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A Parent's Guide to  
**CHASTITY**  
EDUCATION



December 8, 2002  
Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the challenges facing parents in our culture today is to teach our children the truth and meaning of our human sexuality. This task has become all the more difficult in the presence of a culture that often openly defies God's plan for the successful integration of sexuality into the life of each person. In response to this state of affairs, it is the responsibility of the Church not only to proclaim moral truths, but also to facilitate means of formation to understand and live out the moral life. To this end, the Diocese of Fargo offers *A Parent's Guide to Chastity Education* to all the faithful of the diocese.

The purpose of *A Parent's Guide to Chastity Education* is to provide assistance to parents who are faced with the responsibility of educating their children in the virtue of chastity. Catholic institutions of formation, such as schools and religious education programs, should also consult *A Parent's Guide to Chastity Education* for guidance in planning programs. This pamphlet should be understood in this diocese as a source of authoritative guidelines for education in chastity.

God created us in His image. And everything that He created is good. God blessed the human person by saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). Our Father's plan for human sexuality is not only good, but also practical in that it fits the needs of the human person. Education in chastity, therefore, is of tremendous value to our culture and to each of us in our own lives. It is our hope that *A Parent's Guide to Chastity Education* can help the faithful as they carry out their responsibility to live the virtue of chastity and to teach it to our young.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.  
Bishop of Fargo

## **PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE**

Although designed primarily for parents, *A Parent's Guide to Chastity Education* will also be of interest to pastors, principals, teachers, catechists and other education professionals who are engaged in the important work of forming and educating the young. It is only natural that parents will seek assistance from these partners in education. Moreover, the goal of the school or parish is to encourage parents to carry out their responsibility to form their children in the area of chastity education. Any program that is initiated at the parish or school level should have this goal in mind.

*A Parent's Guide to Chastity Education* is a starting point. It is not exhaustive in scope. Use it and the suggested resources as a beginning to your own formation. Talk with other parents and local school officials. Pray about what should be done in your own situation. Consult your local pastor or spiritual advisor. Be confident of the grace God has given you for your own children.

## **I. FOUNDATIONS IN GOD AND MAN**

### **CALLED TO TRUE LOVE**

Our God is a loving God. He made all of us out of love and for love. The human person is made in the image of this loving God. Our vocation as men and women is, therefore, to love as God loves us.

All of creation is good and reveals part of God's plan for us. The sexuality of the human person is thus good and part of God's plan of creation as well. God wants us to use our sexuality for the purpose of true love. We are created out of true love for the purpose of true love. "God created man in His image, in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them."<sup>1</sup>

This plan of God for us, however, was marred by the tragedy of original sin. It wounded our nature, and left us with an inclination to evil. Even though the original gift of human

freedom was designed solely to enable us to choose the good, now we must struggle to avoid evil and embrace the good. Yet God did not abandon us in this struggle.

“Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of His love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.”<sup>2</sup> By His Passion, Death and Resurrection, Christ restores man to friendship with God and heals the wound of sin. This redemptive act gives us the graces necessary to love as God intended man to love.

### **THE CHURCH AS MOTHER AND TEACHER**

Love propelled Christ into history to found a Church that is at the service of human dignity and happiness. As Mother and Teacher of humanity, the Church carries out a solemn command of Christ to announce the truth of salvation.<sup>3</sup> In obedience to this command, the Church rightfully proclaims moral principles that show the way to human happiness. The Church is in no way the author or arbitrator of moral norms. Rather, in obedience to truth and the dignity of the human person, the Church interprets moral norms regarding chastity and proposes them to all people of good will.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE UNIVERSAL VOCATION OF CHASTITY**

The reality of sexuality can never be understood apart from the universal vocation of all men and women to holiness. Human sexuality is a marvelous gift from the Creator, an intrinsic part of our human vocation to love.

Chastity is the right ordering of this gift from God. Chastity brings about the unity of body and soul within the person that is expressed through our feminine and masculine natures. Whether chastity is lived out in marriage, the priesthood, religious life, or the single lay state, it is a fundamental part of our struggle for sanctity. As such, the dignity of the human person requires that every person receive the proper formation in this aspect of our vocation to love.

## **FATHERS AND MOTHERS AS FIRST EDUCATORS IN CHASTITY**

Formation in chastity implies the work first and foremost of parents. In giving life, parents are also given the responsibility to nurture their children materially and spiritually. At the baptism of their children, parents of the child are reminded that they are the first teachers of their children. This responsibility comes from God. Each parent receives a unique and specific grace to form their children in the ways of God and man. “The right and duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.”<sup>5</sup> This means that no one can take a parent’s place in education, especially sex education, except by permission. The Magisterium of our Church has taught quite clearly about the importance of this parental right. The Second Vatican Council states, “The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to find an adequate substitute. It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow men that will promote an integrated, personal, and social education of their children. The family is therefore the principle school of the social virtues that are necessary to every society.”<sup>6</sup>

## **THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Aware of their own educational role, parents need to defend and carry out this primary right and duty. Any educational activity related to education for love which is carried out by persons outside the family must be subjected to the parents’ approval and must be seen not as a substitute, but as a support of their work.<sup>7</sup>

Other educators can assist in this task, but they can only take the place of parents for serious reasons of physical or moral incapacity. Thus, the school’s task is not to substitute for the family, rather it is to assist and complete the work of parents, furnishing children and adolescents with a complete evaluation of sexuality in light of God’s plan for each of us.

## II. PRINCIPLES FOR CHASTITY EDUCATION

**PERSONAL DIALOGUE.** Experience shows that a parent of the same sex as the child is the best communicator of the biological, emotional, moral and spiritual information regarding human sexuality. Chaste love requires young people to learn self-mastery that respects the dignity of each human person and his or her body.<sup>9</sup>

**MORALITY.** The moral dimension of the gift of sexuality must always be presented together with the biological information in the context of vocation and our call to holiness.<sup>10</sup>

⌘ Human sexuality must be presented according to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church. Respect must be maintained for the differences between man and woman that reflect the love and fruitfulness of God.<sup>11</sup>

**CONTEXT.** Formation in chastity and timely information regarding sexuality must be provided in the broadest context of education for love.

⌘ In the light of the mystery of Christ and the Church, parents should illustrate the positive values of human sexuality in the context of the person's original vocation to love and the universal call to holiness.<sup>12</sup>

⌘ Parents should teach their children to evaluate the environments they frequent with a critical sense and true autonomy, as well as to cultivate a detachment from mass media and other influences of our culture.<sup>13</sup>

⌘ Through their educational efforts parents should pass on to children the conviction that chastity is possible and indeed the means to true freedom and harmony in the human person.<sup>14</sup>

⌘ Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the child's reading of appropriate materials, parents help in the formation of conscience that is necessary to the integration of chastity.

**DEVELOPMENT.** Information should be presented with delicacy, but clearly, and at the appropriate time. In order to provide an individualized approach to development, special awareness should be given to the four stages of development: “the age of innocence”, puberty, adolescence, and young adulthood. Too many details too soon is counterproductive, but delaying the first information for too long is imprudent.<sup>15</sup>

Parents should always respond to questions a child may ask, even if they seem inappropriate to their age. Usually if a question is asked, it means a child has been exposed to information that the parents have a duty to clarify so the child is not misguided.

**CATECHESIS.** Formation of parents in the foundations of a mature faith is the cornerstone to educating children in chaste love.<sup>16</sup> If parents do not understand the teachings of the Church, it is recommended that they study authentic resources of doctrine, such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and seek programs that may be available to help them to understand the wisdom of the Church. Parents may also find it helpful to talk with other parents who desire to live and grow in their faith.



### III. GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

**DIALOGUE.** Parents should associate with other parents in order to fulfill their role as primary educators of their children and to guard against damaging forms of sex education.<sup>17</sup> Schools must provide advanced parental notification for all in-school and out-of-school programs that teach in the sensitive area of human sexuality.

**VIGILANCE.** Parents should keep themselves precisely informed on the content and methodology with which supplementary education is imparted.<sup>18</sup>

**ACCESS.** Parents have the right to be informed about the structure of the program. In all cases, their right to be present during classes cannot be denied.<sup>19</sup>

**AUTHORITY.** Parents should follow every form of sex education that is given to their children, removing them whenever this education does not correspond to their own principles. Parents have the duty to provide their children with adequate information appropriate to each child's stage of development.<sup>20</sup>

⌘ Respect should be given to the right of the child or young person to withdraw from any form of sexual instruction imparted outside the home. The child nor other members of their family should never be penalized or discriminated against for this decision.<sup>21</sup>

**COLLABORATION.** Parents who may not always be prepared to teach the intricate side of an education for love can take part in meetings with their children, guided by expert persons worthy of trust. The separation of boys from girls is preferable.<sup>22</sup>

**DISCRETION.** No material of an erotic nature should be presented at any age or in any setting;<sup>23</sup> nor should children be invited or obliged to act in any way that objectively offends modesty, delicacy or their sense of privacy.<sup>24</sup>



#### IV. SAFEGUARDS AGAINST SOME INAPPROPRIATE METHODS

Any catechesis on human sexuality that is contrary — even partially — to doctrinal and moral teachings of the Church should be avoided.<sup>25</sup> Following are some methods that threaten the rights of parents and the moral life of their children:

⌘ Parents must reject secular approaches to sex education that put God at the margin of life and regard the birth of a child as a threat.<sup>26</sup>

⌘ Sterilization and contraception should not be discussed before adolescence.<sup>27</sup>

⌘ If contraception is discussed after the adolescent phase (perhaps in upper grades of high school), the substantial differences between natural and artificial methods should be shown with regard to respect for God's plan for marriage.

⌘ Teaching the intimate details of genital relationships to children is an abuse of sex education.<sup>28</sup> There is, on the other hand, a healthy curiosity in older adolescents (young adults) in the physical aspect of genital relationships which can be presented properly in the context of chaste love, provided parents have prior knowledge and approval of what is presented.

⌘ Parents must be on guard against inappropriate coed environments wherever human sexuality is taught. In general, young men and women should be instructed in such matters in separate classroom settings. Modesty dictates this common sense requirement. Most teenagers appreciate this bare minimum of respect that they deserve.

⌘ Parents must be on guard against any program that promotes pre-marital sex in any way, or that promotes a neutral view on the morality of homosexual acts.

⌘ Parents must also reject the promotion of so called “safe-sex” or “safer sex,” a dangerous and immoral policy based on the deluded theory that the condom can provide adequate protection against AIDS and other venereal diseases.<sup>29</sup>

⌘ The approach of “values clarification” ignores the objective reality of the moral law in general and disregards the formation of consciences on specific Christian moral precepts as affirmed by the Magisterium of the Church. It gives young people the idea that a moral code is something they can create themselves, as if man were the source and norm of morality.<sup>30</sup>



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*For practical help in the teaching of chastity, parents may consult the following books:*

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Hogan, Fr. Richard & Fr. John LeVoir, *Covenant of Love*, Ignatius Press.

Lickona, Tom and Judy, *Sex, Love and You*, Ave Maria Press, 1994.

West, Christopher, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, Servant Publications, 2000.

Wilson, Mercedes Arzu, *Love and Family*, Ignatius Press, 1996.

Closing Note: The Diocese of Fargo Pro-Life Office has available a practical application text for parents and parish educators for the education of young people on human sexuality. *An Education for Chastity* contains: Outlines for Parent/Educator workshop, Mother/Daughter & Father/Son programs, and educational resources recommended by the Diocese of Fargo. For further catechesis of adults the article *Educating our Young People to Chastity*, by Rev. Kris Stubna, and the text *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, A Symposium*, published by Benzinger is also available upon request. Contact Rachelle, 701-356-7910, for more information.

**(Footnotes)**

- 1 Genesis 1: 27
- 2 Pope John Paul II, *The Redeemer of Man, (Redemptor hominis)*, 8.
- 3 Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, (Lumen gentium)*, 17.
- 4 Pope John Paul II, *The Christian Family in the Modern World, (Familiaris consortio)*, 33.
- 5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2221.
- 6 Vatican II, *Declaration on Christian Education, (Gravissimum educationis)*, 3.
- 7 Pontifical Council on the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 113.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 9 Cf., Pontifical Council for the Family, *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*, 67.
- 10 Cf. *Ibid.*, 68.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 75. 77-111 deals in detail with the four principle stages of development.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 115.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 116.

- 20 Ibid., 117.
- 21 Ibid., 120.
- 22 Ibid., 131.
- 23 Ibid. 126.
- 24 Ibid., 127. This principle excludes all improper forms of involving children and young people. In this regard, among other things, this can include the following methods that abuse sex education: (a) every “dramatization” representation, mime or “role playing” which depict genital or erotic matters, (b) making drawings, charts or models etc. of this nature, (c) seeking personal information about sexual questions or asking that family information be divulged, (d) oral or written exams about genital or erotic questions, *ibid.*
- 25 Ibid., 122.
- 26 Ibid., 136.
- 27 Ibid., 137.
- 28 Ibid., 139.
- 29 Ibid., 139.
- 30 Ibid., 140.

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