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Media

MINDFULNESS

EDUCATING TEENS ABOUT FAITH AND MEDIA

MOVIES MUSIC, TELEVISION, GAMES, INTERNET, PRINT, MOVIES, MUSIC, TELEVISION, GAMES, INTERNET, ADVERTISING, TELEVISION, GAMES, INTERNET, ADVERTISING

Gretchen Hailer, RSHM, and Rose Pacatte, FSP



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We would like to dedicate this book with gratitude to all the pioneers in media literacy education in both the secular and religious communities, as well as people who may have been teaching media literacy without even knowing it.

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Daniel Brunner, chapter openers

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Introduction

Throughout history, people have loved storytelling. From the first tales told around a campfire, to those illustrated on the walls of a cave, to words put down on paper with a quill and later multiplied by millions with a printing press, to photographs, films, and all forms of electronic media—radio, television, even interactive video games—we never pass up a good story. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to love the world today, and to live in freedom and responsibility. To do so means that we are to choose, critique, and analyze the sources of our stories, whether from news or entertainment, and to reflect on what they mean.

The Church’s teaching on media and communications will be new for many of you. Yet herein you will find information to help you form and articulate your own criteria for stories and focus your own lenses for navigating your media world. You can then assist and mentor young people in navigating theirs. We will acquaint you with essential ideas about communication, media literacy education, and the four-step media mindfulness strategy for evaluating each medium.

The filmmakers, television executives, writers, marketers, photographers, and software developers of tomorrow are in our homes, pews, classrooms, and shopping malls today. Media mindfulness is no longer a suggestion; it is a pastoral imperative.

Media Mindfulness

What Is Media Mindfulness?

Media mindfulness is media literacy education in the context of faith formation.

Media Literacy Education

Media literacy education is essential for the twenty-first century. Sr. Elizabeth Thoman, CHM, founder of the Center for Media Literacy, and Tessa Jolls, the Center’s president and CEO, wrote these words in the article “Media Literacy: A National Priority in a Changing World.”

The convergence of media and technology in a global culture is changing the way we learn about the world and challenging the very foundations of education. No longer is it enough to be able to read the printed word; children, youth, and adults, too, need the ability to critically interpret the powerful images of a multimedia culture. Media literacy education provides a framework and a pedagogy for the new literacy needed for living, working, and citizenship in the twenty-first century. Moreover, it paves the way to mastering the skills

required for lifelong learning in a constantly changing world. (Center for Media Literacy Web site, www.medialit.org)

We, the authors, affirm this educational statement. In *Media Mindfulness: Educating Teens About Faith and Media*, we apply the statement to faith formation. By anchoring media mindfulness in the media literacy education universe, we are able to mine its wonderful insights, its skill-building pedagogy, its theory and praxis, and integrate them into our ministries when we speak or teach about media and values, virtues, spirituality, theology, Catholic social teaching, morality, intentional living, prayer, and worship.

“Media education is a quest for meaning. Much of the value of a quest lies in the search itself as well as in the achievement of the goal.” (Worsnop, *Screening Images*, p. ix)

The Center for Media Literacy (CML; Web site at www.medialit.org) has developed a list of core concepts and key questions for media literacy education to help teachers, parents, teens, and children critically navigate the media culture of the twenty-first century. Media mindfulness, as a set of Christian life skills and a lifestyle, is rooted in these concepts. You will find these core concepts and key questions integrated throughout this guide.

The Pluses of Media Mindfulness

Teaching about media and values in public education can be difficult because of the pluralistic and relativistic moral, religious, and spiritual reality of our culture and because of the separation of church and state. Often, teaching about values can be done only in partnership with character and citizenship education. In addition, many secular educators shy away from the concept of “formation,” which to them implies a lack of freedom in education.

We believe that the faith community can form

CML’s Five Key Questions of Media Literacy

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than I do?
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

Five Core Concepts

1. All media messages are “constructed.”
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power.

(Center for Media Literacy Web site
www.medialit.org)

its members into free and responsible disciples while adhering to the highest standards of education and pastoral ministry. Therefore, media mindfulness allows us to interpret our culture’s information and entertainment (storytelling) media in light of human and Gospel values, morality and spirituality, and the search for and discovery of meaning.

Concerns About the Media

There are several reasons why educators sometimes miss the opportunity to educate their students about media.

First, some adults do not see information and entertainment media as gifts of God; they perceive media perhaps as more of a problem than an asset

in faith formation. In his 1957 encyclical letter *On Motion Pictures, Radio, and Television*, Pope Pius XII opens with this comment about modern technology in media.

Those very remarkable technical inventions which are the boast of the men of our generation, though they spring from human intelligence and industry, are nevertheless the gifts of God, Our Creator, from Whom all good gifts proceed: “for He has not only brought forth creatures, but sustains and fosters them once created.” (Introduction)

Second, many adults lack knowledge about the information and entertainment media. They see the popular culture these create but are unsure how to approach it from a faith perspective—one that respects and honors the opinions of young people.

Third, many adults prefer to control the media that children and teens consume, rather than communicating with them about media in the context of faith and values. They have the idea that antisocial or immoral media can cause like behavior in those who consume it. While research has produced interesting corollaries between media consumption and behavior, no one has been able to prove that watching television, for example, *causes* people to make certain choices or behave in certain ways. No researcher has established a *causal* link, though we know that media have the power to teach, to persuade, and influence us on many levels.

Responding Rather Than Reacting to the Media

Young children, of course, imitate in their play what they see around them. This is a way of learning. If they grow up in a positive environment, they will learn appropriate behavior and develop a sense of right and wrong from peers, older siblings, parents, other significant adults, and, from television.

What is an appropriate response, rather than a reaction, to media—media that Christian adults may judge inappropriate, immoral, or obscene for

themselves and others? We do not consider media boycotts helpful. As media educators, we choose to educate parents, teachers, and young people in media mindfulness as the first and most powerful response we can make as people of faith in a “mediated” world.

Though writing letters expressing our views, both positive and negative, can be useful to advertisers and production companies, we believe that empowering others to choose media wisely and question everything they hear and see through media mindfulness is much more effective, influential, and long lasting.

Media Mindfulness is a tool for adults concerned with teaching young people about information and entertainment media in the context of faith. The book also provides background on various media for adults who are less familiar with them. Finally, the book provides tools that have been proven to help young people navigate the media world. Much as we might want to shield them from any sinfulness in the media, what we really want for them is the ability to recognize what they are seeing and hearing for what it is, and to form a Christian response to it.

Why *Media Mindfulness*?

Media Mindfulness is a comprehensive curricular tool created for adults who work with teens in Catholic high schools or parish youth ministry. With this resource, you can empower young people to understand and appreciate the fascinating world of media from the perspective of their Christian faith. With this knowledge, teens can make wise media choices, create meaningful media, and question and analyze what they do choose to watch, listen to, play, or read.

The Two Goals of This Book

This book has two goals. The first is to help you enhance your own understanding of media in a faith

context so you can teach and encourage young people to do the following things:

- understand the role of the media culture in their lives
- recognize the difference between media values and gospel values
- learn about the two lenses that the strategy of media mindfulness utilizes
- develop inquiry skills needed to apply the “four questions” format to media choices
- become critically autonomous media consumers
- integrate faith and culture for an authentic Christian life and spirituality

The second goal of this book is to explore the theology and spirituality of communication and media. This book places media in the sacramental world created by God. The universe has the capacity to mediate God’s grace as well as human sin. Once young people have the critical skills to discern appropriate media, they will have the tools to reflect, grow spiritually, and find meaning in ways that integrate faith and daily life.

Media Are Everywhere

Because media are all pervasive in our world, it would be irresponsible *not* to bring the media, their products and messages, into our teaching and learning about faith, morals, and values in the twenty-first century. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion are not the only navigational tools we need in the modern world. All of us need to read, write, and analyze the media as a cultural phenomenon—and to do so within all of these disciplines as well.

Many educators use film and television clips in their presentations to begin a conversation about subject matter, or play popular music cuts to illustrate core concepts of critical thinking about values and media. Sometimes teachers and youth ministers employ clips and cuts merely to attract the attention of young people.

We hope that by learning to engage with our communication and media culture in an informed

and faith-filled way, teachers, youth ministers, and young people—the media makers of tomorrow—can transform it for the good of humanity, imbued with human dignity and the spirit of Christ.

How Can You Most Effectively Use Media Mindfulness?

Become a Co-learner

The most important way for you to use this manual effectively is by becoming a knowledgeable co-learner about information and entertainment media. Each chapter provides significant background about a particular type of media. Having this knowledge and sharing relevant aspects of it with your students will give you a certain level of credibility with them. You can consider the information in each chapter as a kind of script to which you can refer.

This may be a new concept to you, but when it comes to media, the only way to be an effective teacher and minister is to be open to learning as much from young people as they will learn from you. This attitude will help you communicate about the medium effectively and engagingly, honoring the experiences and opinions of youth. At the same time, your respect and openness will invite them to bring their faith into their decisions and choices about the media they consume.

If you do not engage in media education as a co-learner, however, and present yourself as an expert, you are likely to lose any ground you might have gained. Teenagers know quite a bit about media. Learning *with* them is valuable because you not only let them share their own knowledge but also allow them to practice the media mindfulness techniques you are giving them. It is also important for you to experience *their* media, as well as those directed at your own age demographic, so you share some media experiences in common with them.

How to Use This Guide

This book is not simply for theology teachers or youth ministers. It is valuable for all faculty and staff in Catholic high schools as well as staff and volunteers in parish settings. This guide provides background for you and elements you can assemble for structured events, such as presentations or film festivals, or integrate into your existing plans. This book can be used in various ways. It can serve as a resource:

- **for a course or unit on media**, because the chapters are structured to let you customize your presentation for your audience and time frame
- **for media mindfulness across the curriculum**, as part of your regularly scheduled curriculum, or as scheduled media mindfulness events. Each chapter suggests ways to do this.
- **for contemplative prayer experiences** that bring faith and life together. Such opportunities enable youth to reflect more deeply and to build bridges between faith and life.
- **for a daylong or weekend retreat** to contemplate the seeds of the Gospel in mainstream media. The retreat could examine teens' awareness of the world around them and enable them to be mindful of stories, how they are told, how people are represented, their assumptions about human dignity, the good of the earth, the common good, and so on.
- **for parent and teacher association meetings** where participants analyze video clips of parents raising their children, or struggling to do so, and teachers teaching well or not so well. This book also helps you educate the young people's parents about the media mindfulness they are learning.
- **for enriching your media library of books, films, and music**, adding relevance to your teaching about media, communication, and culture in the faith community

- **for Total Parish Catechesis programs, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), or other sacramental preparation**

What Does This Book Contain?

The Structure of the Book

This book has ten chapters and six appendices. Chapter 1, "All About Media Mindfulness," is first of all for you, the teacher or youth minister. It creates the context for teaching about media in the faith community and surveys the background information you will need. This chapter is structured like the others but is intended to engage you before you begin media mindfulness sessions. It provides essential information and the strategies to help you introduce the topic of media mindfulness to your class or group.

In chapters 2 through 9, readers explore the world of eight particular media through the dual lenses of faith and mindfulness. Each chapter has the same structure: an introduction, a section with key facts about the medium, and several creative activities to do with young people.

Chapter 10 is intended to help integrate faith and life through the theology of communication and spirituality for Christians living in a world mediated by technology and messages.

Chapter Organization

In each of chapters 2 through 9, we approach one or several media through the lens of media mindfulness. The chapters are structured to let you choose elements that fit your needs.

- Each chapter begins with a "Scripture Connection" quotation and reflection that helps young people understand how God's word connects to their media world.

- The list of “Session Objectives” will help you decide the scope of your session. Do you wish to achieve all of these goals in one session, or will you choose just a few?
- In the “What Is . . . ?” and “Values” sections, we define each medium and list the values it tends to cater to in the commercial world. We list these because the values that media favor in our culture often do not coincide with human and Christian values. When we understand the values a particular medium tends to promote, it becomes easy to speak of contrasting Gospel values as criteria for choosing media programs.
- A brief history of each medium follows, along with a discussion of “how it works” as an industry. We encourage you to use this information in your presentation.
- A section on the Church’s approach to each medium—or media in general—follows. You’ll find quotations from ecclesial documents; these can help you frame ideas and give young people the faith language to communicate their own faith and values.
- The “Movies” section suggests related films, either for your own preparation or for group showing. Remember: always preview films in their entirety before showing them. A license may be required. (See appendix 4, “Fair Use of Media,” for additional licensing information.)
- The “Characteristics” section summarizes some of the key features of the medium.
- The “Things to Remember When Talking with Teens” section suggests ways to co-learn with young people.
- “Media Saints and Greats,” a kind of a Catholic trivia section, highlights saints who are patrons of various media—or who could be—and other relevant figures too. Not all are canonized, but all are strong role models. You may want to assign further research and reporting about these saints’ relevance to their media and modern life, create saint games, or see movies about some of the saints, talking about them together afterward.
- “Media Detective” suggests ideas for homework, group work, research, and enjoyable ways to inquire, learn, and talk about faith, values, and media. You might offer small prizes to the sleuths who complete these tasks.
- Each “Activities” section outlines four exercises: a general group activity, a creative production in the medium under study, an alternative or supplementary exercise, and an activity that helps you apply the four-step media mindfulness analysis to the medium.
- At least two handouts related to the activities are included in each chapter.
- The “Cross-Curricular Connections” offer ideas for integrating the material into different subject areas. These ideas can heighten the young people’s appreciation for a medium as social commentary and art form, as well as entertainment. Applying media mindfulness across the curriculum enriches the students’ awareness of the media’s social influence in every aspect of daily life, and links media mindfulness with all aspects of learning. The cross-curricular approach also provides opportunities for the creative teacher or leader to team teach, or allow for peer teaching.
- A brief “Reflective Exercise” and “Closing Prayer” end each chapter.
- Finally, you will be directed to a “Self-Evaluation” (appendix 6) where you can assess how the session unfolded, what you learned, and the effectiveness of your teaching methods.

We, the authors, hope and pray that *Media Mindfulness* will serve you effectively in the ministries you carry out so generously in the name of the Lord Jesus and his Church.

Chapter 1

All About Media Mindfulness

Introduction

Scripture Connection

Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. (Matt. 13:16–17)

Our eyes and our ears perceive God’s presence everywhere because God mediates God’s self to us through creation and the people we live with. Media—our shared means of informing, entertaining, and storytelling—are also everywhere. God continues to speak to us through media in modern parables that are meaningful for our life’s journey.

Session Objectives

This session will enable you to accomplish the following tasks and goals:

- To explore with young people the world of communication and the place of media in that world
- To explain what media literacy—and media mindfulness—are not
- To show the relationship of media mindfulness to media literacy education
- To consider the dual lenses of faith and mindfulness as ways to navigate the media culture
- To present the four-part media mindfulness strategy that will be used throughout this book

Media and Christian Values

People who create and promote media often value the following:	The Gospels value the following:
Immediacy • Youth • Newness Bigness • Wealth • Success Glamour • Consumerism Disposability Nature as a disposable commodity Complexity • Multitasking Instant gratification • Winning The human body as an object A sense of entitlement	Patience • Dignity of all • Tradition Smallness • Poverty of spirit • Authenticity Ordinariness • Conservation Cherishability Nature as God’s gift Simplicity • Contemplation Discernment and choice • Integrity The body made in the image of God A sense of sufficiency

Things to Know About Media Mindfulness

It is our responsibility to be mindful of media because, like any form of communication, media tend to promote certain values—some that support the Christian life of discipleship, and others that do not. Mass media are at the heart of our culture, the primary means by which people communicate and interpret what matters. Media literacy education has become more common in the United States in the last few decades. Media mindfulness adds Gospel values to the media literacy approach, discerning God’s presence in media stories and discovering what this reflection process means for us as disciples.

The word *media* is plural; each of its forms is a “medium.” In English-speaking countries, the mass outlets for information and news are usually referred to collectively as “the media.” The term *media* can thus be misleading. In reality, it embraces all technological forms of communication that “mediate” a message. There are many genres within each medium as well. Media mindfulness can be employed to focus on any medium and its productions as well as popular culture.

To build the foundation for a good understanding of media mindfulness, we begin with communication, the process by which values are shared.

Communication

Communication creates relationships between people. Through these relationships, we share our values with one another. The verb “to communicate” comes from the Latin *communicare* meaning “to participate, share, or hold in common.” To communicate means to impart information or tell a story, and it can take several forms.

1. Intrapersonal communication, or “inner speech,” is self-communication: a dialogue or conversation people have with themselves, especially

when they need to make a decision.

2. Interpersonal communication is characterized by a mutual exchange of information or stories, usually between two people, either face to face or by telephone, instant messaging, e-mail, and so forth.

3. Group communication usually involves people gathered for a specific purpose, with specific goals in mind: perhaps to make a decision, carry out a task, resolve a situation, study a topic, celebrate, or pray.

4. Organizational communication is an absolute necessity for an association such as a business, government, nonprofit organization, or parish, to resolve conflicts and thrive. Information must flow continually from the top down, the bottom up, and across all departments or sections as well.

5. Media, or cultural and social communication, differ from the other forms. Note that the four forms above imply a “back and forth” dialogue. Media are delivery systems, and they generally deliver their content one-way. A single source, such as a television station or network, transmits to millions of sets at one time. The audience can receive the programming, but individuals cannot respond on equal footing. Mass media, mediated through technology, are often called “mass communications.”

6. Extra-personal communication refers to communication between machines—machines operated by individuals, groups, and organizations. Examples include e-mail, instant messaging, and Web logs (“blogs” for short). Extra-personal communication has the potential to empower every person on earth and give a voice to each one.

Values Inform Communication

Whenever we have a conversation, our values are implicitly present because we communicate about what is important to us. In order to identify the values that media present to us, it is good to be

aware of the values we bring to any encounter with media.

One easy way to uncover our values is to ask, Where do I put my time and money? This media-based exercise helps reveal our values and make ourselves accountable for them.

State Your Values

List the three main values that guide your life.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The next time you watch a television show or a movie, reflect on your response to that “media product.” Ask yourself: Why did I like or not like the show or film? How did my values influence my response? If you are aware of the values that are important to you and can articulate them, you will find they were probably affirmed or challenged in some way while you viewed the movie or show. It is healthy and necessary to touch base with our values as we engage and interact with media.

Values are important ideals that give direction and inspiration to our lives. Authentic values are those of the Gospel that foster human dignity and the common good. They help us build up the world around us. Self-centered values lead to negative attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to Gospel values and can cause people to suffer both spiritually and materially.

Culture

Culture exists because people communicate their values to one another, forming complex webs of relationship.

Pope John Paul II set the standard for understanding culture when he said:

“Culture . . . is a specific dimension of the existence and being of man. It creates among

the persons within each community a complex of bonds, determining the interpersonal and social character of human existence. Man is both subject and creator of culture in which he expresses himself and finds his equilibrium.” “Message of the Holy Father for the XVIII World Communications Day,” no. 2)

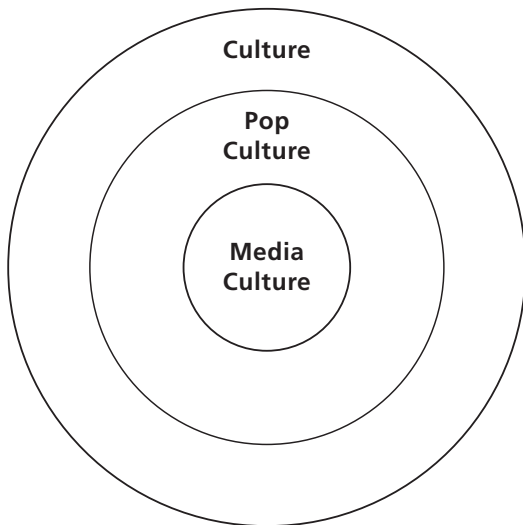
We grow up immersed in our national culture. We soak in the values, attitudes, and beliefs of those around us and of the people we encounter through media. No matter how much a Mexican couple in the United States might want to raise their children as Mexicans, it just cannot happen. Such children will be influenced both by their Mexican parents and by the U.S. culture in which they live. Without other influences such as a healthy family life and faith, this local-environment culture can become a person’s entire worldview, greatly influencing one’s thoughts and actions.

Popular Culture

Moreover, every country has many subcultures. For example, U.S. military families have a unique culture because they may move frequently around the country and the world through their service. A larger subculture is the popular culture—the shared everyday experiences of ordinary people.

Though we cannot avoid the influence of this pop culture, we can increase our awareness of its pervasive messages. With awareness, we can discern which aspects of popular culture support Gospel values and which do not, which helps us escape the lure of the negative aspects. As Christians, our Baptism calls us not only to avoid but to challenge values that do not promote human dignity.

In this chapter, we will explore the popular culture that is the umbrella of the media culture. The relationships between the culture in general, media culture, and pop culture look like this:



(Gretchen Hailer et al.,
Believing in a Media Culture, p. 22)

What Is Media Literacy Education?

Media literacy education means teaching and learning about media, values, and the critical skills necessary for living in the twenty-first century. The media literate person is aware of the boundaries between reality and the constructed reality of the media and knows how to navigate them in meaningful ways.

Media literacy education has taken shape primarily in the last forty to fifty years. In 1964, John Calkin, SJ (1928–1993), wrote a curriculum on film study for his doctorate from Harvard; today he is known as the founder of the media literacy field in the United States. The Media Action Resource Center, formed by representatives from the national offices of Protestant denominations, developed the first comprehensive course about television in the United States in the late 1970s. This course, Television Awareness Training, has greatly influenced the media literacy movement.

The Center for Media Literacy (CML) was founded in 1977 with the publication of *Media & Values* magazine. Beginning about 1990, the media literacy education movement in the United States began to grow. Several international conferences were held in Canada and the United States during the next decade. In 2001, the Alliance for a Media

What Media Literacy Is *Not*

With the following list of ideas, let's distinguish media literacy from other literacies, and explore some of the basic elements of a comprehensive media education.

- Media “bashing” is *not* media literacy; however, media literacy sometimes involves *criticizing the media*.
- Merely producing media is *not* media literacy, although media literacy should include *media production*.
- Just teaching with videos or CD-ROMs or other mediated content is *not* media literacy; one must also *teach about media*.
- Simply looking for political agendas, stereotypes, or misrepresentations is *not* media literacy; there should also be an *exploration* of the systems that can make those representations appear “normal.”
- Looking at a media message or a mediated experience from just one perspective is *not* media literacy, because media should be examined from *multiple positions*.
- Media literacy does *not* mean “Don’t watch;” it means “*Watch carefully; think critically.*”

With thanks to Renee Hobbs, Chris Worsnop, Neil Andersen, Jeff Share, and Scott Sullivan

(Center for Media Literacy Web site,
www.medialit.org)

Literate America was founded, which included an affinity group for faith communities.

People have become increasingly aware that they need skills to intentionally navigate the culture. Now, all fifty states have standards that include media literacy topics either as part of a standard subject such as English or social studies, or as a stand-alone curriculum unit.

The Two Lenses of Media Mindfulness

This book focuses on the media culture through two “lenses”—the lens of faith and the lens of mindfulness.

The belief that all of creation can reveal God to us is the first lens of media mindfulness. Priest and geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, illustrated this Catholic teaching when he said, “By virtue of the Creation and still more, of the Incarnation, *nothing* here below is *profane* for those who know how to see” (*The Divine Milieu*, p. 66). This perspective encourages believers to see the world as a place full of wonder and awe, and the media as potential locations for discovering the presence of God in all manner of unlikely places. Using our eyes of faith on a daily basis keeps us rooted in the values of the Gospel, so that we may live the spiritual values of Jesus in everyday life and therein find meaning.

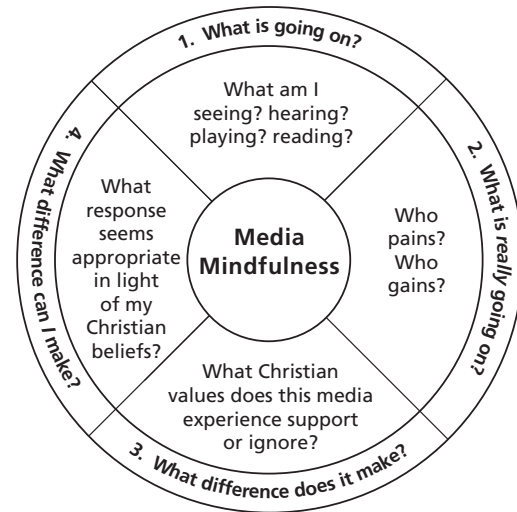
Mindfulness is the second lens, offering a reflective life strategy that questions and discerns. This lens allows us to study each medium in the context of its own structure and language. Using both of these lenses, believers can deepen their faith life in a mediated world in ways that are both faithful and relevant to twenty-first-century living.

The Strategy of Media Mindfulness

The media mindfulness strategy poses four questions for young people and adults to use with various types of media. These questions are based on the theological reflection process as well as the core concepts and key questions of media literacy education. Through the practice of theological reflection, a person moves from a basic awareness of an issue, to reflection, then to dialogue, and finally to action. These four questions are the tools that will help the students examine each medium through the lenses of faith and mindfulness:

- **What is going on?** What am I seeing, hearing, playing, reading, doing?
- **What is really going on?** What is the underlying device or technique that is being employed to accomplish the work of the particular medium, that is, to construct this other reality? Who pains and who gains from this particular media product? In whose interest is this message being communicated?

- **What difference does it make?** What Christian values, morals, or social issues does this media experience support or reject? What is the worldview behind it?
- **What difference can I make?** What personal or group response seems appropriate in light of my Christian beliefs?



(Gretchen Hailer et al.,
Believing in a Media Culture, p. 38)

The first two questions analyze the actual form and content of the media experience itself. The third question focuses on discernment, while the fourth invites a creative response from the believer. The questions are simple and can be used for personal reflection. Individual responses, when shared respectfully in twos and threes, can also generate fruitful conversations.

The strategy of media mindfulness not only influences our choice of media, it enables us to make meaning from what we actually choose to read, do, listen to, play, or watch. It is in this landscape of stories, using metaphor, analogy, and allegory, that the struggle for redemption and grace are won and lost, and, many times, won again. Although media mindfulness enables us to find meaning in all types of stories, the most satisfying stories are about characters who choose transcendent values to guide their decisions.

The Church and Media

The Church teaches that media are gifts of God that can be used to promote humanity as well as to lead people away from God.

Pope John Paul II's last written document was about the mass media. He released *The Rapid Development* on January 24, 2005. He wrote these words:

The Church is not only called upon to use the mass media to spread the Gospel but, today more than ever, to integrate the message of salvation into the “new culture” that these powerful means of communication create and amplify. It tells us that the use of the techniques and the technologies of contemporary communications is an integral part of its mission in the third millennium.

Moved by this awareness, the Christian community has taken significant steps in the use of the means of communication for religious information, for evangelization and catechesis, for the formation of pastoral workers in this area, and *for the education to a mature responsibility of the users and the recipients of the various communications media.* (No. 2, emphasis added)

The words in the last sentence of this excerpt articulate the heart of media mindfulness. It is our responsibility as pastoral leaders, teachers, and parents to help young people navigate our media world and become media mindful teenagers and adults.

Characteristics of Media Mindfulness

- creates autonomous critics who question the media and make wise choices about their media consumption when alone and when with others
- integrates faith and daily life
- promotes a pedagogy of respect for the opinions and insights of others, which can build community through dialogue

Movies About the Media

Use clips from these films to illustrate a point or begin a conversation, or show an entire film to your group and analyze it together.

Clueless (1995, 97 minutes, rated PG-13). In this pop-culture modernization of Jane Austen's *Emma*, Cher meddles in others' lives, and shopping becomes an emotional cure-all.

Dead Poets Society (1989, 128 minutes, rated PG). Set in a school for boys, this film stars Robin Williams as a gifted teacher. Use any of the scenes where Mr. Keating is teaching the boys about learning to think for themselves—for example, when he asks Mr. Dalton to stand on a desk and look at the world from a different point of view.

- is a vital life skill for the twenty-first century, an age increasingly characterized by mediated communication

Things to Remember When Talking with Teens About the Media

- Do anticipate that your students likely know more than you do about entertainment and information media and that during these sessions you will be co-learning with them. (See the introduction for an explanation of co-learning.)
- Do honor your students—their opinions, learning, and experience.
- Do listen actively to them; make eye contact to show your interest.
- Do avoid using imperatives such as “we must,” “we have to,” and “we need to,” even though you will find this language in Church documents. Jesus *invites* and *calls* us to follow him by living the Commandments and Beatitudes.
- Do motivate students through inquiry, discovery, producing media, and sharing of experience about media, faith, and values. This approach is

always more effective than stressing information and rules.

- Do be fair towards media. If young people suspect you are “picking on” a particular medium, they will resist and ultimately tune you out.
- Do not put down their preferences or dislikes.
- Do not make generalizations about media.
- Do not pass judgment on any media you have not seen or heard personally.
- Do remember what it was like to be a teen.
- Do encourage inquiry and conversation about the media.

Media Saints and Greats

- **Saint Thomas Aquinas, OP** (1225–1274), was a philosopher, theologian, and teacher. His *Summa Theologica* explained all the main teachings of the Catholic Church at that time. No question was ever off limits for Saint Thomas, and for this reason he can be considered a patron saint of media mindfulness.
- **Blessed James Alberione, SSP** (1884–1971), founded ten religious congregations and associations, most dedicated to communicating the Gospel message through the media. He launched publishing houses and a film studio, and inspired the establishment of radio stations, video production centers, and Catholic bookstores in more than fifty countries. He encouraged an approach similar to media mindfulness among his congregation members.
- **Igino Giordani** (1894–1980) was a journalist who belonged to a lay association called the Focolare Movement, which is dedicated to spreading God’s love to unite the world through the Gospel message. Giordani was exiled from Italy during Mussolini’s fascist regime because he wrote against it.

Media Detective

Give these interesting and fun assignments to your students so they can investigate the media this week. Have them report back!

- Find out the most popular television shows for various audiences.
- Find out the top five movies at the box office.
- Find out what books are on the *New York Times* bestseller lists.
- Find out the top-selling CDs.
- Find out the most popular video games for teens.
- Find out the Vatican’s Web address and describe the information it provides.
- Find out the number of annual awards for Catholic media of different types.
- Find out which award was given for excellence in the mainstream media most recently.

Activities

Activity 1: Communication Experiences

In this activity, students experiment with current means of communication—and older ones—to spark a conversation about the nature of more advanced technology. Follow these steps to prepare the exercise and share it with your group.

1. Before class, download the Pope’s most recent document on communications and print it. (The document is issued every year on World Communications Day.) Highlight a few sentences that seem especially meaningful, put the document in an envelope, seal it, and address it to your class or group. Leave it in the rectory or school office for members from your class or group to pick up during the session.

2. Acquire two cell phones. Keep one and give the other to a student or group member and ask him or her to call you when you give the signal.

3. At the beginning of the session, explain that this exercise will illustrate communications “then” and “now.” Ask for a volunteer to keep time. Then ask for two volunteers to go and get the letter and bring it back. After they leave, signal the person with the cell phone to call you and tell you how many people are present. Tell another student to announce it to the group. Have someone else call the weather line and announce the local conditions to the others.

4. When the students return with the letter, ask the timekeeper to announce how long it took to retrieve the letter, then ask a different volunteer to read the highlighted parts to the group.

5. Have the students discuss how they felt while they were waiting for the couriers to return. Ask these types of questions:

- What if surface or “snail mail” were the only long-distance communication available now?
- How would you feel about moving to a part of the world without electronic communication? What is the impact of such a lack in a world so much more technologically advanced?
- What are the benefits of swift communications? What might some negative aspects be? (Some examples include the “need for speed” and the increased demand for instant gratification.)

Activity 2: Creating Nonverbal Communication

In this activity, the game of charades stimulates reflection on nonverbal communication.

1. Prepare the group for a game of charades by reviewing the rules, including the signs for a book title, film, television show, song, quote, and any media form you wish to include. Explain that this particular game of charades will be limited to different forms of media.

2. Divide the group into two teams. Ask one person from each team to observe the team during the game and make notes about the kinds of communication that take place between same-team members, between team members and the person acting the charade, and between members of the opposing teams. Remind the observers to note nonverbal expressions, words, and body language. The observers will report back at the end of the game.

3. Ask another person to make a list of all the titles or phrases that were acted out.

4. At the end of the game, ask the two observers to report back on what they noticed regarding communication. Then ask the larger group to discuss these questions:

- What does the group notice about the charade items themselves?
- Do the items reflect school, home, church, or popular culture?
- What was interesting about the teams’ ways of communicating?
- Were all of the forms of communication respectful?

5. Explain to the group that they have just experienced aspects of media mindfulness. First, the young people communicated about media (rather than simply consuming media). Second, there was a record of the media mentioned so that the group could reflect on the ideas the class had. Finally, there were two people observing the nature of the conversation, illustrating that communication can either support values of respect or challenge them.

Activity 3: Media List for College

In this activity, students come to a greater awareness of what media technology items they think are essential to them, and why.

1. Pass out a copy of handout 1–A, “Packing for College,” to each student.

2. Instruct them to fill out the list of items and to give reasons for their choices.

3. After the students have completed their own lists, draw two columns on the board and ask the students to help you compile their lists. Invite them to give their reasons for listing the items.

4. When you have finished the list on the board, tell the students that the college they have selected will let them bring only two media items with them. Ask them to choose these two items from their own list. Then draw two more columns on the board and invite the group to share their results. Ask the students, Are you surprised by your choices? If so, why?

Activity 4: Learning to Be Media Mindful in a Visual World

Use this exercise to analyze a variety of billboards with your students. Prepare by taking digital photos of billboards the week before so you can project them on a screen during the session. Choose wide-ranging content: politics, alcohol, fast food, cars, public service, and so on.

Before showing students the billboards, give them each a copy of handout 1–B, “Media Mindfulness and Billboards.” As a class, go through the four steps, using the additional questions for interpreting billboards. In addition, have students consider these questions:

- How close are some billboards to schools?
- What neighborhoods have billboards?
- How do these placements make an impact on their communities?

Reflective Exercise and Closing Prayer

Plan a visit to the parish church, a cathedral, or a monastery chapel. Ask the students to be silent as

Cross-Curricular Connections



Theater, Film Studies, Television

Production, Speech. With your group, review the forms of communication and culture discussed earlier in this chapter. Ask the students to consider these questions:

- What is the function of communication in each of these subject areas?
- How do sound and visuals function together to create meaning?



Economics, Civics, Government.

Have students research the role of mass communications in each of these subject areas and describe their importance. Research the legislation regulating various media and analyze it for fairness in the service of the public interest.



Religion.

Download *The Rapid Development*, by Pope John Paul II, from the Internet. Copy it and read the document with your students. Talk about how the Pope understands God as expressed through his words on communication and culture.

they enter the building, to bless themselves with holy water, to reverence the altar, or to genuflect if the Blessed Sacrament is present.

Invite the group to take a contemplative walk around the church or chapel and to take note of the various ways God’s Word is communicated. Point out that the symbols are present everywhere, even in how the building smells.

Ask the young people to remember one thing they notice. After ten or fifteen minutes, quietly gather together and sit in the chairs or pews. As the leader, sit behind the young people; play some soft sacred music from Taize or other sources. Read the following reflection as a guided meditation (or feel free to make up your own):

Lord, you have blessed us with the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell so you can communicate your love and presence to us, so we can know you and live fruitfully in this world. In this, your house, we have seen the story of Creation, the fall from grace, our redemption, and we are offered the means of holiness through the sacraments and the example of your saints. Today, in this contemplative experience, you have communicated your love to me through _____. And now I invite each of us to share something that impressed us during our contemplative walk through this holy place.

Self-Evaluation

Please fill out a copy of handout appendix 6-A, “Self-Evaluation,” in this manual.



Packing for College

You are about to leave for college. Use this form to help you decide what media technology to take with you for the year. Be sure to explain why you need each item.

Item	Why?
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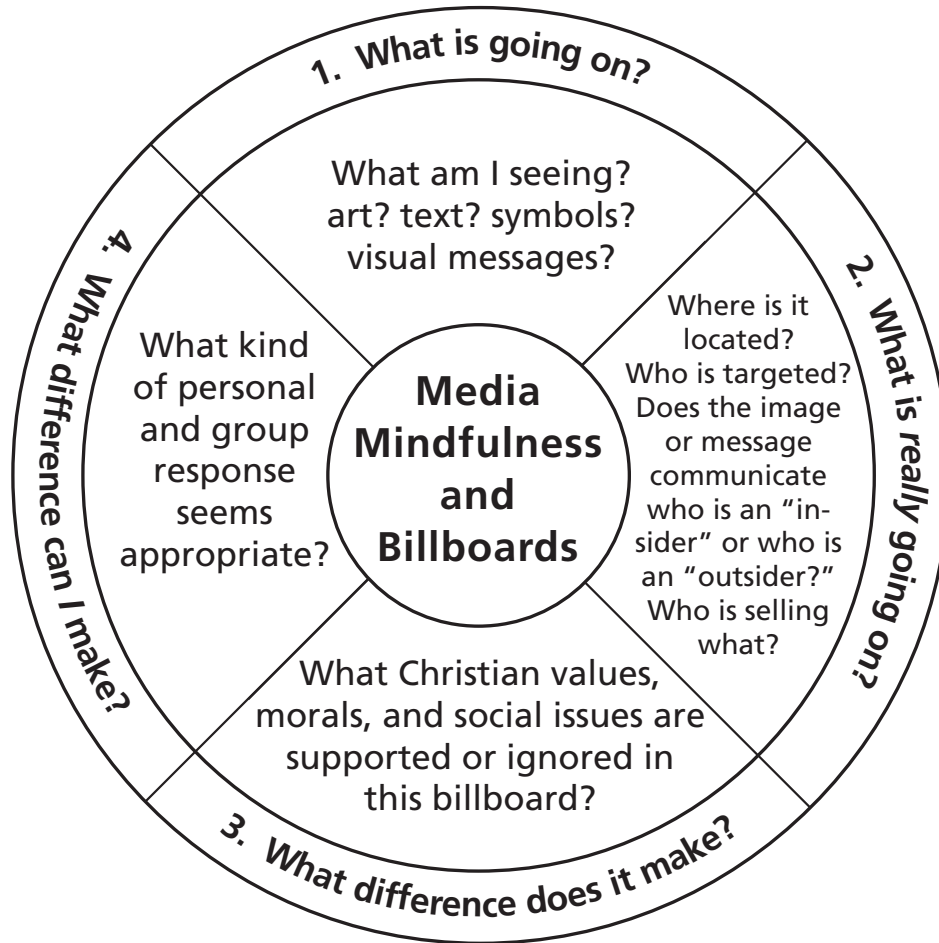
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Media Mindfulness and Billboards



(This diagram is adapted from *Believing in a Media Culture*, by Gretchen Hailer, Thomas Zanzig, and Marilyn Kielbasa [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996], page 38. Copyright © 1996 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

Chapter 2

Popular Culture and Media Mindfulness

Introduction

Scripture Connection

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt. 6:25; 31–33)

In these passages from the Sermon on the Mount, we notice how simply Jesus challenges us not to “sweat” what he sees as the small things of life. Many of the details we worry about are essentially *wants*, not *needs*. We all *need* to eat and drink and be clothed, but we do not *need* the latest fad foods or energy drinks or name brand clothing! These are often *wants* induced by advertising and peer pressure. Once we learn to differentiate wants from needs, and to determine the real source of our desires, then we can enjoy the popular culture with the true freedom of the sons and daughters of God.

Session Objectives

This session will enable you to accomplish the following tasks and goals:

- to help young people differentiate between needs and wants
- to assist them in exploring various aspects of the popular culture
- to explain to them that the allure of pop culture can be dangerous
- to have them consider the Church’s view of popular culture
- to have them apply the strategy of media mindfulness to popular culture

What Is Popular Culture?

Popular culture, or pop culture, is the “people’s culture” that prevails in any given society. Its nature is determined by the daily interactions, pursuits, needs, and wants that make up the everyday lives of ordinary people. Pop culture encompasses many practices, including those pertaining to food, clothing, body adornment, slang, jokes, and mass media entertainment such as sports, TV, and popular music.

Those who create and promote popular culture generally value the following.

- instant popularity
- disposable things
- cultivating followers
- consumerism
- body image
- what is current
- what is noticeable
- what is “here today and gone tomorrow”

Things to Know About Popular Culture

Popular culture exerts a tremendous influence over us, whether we are aware of it or not. Popular culture, with its changing genres, is at once amusing and alluring. It is the stuff of informal banter in the cafeteria and chatter during class breaks in the halls. It is the visual joke sent to others by e-mail or the verbal joke circulated by word of mouth. It is the latest fad in fashion, toys, cars, or sports.

It is necessary to give proper attention to the subtle messages of the pop culture, and the mass media environment that delivers them, in order to resist the attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to the Gospel. Though many cultural values and practices may be in line with Christian beliefs, we are called by our Baptism to be “countercultural,” to stand for strong values that in some cases are very different from the secular values the popular culture holds up to us daily.

Three important areas of popular culture are body image, food and drink, and sports. These are among the major genres of teen popular culture. As you already know, pop fads can come and go, then reappear in the same or other forms decades later. Sometimes we hear parents or grandparents exclaim, “I can’t believe that fashion is back in!”

Body Image

The culture influences and is influenced by the way people view and take care of their bodies.

Body image trends are fascinating: they change from culture to culture, century to century, even decade to decade. Changing criteria for female beauty, for example, can best be seen in the history of art. The Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) painted pictures of the most beautiful women of his day, who were voluptuous, round, and sensual. Similarly, the French Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) depicted “meaty” nudes stepping out of the bath.

In the 1950s and ’60s, the archetypal, iconic *femme fatale* was Marilyn Monroe (1926–1962). Marilyn wore a size 12. She had a tummy, thighs, and a soft neck and arms. Her image was quite different than the very slim, high fashion “waif look” later popularized by designer Calvin Klein in the form of his favorite model Kate Moss, who wore a size 0 at one point.

What happened to create this shift in the culture’s perception of female beauty? Women decades ago likely made great efforts to emulate Marilyn Monroe’s beauty and style. So why have women (and men) gone from accepting a curvaceous form to pursuing a youthful yet almost gaunt image? Has the media’s ideal of beauty led many people to try to lose weight by all manner of dieting, exercising, liposuctioning, and obsessing over every wrinkle and gray hair?

The profit motive, rather than medical knowledge, bears quite a bit of responsibility. There has been a rapidly increasing economic drive in America since the 1950s to market nearly any product likely to make money, regardless of its human impact. So it is no coincidence that corporations increased their focus on female adolescents and women, who were a vast untapped market. Some advertisers then had to create a discontent, a perceived need, in order to sell products. Over time, advertisers and corporations created a new model of female beauty: the eternally young and slim woman. This would be in contrast to companies who have actively promoted greater health in women through exercise, healthy eating, and education.

Many forces came together to change the culture's notion of beauty. This image of female beauty is exemplified in the form of the Barbie doll, released in 1959. Barbie is the fantasy girl who has been accused of planting the seeds of body-image discontent in little girls. The billion-dollar diet industry took root as fashion magazines began to picture impossibly skinny models scowling seductively from their pages. What most readers failed to realize, however, was that the "look" in magazines was achieved mostly by airbrushing and lighting!

Many Americans have bought into these marketing campaigns and as a result, they now spend billions of dollars a year on diets and diet-related services. Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia among youth—especially young women—increased along with this quest to become thin. Both conditions require medical attention, can cause permanent damage to health, and may even lead to death. In search of the perfect body, many young women also demand cosmetic surgery at a time when their bodies have not yet matured to their full potential.

Skin Fashions

Popular culture also promotes "skin fashions," such as certain skin tones, cosmetics, tattooing, and body piercing, as well as hairstyles. These vary from decade to decade, culture to culture. All of these fads can tap into people's desire and perceived need to belong to a group.

Historically, people in various ethnic groups have held clear preferences for skin color, often favoring those with light tones over dark. Oddly enough, in some societies, people often strive for a "tan" appearance, even though for some people a darkened hue is really evidence of skin damage and a sign of early aging or even cancerous conditions. Other societies (some in Asia, for example) favor skin that is kept from the sun or even lightened through various methods.

People have used cosmetics for centuries to enhance skin tone and facial features. As early as

4000 BC, the Egyptians were using various barks, herbs, and berries to color eyes and skin in ways that resemble eye makeup and blush today. Interestingly enough, it wasn't until the 1920s that ordinary American women—not just actresses and prostitutes—began to use lip color and nail polish.

Tattooing communicates status in certain cultures. Sons of Samoan chiefs are privileged to have elaborate tattoos etched on their bodies. In past decades, United States servicemen, particularly those in the Navy, had themselves tattooed during their travels. Because these men visited exotic ports, the lure of the tattoo was understandable.

Body piercing is another skin fashion that appears from time to time in various cultures. In traditional Mexican families, baby girls have their ears pierced at the time of their presentation to God. Recently, men and women throughout North America have been piercing other parts of the body to hold rings and other jewelry.

Facial and body hair also have cultural "seasons." In ancient times, before the razor, men removed facial hair with shells—a good enough reason to maintain beards! As the centuries unfolded in Western culture, vogues developed for certain hairstyles for both men and women. Usually, elaborate hairstyles for women were only *de rigueur* for the upper classes and often took hours to do.

Until the last century, body hair was usually left alone, but during World War II when silk stockings were hard to find, women began to shave their legs and use eyebrow pencil to draw "seams" down the back of them. Soon after, as bathing suits became more revealing, women also shaved the hair under their arms. Today, the popular culture sells body waxing as "sexy" and many women and men have their body hair removed. This last fad also has its dangers since our body hair serves important functions for good health and hygiene.

Body fragrances also have been around for millennia. The ancient Greeks and Romans used scented oils after their elaborate bathing rituals. The fragrances came from tree bark, berries, floral essences, herbs, and spices, with alcohol as a

stabilizing ingredient. Today the perfume and cologne industry garners revenues in the billions, and another product has more recently emerged: body sprays. These are lighter than perfumes and colognes, and are marketed for after-shower use. The targeted customers for these products are young males.

Clothing

Clothing fashions that were once culturally localized are now global commodities, with clothing often sewn in faraway countries. It is in the clothing industry that we can really see the necessity of separating our wants from our needs.

We may, for instance, need a new pair of sneakers. But do we need a pair that costs over a hundred dollars? This is where the marketers step in. Since popular culture often favors “planned obsolescence,” it becomes necessary to create ever newer styles of shoes and other clothing to lure us. (Planned obsolescence is a marketing strategy that anticipates a short life span for a product: it will be obsolete, outworn, or out of style soon and will need to be replaced.)

People can end up with large wardrobes if they buy new clothes every time the fashion changes. Sometimes designers stress the sleek look—tight clothing meant to show no bulges at all. At other times the cuts are bulky and chunky—a perfect style for those who haven’t dieted themselves into a size 0. For one season, a drab color is in; at another time, flashy colors are all the rage. The one thing to remember, though, is this: in order to be “in,” to belong, adults as well as young people feel the need to buy what is “in” and what is cool.

The mall, the ubiquitous shopping center, fulfills the need to belong in a new way. The first of the now-traditional American shopping malls appeared in Dallas in 1931. Its design had all the stores facing each other, but with their backs to the outside world. This layout is the opposite of the time-honored “Main Street USA” whose storefronts line the open street. Today, many of the former “mom

and pop” businesses found in town centers can no longer compete with the huge chain department and specialty stores in the malls. Though small businesses have long been the backbone of the United States economy, today many cannot compete. They close their doors on Main Street for good once the local mall or megastore is constructed.

On a positive note, malls also provide a place for people of various ages and lifestyles to hang out. Often when we visit a mall, we’ll see some of the following individuals and groups: young couples enjoying their small children tumbling in the play area; older singles reading a book or newspaper over a cup of coffee; middle-aged people using the mall for a safe exercise venue; teens cruising by foot to check out their peers.

Food and Drink

Another highlight of the mall is the food court. In the past, food had specific cultural and geographic boundaries, but in this age of globalization, fast-food outlets literally dot not only the mall but also the globe. Health professionals keep reminding us that a regular diet of these foods is simply not good for us. Small children raised on french fries, for example, are much more apt to have problems with obesity as teens and high cholesterol as adults.

In addition to the ever-present diet soft drinks, advertisers are now promoting so-called “energy drinks” through billboards, magazines, and product placement on television and in films. This campaign may simply be a scheme of the soft drink industry to sell to a youth audience something they already possess—in abundance.

On a positive note, many Americans are trying to eat in a healthier way, dieting for health rather than for fashion, and moving toward organic foods and away from foods that have a high chemical content. These are trends that respect human dignity and the environment.

Sports

Sports create a sense of belonging that is an important part of human experience. Athletics help keep people healthy, and team sports promote personal growth and build community. We cheer for “our” team no matter who they are, and we purchase all manner of attire to express our allegiance. Watching live games, or televised ones at home, brings friends and family together. Sports also have a global dimension: we can watch soccer games from all over the world and follow the careers of international players with just a click of the remote.

Sports are an important aspect of the popular culture. Not only do they create celebrities, but they are an industry as well. When we see how professional teams lure graduating college players with huge salaries, we can see how money dominates in professional sports.

Church and Popular Culture

The 2006 *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)* from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops acknowledges that “much of what people today know and think about is conditioned by the various means of mass communications” (page 105). The Church expresses the sense that media are gifts from God and that all believers should engage in the media culture that surrounds us—and engage with a discerning eye. The Church must use media tools available to communicate the Good News and must also teach the young, especially, to recognize the consumerism and other un-Christian values that the media can communicate.

In 1992 the Pontifical Council for Social Communications issued *Dawn of a New Era (Aetatis Novae)* and called for a critical and mindful engagement with popular media and the culture it produces:

But even as the Church takes a positive, sympathetic approach to media, seeking to enter into the culture created by modern communications in order to evangelize effectively, it is necessary

at the very same time that the Church offer a critical evaluation of mass media and their impact upon culture. (No. 12)

In his 2005 apostolic letter *The Rapid Development*, Pope John Paul II expresses this hope:

In fact, the Church is not only called upon to use the mass media to spread the Gospel but, today more than ever, to integrate the message of salvation into the “new culture” that these powerful means of communication create and amplify. It tells us that the use of the techniques and the technologies of contemporary communications is an integral part of its mission in the third millennium. (No. 2)

The 2006 *NDC* from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops synthesizes relevant documents and articulates their teaching for the faithful in the United States. The *NDC* acknowledges the popular culture in which young people live, and from which they often derive values contrary to those of the Gospel:

Catholic young people, like their counterparts in other faith traditions, have emerged as principal consumers of a developing popular culture that emphasizes a level of materialism and permissiveness designed to sell products and entertainment to the greatest number as efficiently as possible. (P. 16)

Characteristics of Popular Culture

- catches people’s attention
- creates trends
- determines fashion
- is stylish
- is “all the rage”
- is “cool”
- creates artificial needs