

Too stressed out for God?

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Anita Martin's 19-month-old daughter, Sarah, was repeatedly making her wishes known as her mother was being interviewed by the *Catholic Courier*.

"Yes, I know, the bobby's coming," Martin said to her daughter in between answering questions. The "bobby" happens to be Sarah's name for the bottle.

The mother-daughter interaction is a perfect example of how harried the life of parents can be, a life that Martin nonetheless insists needs time for faith. Martin serves as youth minister for St. Patrick Parish in Owego. Her husband, Dan, shares in her service to the church, coordinating youth-ministry activities for the Tioga Catholic Community, which comprises the parishes of St. Patrick, St. John the Evangelist in Newark Valley and St. Francis of Assisi in Catatonk.

Contemporary families "burn the candle at both ends," said Martin, who keeps busy herself by caring for Sarah and her brothers, Samuel, 10, and Isaiah, 8.

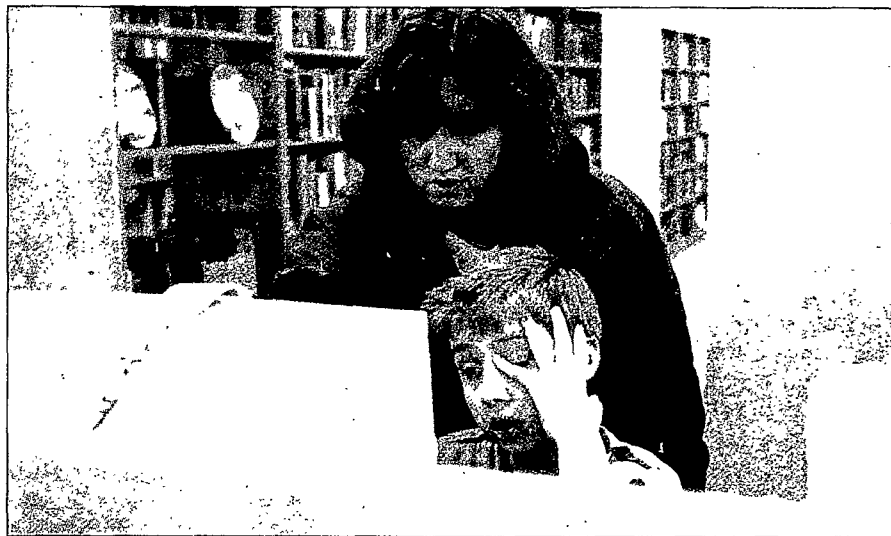
"One day, you're going to your friend's in the morning, taking Isaiah to piano lessons and, in the evening, your husband is doing Stations of the Cross," she said of a recent daily schedule. Even in a family like hers that is devoted to the church, spirituality is always in danger of being placed on a "back-burner," she said. The Martins, however, believe there is a way to keep a family's Catholic faith alive even if it seems time won't allow it. First and foremost, she said, couples need to create a common prayer life, and spend time together away from their children on a regular basis.

"If your relationship isn't healthy, then your relationship with your children and God isn't going to be healthy," she said.

Families also need to make attending Sunday Mass together a priority.

"By making rituals important and stressing them in your lives, your children are going to see that that's important," she said.

She added that weekly Mass-going can be a refreshing experience for a family, between enjoying the liturgy



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Keith Johnson, a student at St. John the Evangelist School in Spencerport, and his mother, Catherine, who is a lunchroom supervisor at the school, find some time to spend together at the Ogden Farmer's Library March 14.

to socializing with fellow parishioners before and afterward.

"It gives us a good start to the week," she said. "It puts our perspectives in order. It reminds us that God is in everything we do."

On that note, families can find God in everything simply by paying attention to him throughout the day, she said.

"When you're taking that kid to soccer; when you're tired and making dinner, the spirituality is there," she said. "It just requires you to take advantage of the situation."

Sharing prayers with children can help families find God in any situation, she added.

"When you're taking the kids to a

soccer game, saying a prayer in the car is a perfect opportunity, instead of listening to the music or whatever else, to thank God for the gifts he's given you of sportsmanship and the ability to play that particular sport and that you do your best and that nobody gets hurt."

Martin added that parents can heighten awareness of God's presence in their families' lives around the holidays. For example, rather than simply putting up a nativity scene at Christmastime, a family can take a few moments and bless each piece of the scene, she said.

Martin said the opportunities to experience God are virtually limitless given the right attitude.

"He's always there to lend you a hand and to lend you an ear," she said. "It's just how you choose to listen and hear and see God."



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