

Kids, Church, Sunday School and Sunday Morning Conflicts Such As Sports and other Extra-Curricular Activities

By The Rev. Dr. Robert "Odie" Odierna

SS = Sunday School

ECA = Extra-curricular activity

We are all part of a culture that does not respect or care about our Sunday morning Church and Sunday School (SS) schedule. It is a reality – and I don't pretend we can change it. The issue is learning how to work *with* it. These days, many parents sacrifice their child's involvement in church/SS for an ECA. Somehow we erroneously believe we can help our child develop faith, belief, values, morals and a healthy understanding of God's role in evil, conflict, crisis and our choices - *without* participating in church/SS. We are running the danger of bringing up a generation of young people, who, when they become adults, will not have learned the value of faith, relating to Christ, Church and Christian Ed – because they will not have been there to learn any of the lessons. It's like expecting your child will learn academics without hardly, if ever, attending school. So what's the answer in our over-scheduled job as parents.

Society was different when I was a child, but had I been given the choice then between going to church/SS or playing sports - sports would have won! And I loved church! I also brought up three children – all of whom had conflicts with their ECA's and church. I also coached youth sports at the Club level for 15 years. So I understand the problem and have what I believe are some helpful suggestions.

Help your child set appropriate priorities for what is important in life -

Participating in sports is a *huge* value of mine, but I am clear that the best opportunity to advance in life comes from improving one's *academic* achievements and developing a healthy *value* system. When I coached I emphasized to the parents of my kids that family, school and church all took priority over attending a practice and that when it came to a game those priorities should be balanced and shared! Include in the lessons to your kids, the value of learning about faith and belief in a loving and caring God. Helping children to learn about God and where God is in their life when things go bad is a critical life lesson. Church/SS attendance also helps you/them learn about the importance of the faith community – people supporting one another and wrestling together with questions we all have about life and God!

Avoid Extremes – if you are allowing your child's ECA to totally exclude their participation in church/SS – OR if you are preventing your child from participating in an ECA because they exclusively have to go to church/SS – then I feel you are doing a disservice to your children. You might get scolded from the ECA leader about the need to make a "commitment"! But at pre-high school age, nothing in life should be so all consuming and important. Help them learn that *balancing* several things that are crucial to their physical, emotional and spiritual health, growth and development is important! Be a good role model yourself for this vital life lesson!

Work out compromises – Don't allow your child's activities be "either/or". Be clear with your child, their coaches, and the organizational leaders that your child will have to miss the activity occasionally due to church activities. And in the same manner be clear with your clergy and Sunday School teachers that sometimes your child will miss their classes due to their ECA. I do support this! For example – it is not impossible for your child to get to church *twice* a month: Once per month by missing the ECA *entirely* (to miss one game/event per month so they can occasionally go to church during the season is NOT the end of the world, *especially* for children in grammar and middle school!); The second by taking them to whatever *other* service can fit into the schedule without missing the ECA. There are 3 services (8:00, 9:45 and 11:15) to choose from that you could try to make, depending upon the time of the ECA. Their attendance in church and the education they get by osmosis from receiving HC, sermons etc will still be valuable, even if they cannot make SS. Some attendance is better than none!

Get into positions of influence – I became the coach to my kid's teams and therefore was able to lobby to have our games played at other times besides Sunday mornings. Now granted, I had a lot of clout as the *priest* in town, who literally could not make Sunday mornings – but it proved that the people who make up the schedule can be influenced and they do have "some" flexibility for when they schedule your child's event.

Don't give your child the choice – You force your children to live with you and to go to school because there are life values attached to these activities. Help them understand the importance of priorities and balance as talked about above. Let them know that some things are a "given" when it comes to your parenting and the values you want them to learn. Major choices should not come until high school and after confirmation (typically 9th grade).

Be realistic about your expectations and goals - Many parents involve their children heavily in sports/ECA's, but often without realizing that an average of only 1 % of children will receive a Division I/II College scholarship. And then, only 1% of those who *play in college* go on to play professionally, and 90% of those come from Division I colleges! Have your child participate in ECA/sports for the values and benefits that ECA/sports can give, not because you/they think you can win a scholarship or become a pro. Burn-out in an activity before kids even get to high school is now extremely high because the involvement when they are young is too intense and all consuming. Feel free to contact me anytime by phone/email to discuss these issues.

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Contact our clergy for more ideas and information

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