

CATHOLIC FAMILY FUN

*A Guide for the
Adventurous, Overwhelmed,
Creative, or Clueless*



Sarah A. Reinhard

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Foreword by Greg Willits



Chapter 1

Silly Things to Do Together

Sometimes, the best way to be together is to just let your hair down and be silly. If you can't put on a funny face with the people in your house, who *can* you be comfortable with?

Have you ever pictured Jesus smiling or, better yet, laughing? Perhaps the reason so many people have trouble getting close to God, Mary, or the saints is that we don't think of them as smiling. It's impossible to be silly without smiling, so, in this section, let's just be silly! Here are some ideas to get you started.

Be "Crazy"

Prep: Little or none

Duration: Less than 1 hour

Cost: Low

This is balm for cabin fever, whatever the weather. You go outside and, well, run around. I don't like to run, but my young daughters do, so I can send them on a race around the house. These moments often turn into discussions about what's going on in nature and how God made our Earth.

To use this as family fun, you will want to have a few specific ideas in mind, once the initial running-around is done (and because there

will be at least one adult present, for whom running around might not be such an option). “Crazy” here means *uninhibited*, releasing the free spirit within, and in doing so, relaxing a part of yourself that might have forgotten all about relaxation.

Some Ideas to Help You Get Started

1. Let the kids run a bit to start. In the summer, maybe the running will be a result of the squirt guns the adults are brandishing. In the winter, maybe it's their way of avoiding tickle attacks on a snow-bank.
2. Partner up and see who can be crazier. Dance and sing. Run around shouting gibberish or nonsense phrases. Act like circus animals and perform exercises from a circus stunt. Work as a team against another team. Anyone who's left out can serve as the judge and participate in round two.
3. Challenge one another to do stunts. Who can do a handstand? Who can perform a somersault while catching a bug and juggling three dolls? Who can think up the most outrageous (but safe!) trick?
4. Does the weather prevent you from going outdoors? Craziness can be found inside, too. How about crazy dress-up with silly hats, different color socks, different shoes on each foot? Take an old eyeliner pencil and decorate the family with fake mustaches, then top them with a zany gelled hairstyle. Try a goofy picture-posing session when you're all looking your silliest.
5. How about weird food? Use food coloring, then see who's the bravest taste-tester. Have a guessing game with different foods. Blindfold the kids and see if they can guess what they're eating. If you have picky eaters who find this intimidating at first, try adding some color and letting them dig in to a *Green Eggs and Ham* sort of meal. Food coloring can make your eggs actually green, your macaroni blue, or your butter orange.

6. Take pieces from one board game and figure out a way to use them for another board game. Bonus points if you use the rules from a third board game.

Faith Angle

✓ Spring and fall are great times for discovering things outside when taking a breather from all that crazy time. What evidence do we have of God's order for the universe or his presence around us? Can we see his hand in creation? What is God's craziest creation, and why do you think so? Read one or both of the creation stories from Genesis (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25) and reflect on what it means to your family. You could also spend time with your family discussing what can be learned from each.

Make It Yours

✓ Give your older kids a challenge or a goal when they're outside running crazy. Enlist their help in deciding a method to the madness. How will you be crazy together? What will make everyone laugh? What's something outrageous that they can think of? Make them your partners in planning. Even better, encourage them to work as a team to make this truly fun!

Sing a Camp Song

Prep: Little or none

Duration: Less than 1 hour

Cost: Low

My kids seem to enjoy singing "Apples and Bananas" as much as I do. I've forgotten many of the songs I used to know by heart, but I've found great resources online that jogged my memory and triggered wonderful memories of singing.

You can combine these songs with other activities. We like to sing while we're picking up—inside or outside—and when we're on a long drive. A song can change the mood of an outing or activity, and maybe *that's* why they're burned into my memory as something fun to do.

Here are a few to get you started (links to videos and the lyrics are on this book's website):

The Bear Song

Sing the story of the kid who dared to meet a bear, then realized the need to run from that bear. Can quick thinking and a tree save you from a bear in sneakers? Featuring parts for solo artists as well as the whole choir and fun echoes, this song is full of action and ends with a hilarious "moral."

Father Abraham

Use your whole body to praise God! This short and simple tune reinforces the good news that we are children of God and Abraham while continuously adding body motions.

As you sing, raise your left arm, left leg, right leg, hips, head, and tongue. Then turn around, touch the ground. And finally, sit down!

Little Bunny Foo Foo

The rambunctious Foo Foo doesn't treat field mice very nicely, so the Good Fairy gives the bunny three chances to play fair or be turned into a "goon." This popular song features two things kids love: a corny pun and active hand motions. Just be careful your children aren't overly enthusiastic about bopping their siblings—or you—on the noggin!

Old Lady Leary

Challenge your crew to drop words while singing faster and faster. This song relates the tale of Mrs. O'Leary, whose infamous cow reputedly started the Great Chicago Fire. Nine words have corresponding

motions. Each time you go through the song, you replace another key word with a gesture. By the end, you'll hardly hear voices at all!

Save this song for less public gatherings. Yelling "Fire" 27 times at the top of your lungs, while fun, could be easily misinterpreted.

Actions

- * Bed—hold hands to one side of head as if you were sleeping
- * Lantern—hang an imaginary lantern
- * Cow kicked it over—kicking motion
- * Wink—wink (of course)
- * Hot night—make motions as if fanning your face
- * Fire—throw hands into the air with each "fire"
- * Pour on water—throw pretend buckets of water
- * Save my baby—make baby cradling motion
- * Jump—JUMP

Faith Angle

- ✓ Try singing a song or chanting as part of your family's prayers. You could start with the Hail Mary. You could even explore doing it in another language.
- ✓ You can also choose songs that are part of your parish's songbook. Check for versions of them online so you know the tune. Make these your cleanup songs or what's playing in the background in your home.

Make It Yours

- ✓ Let your older kids go online and find a song they want to teach everyone else. There are plenty of camp song resources, and YouTube allows a great variety of ways to learn the tunes and motions.

- ✓ Write your own song, or new words to a tune you know.
- ✓ Make your own motions for a song.
- ✓ Take words from a story or saying and make them into an animated camp-style song that you all sing together.

Joke Time

Prep: Little or none

Duration: Less than 1 hour

Cost: Low

Laughter is a remedy for many things in life, and I've found that the right kind of laughter can bring people together. When we're not making fun of others or hurting people, our laughter can be therapy for the challenges of life, one that we share in a special way as family.

Get a book out of the library or go to one of the many kid joke websites. You may spend some time beforehand working with younger children (in the five- to nine-year-old range) to learn their jokes so they can deliver them. Older kids, starting at about age ten, may have their own ideas about a joke time family fun activity.

Sometimes, kids' jokes aren't that funny. That's okay. We don't have to pretend they're funny when they're not, but we don't have to be mean about it either. The spirit of this activity is finding ways to use words to make us laugh. This is a good time, too, to discuss that there are some things that aren't appropriate for joking, and that, while we may joke a certain way at home, we wouldn't do it in public.

You might be wondering how these play into a fun activity. Can you imagine your crew taking turns doing a stand-up routine?

Consider making joke-telling a part of another family activity or doing it in the car to get warmed up. And remember, family fun doesn't

have to last hours and hours. Depending on the age of your children and your time allotment, lengthy activities may be inadvisable.

Knock Knock

My kids particularly enjoy making up their own knock-knock jokes. It has become almost a rite of passage in our house, proof that the speaking abilities of the current toddler are now at a new level.

Here are a few to get the creative juices flowing. They've been rated most popular in the Reinhard house, but I encourage you to modify them and be creative together.

- * Knock, knock. Who's there? Interrupting cow. Interrupting cow wh— (at this point, the person telling the joke moos).
- * Knock, knock. Who's there? Boo. Boo who? Aw, don't cry. It's only a joke.
- * Knock, knock. Who's there? Little old lady. Little old lady who? Hey, I didn't know you could yodel!

Riddles and Jokes

Riddles are great fun when you have a wordsmith in the house, so my favorites tend to be plays on words. My kids, though, love the just-plain-silly riddles, such as these:

- * What kind of keys do kids love? *Cookies.*
- * What do you call a fly without wings? *A walk.*
- * How do you stop an elephant from charging? *Take away his credit card.*

A good joke is always a hit, too, and tends to be received the way a good story is, by everyone in my family. There's an art to joke-telling, to be sure, and so I feel a certain responsibility to pass this along to my kids (though I lack much of the finesse required).

What's funny to a five-year-old might be boring to a twelve-year-old, but they can get themselves laughing, I'll bet. Most groups of kids,

especially those who are friends or family, can come up with some pretty hilarious jokes and riddles. Your older kids will enjoy puns—and everyone can chime in with the groans they inspire!

Practical Jokes

This is not for the faint-of-heart, and, truthfully, my family isn't really at this stage yet. There's a fine line between teasing too hard and being truly humorous with practical jokes. Is short-sheeting a bed funny or cruel? It depends on the person. Here's a way to approach it: put your names in a bowl and draw them. The "victim" (recipient) of a practical joke could be warned ahead of time, but doesn't have to worry about being on the receiving end again until everyone else has had a turn.

Faith Angle

- ✓ Our priest often opens his homily with a story that leaves us chuckling. A favorite priest we knew a long time ago used to tell a joke before the final dismissal of Mass every week. Find out your priest's favorite joke and share it with your kids. They may not "get it," but they'll enjoy knowing that Father has a sense of humor, too. (If your priest is anything like mine, he also won't mind getting a few new jokes from his younger parishioners!)
- ✓ St. Philip Neri is well-known as a saint who had a humorous side. Use his example and learn, with your family, how holiness and fun can go together, and that our lives of faith can even be funny. Maybe you can begin and end your fun with a prayer asking this saint to be with you.

Make It Yours

- ✓ Keeping a record of the jokes that are your favorites now—and in the future—is a great way to preserve this season of your

life. Invest in a notebook and jot down those jokes that just crack your family up. Have the kids write their favorites too, when and if they're old enough to do so. You can combine this with other journaling and/or scrapbooking activities to create a real treasure for future generations and family gatherings.

Unbirthday Party

Prep: Varies, Medium 1–2 hours

Duration: Varies, High, more than 2 hours

Cost: Varies, Medium

This idea is inspired by *Through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll (the sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*). When Humpty Dumpty mentions to Alice that he received his cravat as an unbirthday present, he sparks something in my imagination. Disney's 1951 movie *Alice in Wonderland* even has a song for unbirthdays!

Birthdays are special, and kids know it whether you're the kind of family that celebrates with huge parties or the kind that prefers quiet gatherings. As a parent, I remember the day my children were born and marvel at how much they've changed in the intervening years.

An unbirthday party takes some components of a birthday party celebration and leaves out others. You can decide what to keep and what to lose, and that might change with each unbirthday party. This might be your child's chance to invite friends over and play party games. Or it could be a field-trip event, involving candy and cake and screaming laughter. How much effort you put into your unbirthday party is completely up to you.

Chances are, you'll have a different approach for different times of the year and during different seasons of your life. In the summer, a big pool party may be the perfect unbirthday party for your winter birthday child. In the winter, going ice skating may be just the thing for the

summer child. Or perhaps an unbirthday party spells family time with special desserts.

Whatever you decide, make it fun. Make it special. Make it stand out from the other days of the week. Whether that's with a cake or a fruit punch, party hats or sparkly hair bows, balloons and streamers on the ceiling, or signs around the house, you decide.

Will you cook a distinctive menu or have desserts first? Will you honor one person or everyone in the family? Will there be presents or prizes exchanged? You could use your family calendar and make a set of chance cards for whose turn it is to celebrate an unbirthday this month.

A Brief How-To

1. **Pick your date, time, and location.** When will you have your party? Will it be at your house or will you go somewhere else?
2. **Decide the details.** Who's coming? Where will you have your party? What's the menu? Is it in honor of one person in your family, or is it an all-out celebration for everyone?
3. **Pick a theme.** Though I'm notorious for hating themes and decorating, I have to admit that a theme can really take an unbirthday party to a super-fun level. My approach is simple: just balloons, streamers, and confetti. I leave it to you to take it to the level *you* like. Children can—and love to—help with this (whether you're a theme-lover or not).
4. **Get your supplies, plan your menu, and do the behind-the-scenes work.** This step also involves getting input from everyone in your family. Not asking your spouse for ideas could leave a hole in the plans that you may not even have noticed. In the event of a surprise, of course, be sure that everyone knows things are top secret.
5. **Enjoy yourself.** It probably says a lot about me that I include this as a point to remember. But as the planner and organizer in my

house, and as someone who doesn't always relish that role, I find I have to keep in mind that these undertakings are in the spirit of *fun* first and foremost. No one will enjoy the event if I'm sulking over details or exhausted from overdoing some aspect that others don't care much about anyway. So, remember, *enjoy* yourself.

Faith Angle

✓ Why not plan the date of an unbirthday party to coincide with a baptismal day or a favorite patron saint's feast? (Feel free to change the name of this activity then, too!) Use the names of the members of your family as a starting point and find the accompanying saint's feast day. (If you don't share a name with a saint, how about your patron saint?) Often, a saint's feast day is the day he or she died, which is the day he or she entered heaven—a great reason to celebrate! You can find a lot of saint information on the internet, or by checking the Ordo for your country. The Ordo tells when feast days are *actually* celebrated; a few years ago, for example, the feast of the Annunciation was transferred from March 25 to several days later because March 25 fell during Holy Week. (Note: the Ordo is the liturgical calendar, *not* the Order of Mass.)

✓ There is no shortage of liturgical feasts throughout the year. Why not punctuate the long stretch of Ordinary Time with something out of the ordinary? We celebrate the Virgin Mary's birthday on September 8, and the birth of John the Baptist on June 25. The Feast of the Archangels, St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael, is September 29. How about a scavenger hunt to honor St. Anthony's special place as the patron of lost articles? How about a nail-driving contest to celebrate St. Joseph's patronage of carpenters? And don't forget the patron saint of your parish!

- ✓ Could one of Jesus's parables be the inspiration for a theme? Maybe you could plan a bread and fish dinner outside on blankets, picnic-style.
- ✓ There are many times that we just make a favorite meal or dinner to coincide with something special—a good grade or a job promotion. Find out your priest's favorite dinner and see if you can have him over for dinner to celebrate *his* "unbirthday."

Make It Yours

- ✓ Keeping it on a level they can handle, why not let one (or more) of your kids be in charge of a particular planning detail? It will teach them important lessons about responsibility and, even more significantly, demonstrate your confidence in them (and it takes some of the pressure off you!).

Opposite Season

Prep: Little or none

Duration: Medium 1–2 hours

Cost: Low

The idea of pulling out my heavy winter coat in the middle of a steamy July while I'm in my non-air-conditioned house has zero appeal. To my kids, though, this doesn't just sound like a great idea, it inspires enthusiasm *and* cooperation. They'll dig out their gloves and hats, put on snow boots, and think of all sorts of ways to enhance the experience.

That sweat on their foreheads, dripping onto the scarves around their necks? They don't even notice it. And the smiles on their faces? . . . priceless.

You can imagine their delight when I smile at them as they dance around in swimming suits on subzero February afternoons. Beach towels on the floor, some fun music, popcorn, maybe a beach movie. They are simply delighted.

So I bring it to you as something that's silly . . . and completely fun and easy to do.

What to Do

1. **Get the gear out of storage.** (Or maybe it's just tucked away in a corner of the closet.) You'll need it. Oh, the adults need to be properly in theme, too, though you can probably get away with going a little more low-key than the kids.
2. **Plan some appropriate food.** What's your favorite summer or winter meal? If it's inappropriate, settle for snacks instead. (Hot cocoa in August? Why not!)
3. **Think of some fun seasonal games.** Obviously, you can't build a snowman in July, but you can watch a favorite winter movie or ride the snowplowing tractor with all your gear on. In the winter, you can fill a baby pool in the house with little balls and jump in.

Faith Angle

- ✓ Why not celebrate an "unfeast" of your favorite saint? Learn a prayer and pray it together during your family fun.
- ✓ Christmas in July is more than just a clever advertising idea; it could also be the way for you to focus on the true meaning of the seasons without the distraction of gifts and the commercialism that's rampant during the Advent and Christmas seasons. July might be a good time to talk about the *real* St. Nicholas, too!

Make It Yours

- ✓ Does your family have a favorite season or one that's especially meaningful? Is there a time of year that has special significance?
- ✓ Capture the essence of what makes that season important, and relive it during the off-season.