

Take Back Your Time

- Resist a relentless pace of life for yourself and your family.
- Reclaim time from long hours at work, school or extracurricular activities.
- Choose four windows of time between Labor Day (September 5, 2005) and Take Back Your Time Day (October 24, 2005) to rest and recreate balance.

Youth Sports and Public Activities On Sunday Mornings

The following statement on hindrances to and disruptions of Sunday worship services and the dilemmas these situations cause for youth, families and churches was approved by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches in 1997. Because it continues to be relevant, we urge congregations to distribute this statement, accompanied by appropriate local information, to community officials, organizational leaders, and newspapers as a helpful deterrent to scheduling insensitivities.

Throughout Massachusetts, many public activities, particularly sports events, are scheduled in conflict with traditional times for Christian worship. Thus, some of our members, particularly youth, are confronted with a difficult choice. They will participate either in worship or in recreational activities.

This is a painful dilemma for children and parents. These choices disrupt the whole family, because parents transport children to these events and want to support their children by attending the games.

Moreover, in some communities public activities such as marathons, “walks,” bicycle races, or parades have hindered people from attending worship. These events often are for laudable charitable causes, which heightens the dilemma for community-minded church-goers. Yet sometimes such events even have disrupted worship services, blocking off access streets, posing parking problems by using public areas near churches as gathering points (especially problematic for frail elders), causing churchgoers to run a stressful gauntlet to reach the church door, and creating noisy distractions during worship. In one case, a parade disbanded on a church lawn, with cheers and loudspeakers blaring, while members inside the church were trying to participate in a service of Holy Communion.

A pattern of public insensitivity to the religious traditions of our churches has emerged, while at the same time many community

leaders are talking about the importance of supporting “family values” by providing moral education of youth through family and religious life.

Sunday traditionally was observed as a day of rest. In Christian theology, it has a deeper meaning. It is the Day of the Lord, a Day of Reverence. It comes not only at the end of a week of labor, but it also is the beginning of a new week—the Day of Resurrection when we gather and worship, offering back to God thanksgiving for that which we have received.

To be told to re-schedule our worship, as has occurred sometimes, is insulting. It shows a lack of appreciation for the needs of various groups in our pluralistic culture, as well as a lack of concern about injured sensibilities when religious piety is abused. We, therefore, appeal to all public officials and private planners of public events to avoid imposing impediments to religious worship, whatever the religious tradition. We understand the difficulties of public scheduling in a pluralistic society. We are convinced, however, that these problems are surmountable with sensitivity. We know of communities where a satisfactory solution has been found. If the various religious traditions in a community are treated with respect and fairness, the benefits of good will, mutual trust, and cooperation will far outweigh any scheduling liabilities.

Some Recommendations

Because of the serious nature of this problem, we propose the following to churches and communities. In all instances, we urge clergy and congregations to work together ecumenically to offer a common voice:

1. Enlist parents and other adults to make a commitment to reclaim Sunday as a Sabbath time set apart.
2. Talk with members of the School Committee and other officials responsible for scheduling, and urge them not to plan athletic

- practices and events for Sunday morning.
3. Meet with local league officials and coaches to explore other scheduling options.
 4. Encourage civic leaders—mayor, town manager, city council, Board of Selectmen—to take a fresh look at these developments and their impact on families, society, and community life.
 5. Be prepared to offer alternative suggestions.
 6. Contact the Massachusetts Council of Churches for information about how other clergy associations, councils of churches, and similar bodies have approached the problem in their community.

It's About Time: Resources for More Information

Sabbath observance web sites

Lord's Day Alliance of the U.S.

www.LDAUSA.org

Anti-Defamation League

regarding workers' rights to religious observance

www.adl.org/issue_religious_freedom/religious_ac/accommodation_QA.asp

Practicing Our Faith

www.practicingourfaith.org

Reflections on the Sabbath by the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University

www.christianethics.ws/cesabbath.htm

Short List of Recommended Books

Bass, Dorothy C., *Receiving the Day: A Guide for Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, Jossey-Bass, 2000,

study guide companion available at

<http://www.practicingourfaith.org/cfm/library/pdf/RTDguide.pdf>

Carter, Jimmy, *Living Faith*, Times Books, 1996

deGraaf, John, ed., *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time*

Poverty in America — the Official Handbook of the National Movement, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003

Doherty, William and Barbara Carlson, *Putting Family First: Successful Strategies for Reclaiming Family Life in a Hurry-Up World*, Owl Books, 2002

Edwards, Tilden H., *Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians*. Seabury Press, 1992

Heschel, Abraham Joseph, *The Sabbath*, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1951

Jones, Rev. Kirk Byron, *Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down*, Judson Press, 2003

Massachusetts Council of Churches, *Labor and Leisure: A Look at Contemporary Values*, MCC, 1994

McCrosen, Alexis, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, Cornell University Press, 2000

Meiksens, Peter and Peter Whalley, *Putting Work in its Place: A Quiet Revolution*, Cornell University Press, 2002

Muller, Wayne, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, Bantam Doubleday Dell, 2000

Muller, Wayne, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, Bantam Press, 1999

Paulsell, Stephanie, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*, Jossey-Bass, 2002

Philipson, Ilene, *Married to the Job: Why We Live to Work and What We Can Do About It*, Free Press, 2002

Schor, Juliet B., *Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, Basic Books, 1992

Solberg, Winton U., *Redeem the Time: the Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, Harvard University Press, 1977

Swenson, Richard, M.D., *A Minute of Margin: Restoring Balance to Busy Lives*, Navpress, 2003

Taylor, Betsy, *What Kids Really Want that Money Can't Buy: Tips for Parenting in a Commercial World*, Warner Books, 2003

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- Listings in this bibliography do not imply an endorsement of the materials or organizations by the Massachusetts Council of Churches.

Take Back Your Time

An Idea Whose Time Has Come: Engaging the Take Back Your Time Project

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Imagine four windows of time

Imagine if you and your family took, for example, four Wednesday nights off from long hours at work, school or extracurricular activities. What would you do instead?

wander in the woods • pray • make music • play board games • share a personal thought or feeling with a loved one • ask an older person about his or her life • do family bible reading and worship • read poetry aloud • take photographs of the beauty around you • knit • play with children • do a jigsaw puzzle • write in your journal • talk with children about God • write a letter to an old friend • sleep • read a psalm very slowly • plant trees • cook slow food • sing old favorites from a hymnal • listen deeply to children's ideas • eat a picnic • cuddle with your pets • laugh • take off your wrist-watch • invite the Holy Spirit to breathe afresh upon you • reflect on the balance of labor, leisure and consumption in your own life

What's next?

If reclaiming time and reflecting on the balance of labor and leisure invites you to go deeper, consider the following ideas:

For individuals

- share your reflections on the experience with your loved ones
- begin keeping a “time diary” to raise your awareness of how you spend your time
- make restorative time a once-a-week or once-a-month family commitment
- invite others to join with you
- reflect on the imbalance of time in your life, and make a concrete plan for restoring a healthy balance
- organize a buddy system in your congregation for those who want to sustain their commitment to a balanced life
- consider how much is “enough”— how much money, how much time, how much stuff
- calculate your personal “ecological footprint” at www.earthday.org
- identify three ways you can reduce your consumption of resources
- write about the experience for the church newsletter
- talk about the experience in a congregational “mission moment”
- suggest this topic for a teen or adult Sunday School series
- write a letter to the editor of the town paper
- dedicate some of your newly liberated time and energy to neighborhood and community volunteering
- organize a congregation or local ecumenical gathering for reflecting on the balance of time in our lives
- join (or organize) a local civic group to promote Time Day in your community
- become active in legislative issues related to justice in labor and leisure
- start planning in your community for Time Day 2006
- subscribe to the Time Day email newsletter to stay involved — www.timeday.org

For congregations

- organize a coffee-time highlight in anticipation of Time Day, Monday, October 24, 2005
- create a buddy system for those who want to sustain their commitment to taking back their time
- provide a youth or adult Sunday school series on the topic (see resource sheet for suggested materials)
- organize a book group
- invite a lay sermon or Bible study from someone who took Four Windows of Time
- find out whether any civic groups in your community are already organizing, and join them
- start a community-based movement, if one doesn't exist



For communities

A number of cities, towns and counties across the country have embraced this as a community-wide quality of life concern, and some have web sites to share their experience. For example:

Ridgewood NJ www.readysetrelax.org

Needham MA www.town.needham.ma.us/Youth/YouthCommissionNeedhamUnplugged.htm

Northborough MA www.town.northborough.ma.us/unplugged/unplugged.ht

Southborough MA www.town.southboroughtown.com/youthfamily/southborough%20unscheduled.htm

Wayzata MN www.puttingfamilyfirst.org

Barnstable County MA (Cape Cod) Human Condition Project www.bchumanservices.net

National Family Night www.familynightamonth.org

Take Back Your Time

Time for a Change: Time as a Social Justice Issue

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What's really going on here? U.S. Americans were promised that the high-tech innovations of our economy would create more leisure time. What's actually been happening?

- Americans work an average of nine full weeks (350 hours) more per year than European workers.
- From 1973 to 2000, the average U.S. worker added an additional 199 hours to his or her annual work schedule.
- Americans have by far the shortest paid vacations in the industrialized world.
- America is the only country in the industrialized world that doesn't have a law guaranteeing paid vacation time.
- 26% of American workers don't take any vacation at all.
- 80% of men and 62% of women put in more than 40 hours a week on the job. We work longer hours than medieval peasants did.

(statistics as reported in the *Take Back Your Time Handbook*)

An issue for everyone. Excessive work time impacts workers across the socio-economic spectrum: the high-tech employee with the 80 hour work week without paid overtime or compensatory time, the service worker with required mandatory overtime, and the 'working poor' employee holding multiple part-time jobs with no health benefits, sick days or vacation time. Instead of hiring more workers, businesses often push current workers harder — with the potential consequence of increased workplace accidents and injuries — while other Americans have no job at all. For many low-paid workers, long hours are often the only way to earn a living wage. And the lowest paid among us are also those least able to purchase conveniences which help alleviate the stress of long work hours.

As the Shalom Center states:

"Much of the public dialogue in America worries more about unemployment or 'disemployment' than about overwork. But the two are intimately connected:

- Many of us, because many jobs are badly paid or are chopped up into 'temporary' or 'part-time' jobs by employers seeking to avoid paying benefits, feel forced to take two or three part-time jobs, each of them inadequate and ill-paid, in order to make barely enough money to meet our basic needs. In this way, 'underwork' drives people into overwork.
- Where employers feel themselves not accountable to the public or the labor movement, some ignore or evade existing laws that restrict 'overtime,' and force workers into working longer hours for less pay than laws on the books provide.
- And many of us, when employers increase profits by 'downsizing,' find themselves working far harder and longer to replace one or two workers who have been dismissed."

— from www.shalomctr.org/freetime

Excessive work hours affect us all — physically, spiritually and economically — but especially harm those in our society who are most vulnerable.

Legislative possibilities. For individuals, congregations and communities, "*Take Back Your Time*" is about changing habits to restore balance between work and leisure. For many Americans, however, the ability to change such habits is affected by workplace constraints and cultural mores. Thus, public policies and social practices need to be addressed in order to create the context for taking back our time.

For example, the Massachusetts Council of Churches issued a statement (*“Youth Sports and Public Activities on Sunday Morning”* available at www.masscouncilofchurches.org/docs/sunsport.pdf), expressing concern about the difficult choices confronting church members, especially youth, when public activities such as sports events are scheduled in conflict with traditional times for Christian worship. The Council appealed to all public officials and private planners of public events to avoid imposing impediments to religious worship, whatever the religious tradition.

Nationally, the Time Day movement has a six-point legislative platform focused on those changes which are achievable and will make a substantive difference in all our lives. Their agenda is to:

- Guarantee paid childbirth leave for all parents. Today, only 40% of Americans are able to take advantage of the 12 weeks of unpaid leave provided by the 1993, Family and Medical Leave Act.
- Guarantee at least one week of paid sick leave for all workers. Many Americans work while sick, lowering productivity and endangering other workers.
- Guarantee at least three weeks of paid annual vacation leave for all workers. Studies show that 28% of all female employees and 37% of women earning less than \$40,000 a year receive no paid vacation at all.
- Place a limit on the amount of compulsory overtime work that an employer can impose, with the goal being to give employees the right to accept or refuse overtime work.
- Make Election Day a holiday, with the understanding that Americans need time for civic and political participation.
- Make it easier for Americans to choose part-time work. Give hourly wage parity and protection of promotions and pro-rated benefits for part-time workers.

Although the Massachusetts Council of Churches has not taken a position on this legislative platform, many of these issues are being addressed in legislation considered by the Massachusetts State Legislature.

An issue for the church as a workplace. Clergy are among the most overworked professions in America. Clergy burn out is a familiar phenomenon in all churches. As we reflect on the balance of labor and leisure in our lives, are we sensitive to the need for rest and renewal for clergy? Many churches are considering sabbatical policies that combine clergy rest with congregational self-reflection and renewal. Are our churches just and sustainable workplaces?

Resources for More Information

Lilly Endowment National Clergy Renewal Program
www.clergyrenewal.org

The Free Time/Free People Project for Social Change
www.shalomctr.org/freourtime

Work to Live Campaign for Legislative Change
www.worktolive.info

National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice
www.nicwj.org

Center for a New American Dream
www.newdream.org



“Doing, making, profiting, producing, and consuming have been elevated into idols. While corporate profits have zoomed and the concentration of wealth has increased, real wages have remained stagnant for twenty years, and the pressure has intensified to work harder and longer, just to stay in the same place. Varied communities and cultures, eco-systems and habitats, regional economies and grass-roots citizenry have all suffered from the voracity of these idols.

At the root of our religious and spiritual traditions is a critique of these idolatries. We know that human beings need time for self-reflective spiritual growth, for loving family, and for communal sharing. And the earth itself needs to be nurtured by human communities that allow for it to rest, to renew itself from meeting human needs. Yet the workings of American society work increasingly to squeeze dry the time for spirit, family, and community.”

— from www.shalomctr.org/freourtime

Take Back Your Time

Parenting and Time: Finding Rest for Our Souls

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Parenting and Time: Finding Rest for Our Souls

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

— Matthew 11: 28-29 (NRSV)

“Concern for spiritual things will unite the family.”

— St. John Chrysostom, Homily XXI on Ephesians

Our families are carrying heavy burdens. Many parents hold multiple jobs. Adult children juggle the responsibilities of work and care for ailing parents. Spouses leave notes for each other because they aren't home at the same time for face-to-face communication. Some children move from packed days at school to after-school activities that run late into the evening. Other children in economically deprived regions don't have the option of participating in after-school programs. Weekday responsibilities slide into weekends. People complain about having little time left for church or Sabbath keeping. Families in every economic circumstance are struggling to find a balance. How do families find time to be with God in all this busyness?

In the life of faith, Christians depend on the God we know through Jesus Christ, the source of all life. We depend on community, specifically the church community, for support in our struggles. In “The Sabbath Promise,” Michaela Bruzzese of *Sojourners Magazine*, May 2005 writes “holy rest challenges our individualism: it reminds us that we need each other. The manual for discipleship, if it existed, would come with a warning: Do Not Try This Alone.” Take Back Your Time/Take Four Windows of Time provides a vehicle whereby families can support each other as they seek to change an unhealthy and unholy imbalance between work and rest.

An invitation to find rest for your soul: Ideas for families to Take Back Your Time

- Share how individual family members spend their time with the activity page from the National Council of Churches Family Week 2003 at www.nccusa.org/nmu/mce/familyweek2003.html
- Invite your family to reflect together about what each member values. How do those values relate to your use of time? Are your priorities in alignment? The National Council of Churches Bible Study for Joshua 24:1-8 and Matthew 6:19-21, 24 “As for Me and My House: Slowing Down the Work-Family Seesaw” might be a good discussion starter. See <http://fm2.forministry.com/qryArticlePrint.asp?Record=2740>
- Look through an old family picture album. Share with your children the things you remember and value from your own childhood. Does your family's schedule adequately reflect these values? Sit down as a family and take time to reassess your children's activities. Children in the United States have a range of schedules, some too full, others with too much unstructured or unsupervised time. What is a balance that feels right for your family? Is there enough play time, structured time, study time, unscheduled time and spiritual time in your child's life? What one thing could be changed that would make a difference?
- When your child is asked to join a new activity or attend an event, make an agreement to delay the decision until you can discuss it together. For help, read the chapter in the book *Practicing our Faith* edited by Dorothy Bass entitled “Saying Yes and Saying No” by M. Shawn Copeland.
- Children are not getting as much time for unstructured play as we think they do. Though it runs counterintuitive to the idea of loosening the grip our calendars have on our lives, if your family needs it, schedule some free time for unstructured play!
- Consider spending some time with your children in silence. Try turning off the radio or DVD player in the car. See what happens.

Your seventh grader may become more communicative than you expected! Or you may notice things while driving that previously had escaped your observation. Read the article “Silent Spaces, Silent Times” at www.theologic.com/offweb/forfolks/silentspaces.htm

- If you haven’t taken the time to read in a while, or if your family reads while doing other things, set aside some time to sit in the same room and read together, or read to each other. Two recommended books: *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Pressure* by Stan and Jan Berenstain, *Five Minutes’ Peace* and *A Quiet Night In* by Jill Murphy. Religious book stores carry a wide range of Bible stories for children of various ages. Visit the Massachusetts Bible Society at www.massbible.org.
- Christians understand the power of the simple act of breaking bread in building community. Recover the practice of eating together as a family as regularly as possible. Be prepared with small snacks if people start to get hungry before everyone arrives. On special occasions, consider including someone from your church whose family lives far away.

Ideas for churches helping families Take Back Your Time

- Invite every member of the congregation to take “Four Windows of Time” this fall. Involving a number of people in this counter-cultural experiment together will provide mutual support and encouragement.
- Have a public conversation at your church about the pressures families feel to have full schedules because that’s the perceived way to get into a “good college.” Make an effort to include adult members of the congregation who may be in the public school system. Involve the youth groups. Envision another way. What could this look like? How could you help?
- Celebrate “Turn TV Off Week” and visit www.tvturnoff.org for other things your family can do while your TV takes a vacation. This year, the average American youth will spend 900 hours in school and 1,023 hours watching television. Does this reflect what you value for your children? Read the article “Television in the Christian Home” at www.theologic.com/offweb/curreven/tv02.htm and read the Ten Commandments for Family TV viewing at www.gbod.org/family/articles.asp?item_id=8799
- Invite your church’s bible study or parents’ group to study scriptures about Sabbath keeping.
- Host a discussion group about the book *Getting it Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family and Work* by Carol A. Wehrheim.

- Parents of all demographics report that summer is the hardest time to find meaningful activities for children. Start early by having a family conversation about what your children would like to do. When do they need “down time” with no activities? What can your family afford? Consider talking to other members of your church about ways that you can help one another.
- The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has declared this to be the “Year of the Family” and has compiled resources for Christian parenting in a busy world at www.familyaschurch.org. Many of these are suitable for use in a variety of Christian traditions.
- Have a “Family Sunday” at your church to celebrate families and talk about their struggles. According to the National Study of Youth and Religion [U.S.A.], mothers and fathers with early adolescents, all who are religiously involved, are more likely to have significantly stronger familial relationships than families that are not religiously active. Worshipping together is a way to reconnect an active family life to the spiritual Source of all life. Attending church during the summer or when you are out of town helps instill in your children that worshipping God isn’t something from which we take a vacation

Ideas for communities helping families Take Back Your Time

- Invite the Massachusetts Council of Churches to your local ecumenical or interfaith council or ministerial association to talk about the Take Back Your Time/Take Four Windows of Time project and its implications for families and youth.
- Advocate for better after school activities, appropriate scheduling of youth sports events, and summer jobs in Massachusetts. The 2004 Public Agenda Report “All Work and No Play?” found that low-income and minority families are significantly less satisfied with the quality, affordability and availability of out-of-school time options. Contact the Massachusetts Council of Churches for resources.
- Encourage your entire city or town to take a night off, with no homework, no sports, and no meetings. Some Massachusetts communities that have joined this growing trend include Needham, Newton, Belmont, Falmouth, Lexington, Northborough and Southborough. Read more about Needham Unplugged at <http://www.town.needham.ma.us/youth/YouthCommissionNeedhamUnplugged.htm> and other towns at www.readysetrelax.org.
- Have a public discussion about ideas and resources to balance family life, spiritual life, work, school, and other activities. Draw ideas from www.puttingfamilyfirst.info, www.pbs.org/workfamily, www.familynightamonth.org, www.spiritualparenting.com, www.hyper-parenting.com.