

Scheduling time for real priorities

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I know that summer does not officially end until Sept. 21. And I know even after that date we will have stretches of hot weather that will make us think we are back in mid-July. It seems that a stretch like that always comes upon us the first full day the kids are back in school.

Summer is a favorite time for most of us. I know it is for me. The warmth of those days, vacation time and a general slowing of the pace of life are some of the elements that make this time of year especially attractive to me. I find a special beauty in each of our seasons, and would miss their variety greatly were I to live in a part of our country where the climate does not hold that kind of variety. But summer is my favorite. It always has been.

Since I returned from vacation at the end of July, I have noticed again a phenomenon that has been growing in recent years — that activities that normally would have been held after Labor Day in years past are now being held in August.

I do not refer here to unforeseeable circumstances that demand immediate attention. I mean meeting to prepare for meetings. Or meetings that once were dropped between June and September now appearing on July and August schedules.

It's one sign among some others that makes me wonder if work schedules are driving human life so strongly that we've forgotten how to relax and enjoy the blessings of leisure time.

Did you ever try to set up a meeting of busy people? It's not hard at all if you can function well between 4:30 and 5:30 a.m. And don't count on that hour without someone calling back to the office to be sure that hour isn't booked up. ("That hour is usually free on the third Wednesday. But it never hurts to call.")

Of course, I'm not saying this phenomenon is the pressure of church workers or business people. My sister told me it is a problem in families, too — especially as they begin to grow and become more independent.

Last week, for example, she told me that at our annual family reunion my five nieces who were able to make it decided that they'd like to get together again as soon as possible. They checked their calendars and discovered their next common free time was 3 p.m. one year from next Tuesday. And Kathleen still had to check with her people to see if she was free!

I am not knocking hard work in support of family, to build up a business or in pursuit of endeavors that build communities. I am just reflecting aloud on the possibility that increasing activity even in the pursuit of good things can cause us to miss out on life's richest treasures — really savoring the slow, steady growth of a child; attending to the ways in which a spouse is changing; devoting oneself to join the spouse on his or her new ground.

I think also of the tendency born of constant activity to measure our worth by our productivity. It can happen to any of us. When it does, we fall into a trap and forget that we are of irreplaceable worth and of immense dignity for no other reason than



that we're made in the image of God. For the vast majority of human kind a compelling example of our innate worth is the tiny baby. Utility? Productivity? Not a whole lot. Beauty? Dignity? You supply the answer.

Do we have time to sit and let our deepest yearnings and fears and joys bubble to the middle of our awareness? Do we have time to rest in quiet with the God who made us? Do we stop long enough ever to notice the shade of concern in the eye of a loved one? Do we feel guilty and restless if anything is left undone and we are just sitting? Do we ever just yearn to be?

I am not talking only about you out there. I lost my appointment book lately, and it dawned on me that internally I was responding to that inconvenience as though it were a life-threatening situation. Really.

The incident and my response to it led me to some good reflection on what I find to be of importance, of how I translate my priorities into my use of time. I've got some way to go in that.

Peace to all.

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