

Theme: Family Ritual
Question: Can a family with teenagers still pray together?

Teens and parents in conversation

HomeWord



Volume 8, Number 5

Editor's Note. As you probably know, this is the final issue of *HomeWord*. It is with a great amount of nostalgia and some regret that I bid farewell to you, *HomeWord* reader. In preparation for this issue, I took time to look over some of the very first, and admittedly my favorite, issues. *HomeWord* began as a simple publication that I wrote and edited from home. I printed the masters on my own printer, and with the help of my then school-age sons, I stuffed and mailed the envelopes each month. That was in 1996. In late 1999, Saint Mary's Press took over the publication of *HomeWord* when I became an editor there.


Ralph Stewart IV, the first teenager to contribute to *Home-*

Word, submitted a piece about a simple prayer service he did with his family. I included his article in the fifth *HomeWord* issue, which had family ritual as its theme. It's always been one of my favorite issues, so we are reprinting the article here. Ralph was just fifteen years old at the time, and his family was living in Grand Island, Nebraska. Now he is about to graduate from college, and his family is living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.


Many thanks to all those who have written for *HomeWord* over the years. Thanks to all the parishes and schools that have subscribed. A special thanks goes to you, *HomeWord* reader.

—Leif Kehrwald

Parent Talk by Leif Kehrwald

 People have a natural, human need to be connected with someone or something beyond what they can see, feel, or taste. Part of every person seeks truth, wholeness, and profound roots. This is what brings us together in faith.

The seasons and rhythms of the year provide many opportunities for simple, shared rituals in the home. Family rituals, traditions, and

 celebrations can bridge the frenetic reality of life with a few moments of peace, perspective, and purpose.

From saying nightly prayers around the Advent wreath to bringing food and clothing to the homeless during Lent to toasting with champagne at Thanksgiving dinner, these activities nurture our spiritual journey.

The key is to be sure that the ritual is meaningful. A meaningless ritual runs the risk of becoming an arduous habit contributing to family stress.

What's the difference between habit and ritual? Intentional reflection.

A habit takes on meaning when we reflect on what we're doing, how we're doing it, and what it's doing for us. A bit of reflection on our seasonal and holiday routines can lead to meaningful family rituals.

Home rituals don't have to be like High Mass, with mysterious gestures, wistful readings, and elaborate preparations. Home rituals should be simple,

utilizing the environment of regular household life. It takes some energy and forethought, but it's worth it. Once we get started, even with something simple and imperfect, we sense the spiritual power.

Seasonal or annual gatherings can also be times to celebrate rites of passage. What events of the past year made a permanent mark on our family? Did someone graduate, get married, learn to walk, start a new career, recover from illness, or die?

Rites of passage bring healthy closure to the key changes that took place during the year. To celebrate rites of passage, we must remember ▾

Teen Talk by Ralph Stewart IV

When someone says to a teenager, "prayer service," what is the first thing that comes to mind? Usually it is "Oh great — something boring!" But not for me. Not anymore. Just recently I did a prayer service for my family. It was a lot of fun, and it was not boring. It was not very long either.

Because of my brother, Mike, at first I wasn't sure I wanted to do this. I was afraid of what bad things he might say about the prayer. He is only a few years older than I am, and his opinion really counts. I did not want him to think that it was boring.

So why did I do it? I figured that the prayer service would be better if ▾

Teen Talk *continued*

I did it than if one of my parents did it for us!

I did the prayer service during the first week of Advent, the day before the feast day of the Immaculate Conception. The readings were about Eve and Mary

and the decisions they made and the impact they had on us.

Mary and Eve were alike because they both had big decisions to make. They were different because Mary made a good choice by accepting the fact that she was going to have a baby. But Eve made a bad choice by not resisting the temptation to eat the apple. So we're like Mary when we make good decisions, and we are like Eve when we make bad decisions. This became my "homily."

Next I came up with two family discussion questions. The first one

(based on Mary) was, "What was a good decision that you made, and what were the results from it?"

The other (based on Eve) was, "What was a bad decision that you made, and what were the results from it?"

After our discussion we said a blessing and played some soft music. (We started with music in the beginning also.)

When the prayer service was over, it was a relief. All my fears were laid to rest. Everybody had something nice to say. Even my brother didn't say anything bad. It made me feel great! In fact, I think I will do another prayer service some day because I liked the results from this one.

What do you think? If fifteen-year-old Ralph can do it, perhaps you can too!



Parent Talk *continued*

the way things were, honor the present, and embrace the future.

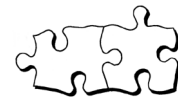
Family members spending their first Easter (or Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, or whatever) in a new house might celebrate by first sharing about



past Easters in their old home. They can then light a candle, recite a simple blessing for their new home, and conclude by imagining future

happy holidays in what will soon be their not-so-new home.

Family life holds all the necessary ingredients to nourish our spiritual journey: love, struggle, community, chaos, routine, unpredictability, joy, sorrow, memories. We should take the time and energy to shape some of these ingredients into a ritual with the other folks in our home.



Tips For Family Ritual

Families who take time to reflect on their daily, weekly, and seasonal habits will likely discover some opportunities for family ritual.

A few suggestions:

- Adopt the attitude: *If it's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly!* Research shows that even if you're not very good at doing ritual, the effort has a powerful impact.
- Give simple blessings to one another at moments of daily transition: morning leave-taking, bedtime, and so forth. While tracing a cross on your teen's forehead at bedtime or offering a verbal blessing as she goes out the door—"Today is the day the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad!"—may seem a bit childish, many young people deeply appreciate the offer of spiritual intimacy.
- Initiate at least one annual religious ritual in your family each year. You may want to rediscover the ethnic religious traditions that are your legacy. It is also important to share responsibility for celebration and ritual among all family members. When given the challenge and opportunity, teens can be powerful and imaginative prayer leaders.
- Get a book or two on family prayer and ritual. Give your family ritual time, space, and planning. Set up a regular time for family prayer.

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