Incorporating exercise leads to healthier outlook for parents

Even before starting a family, Barry and Teresa Stitz led an active lifestyle. Eight years after the birth of the first of their three boys, the St. Joseph, Fullerton, parishioners still make health and fitness a priority in their family.

“Being first-time parents, you never know what to expect,” said Mr. Stitz of the birth of the couple’s son Ben in 2000. “Things were pretty hectic in the beginning, and when you did have time to exercise, you were so tired from the responsibility of raising a child, exercise was the last thing on your mind.”

While, like many new parents, the Stitzes faced the challenge of staying fit after having children, they managed to schedule time to work out, eventually making it a family affair.

“I had good discipline, had always played sports and was in shape,” said Mrs. Stitz, who was teaching health and physical education at St. Clare School in Essex when Ben was born. “I really enjoyed working out – it was part of my every day.”

She stayed active during her pregnancy. After Ben was born, the two would take early-morning walks, followed by a nap. Sometimes she would wait until 9 p.m., after he was asleep, to hit the gym.

Mr. Stitz, 38, played soccer for the Baltimore Blast and incorporates fitness into coaching soccer at Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore, where he serves as vice president for advancement.

Once their son was a little older, the Stitzes were able to incorporate playground and park time.

When their second son, Sam, was born three years later, Mrs. Stitz, 36, bought a double stroller and continued with the morning walk.

“While I was walking, I would make it more of a treasure hunt,” said the stay-at-

home mom. “In the fall, we’d look for different leaves that we liked, or rocks, and we’d just take a little bag along and collect things. It was fun for me, and I would get my exercise, too.”

She even incorporated God in the walks by asking questions such as, “How do you think God came up with that?”

Now, with Matthew, 1, in the mix, the family spends a great deal of time outdoors. Matthew plays with toys, while the older children kick the ball around or go hiking.

Mrs. Stitz encourages healthy eating, and fruits and vegetables are a regular part of the family diet.

As far as advice for other families, Mrs. Stitz acknowledged, “the hard part is when you feel overwhelmed and think this is the last thing you have time for.

“If you do make the time,” she said, “it really does decrease stress and starts to give you a healthier outlook.”

Tips for staying healthy as a family

Teresa Stitz, a 36-year-old mother of three and former health and physical education teacher, suggested the following tips for families and parents to stay fit.

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