“The Christian family...is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity.”

On the Family, Pope John Paul II

Keep Good Companions
by Tom McGrath

Rummaging through some old boxes my Mom no longer wanted in her attic, I came across a holy card and smiled. Back in grammar school, each year before summer vacation began, the nuns would hand out holy cards with sage advice. On the back of the card were strong urgings: see only movies approved by the Legion of Decency, attend Mass each week, and keep good companions.

That last bit of advice makes more and more sense to me as life grows increasingly complicated. I’ve got enough distractions pulling me in one direction or another without having my friends leading me astray. And that is especially true in my marriage.

Let me tell you a story about what I mean. A number of years ago our family was going through a bit of chaos. We had bought a new house, but hadn’t yet sold the old one. The new house needed lots of work, so after my day job I would put in another eight-to-ten hours at the new place. I hardly saw the kids. Kathleen and I were two ships passing in the night. I was feeling overworked, overtired, and underappreciated. A real vulnerable time.

One night working alone at the new house I got a phone call. It was from a girl I’d had a crush on in grade school. We’d seen each other at a recent class reunion. She had just been divorced. She invited me to meet her for lunch. Sensing a lot more in the invitation, I stood immobilized with an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other.

As grace would have it, I heard a knock on my screen door. There stood Jerry, a guy I’d met at church who had become a truly good friend. His kids babysat for my kids. He and his wife listened to us and encouraged us through our good times and bad. I knew him and he knew me. Seeing him standing there, I saw myself through his eyes and said softly into the phone, “Hey, I don’t think that’s a very good idea for either of us. Let’s keep our memories golden, and not tarnish them.”

And then I hung up the phone, grabbed a monkey wrench and, side-by-side with Jerry, installed that washing machine. Only now I wasn’t just working on the house, I was working on my home.

We take on the values of the people we associate with. If marriage means little to them, their attitudes and habits will erode our own commitment. If they value marriage, it will shore up our own view, even if they don’t say a word about it. Do yourself a favor. Listen to my old eighth grade nun. When it comes to your marriage, “Keep good companions.”

Questions to consider:
1. Of your friends as a couple, who do you feel most supports your marriage and the idea of marriage?
2. Are there certain activities that you engage in with friends that undermine your marriage?
3. How do you help support the marriages of others that you know?

Tom McGrath, author of *Raising Faith-Filled Kids: Ordinary Opportunities to Nurture Spirituality at Home* is a contributing editor of U.S. Catholic magazine.