

# Seven habits of a highly effective Catholic family

**By Maria Wiering**

*mwiering@CatholicReview.org*

*Twitter: @ReviewWiering*

COLUMBIA – Service is a regular part of life for the Sniezek family, parishioners of St. Louis in Clarksville.

John, Ginny and their five children – Matt, 16; Katie, 14; Maggie, 12; Anna, 9; and Maria, 5 – are involved in a litany of volunteer efforts, including activities organized by St. Louis' Knight of Columbus council, where John is a longtime member.

The council, No. 11898, took note, and nominated the Sniezek family for an award, which they recently received: the 2013 Maryland Knights of Columbus Family of the Year.

A household busy with school, parish, work and community commitments that also prioritizes time together, the Sniezek family outlined seven practices they follow to build a strong family life – a nod to author Stephen R. Covey's successful "seven habits" series.

## **1. Everyday events are opportunities to deepen relationships.**

"There's lots of options in everyday life for one-on-one time without it being a planned, structured event," said John, 44. He and Matt talk during their 30-minute commute to Matt's school, Mount St. Joseph High School in Irvington, rather than Matt sleeping or listening to his iPod. Ginny, 42, takes one of the kids along on errands, both for help and time alone together.

## **2. Be mindful of blessings.**

The Sniezek family frequently thank God for blessings such as good health, siblings, family, good schools and friends, and often remind each other of the good things they have.

"If kids can learn to appreciate what they do have, they are less likely to want all the material possessions that society says you need," John said. "They won't be envious of others and will be more likely ... to help those who are not as fortunate."

## **3. Do things as a family.**

With baseball, basketball, music, swim, dance lessons, volunteer work and other activities vying for the Sniezek kids' time, coordinating schedules is a challenge, even on Sundays. Attending Mass together is a priority, even if it means waking

early to go to St. Louis' 6:45 a.m. Sunday Mass or visiting another parish for a convenient liturgy.

They also prepare dinners together as a family and attend each other's games, productions and recitals whenever possible. On many Friday nights, the family gathers together to watch a movie, rather than each person pursuing his or her own entertainment option. "We can be ourselves around each other," Katie said.

#### **4. Make volunteering a family affair.**

John and Ginny volunteer with activities their kids are involved in, or take on projects in which the whole family can participate. Instead of just dropping off Matt for sports practice, John started coaching. Ginny helps to lead her daughters' American Heritage Girls troop. Family members take on a variety of tasks for the parish's Vacation Bible School and Knights of Columbus events.

It's a good feeling when you use some of your time helping others to make their lives or jobs a little easier," Matt said.

#### **5. Teach responsibility early.**

Each Snizek pitches in when it comes to chores, even Maria. Weekly responsibilities from lawn work and laundry to changing the litter for the family cat, Lucky, are outlined on a chart. "They all need to contribute to the family," John said.

#### **6. Keep expectations consistent - and high.**

Even if kids don't always reach it, setting a high bar means they'll work hard to achieve it, John said. He and Ginny emphasize the importance of hard work and taking responsibility for mistakes and failures.

#### **7. Surround your family with people who share your beliefs.**

The Snizeks expect their children's education to reinforce their family's values and Catholic faith. John and Ginny home-school their youngest daughters. Their older children attend Catholic schools. Maggie is at St. Louis School, and Katie attends Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville.

Also see:

Playing God Part 3: End-of-life ethics