions:

**Quinoa Taboulli:** cooked and cooled quinoa, raw pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, sunflower seeds, chopped onion, celery, parsley and mint. Dressing of olive oil, salt and pepper. Serve this with whole grain chips – add chicken to boost the protein.

**Pasta salad:** Rice pasta, turkey or chicken meat, carrots shredded, cherry tomatoes, pine nuts, raw walnuts, celery, parsley, jicama. Drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper.

Pumpkin muffins, chocolate protein cookies, high protein oatmeal squares with m&m's or chocolate chips.

**Monthly and Annual exercise and health plans:** at my monthly spiritual 'retreat', I bring to God my goals. I bring my issues of vanity and sloth. Take a look at budget: are there things I can afford now? Things I should cut out?

**Mom's social:** offer up social commitments out of the house for now, plan a phone chat or walk with a friend or during a carpool time! Get a head set and make your calls while deep cleaning! Get creative and make it happen!

- **Double Date:** this enables time for us a couples, girl and guy time! We often meet at our homes.

#### **Date and Meet with your Husband:**

**Date husband daily:** catch up, share personally, give notes, emails, text, phone calls, and look him in the eye. For the last few years we've added each New Year's an 'activity' that is simple yet keeps us bonded. Limiting or omitting things like these can lead us to feel as if we are just housemates and partners, this lack of priority can lead to feeling like strangers; we need all the intimacy we can get to remain strong through the inevitable challenges that come with a large family. Some examples include: one dance a night, taking turns picking a song, leaving notes of encouragement and love, choosing one book to read together, even just a few pages a night either out loud, or, we purchase two books reading them separately but the ability to discuss the book offers the chance for dialogue and bonding.

**Meet with husband Daily:** catch up on business, kid's behavior, needs and successes. This enables him to focus in on who needs his 'wisdom', his 'hug', his 'talking to'. By mid morning we've connected for a least a short while to determine when our catch up time will be. I then plan for this time; 10-30 minutes is the usual length.

**Date husband weekly:** 1-3 hours for fun, romance and playfulness. Our dates rarely cost any money and we rarely go anywhere. My kids have learned at an early age to respect our couple time. With so many children so close together, we learned early on to carve out the time, but, if we were going to wait for the time and money to leave, it would never happen. It takes planning and a mind set of enjoying the simple fun, but we find we date more often and can find joys in the simple things; a luxury really! To be honest, I don't really like myself or my husband very much if we don't have this time! I also learned early on, 'what the kids don't know we know is what matters.' If my kids are up but are not bothering us, I leave well enough alone. We even used to have toddlers come out of their room and peek around the corner, as long as we did not acknowledge their presence, they assumed they were not seen, hence, I chose not to interrupt our time. I chose to ignore their presence and focus on the priority at hand, my project or my husband. The children knew if they were found out, there would be a consequence so they try to maintain remain in hiding, all the while still near to us. I could even walk by them acting as if I did not see them. If I acknowledge their presence then I have to take the time to give them the consequence they are asking for; this takes time and energy. On the other hand, if I ignore them and they are not interrupting, then we can enjoy this ignorance with bliss! Many a night we found children asleep in the floor leading up the room we were in; we both chose our battles and had a satisfying experience! It's all in how you want to look at it.

**Meet with husband Weekly:** this time is for discussing business, money, kids 'issues' and how to execute plans

**Date husband monthly:** we try to find one day from 3pm to 10 pm. we've found in doing so we have enough time for fun, catching up, really letting things come up. Knowing we have this time carved out frees my mind and brings me peace and allows me to save it up and not dump things on him during the day or week. Hence, our daily encounters and weekly times are fruitful and rejuvenating.

**Annual overnight with husband:** Extended day and overnight with or with/out the baby each year: the ideal time we have 1-2 times a year is from mid day on Friday until after bed time on Sat. This is short enough to leave the little ones or to take a baby yes long enough to have a nice meal, go shopping, relax. I often save up 'bigger' things to do that my husband can offer his muscles and mind to me. In general, he offers this time to me to plan and he comes along for the ride, providing me with his attention and support. In turn he received a joyful wife ready to meet his and the family's needs 'unbegrudgingly'. (Is that a word? I like it!)

**Home: orderliness:** Lack of orderliness can be the root of many sins and obsessive orderliness can be the root of many sins. Kids are on chore list starting at age 3 and they receive allowance starting at age 4.

We give them money in order to teach them responsibility, but, also so we can take it away!

**Allowance:** a dollar a month per year. 10% to saving, 10% to charity. They are not to purchase junk food.

"When you are older are responsible for your own insurance you can determine what you'll eat and drink!"

Our goal is to never fight with our children; we'll never win. Fighting with preteens or younger will lead to fighting with teens and older - the loss and weapons used are heavy and deathly; most especially for one's soul. From an early age our goal is that our children feel the natural consequences for their actions. The rules are set; they have a choice to reap the rewards or consequences. It is our responsibility however to set the rules and make them clear.

An older child deserve the opportunity to feel the consequences of a poor choice thereby it would be a disservice if I just let things slide.

**Tips for living in small space and general home orderliness:**

-If it is not needed in the next season for a child, donate it.

-Be creative; ask yourself, 'where is it written that I have to do this, have this?'

- For school, participating in MODG has been helpful because I only keep what is essential for these classes' including her supplemental stuff. Why reinvent the wheel; there are MANY other invaluable books, but, I am fortunate to be able to

participate in her curriculum therefore I give away and keep from purchasing anything that is not used in her syllabi; not included classical literature.

- Keep the bare basics, we had: 2 pairs shoes each, one church outfit per season, 5 sets of clothes, not always 5 pairs of pants. One coat per season ONLY with a hood so we can omit hats. Puzzles: five not 20, games 5 not 20, one box of toys in the main room. Omit paper goods of all kinds (except toilet paper), enough towels for one person per week, with a few extra.

- I used my big van and under beds to store excess food. I remember vividly one time when we had another family over and we needed another can of refried beans. I asked one of my kids if they'd run to the van and grab a can. My friend asked me if I needed help brining the groceries, 'no, we store it there!' She too admitted to using her van and under her kid's beds to store canned goods and such! We had a good laugh sharing other creative ways of doing things because of the small space and the virtue we believed it stirred in our children.

- We only own coats with hoods; limits the needs for hats and losing hats. We try to keep only 'hoodies' for the same reason.

- Keep as many things off the floor: Don Aslett's philosophy of setting up your home like a hotel: i.e.: attach lamps to the walls off the ground, limit what you have to move when you vacuum, limit what can be moved and broken, set up for speed cleaning.

- Got rid of pj's years ago. Dress in clean clothes, ready to go in the morning and fewer things to keep organized!

- No toys with batteries. No toys that does not stimulate explorative play, creativity.

- No toys that make any noise that make mommy want to cry or yell 'I quit'!

- Limit stuff; if I'm not going to use it in the next season, or in the next year with the next child, I give it away (barring a few expensive items like leather shoes or suit coats), but I humbly welcome hand me downs. I figure, if someone else can use this NOW and I can use this space, above all, I can find things and organize more easily the few items we have.

- chore list for each child and this list changes periodically when our needs change, or when a child has mastered his chore therefore earns the privilege to move on to another.

- Each child has a tick list to look at making it easy for them to follow through and easy for me to remember who is responsible for what.

- Our kids are officially on the chore list by age 3 and they receive allowance by age 4.

- We give our children money in order to encourage responsibility and most of all so we can take it away when they do not follow through with their responsibilities!

- With this money we do expect them to save 10% and we expect them to give 10% back to God in some way

- We give our children a dollar a month per year. Our 10 year old received 10 dollars a month. However, our children are expected to purchase anything beyond food and clothing (and clothing if it is beyond what we deem reasonable).

- Except for the rare occasion, we have one stipulation; they are not to purchase junk food: "When you are older are responsible for your own insurance you can determine what you'll eat and drink! For now, I'll set limits!"

- We use candy as rewards and to celebrate

- By giving allowance, by having an Xbox and computer games, we have something to take away; it works.

- Our goal is to never fight with our children; we'll never win.

- By making our expectations clear from the start it is no surprise when we come to them and point out, 'we notice you chose to hire me to do your dishes today. We've deducted 5.00 from your money book.' Or, it looks to me like you decided to give into distractions this morning so your math is not complete; I'm sorry you chose to do more math this weekend instead of play Xbox. I hope you'll decide to earn that back because I know how much you like to relax and play Xbox! I want that for you!

### **Keeping the house in order around the clock:**

**Daily:** entire house pick up before each meal

'Hire a maid.' The chores are clearly written out. We have daily, weekly and monthly chores. If they choose not to do their chore, they've made the choice to hire the maid to do this. I discern if I am going to do the chore or ask siblings to do the chore. (The siblings would then earn that money) Either way, the balance of our home was disrupted therefore they choose to pay the consequence by 'hiring a maid'. It is important that the children recognize that they are important to the family. They deserve the encouragement to become responsible respectful adults. Taking over their

chores or fighting with them is not encouraging this independence hence limiting their success. And, their lack of commitment to what is their part to maintain order in the home, effects everyone. We keep the chores the same for sometimes over a year. The general rule is, 'if you despise a particular chore then it would be wise if you'd master it thereby encourage mom to give someone else the opportunity to master it!' they have learned if they 'hate it' hence do it half way, or, worse, whine while attempting to compete it, this will get them nowhere! "Mom, please will you give me a different chore?" 'Well, from the looks of things, you have shown me that you have not mastered this chore. It would be a disservice if I sent you off in life without mastering the art of scrubbing the toilet thoroughly so it looks like you need more practice! Once you've proven you are able to wipe down the bathroom efficiently for several weeks in a row, this will show me you do not need the practice and I'll let someone else have a try!"

**The current rates for the maid in our home are:**

2.00 For every daily job that is missed, 5.00 for it not getting done by the end of the day.

10.00 for not getting a weekly job done and add 2.00a day to that each day it is not done

20.00 For every monthly job that does not get done and 5.00 for each day until it complete.

**Weekly** deep clean: dusting, bathrooms, kitchen floors, cooking, vacuuming, organize toys, books shelves, etc

**Monthly** deeper clean, give away, prepare for next season if it's approaching, cooking

**Annual** evaluation and bigger home repair – this happen before holy week and we set a plan for spring and summer

**Most valuable home management tips**

-Prepare for Sunday mass on Saturday afternoon, both physically and spiritually: car packed, prayer books and essentials included, breakfast organized, clothes ironed/organized, pass by mom and put on mom's bed etc

-Set times for bed, immediate consequences if violated, this enables time for me to feed my soul and my husband.

-Cleaning supplies in each bathroom and kitchen. Toothbrushes in each bathroom, for each child, hair brushes abound...invest in lots of practical items that will enable you to stay on time and limit the time lost in looking for something.

-No money or candy in rooms: this leads others into temptation, adults use a bank for valuable- you use the mommy bank. This just keeps things simple, avoids messes and temptation.

**Prioritizing time to meet with specific children and carving out time for unique circumstances for our children:**

-If one of my children is in a particular physical or emotional state of weakness – focusing on this 'red flag' is obviously a priority.

-Dad has a commitment to check in with boys starting at age 5 for 10 minutes. Dad checks in with: Mon Son 1, Tues son 2, Wed son 3, Thurs Son 4 and Fri. Son 5. Mom does the same with girls.

-if we don't put in on our calendars, we will find reason to move it; indefinitely. These times are meant to be shorter in length than a planned 'date' with our children but still consistent.

- Girls 'date' with dad - a run to the store, a short bike ride or kicking the soccer ball around.

- Official 'dates' with our children starting at preteen; depending on temperament, but not later than age 13.

-Age 10 we try to have monthly dates with our kids, dad with the boys, and mom with the girls depending on temperament.

-age 13, 2x month dates. If there is a red flag with one of them, i.e.: struggling in some way, socially, emotionally, academically, spiritually, we then carve out more time. We can see these red flags coming because of the regular time we have set for each child.

-The time we share must be such that it is long enough to allow 'stuff' to come out, but, short enough that one will remain committed to making it happen. We have found by making this time a priority it limits big surprises later and brings security to our children.

-Our children get the message, "Although there are a lot of here, we love you uniquely and specially and we are here for you! '

-If one of our children seems to have a real need to talk, we try to drop what we are doing and engage then! This does NOT include our highly social or fanciful children who could, if given the audience, enjoy the pleasures of entertaining us all day long! At our weekly dates, we as a couple, make sure to share the fruits of our time with this particular child.

-When a child is moving through or stuck in a unique circumstance, we also consider, daily, weekly, monthly 'check in's to make sure there was not a 'quick fix'. We, at our weekly dates, make sure to discuss this as a couple.

**Prioritizing school needs:** There are countless ways to home school including adjusting year to year depending on particular circumstances and one's level of enthusiasm. Recognize your strengths, be open to many varying options and invest in what works for your family!

**Co-ops:** between the coops that are run by families, with alto of time and energy invested hence the cost near to nothing, to the coops require a financial investment, but the parents do little to nothing. They can be a great way to bring balance to one's homes cool.

**Boxed curriculum:** For my family, based on the many variables included number of children, ages of children, doctor's appointments, and regular interruptions, we've found it best to maintain

**Enrolling in correspondence schools** for general guidance or saturated guidance

**Hiring Help:** home school teen to help with childcare or cleaning, 1x month deep cleaner, get creative and be open/budget for hired help if you are able

Lastly, I was asked what I do **get a toddler to entertain themselves, during the winter months:**

Boxes and boxes of various things that ONLY come out during school time. They are now old enough to clean up too! Older kids take ½ hour to hour periods keeping kids entertained; the babysitter tidies up before calling the next 'sitter'.

**Handling College:**

-10<sup>th</sup> grade start test prep at home

- Summer before 11<sup>th</sup>, pay for on line test pep at collegeboard.com: Unlimited test prep for 6 months. This is especially invaluable for writing.

- Kids in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades take one SAT or ACT a month for a year.

-PSAT in October of 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

-Depending on how they do on their ACT and SAT test prep, we focus on their strength i.e.: did well on ACT so now we try to really WOW them with the ACT omitting practice for the SAT.

-We have chosen NOT send any free results to the schools; we wait to see how they did. If the school sees a low score, then a high score they will have a different impression, first impression than if they saw both grades at once. Once you take an official test, ALL scores will be sent. We deem it better to have them see the good and the poor together, instead of risking them seeing the low grade and then months later, the high grade. It costs a little more but feels it's worth it.

-Our kids pay for their own college but we support them the best we are able by adding them to our phone plan, giving them free miles and most of all, moral support and guidance.

- David has taken the children in their senior year to visit 3-5 colleges. This is a time of great bonding and the beginning of the next phase for them; we spend 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades with saturated time discussing their goals, their future, listening to their ways of thinking as adults.

We try to help our 11<sup>th</sup> grader visit colleges they are interested in if possible, or, work to get a speaker to visit our area.

-we set up their schooling to be more rigorous in the earlier high school years; so far our seniors have been able to work nearly full time for 18 months before going off to college. When working full time we adjust our expectations at home seeing their vocation at this time of their life as student and we do what we can to support this and to help them maintain balance. We often tell them, 'your job today is to just 'hang out' with some of siblings!' This might mean taking younger ones to the library or teens shopping.

-Once our children graduate they pay room and board; more or less depending on if they are school. They always have the option to work this off doing chores for us. The expense is minimal but we feel it's an important message we give to our adult children. With this stage comes great independence and mutual respect between the adults in our home; we've enjoyed it thoroughly.

### **Family Spiritual:**

#### **How do you nurture prayer as a sacred and special time with your family?**

Be a calm and dedicated example open to change in your family routine to make sure what you do emulates the virtue you wish to instill. One decade prayed with the ability to guide the toddler and maintain order is better than an entire rosary with tension and chaos. Keep in mind, the chaos may be perpetuated by mom! We invite the children to come be part of our prayer time, and we also excuse them to pray in their rooms until they can come and be reverent.

#### **Mom's job during family prayer time, as with meals, is to guide and nurture, NOT to be fed.**

### **Fostering the faith:**

Pray for them one toilet paper roll at a time! ...One diaper at a time, to finger print at time...pretty simple road to sanctification if you keep the right frame of mind counting your blessings.

Pray out loud consistently throughout the day, for your benefit and for your children: "Jesus I know you can help me!" "Mary, help me to be like you! You are so mild and loving!"

**Daily:** morning offering, spiritual communion, announce the saint for the day with nuggets about their life, daily scripture reading, daily mass when able (it can be harder NOT to go to mass than I can be to attend.), noon day prayers including grace and Angelus, 3pm Divine Mercy, grace at all meals, Evening rosary. Holy minutes: one person is assigned to call out 'holy minute' – we pause, pray silently for one minute, counting our blessings, aiming to Glorify God in everything we think and do and say for the next 59 minutes! Lastly, when I recognize a red flag in our family, i.e.: general ungratefulness, slang language...I study this for a while and determine what we can do, add to our daily commitments to bring about a change. I.e.: we've been reading the Divine praises in light of recent language and tone of voice I'm witnessing as a whole in our family. We discussed how we treat one another offends our Lord, let's look for ways to praise one another and build each other up, let's honor Jesus by praying to Him, listing the many 'name's He's been honored with asking for the Holy spirit to tug at us, our Guardian angel to guide us to be kinder to one another and recognize the goodness in one another.

**Weekly:** mass and holy hour but not necessarily at church and examine family goals

**Monthly:** confession and examine family goals and upcoming liturgical feasts, make a plan, find my supplies, or, decide to omit something. This year we skipped the Jesus tree because of the challenges of this pregnancy and the age of my toddler; we consciously did this however and we discussed it with the kids. We quickly came up with a few simple things to replace our usual traditions.

**Family social:** build up the support you'll get from other families to help you raise responsible, respectful Godly children, and, to support your marriage. It takes effort; camping, pot lucks, sports, take time to get creative, share your talents, emphasize others talents, initiate the efforts for it is an investment. Build up the family of God around you to keep you grounded.

### **Favorite success response to comments about family size and/or homeschooling**

My short reply is this: I try to reply with a question. "um what do you mean, I'm not sure what you are saying?" this gets them to think and put the question back on them.

Depending on our frame of mind, we can become defensive and irrational ready for a fight!

Set realistic expectations; don't go into situations with your 'dukes' – YOU WILL LOSE and they won't care!

Be prudent in planning accepting when you are vulnerable!

They don't care to hear your story. Also, please consider that most often people are not trying to negate you, they are just plain shocked! Try to see this as an opportunity.