

# HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 10 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## In This Issue

### Families in Relationship with Contemporary Culture

Today's American families are bombarded by opportunities, challenges, expectations, and distractions as they struggle to keep up with the rapid growth and change of society. Much of what society offers, although seemingly attractive, can be detrimental to healthy and faith-full family living. It is up to the individual families to choose the opportunities and face the challenges that will enhance their faith-full family lifestyle.

In this month's issue, we introduce two new *HomeWord* authors who share their stories of personal growth amid the pressures of society. **A. J. Wagner** of Dayton, Ohio, describes how his addiction to TV severely compromised his marriage and family life. **Kate Soucheray** of Woodbury, Minnesota, shares her family's struggle to balance extracurricular activities and quality family time. Perhaps you can relate to these experiences and be motivated to make similar choices to confront the challenges of contemporary culture.

We conclude with several practical suggestions that your family might consider.

*HomeWord* is edited by Leif Kehrwald and is published monthly for parish bulletins and individual households by Family Faith-Life Resources of Saint Mary's Press.

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## HOOKED

by A. J. Wagner

I have an addiction.

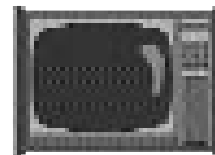
I'm dealing with it now, but for years it controlled my life. I didn't mean to become addicted. It crept up on me slowly. When it was at its worst, my addiction prevented me from interacting with my wife and family, often kept me from working, made me late for everything, and controlled my schedule. I was so out of it at times that I didn't know I had responsibilities, or at least didn't act as though I had any. It wasn't fun. I just sat around in a daze doing nothing, accomplishing nothing.

You probably wonder how something that started as a few brief moments of escape could so completely dominate my life. Then again, I didn't wonder. I was far too caught up in my fantasy world to even know that I should wonder—to even know that I was addicted. I couldn't figure out why my relationships were falling apart, why my job performance was lagging, why I was frequently ill, and why I never had any time. The only thing I was sure about was getting that next fix.

I am addicted to television.

I would watch the tube from the moment I woke up in the morning until the moment I left late for work. When I returned from work at night, I'd turn the set on, and it would stay on until I went to bed. Instead of having meaningful conversations with my wife, I would watch meaningless sitcom repeats that weren't even funny the first six times I saw them. Instead of spending time with my kids, I would watch men playing football on TV. I found myself watching how-to shows instead of actually lifting a finger to do what needed to be done around the house. I spent my Sunday mornings with *Face the Nation* instead of facing my parish community. These years were my worst years as a husband, a father, an employee, and a Christian; these years were my peak times of television viewing.

It was Marriage Encounter that saved me. Through the Marriage Encounter program, which is sponsored by local parishes, my wife, Joan, and I learned to



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## Our First and Last Tournament Season

by Kate Soucheray

The world is often hostile toward a family-centered lifestyle. Two years ago our daughter, Maggie, played on a tournament basketball team. She is our oldest, so we weren't sure what this meant until we were handed a weekend schedule. The first game was Friday evening, and a win or loss that night would dictate our lives for the rest of the weekend.

We were surprised that a basketball tournament could last an entire weekend, but because of the nonchalant acceptance of the other parents, we showed up Friday night. Maggie's team won that game, so they played again Saturday morning. Because they won the Saturday morning game, they played again that afternoon, Sunday morning, and finally Sunday evening. Her team made it to the final play-off round and won the championship.

But at what cost? Our whole family spent the entire weekend in a school several miles from home, watching Maggie display a blossoming basketball talent. Yet what quality time had we spent together? Why were we the only family that didn't snatch the following weekend's schedule excitedly from the coach's hand? We

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## Confronting Contemporary Culture: A Few Practical Suggestions

**State your family vision.** Hold a family meeting and discuss the things that are vitally important to you as a family: e.g., spending time together, respecting one another, sharing responsibility, reconciling and forgiving, and so on. From these items, develop a family vision statement. Write it out and post it on the refrigerator or some place for all to see.

**Reach out beyond your own family.** Too many families are isolated. Get to know your neighbors. Learn everyone's name. Ask them to keep an eye on your house while you're at work or when you're away on a trip. Return the favor by feeding their pets or tending their garden while they are away. Keep an eye on one another's children. Call them when you see disturbing behavior.

**Provide direct experiences for your children and family.** Today's technology allows us "virtual" contact with just about anything in the world, but that's far from real contact. Take the time to actually visit the rain forest, the desert, the mountains, or a farm or ranch. Then check it out on the Net. Our children can learn from vicarious experiences only to the extent that they connect with direct learning experiences. Take a tour of a nearby factory or museum or . . . you name it.

**Reclaim the role of storyteller.** Because America's young teens spend about thirty-five hours a week in front of the TV and only about thirty-five minutes a week in conversation with their parents, we can assume that the identity and narrative of our culture will be passed on to the next generation by way of a similar medium. Aren't our stories shared better when we're all gathered in the family room?

*("HOOKED," continued from page 1)*

dialogue more effectively. Through sincere, uncritical dialogue, we determined that my television viewing was destroying our family. We then put our television in our unfinished, cold, dark, damp basement, making TV viewing as inconvenient as possible. Cable wasn't an option. It took a long time, but I can now control my viewing.

But I still struggle with addiction. I cannot have games on my computer; in fact, I wrote this essay on a computer with no Solitaire, no Hearts, and no Minesweep. I avoid the Internet, and I keep certain "comfort" foods out of the house.

I now direct my energy to all those things I missed when I was not in control of myself—mainly my life with my family and my life with God. Without the support of my wife, I would never have gained control of my addiction, and without God, it wouldn't have mattered. As believers it is our mission to know, to love, and to serve God. Television programs, computer games, soccer leagues, business ventures, golf games, money, food, alcohol, shopping, drugs, running, work, and the many other addicting forces in society can distract us from that mission.

I am not sure which came first—my awareness that I was failing in my mission to God or my awareness that I was watching too much television. But that probably doesn't matter. What really matters is the support and love that I was always receiving and can now acknowledge. What really matters is the forgiveness that has allowed me to move forward. And what matters most is that now I know—I have an addiction.

A. J. Wagner is an attorney, author, and twenty-three-year volunteer for the Family Life Office in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

*("Our First and Last Tournament Season," continued from page 1)*

wondered what was wrong with us. Why were we not totally buying into this adventure?

Our experience that weekend repeated itself every weekend of that season. We found ourselves living in various metro-area gymnasiums. We ate nachos with cheese drooled on top, drank countless glasses of pop, and tried to get homework done in school hallways when Maggie wasn't playing. Basically we had no family life for four months.

Sunday morning games were the most frustrating. If we went to Mass and Maggie missed a game, she was benched for the rest of the day. Family spirituality, while vitally important to us, received no support whatsoever from Maggie's team or from tournament organizers.

Although Maggie won many ribbons and a few trophies, those rewards never made up for time lost as a family. When the season finally ended, my husband and I were burned out, and our younger sons begged to never attend another basketball game as long as they lived. Even Maggie, who loves basketball, said she wasn't sure she wanted to miss so many weekends with her family and friends again.

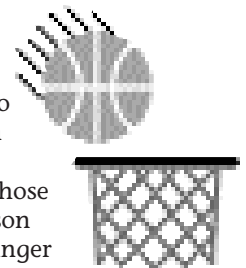
But again we found ourselves in the minority, especially when it came to Sunday worship. We didn't realize how Sunday Mass centered us as a family until we didn't have it. We explained our decision not to play the following season by saying, "This just doesn't work for us." The other tournament team families thought

our decision was very unusual. But isn't that the very message of the Gospel? Doesn't our faith often put us in contrast to popular culture?

We decided that "tournament anything" is not for us. We value our precious family time, and we're no longer willing to hand it over to just any activity or organization. Developing a cohesive family takes time together and shared commitment to time-honored principles, such as being trustworthy Christians and doing what we know in our heart is right. In a strange way, we are grateful for that fateful basketball season. Now we really know who we are as a family, and we realize the importance of our time together.

How about your family and the time you spend together? Who has control over it? Have you handed it over to an outside organization? What steps could you take to confront the popular culture for the sake of your family?

Kate Soucheray lives in Woodbury, Minnesota, with her husband and three children.





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Dear Colleague,

Enclosed is your latest issue of *HomeWord*. We hope you will make a special effort to make it available to all families in your parish or school. We address a very important topic this month: Families in Relationship with Contemporary Culture.

Today's American families are bombarded by opportunities, challenges, expectations, and distractions as they struggle to keep up with the rapid growth and change of society. Much of what society offers, although seemingly attractive, can be detrimental to healthy and faith-full family living. It is up to the individual families to choose the opportunities and face the challenges that will enhance their faith-full family lifestyle.

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When church leaders recognize the tremendous efforts that many families go to just to cope, the families begin to find an ally in their local church community and can pursue their faith amid the demands of everyday life. When this integration occurs, families have no trouble recognizing their holy and sacred nature.

As church and school leaders, we tend to ignore the social realities facing families today at our own peril. We hope this issue of *HomeWord* encourages you to stay in touch with families and support them on their challenging journey of faith.

Sincerely,

Leif Kehrwald  
*HomeWord* Editor



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