WHY DINNER TIME?
WISE COUNSEL FROM CHURCH LEADERS

The number of those who report that their “whole family usually eats dinner together” has declined 33 percent. This is most concerning because the time a family spends together “eating meals at home [is] the strongest predictor of children’s academic achievement and psychological adjustment.” Family mealtimes have also been shown to be a strong bulwark against children’s smoking, drinking, or using drugs. There is inspired wisdom in this advice to parents: what your children really want for dinner is you . . . Parents should act to preserve time for family prayer, family scripture study, family home evening, and the other precious togetherness and individual one-on-one time that binds a family together and fixes children’s values on things of eternal worth.

Parents should teach gospel priorities through what they do with their children . . . We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families. In choosing how we spend time as a family, we should be careful not to exhaust our available time on things that are merely good and leave little time for that which is better or best. Elder Dallin H. Oaks (Good, Better, Best – October 2007 General Conference)

Since “no other success can compensate for failure in the home”, we must place high priority on our families. We build deep and loving family relationships by doing simple things together, like family dinner and family home evening and by just having fun together. In family relationships love is really spelled t-i-m-e, time. Taking time for each other is the key for harmony at home. We talk with, rather than about, each other. We learn from each other, and we appreciate our differences as well as our commonalities. We establish a divine bond with each other as we approach God together through family prayer, gospel study, and Sunday worship. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf (Of Things That Matter Most – October 2010 Conference)

Think of mealtime as a celebration. After our whole family has survived another day, with all of its ups and downs, we come together in the evening and celebrate together. We don’t have to wait for birthdays or holidays to be happy together. Life is short. It doesn’t matter that we’re eating macaroni and cheese with mismatched forks. What does matter is that we make mealtime a relaxed and enjoyable time together. We begin our meals with family prayer. This is a great way to invite a spirit of gratitude to our table. Grateful families are happy families. Mealtime conversations can be a genuine family lifeline to connect busy families swimming in a sea of hectic and conflicting schedules. In fact, families who eat together are more likely to take an interest in what all family members are doing. Janane Wolsey (Mealtime, Family Time- Ensign– Sept. 1998)
Let us make our kitchens creative centers from which emanate some of the most delightful of all home experiences. **Barbara B. Smith**, former General Relief Society President (Follow Joyously– Ensign, Nov. 1980, 86).

It is impossible to overestimate the influence of parents who understand the hearts of their children. Research shows that during the most important transitions of life—including those periods when youth are most likely to drift away from the Church—the greatest influence does not come from an interview with the bishop or some other leader but from the regular, warm, friendly, caring interaction with parents. With that in mind, when we sit down at the dinner table, is our whole family there? I remember as a young man asking permission to play baseball through dinnertime. “Just put my meal in the oven,” I said to my mother. She responded, “Robert, I really want you to take a break, come home, be with the family for dinner, and then you can go out and play baseball until dark.” She taught all of us that where family meals are concerned, it’s not the food but the family interaction that nourishes the soul. My mother taught that the greatest love we give is within our homes. **Elder Robert D. Hales** (Our Duty To God: The Mission of Parents–Liahona May 2010)

The kitchen table can provide a place for many valuable lessons and warm communications. We should not only partake of good food, but of love and friendship. **LeGrand R. Curtis** (Happiness is Homemade– Oct. 1990 General Conference)

Twenty–nine years ago, President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Second Counselor in the First Presidency, lamented that families have so little time together. Think about that—29 years ago—he said in general conference: “One of the main problems in families today is that we spend less and less time together. … Time together is precious time—time needed to talk, to listen, to encourage, and to show how to do things.” … As we spend time together and talk with our children, we come to know them and they come to know us. Our priorities, the real feelings of our heart, will become a part of our conversation with each child. … .The prophet Moses teaches us in Deuteronomy: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:5–7; emphasis added). And may I add one more: “And when thou eatest at the dinner table together.” If we desire our families to be together forever, we begin the process today. Spending time talking with our children is an investment in our eternal family as we walk the path toward eternal life together. **Rosemary M. Wixom** (Taking Time to Talk and Listen–Ensign Apr. 2012)
As a young mother I did not fully understand my power as a nurturer. Though we were a busy family, I considered everyone’s presence at dinnertime nonnegotiable. It was our most consistent gathering time, and everyone planned to eat together before going on to other activities. I learned of the influence of my nurturing when our youngest daughter wrote in a college paper: “Dinner in our home was not just an eating ritual, but a special time for the family to communicate and to share our thoughts and stories of the day. ... We often sat together for over an hour as we savored the conversation as much as the food.” . . . I thought I was just cooking casseroles and soup. But I had created the venue, the reason to gather. Because I prepared a meal to share with my family, something special happened. It was a simple process, and our style changed with the ages of our children. When they were young we could discuss a picture from the Gospel Art Picture Kit (item no. 34735) or memorize a scripture. When they were older we asked more questions and shared experiences. Over the years our children grew and matured, and we loved each other . . . Mothers, who are “primarily responsible for the nurture of their children,” can be a powerful force for strengthening families when they use mealtimes to gather loved ones. They follow the example of the Savior to calm, teach, and help their families remember important things as they feed, cultivate, educate, and rear at the consecrated tables in their homes. Julie B. Beck (Powerful Nurturing—Ensign Dec. 2005)

The family is ordained of God. . . . Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. (The Family: A Proclamation to the World)

Create meaningful family bonds that give your children an identity stronger than what they can find with their peer group or at school or anyplace else. This can be done through family traditions for birthdays, for holidays, for dinnertime, and for Sundays. In today’s world, where Satan’s aggression against the family is so prevalent, parents must do all they can to fortify and defend their families. Elder M. Russell Ballard (What Matters Most is What Lasts Longest—Liahona Nov. 2005)