**[Plan your summer vacation around God!](https://mychristmycare.wordpress.com/2014/06/16/plan-your-summer-vacation-around-god/)**

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**CARE OF OUR FAMILY: GROWING IN CHRIST DURING FAMILY VACATIONS**

The final bell rings marking the end of the school year—and the mad rush for the exits ensues. Many of us can remember that highly anticipated and energetic time of our youth. It is a time of hope for a new day, a time of planning on summer camps, a time of family vacations. And so often, we also think of it as a time to take vacation from Church…

 Interestingly, the Church offers a Fast at the beginning of this time of year—the Apostles’ Fast. It is a time that is so often neglected in our family life here in the United States and Canada. And yet, it is a time that can be the greatest blessing to recharge our spiritual batteries and prepare for the family vacation season.

 When we fast, we set aside the time to care for our relationship with God. When we fast, we take the time to deny the self, and thus strengthen our ability to say “YES” to God—uniting our will to His Will. When we fast, we remind ourselves that there is something more important than immediate gratification.

The question remains: How do we fast and still have a family vacation? Family time—including taking a vacation together—is vital to the health of our relationship with our loved ones. There is nothing more important than keeping the Gift of the Family healthy and whole and dedicated to God. That does not mean that to be a healthy family, an extravagant trip is needed. How healthy is it to take a “vacation” from the one thing that nourishes us as a family: Christ? How healthy can it be to remove ourselves from the one place where Jesus Christ is revealed in His Fullness: the Divine Liturgy? This week, as the summer planning sessions are beginning in earnest, let us take some time to prioritize our family life so that our summer vacations can reflect our values in Christ. When we set our family time priorities, it is important to list them in the same manner as our personal ones, keeping in mind the one thing needful: Our Relationship with Christ! Each family should take some time to determine what is truly important to them. Below is a suggested list of priorities for the top five of any list:

**1)       Family Relationship to God.**

The family should always take time to pray together in the home. Nothing can reinforce the value of caring for one’s relationship with God than taking the time to do so as a family. Where is your family altar/shrine in your house?

**2)       Family Relationship to one another.**

Communication is the key to love: How often do you sit and talk as a family? Do you have regular meals together? Prioritizing family time helps to develop strong relationships. It also enables parents and children alike to know that they matter.

**3)       Family Relationship to the Church and parish life.**

Participation as a family in the Divine Services and the life of the parish is an essential part of any family’s spiritual growth. Coming together in the Holy Eucharist unites the family in the strongest bond: the Body of Christ! And, lest we forget, we participate in this Thanksgiving Offering both by receiving it regularly, and by contributing our Time, Talents and Treasures to the Church.

**4)       Finding a balance between working and providing for the family and loving the family relationally.**

It is important to balance work and family life—especially in the compartmentalized lives we lead here in the United States. This is why it is sometimes necessary for families to take a vacation together so that those who work may have an opportunity to dedicate time—our most important Gift—to loved ones. This doesn’t mean that this time needs to be an extravagant expense—just dedicated to family.

What about planning the family vacation around all of the things we are to Care for in our lives as Orthodox Christians? What about while on a beach vacation, look up the closest Orthodox Church and be sure to attend? What about taking some time to volunteer at a FOCUS location or homeless shelter while enjoying said trip? What about taking a trip to help out in at the orphanages in Kosovo and Metohija, or if that’s too far, at Project Mexico and the St. Innocent Orphanage? Or, what about setting aside some time in our vacation schedule to visit a monastery to pray?

A good rule of thumb would be the tithe of our time…set aside at least one tenth 1/10 of the vacation time to dedicate it to giving thanks to God. Our Father expects us to enjoy the fruit of creation—after all, He proclaimed it to be very good. Let us just not forget to honor and give thanks for all of His blessings through it.

**5)       Family relationship toward the community.**

It is important to for the family to also keep in mind how we interact with the least—those placed in our lives as opportunities to reach out in Christian Love. Are we involved in our Diocesan Events and Church Camps? Are we planning our annual budgets around caring for our Thanksgiving to God (and our Stewardship Commitments)? Are we involved in helping to feed the hungry in our community? Do we visit the sick, shut-in, or imprisoned? Are we dedicated to helping in the community?

This week at the beginning of summer, let us decide if we are living for this temporary life, or if our focus and attention remains on our eternal Life in Christ. This week, let us embrace the Fast with joy, so that we might offer ourselves to Christ. This week—let us plan for a Summer Vacation that helps our Salvation!

B*y Father Christopher Rocknage*