

OUR CATHOLIC MISSION

TRUTH AND FIDELITY IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

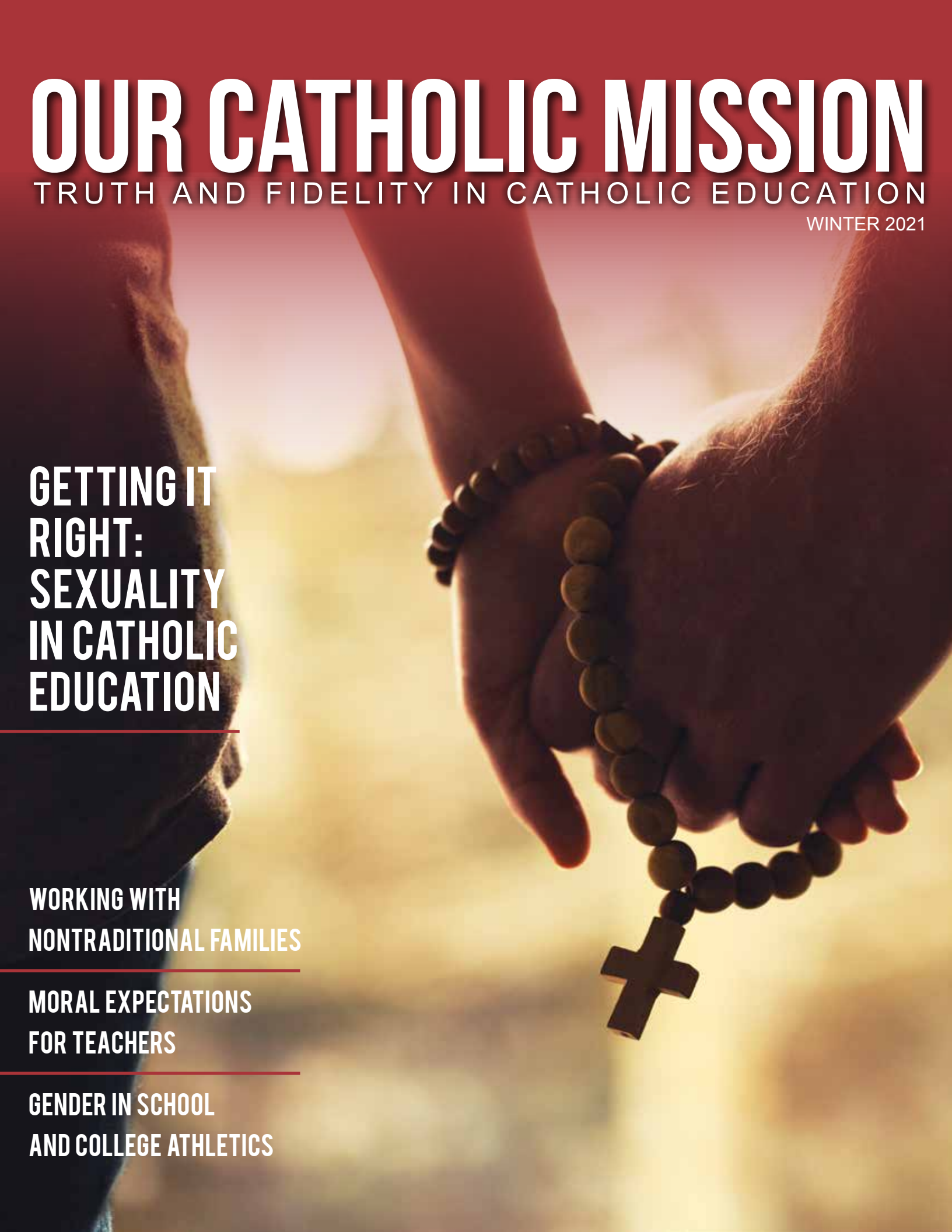
WINTER 2021

**GETTING IT
RIGHT:
SEXUALITY
IN CATHOLIC
EDUCATION**

**WORKING WITH
NONTRADITIONAL FAMILIES**

**MORAL EXPECTATIONS
FOR TEACHERS**

**GENDER IN SCHOOL
AND COLLEGE ATHLETICS**





FOR MORE THAN 27 YEARS,
THE CARDINAL NEWMAN
SOCIETY HAS WORKED TO
PROMOTE AND DEFEND
FAITHFUL CATHOLIC
EDUCATION.

DID YOU KNOW:

- MORE THAN 900 SCHOOLS AND A QUARTER MILLION STUDENTS ARE USING OUR FAITHFUL CATHOLIC CURRICULUM STANDARDS.
- MORE THAN 75,000 PARENTS AND STUDENTS WILL USE OUR NEWMAN GUIDE IN THEIR COLLEGE SEARCH THIS YEAR, AND
- MANY DIOCESAN SUPERINTENDENTS, PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS RELY ON THE NEWMAN SOCIETY TO HELP DEVELOP THE POLICIES THEY NEED TO MAKE CATHOLIC EDUCATION STRONG AND FAITHFUL!

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Welcome to the New 'Our Catholic Mission'

I hope that you are having a blessed start to 2021!

With this issue you may be receiving *Our Catholic Mission*, a newsletter of The Cardinal Newman Society, for the first time. Welcome! We have expanded circulation to include many more Catholic school superintendents, principals, college leaders, and other educators. I hope that you find it helpful to your important work.

Over the last several years, the Newman Society has been able to develop and publish many resources for Catholic educators—and more are on the way from our Catholic Identity Standards Project. We cover every topic that is important to Catholic education, from mission statements to athletics and curriculum. At the end of the day, we want to help Catholic educators strengthen Catholic identity in every aspect of their programs and operations.

In this issue of *Our Catholic Mission*, we focus on the importance of clear and consistent human sexuality policies. Why this highly sensitive topic, and why now?

On the next page, we begin to answer those questions. The bottom line is that Catholic schools need to provide faithful education while protecting against strong social pressures to compromise the faith and against legal threats. Believe me, I would like nothing less than to focus our work on other issues, but this is where the danger lies for Catholic education. The value of the Newman Society's work is in our thoughtful, faithful and sensitive approach to issues that matter most to Catholic educators—including the first and primary educators, parents—who are working to strengthen Catholic identity.

In the meantime, we are well aware of the serious challenges of navigating Catholic educa-

tion amid the COVID-19 crisis. Last spring, schools and colleges were rushed into a "distance learning" model. You may be interested in the Newman Society's recommendations for faithful distance learning, available on our website.

In the fall, many Catholic schools and colleges went to great lengths to return to in-person learning while following health restrictions. In hard times, Catholics shine—and that has certainly been true for Catholic educators!

I hope that in reading this issue and the other resources we provide Catholic educators on our website, you will find inspiration for your important work in Catholic education, whether as a leader, teacher or partner in the Newman Society's mission.

Despite the challenges we face today, let us not lose focus on what is most important in Catholic education. Catholic educators prepare students for this life and for the life to come.

If you have any feedback or comments on this newsletter, we would love to hear from you by email at Programs@CardinalNewmanSociety.org or via our website at NewmanSociety.org.

May God bless you and your students as we begin a new year with hope and fidelity!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

PATRICK REILLY
President and Founder
The Cardinal Newman Society



A Call to Teach Uncomfortable Truths (and a Helping Hand)

Three decades ago, Pope Saint John Paul II urged Catholic educators to embrace and defend a true “Christian anthropology,” even as the Church faced growing challenges to its teaching on sexual morality, gender identity and marriage.

“If need be,” he wrote in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, “a Catholic university must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.”

The courage to teach and witness to the truth is no less important to elementary and secondary schools, because the truths of the human person are foundational to Catholic education.

“Far from undermining the tolerance of legitimate diversity, such a contribution illuminates the very truth which makes consensus attainable, and helps to keep public debate rational, honest and accountable,” said Pope Benedict XVI in his 2008 address to school and college leaders.

No Catholic educator, focused on student formation and institutional needs, is eager to face the uncompromising activism and personal struggles of those who are in conflict with the Church’s teaching on sexuality and gender. It must be done compassionately and rationally—and even so, controversy can erupt at any moment.

Nevertheless, Catholic educators have no choice but to embrace and implement authentic human sexuality policies in our schools and colleges. It is not only right, but it is necessary, given the serious legal threats to religious freedom and accusations that Catholic education is bigoted and unjust. Confusion and uncertainty do not improve the position of Catholic schools and colleges.

Last summer, the Supreme Court issued a landmark and potentially devastating ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, that an

“employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII,” the federal law banning employment discrimination. How does a Catholic school or college make employment decisions that are faithful to its mission?

There may be several legal opportunities for a Catholic school or college to protect its religious freedom. There are religious exemptions in Title VII and Title IX that could potentially be helpful, and the “ministerial exception” may cover at least some employees. There is recourse to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the First Amendment.

Still, it seems that almost every week brings another activist, lawmaker or ruling accusing Catholic educators of discrimination and violating the dictates of gender ideology. Christian beliefs about the human person, which were widely embraced for thousands of years, are no longer widely held in our secular society. We have seen alumni attacking Catholic schools and colleges in social media, attracting news reporters and quickly bringing a firestorm of pressure on the Catholic school to alter its course. Is every diocese, school and college prepared for this?

The key defense is to get human sexuality policies in order, now. Many institutions have already made great progress in this important work.

Catholic educators must firmly ground all policies in Catholic teaching and explain in writing why policies are necessary according to religious beliefs. Many Catholic education leaders, however, have seemingly embraced the opposite

strategy of laying low and downplaying Catholic identity. Lawyers who are experts on religious freedom have cautioned against this strategy because it ultimately only serves to weaken a religious freedom defense when the institution’s insincerity and inconsistency are exposed.

A Catholic school must put into writing the school’s Catholic beliefs, especially those that are likely to be challenged, and clearly identify authoritative sources of the school’s beliefs, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Policies should be clear, consistent, and truthful across the board, and then implemented with charity.

Catholic educators who love their students, faculty, staff and community are called to share the Truth—especially now, when the truth about human sexuality is so often distorted in society. To get education right, we must teach and witness to the truth about human nature and freedom.

The Cardinal Newman Society has been working to help Catholic educators consider how Church teaching impacts school and college policies. Our resources recommend standards to help Catholic school superintendents, principals, college presidents and other educators develop clear and consistent policies that uphold the Catholic understanding of the human person—including personnel policies, admissions policies, athletics policies and more.

Catholic educators have an ally in the Newman Society, which fully appreciates the difficulty of addressing real situations concerning human sexuality with pastoral concern and charity, while being upfront and truthful about what is necessary to faithful Catholic education. **OCM**

“CONFUSION AND UNCERTAINTY DO NOT IMPROVE THE POSITION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.”

Getting it Right

Witness and Teaching on Sexuality in Catholic Education



In 2019, the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education released *Male and Female He Created Them*, a response to the contemporary “gender ideology” that has sown confusion in American society and even within Catholic education.

The document is important for its forthright acknowledgment of topics—including homosexuality and gender identification—of growing concern to Catholic families, schools and colleges. But despite the Congregation’s expressed hope that the document will be a “practical” resource to Catholic educators, it offers minimal guidance to help navigate the complexities of real situations with students and employees who struggle with sexuality and chastity, especially if they openly dissent from Catholic teaching or act in ways that are scandalous to students.

Increasingly, Catholic dioceses, schools and colleges are embroiled in controversy and conflict over sexual matters. To prevent such problems, these situations require pastoral sensitivity and the guidance of clear institutional policies that both uphold and explain the obligations of faithful Catholic education.

This is one important contribution of The Cardinal Newman Society: helping Catholic educators identify the principles of Catholic teaching and standards of policy and practice to strengthen faithful Catholic identity. Moreover, our work helps protect Catholic education by giving schools and colleges compelling claims to religious freedom, based on clear and consistently implemented policies that are tied directly to their Catholic mission.

Catholic educators cannot get human sexuality wrong. Not only would that be a tragic failure of Catholic education, which strives to form young people in faith, morality and truth, but it also invites lawsuits and increased threats to religious freedom if Catholic educators are perceived to

be motivated by bigotry or arbitrary decisions instead of clear and compassionate Catholic teachings.

Consider for example the conflict in Kansas City a couple years ago, when the Archdiocese turned away a kindergarten student parented by a same-sex couple. What principles should guide admission to Catholic education? Does a Catholic school or college accept a child struggling with gender confusion?

How should a Catholic school or college respond when a teacher or professor announces a same-sex marriage or declares a new gender identity? In athletics, should students be able to use locker rooms or compete on teams of the opposite sex?

At the Newman Society, we have heard from well-intentioned educators who refuse to articulate their policies, instead leaving each situation to their own discretion. That approach, while understandable, can often lead to disaster for the school or college. Clear standards of policy and practice, consistent with traditional Catholic moral and theological norms, are key to ensuring fidelity, compassion and justice.

Principles of human sexuality in Catholic education

Our Catholic Identity Standards Project recently published “Policy Standards on Human Sexuality in Catholic Education,” updated from a 2016 paper that was one of our most popular resources for educators. The updated guidance is available at the Newman Society website.

It looks broadly at Catholic teachings on sex, gender, chastity and marriage, drawing on magisterial teaching to identify key principles for Catholic education and then recommending standards to guide policymaking at Catholic schools and colleges. It also briefly considers the large variety of policies that should be developed

to uphold Catholic teaching on sexuality, provides sample policies from several U.S. dioceses, and includes citations from Vatican documents.

Among the principles guiding Catholic education policies is the mission to provide integral formation of students so that the intellect and conscience work together to ensure true bodily health and integrity. Catholic education is so much bigger and so much more important than just teaching students academic subjects. It respects each student as a “complex and multifaceted being, striving for full human flourishing in their physical, moral, spiritual, psychological, social, and intellectual faculties.”

In society today, a disjointed view of the human person can sometimes influence Catholic educators. But as Catholics, we know that our uniquely human biological, social and spiritual elements are connected and should be developed in relation to each other.

In addition, Catholic education is “founded upon a sound Christian anthropology, which describes the human person as ‘a being at once corporeal and spiritual,’ made in the image of God, with complementarity and equality of the sexes as male and female.” Biological sex and gender cannot be separated, but should be “seen in harmony, according to God’s plan.”

Finally, Catholic education should help every student grow in virtue and “faithfully fulfill his role in building the Kingdom of God.” Catholic schools and colleges should be encouraging all community members to strive for chastity, according to their vocation as single, married or religious.

Implementing human sexuality policies

From these principles, the Newman Society recommends several important standards to guide policymaking related to human sexuality. Catholic education should, for instance:

- expect all members of the Catholic educational community to strive for a life of chastity in keeping with their particular state of life, emphasizing the importance of chastity to a life of virtue and growth in one’s relationship with God;
- provide clear institutional supports for living chastely, such as single-sex dorms and rules regarding clothing and behavior to establish standards and minimize temptation;
- ensure that all human sexuality materials and instruction are carefully vetted for complete fidelity to Church teachings, taught by qualified and committed Catholics, modest and pure, targeted to the appropriate age and developmental stage of the student with respect for a child’s latency period (lasting up until puberty), and available in advance to parents who may choose to opt a minor student out of the program;
- ensure that all speakers, vendors, third-party services, and materials are in harmony with the Catholic moral formation of students;
- relate to all members of the school or college community according to their biological sex at

birth and maintain appropriate distinctions between males and females, especially in issues of facilities use, athletic teams, uniforms, and nomenclature; and

- prohibit advocacy of moral behavior at odds with Catholic teaching and activities that tend to encourage immoral behavior, especially on issues related to chastity.

These standards can be applied to nearly every aspect of a Catholic school or college. For example, dance policies, consistent with the goal to form virtuous and Christ-centered persons, should require students to refrain from any immodest, impure or sexually suggestive behavior both on and off the dance floor. College residence policies should ensure that students are assigned

housing based on their biological sex, are prohibited from engaging in immoral sexual activity, and preserve the privacy of bedrooms from opposite-sex visitors.

It is crucial for a Catholic school to consider every activity of Catholic education and ensure that it upholds Catholic teaching. Students should know God’s beautiful purpose for sexuality and their calling to chastity. Truth is the foundation of Catholic education, and as our updated paper warns, “Educational programs or policies that promote a false understanding of the human person put the whole educational project at risk.”

OCM

“CATHOLIC EDUCATION SHOULD HELP EVERY STUDENT GROW IN VIRTUE AND ‘FAITHFULLY FULFILL HIS ROLE IN BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.’”

Specific Areas and Types of Policies

Catholic education policies related to human sexuality are needed across many areas of a school or college’s operations. The Newman Society is working on specific policy guidance for each of these activities and topics.

Admissions Policies

Athletics Policies

Bullying Policies

Chastity Policies

Dance Policies

Dress Code/Uniform Policies

Employment and Volunteer Policies
(see page 6 of this newsletter)

Facilities Use Policies

Formal Titles and Names Policies

Health Services, Counseling,
and Programs Policies

Housing Services Policies

Instructional Material Policies

Mission Integrity

Nondiscrimination Policies

Public Displays of Affection Policies

Same-Sex Attraction Policies

Sexual Harassment Policies

Sexual Identity Policies

Single-Sex Program Policies

Speaker Policies

Student Clubs Policies

Student Pregnancy Policies

Third-Party Vendor Policies

Moral Witness at the Heart of Catholic Education

Last summer, the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed that the “ministerial exception” applies to certain Catholic school teachers, a ruling hailed as protecting Catholic schools and colleges that uphold moral standards for employees.

While the ruling addresses serious questions of religious freedom, it also raises issues that many dioceses, schools and colleges have been wrestling with for several years: What moral standards should be expected of employees in Catholic education? The Church has repeatedly called on teachers to witness to the faith in both word and deed. But what about non-teaching employees?

Underlying these concerns is the necessity of ensuring that all employees faithfully serve the mission of Catholic education. Clear and consistent contracts and policies are the best means of upholding Catholic identity while avoiding employee disputes and lawsuits.

Ministerial exception

As explained in the Newman Society’s summary of the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Our Lady of Guadalupe School* (available at our website), the Court explicitly forbade federal courts from interfering in Catholic school employment decisions concerning teachers of religion, because that would constitute a violate of the First Amendment’s Free Exercise Clause.

The Court also signaled that the ministerial exception covers other employees with substantial religious duties, but more



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litigation will be needed to determine how the exception applies to teachers of subjects other than religion, clerical and maintenance staff, and higher education employees.

Already lower courts are testing and even challenging the ministerial exception. A panel of judges for the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals determined that the exception only prevents lawsuits concerning hiring and firing decisions, so it allowed a former employee of a Chicago parish—fired because he entered into a same-sex union—to proceed with a lawsuit claiming a “hostile work environment.”

The Newman Society responded with the help of attorneys at Alliance Defending Freedom, filing an *amicus* brief urging the full 7th Circuit Court to overrule the panel decision and to apply the ministerial exception to all employment-related matters. In December the full court took the rare step of vacating the panel ruling and will soon reconsider whether to let the case move forward.

Morality expectations

In 2015, controversy erupted in the Archdiocese of San Francisco over morality clauses in teacher contracts, although the Church’s standards were in the end preserved. Many other dioceses have implemented similar employment guidelines both to protect Catholic schools and to provide clarity to employees.

Catholic school and college leaders should be clear about moral expectations when interviewing prospective employees, and there are a variety of ways of inserting faith and morals clauses into employment documents. These include morality, witness, and belief statements and language in pre-contract agreements, contracts, and employee handbooks.

Catholic schools and colleges can avoid disputes by clearly explaining to employees the fundamental religious nature of all their efforts and the Catholic principles that undergird employment policies. All employees should be made aware of their responsibility to advance the religious mission of Catholic education. There should be no confusion about which faith and moral transgressions can result in disciplinary action or firing.

See the Newman Society website for our review of moral standards for Catholic schools and a compilation of sample policies from dioceses around the country.

All Employees Matter

Moral standards at most schools and colleges focus especially on teachers and professors, which is understandable. Many Church documents highlight the duty of teachers to be witnesses to the faith. They have a primary role in Catholic education and direct influence over their students.

Moral standards should apply to educators in every subject area, not just religion teachers or theology professors. This is true especially in elementary and secondary education, when impressionable children rely on good role models and moral guides for their formation.

“MORAL STANDARDS SHOULD APPLY TO EDUCATORS IN EVERY SUBJECT AREA, NOT JUST RELIGION TEACHERS OR THEOLOGY PROFESSORS.”

“A teacher who is full of Christian wisdom, well prepared in his own subject, does more than convey the sense of what he is teaching to his pupils,” declares the Congregation for Catholic Education in *The Catholic School* (1977). “Over and above what he says, he guides his pupils beyond his mere words to the heart of total Truth.”

As even secular courts acknowledge by the ministerial exception, teachers in Catholic education are expected to display more than knowledge of a particular subject area—they are to be witnesses to the faith in word and action.

“Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher,” exhorted Pope Saint Paul VI in *Gravissimum Educationis*, the Vatican II Declaration on Christian Education.

Many non-teaching employees, too, have formational duties that are essential to Catholic education. These include coaches, counselors and others who are involved with student activities. They work closely with students and should be held to the same high moral standards.

What, then, of the receptionist and the librarian? Or the nurse? Or maintenance staff?

Such positions are often viewed as having primary secular functions and therefore not accountable to Catholic moral standards beyond the ethics of their particular tasks. Lawsuits against schools have increasingly concerned employees who were fired for civil same-sex unions—and many would question the need for a groundskeeper to witness to Catholic teachings on marriage.

Nevertheless, all employees should be held to high standards at a Catholic school, because every employee is a member of the school’s Catholic community that is committed to students’ formation. Although the extent of their interaction with students may differ, any employee of a school can have an impact on students’ outlook and behavior.

The Newman Society is developing standards to help Catholic educators develop policies and employment documents upholding moral expectations for employees. See also our recently published argument for applying such expectations broadly, in “All Employees Matter in the Mission of Catholic Education” by Dr. Dan Guernsey. He notes that even limited student contact by an employee has potential for good or ill, and every employee should serve the mission of Catholic education.

Consider a secular business: every employee serves the company’s objectives, and any action that undermines the company’s success is reason for discipline or dismissal. The purpose of Catholic education is to teach and form young people in the faith and lead them to God, and no employee should ever obstruct that mission.

OCM



Mission Fit: Working with Nontraditional Families

Last year, when the child of a same-sex couple was denied admission to St. Ann Catholic School in Prairie Village, Kan., the incident sparked public debate over Catholic school admissions policies.

It also revealed disagreement in dioceses across the country about standards for Catholic school enrollment, particularly when students' family relationships are taken into account. Disagreement in the Church regarding nontraditional families—the growing variety of home situations beyond a faithfully Catholic family with a married mother and father—may leave schools more vulnerable to discrimination lawsuits and to vilification by the media, politicians and social activists.

Following the incident at St. Ann's, the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kan., issued a statement, which read in part:

The Church teaches that individuals with same-sex attraction should be treated with dignity. However, the challenge regarding same-sex couples and our Catholic schools is that same-sex parents cannot model behaviors and attitudes regarding marriage and sexual morality consistent with essential components of the Church's teachings. This creates a conflict for their children between what they are taught in school and what is experienced at home. It also becomes a source of confusion for the other school children.

Critics pounced, accusing the Archdiocese of discriminating against homosexuals while admitting children whose parents are divorced and remarried. Other dioceses disregard parents' sexuality when making admissions decisions. Some argue that Catholic schools should welcome students from any family situation, so that at least the children can be taught the Catholic faith.

What policies best serve the mission of Catholic education? While it may take some time to reach consensus, The Cardinal Newman Society, through its Catholic Identity Standards Project, is working with educators to develop guidance on this critical but complex issue.

Not every family

As a key means of evangelization, Catholic schools serve the Church's mission to teach the nations about Christ and all truth. In principle, they should be eager to teach every young person who seeks admission, although that is not possible or wise in every situation.

In practice, it is rare for a Catholic school not to limit enrollment for practical reasons as well as concerns about a student's behavior and impact on other students' education.

Enrollment decisions should also look at a student's family situation, not because it is a school's primary mission to address the moral life of parents—although the school can do much to witness to moral truth and help parents get the pastoral care they need—but because family circumstances may make it impossible to fulfill the mission of Catholic education without conflict, confusion and scandal to the students who are enrolled in the school.

Denying admission because of family situations, often no fault of the child, is difficult. But it is critical to the mission of Catholic education to prevent situations that could unintentionally lead other impressionable students away from virtue and holiness, which directly contradicts a Catholic school's purpose.

A Catholic school is more than a service; it is a community committed to the mission of Catholic education, and participating families need to be a part of that commitment. Enrolling Catholic families should be a school's first priority, because of the right of baptized Catholics to for-





mation in the faith and the Church's obligation to serve this need.

Family circumstances

In today's culture, schools increasingly are faced with students whose parents or guardians are not Catholic, unwed and cohabiting, remarried outside the Church, in a same-sex union, or identify as transgender.

In many of these instances, families may be safely invited into a Catholic school if they agree to support the mission of educating and forming students in the truths of the Catholic faith and do not interfere with that mission. Every such family seeking a Catholic education should be addressed with compassion and a desire to help parents reconcile with Catholic teaching, usually by referring them to a priest or other parish ministries for pastoral care.

Still, with its purpose of teaching truth, a Catholic school must be prepared to delay admission or turn away or dismiss a student whose family situation causes moral confusion and scandal among other students in the school's care. This requires courage. A Catholic school must have the conviction that upholding its mission, protecting its students from confusion and scandal, and guiding families to moral truth even by denying enrollment is true compassion.

In some cases, a school could attempt to help a family regularize a home situation, as long as the problems are not so publicly visible and confusing to other students that they conflict with the mission of Catholic education. A school must avoid appearing to condone parents' immoral choices and compromising the school's reputation for teaching truth.

It must also consider the potential damage when parents openly and strongly oppose the moral lessons at a Catholic school. Children naturally rely on their parents' emotional and physical care, and in cases in which the parents are so strongly opposed to what a Catholic school teaches, a school could cause the child to be-

come alienated from the parents or, more likely, alienated from the Church. In such cases, it may be imprudent to enroll the child in Catholic education until they have the maturity to sort through such painful and complex realities.

For Catholic educators today, the most difficult situation to handle may be when it is discovered that a current or prospective student's parents or guardians are in a homosexual relationship. This is not identical to other irregular and immoral circumstances, because the Church teaches that same-sex unions are fundamentally in opposition to marriage and allow no possibility of regularization, as is possible in most male-female relationships. It is always the case that a public same-sex union brings moral confusion and scandal into the school community.

“...A CATHOLIC SCHOOL MUST BE PREPARED TO DELAY ADMISSION OR TURN AWAY OR DISMISS A STUDENT WHOSE FAMILY SITUATION CAUSES MORAL CONFUSION AND SCANDAL AMONG OTHER STUDENTS...”

For deeper discussion of these issues, the Newman Society recommends two papers at our website: “Not All Families Are a Good Fit for Catholic Schools” and “Working With Nontraditional Families in Catholic Schools,” both by Dr. Dan Guernsey. These were circulated among Catholic educators, diocesan leaders, and theologians for comment before publication. **OCM**

Athletics Should Uphold Truth of Body and Gender

Seeking “a fair and safe playing field for all children and young adults,” the U.S. bishops in October backed federal legislation to prevent schools and colleges from allowing male athletes—including those who identify as transgender—to participate in female sports.

The bishops’ position should not be surprising. It reflects the Church’s clear teaching that gender is not divisible from biological sex, and that men and women should not be treated as identical despite sharing equal dignity and humanity. The Church has a long history of single-sex education and athletic programs, recognizing both physical and social differences between the sexes while protecting students’ safety, development and chastity.

But in athletics programs at many Catholic schools and colleges today, the Church’s teaching is less clear. Some participate in athletic

conferences that allow students to declare their gender and compete against students of the opposite sex, while others have similar internal policies.

In Connecticut, three female high school athletes have filed a federal lawsuit claiming violation of the federal Title IX law, because biological males have been allowed to compete and win female titles in state track championships. The U.S. Department of Education has agreed that girls have the right to compete in all-female events. But since 2017, when the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference allowed students to choose teams according to a “preferred gender identity,” Catholic schools have continued to participate in the league.

Likewise many Catholic colleges belong to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which allows a biological male to compete on a women’s team after one year of tes-

tosterone suppression treatment. The NCAA hosted a summit on gender identity last October and is widely expected to expand its transgender policies and outreach.

Responding to the apparent need for clarity in Catholic education, the Newman Society is developing recommended standards for policies addressing all aspects of athletics programs—not only gender issues, but also the role of sports in virtue development and many practical concerns. These will be circulated for comment by athletics directors as well as diocesan leaders, school leaders and theologians.

But to specifically address the issue of gender, we have circulated and published a helpful advisory by veteran educator Dr. Dan Guernsey, titled “Protecting the Human Person: Gender Issues in Catholic School and College Sports.” It is available at the Newman Society website.



“IN CONNECTICUT, THREE FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES HAVE FILED A FEDERAL LAWSUIT CLAIMING SEX DISCRIMINATION, BECAUSE BIOLOGICAL MALES HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO COMPETE AND WIN FEMALE TITLES IN STATE TRACK CHAMPIONSHIPS.”



Body and soul

When athletics are done well, it's a great blessing for Catholic students, Guernsey writes.

Athletics serves the mission of Catholic education, which "entails the pursuit of truth, the integral formation of the human person, the sanctification of students, and service to the community," he notes. Sports in Catholic schools and colleges "can be particularly effective in developing virtue, building community, and providing a powerful experience of the unity of body and soul."

The Vatican teaches:

...in the context of the modern world, sport is perhaps the most striking example of the unity of body and soul. ...neglecting the unity of body and soul results in an attitude that either entirely disregards the body or fosters a worldly materialism. Hence, all the dimensions have to be taken into account in order to understand what actually constitutes the human being.

Gender ideology is thus a danger to students and incompatible with a Catholic understanding of sport.

"Because athletics is such a powerful influence on both individuals and cultures, it can also pose a threat when it does not serve truth or does not serve to praise God," writes Guernsey, recalling Pope St. John Paul II's teaching that "self-denial and respect for the body as God's gift are fundamental to a healthy athletic program."

"Gender theory is a distortion of the full development of a person and attacks the integrity of the body," writes Guernsey. "It works against a Catholic understanding of athletics and the good of the person and so has no claim on Catholic programming."

The way forward

Guernsey recommends practical steps that Catholic schools and colleges should take to maintain a strong Catholic identity:

"Catholic educational institutions should publicly and explicitly affirm and seek to implement their faith-based mission and develop and consistently abide by policies in all programs that support this mission. They should assert religious freedom to uphold Catholic teaching and claim exemption from laws, regulations, athletic association rules, etc. that demand conformity to gender ideology."

"Athletic programs should include in their

goals the use of athletics as a means of inculcating virtue, especially justice and fair play, promoting the unity of body and soul, and protecting the human body not only from physical injury, but also from any attack on its integrity, exploitation, and idolatry."

"Athletic policies should require that students participate on sport teams consistent with their biological sex."

"Athletic personnel should be formed in a spirituality of athletics as part of their ongoing professional development. Such formation may include presentations by theologians on Christian anthropology, the role of sport and play in human well-being, and sports as a tool of evangelization and virtue development."

By taking a leading role in local and national conversations about gender in sports and asserting the importance of single-sex competition, Catholic athletic directors and education leaders can find common ground with others. Some other Christian schools and colleges will share our moral perspective, while others will share our concerns for player safety, fair play, and justice. Advocates for women should be concerned about protecting single-sex athletics to ensure opportunities for girls.

"Catholic education is devoted to the sanctification of its students and integral formation by witnessing to Christ and all that is true and good," Guernsey writes. "To lead the children in their care to God requires that they encounter the fullness of His truth and that they not foster situations in which students might be led astray in matters of basic human nature and morality." **OCM**

“SPORTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES ‘CAN BE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN DEVELOPING VIRTUE, BUILDING COMMUNITY, AND PROVIDING A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE OF THE UNITY OF BODY AND SOUL.’ ”

SELECTED NEWMAN SOCIETY RESOURCES FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES

Human sexuality policies

- Policy Standards on Human Sexuality in Catholic Education
- Working with Nontraditional Families in Catholic Schools
- Not All Families Are a Good Fit for Catholic Schools
- Protecting the Human Person: Gender Issues in Catholic School and College Sports
- Fighting Pornography on Catholic College Campuses

Moral standards for employees

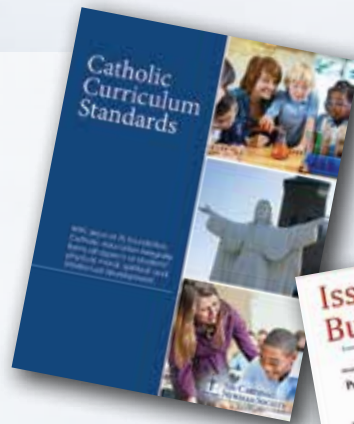
- All Employees Matter in the Mission of Catholic Education
- Community Matters to a Catholic School's Mission
- Faith and Morals Language in Catholic School Teacher Employment Documents: Best Practices Brief
- Morality Language in Catholic School Teacher Employment Documents: Exemplar Statements, Language, and Contract Samples

Legal issues

- Key Points on Supreme Court's Espinoza Ruling on Public Benefits for Catholic Education
- Key Points on Supreme Court's Our Lady of Guadalupe Ruling on Ministerial Exception
- Key Points on Supreme Court's Bostock Ruling on Sex Discrimination
- Amicus brief to 7th Circuit Court of Appeals regarding ministerial exception

Academics

- Catholic Curriculum Standards
- Policy Standards on Secular Academic Materials and Programs in Catholic Education
- Analysis of Advanced Placement Courses
- Analysis of International Baccalaureate Program
- Analysis of Secular Character Development Programs and Materials
- Policy Standards on Literature and the Arts in Catholic Education
- Maintaining Catholic Identity in Distance Learning Instruction



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