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## Sexuality Programs in Catholic Education

An important part of the mission of Catholic education is the integral formation of students—body, mind, and spirit<sup>1</sup>—and, because we are a body/soul unity, it is important to acknowledge and address the human person’s sexual integrity and its role in intellectual development and the formation of the will.<sup>2</sup> The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education acknowledges the integrative role of one’s sexuality with the development of other facets of the human person:

Sexuality... is an integral part of the development of the personality and of its education process: “It is, in fact, from sex that the human person receives the characteristics which, on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman, and thereby largely condition his or her progress toward maturity and insertion into society.”

Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual levels, making its mark on each of their expressions. (*Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*, 1983, 4-5)

Integral formation acknowledges and facilitates the inner harmony of man’s nature as a human person made in the image and likeness of God with an intellect and will, the ability to love and the ability to give of oneself totally, both physically and spiritually, to another of the opposite sex in a complementary fashion.

As Catholic educators seek to form students in the area of human sexuality, it is important that they do so carefully and thoughtfully, in partnership with parents, and in line with Church teaching provided in this sensitive area. The following principles and standards, informed by guidance from the Church, aim to assist in fulfilling this complex and crucial mission. The

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 55, 83, 112; Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) 1, “Therefore children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral, and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy. Let them be given also, as they advance in years, a positive and prudent sexual education.”

<sup>2</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983) 35.

principles below are more narrowly tailored to the topic than the moral and religious principles guiding the Newman Society's other policy standards documents, for two reasons: the Vatican has provided more explicit guidance on this topic, and this document may be viewed as a further development of the principles and standards in the Newman Society's *Policy Standards on Human Sexuality in Catholic Education*.

## Principles

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### **Principle 1: Human sexuality programs in Catholic education are clearly and convincingly grounded in Christian anthropology.**

In accordance with Catholic education's duty to equip students for attaining human perfection in full communion with God, programs in human sexuality should be based on a clear and convincing presentation of Christian anthropology which recognizes human nature as a gift from God with a specific design and purpose that must be respected. This foundational principle is articulated by the Congregation for Catholic Education:

It is clear that if we are to provide well-structured educational programmes that are coherent with the true nature of human persons (with a view to guiding them towards a full actualization of their sexual identity within the context of the vocation of self-giving), it is not possible to achieve this without a clear and convincing anthropology that gives a meaningful foundation to sexuality and affectivity. The first step in this process of throwing light on anthropology consists in recognizing that "man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will." (*Male and Female He Created Them': Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, 2019, 30)

Pope Benedict XVI also articulated this principle:<sup>3</sup>

Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. (*Address at the Reichstag Building, Berlin*, Sept. 22, 2011, 8)

Among the fundamental truths of the human person embedded in a Christian anthropology are:

- the material world (and everything that exists) is good, as it is created by God;<sup>4</sup>
- the things of creation are to be received with awe, respect, and gratitude as gifts from God and not manipulated, dominated, or controlled in ways contrary to their natural ends;<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address at the Reichstag Building, Berlin*, September 22, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 339.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism*, 307.

- everyone, by nature of their being created in the image and likeness of God, has inherent dignity and should be treated with love and respect;<sup>6</sup>
- the human body is a creative gift from God and constitutes “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19), which we should treat with honor and respect according to God’s original design and purpose;
- the human person is a “being at once corporeal and spiritual; body and soul.”<sup>7</sup> These are not two natures intertwined but rather a union which forms a single nature;<sup>8</sup>
- God made us male and female, two distinct but equally dignified and complementary ways of being human;<sup>9</sup>
- the concepts of sex and gender can be “distinguished but not separated,”<sup>10</sup> and a person “should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity;”<sup>11</sup>
- there is a natural “language of the body” which helps us understand and express our united physical and spiritual selves;<sup>12</sup> and
- God, through Jesus Christ, the perfect man, fully reveals man to himself.<sup>13</sup>

Human sexuality programs not firmly based in Christian anthropology may lack, deny, or misrepresent the truth about the nature of the human person. In *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education* (1983), the Congregation for Catholic Education outlines a sexuality program founded on Christian anthropology, focused on the integral formation of the human person, directed toward Christian virtue, and sustained by the grace of Christ:

In the Christian anthropological perspective, affective-sex education must consider the totality of the person and insist therefore, on the integration of the biological, psycho-affective, social and spiritual elements... A true “formation” is not limited to the informing of the intellect, but must pay particular attention to the will, to feelings and emotions. In fact, in order to move to maturation in affective-sexual life, self-control is necessary, which

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<sup>6</sup> *Catechism*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism*, 362.

<sup>8</sup> *Catechism*, 365.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:27; *Catechism*, 2334, 2383.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia* (2016) 56.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism*, 2393.

<sup>12</sup> Saint John Paul II, “Language of the Body, the Substratum and Content of the Sacramental Sign of Spousal Communion,” weekly address (January 5, 1983), in *The Redemption of the Body and Sacramentality of Marriage (Theology of the Body)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005) 268-270.

<sup>13</sup> Saint Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965) 22, at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed on Oct. 6, 2020).

presupposes such virtues as modesty, temperance, respect for self and for others, openness to one's neighbor. None of this is possible except in the power of the salvation which comes from Jesus Christ. (35)

Embedded within this anthropological presentation are Church teachings on morality and sexuality.

**Principle 2: Human sexuality programs in Catholic education are deeply rooted the broader instruction of Catholic moral principles and worldview.**

The Congregation for Catholic Education insists that the integration of moral principles be central in imparting knowledge of life and love: “The Church is firmly opposed to an often-widespread form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles,” and “education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as the necessary and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality.”<sup>14</sup>

Catholic educators have a duty to cultivate in students those elements of Christian thought necessary for sound judgment, mindful that “[r]eference to Jesus Christ teaches man to discern the values which ennoble [him] from those which degrade him.”<sup>15</sup>

“It is only in the Mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear” (GS, 22), and human existence acquires its full meaning in the vocation to the divine life. Only by following Christ does man respond to this vocation and become so fully man, growing finally to reach the perfect man in the measure approaching the full maturity of Christ... In the light of the Mystery of Christ, sexuality appears to us as a vocation to realize that love which the Holy Spirit instills in the hearts of the redeemed.<sup>16</sup>

Instruction in human sexuality should also take into account the child's contemporary culture and address and negate those practices and behaviors contrary to Christian morality, identifying those areas where Christ and His Gospel elevate and transcend culture. By helping students observe contemporary culture from a Catholic worldview, they learn to assess these conditions in light of the truth of reality.

Programs of affectivity and sexuality based only upon natural law, without mention of Christ and Catholic teaching, are insufficient for Catholic schools. Natural law “is the light of intellect infused within us by God.”<sup>17</sup> Indelibly inscribed in human nature itself, it unites people with a set of common principles.<sup>18</sup> However, while this law extends to all mankind and enlightens all to

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<sup>14</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) 19.

<sup>15</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977) 19.

<sup>16</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983, 29-30

<sup>17</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004) 140.

<sup>18</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 141.

certain fundamental truths of good and evil, it is also the foundation upon which “revealed law and Grace, in full harmony with the work of the Spirit,” find fruition.<sup>19</sup> It is impossible to annul God’s natural law,<sup>20</sup> but man, as a result of sin and his fallen nature, often fails to recognize or live in accordance with these truths. Fallen man needs God’s grace and revelation even to live according to the dictates of the natural law. Christ elevates and fulfills natural law<sup>21</sup> and is man’s only hope of salvation:

*Human freedom needs therefore to be liberated.* Christ, by the power of his Paschal Mystery, frees man from his disordered love of self which is the source of his contempt for his neighbor and of those relationships marked by domination of others. Christ shows us that freedom attains its fulfillment in the gift of self. By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus places man once more in communion with God and his neighbor.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, a foundation in natural law is essential but insufficient for programs in Catholic education but may be the best one can do in those contexts where an elevated discussion of our relationship with God is not possible.

Catholics recognize the dignity of the human person resulting from being made in God’s image and likeness, as temples of the Holy Spirit and therefore called to live chastely according to their state in life.<sup>23</sup> Sexuality programs in Catholic education should therefore promote the virtue of chastity and “devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy.”<sup>24</sup> Helping young people understand chastity as “a virtue that develops a person’s authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the body”<sup>25</sup> is an essential part of the formation of Catholic youth in human sexuality.

It is also important that this formation not encourage or model moral relativism. Moral relativism, the idea that there are no binding truths outside of personal or societal preference, is a common error in the modern world and in the lives of many students today. These errors are prone to occur in values clarification programs where young people are “encouraged to reflect upon, to clarify, and to decide upon moral issues with the greatest degree of ‘autonomy,’ ignoring the objective reality of the moral law in general and disregarding the formation of consciences on the specific Christian moral precept.”<sup>26</sup> The Pontifical Council for the Family warns that through such values clarification programs,

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<sup>19</sup> *Catechism*, 1960.

<sup>20</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 142.

<sup>21</sup> International Theological Commission (2009) Chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 143.

<sup>23</sup> *Catechism*, 2348.

<sup>24</sup> St. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation: Familiaris Consortio* (1981) 37.

<sup>25</sup> St. John Paul II (1981) 37.

<sup>26</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) 140.

Young people are given the idea that a moral code is something which they create themselves, as if man were the source and norm of morality. However, the values clarification method impedes the true freedom and autonomy of young people at an insecure stage of their development. In practice, not only is the opinion of the majority favoured, but complex moral situations are put before young people, far removed from the normal moral choices they face each day, in which good or evil are easily recognizable.<sup>27</sup>

The document further warns that “this unacceptable method tends to be closely linked to moral relativism, and thus encourages indifference to moral law and permissiveness.”<sup>28</sup> In Catholic education, content should be based on objective truth.

**Principle 3: Human sexuality programs in Catholic education are delivered at the appropriate intellectual, moral, emotional, physical, and spiritual level of the child.**

Methods used and content presented in these programs should take into consideration the various phases of a child’s intellectual, moral, emotional, physical, and spiritual development, in particular the “‘years of innocence’ and puberty,” “the way each child or young person experiences the various stages of life,” and the “particular problems associated with these stages.”<sup>29</sup>

The years of innocence are said to be between the ages five and puberty.<sup>30</sup> According to the Pontifical Council for the Family, “this period of tranquility and serenity must never be disturbed by unnecessary information about sex.”<sup>31</sup> Information regarding sexuality should be indirect.

During this stage of development, children are normally at ease with their body and its functions. They accept the need for modesty in dress and behavior. Although they are aware of the physical differences between the two sexes, the growing child generally shows little interest in genital functions... Nonetheless, this period of childhood is not without its own significance in terms of psycho-sexual development. A growing boy or girl is learning from adult example and family experience what it means to be a woman or a man...in some societies subjected to ideological pressures, parents should also protect themselves from an exaggerated opposition to what is defined as a “stereotyping of roles.” The real difference between the two sexes should not be ignored or minimized, and in a healthy family environment children will learn that it is natural for a certain difference to exist between the usual family and domestic roles of men and women.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, 140.

<sup>28</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) 124.2.

<sup>30</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 78.

<sup>31</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 78.

<sup>32</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 79-80.

At this stage, the establishment of trust and the modeling and witness by parents, caregivers, and teachers in all areas affecting sexual integrity are important.

Beginning with puberty, the period in which adolescence reach sexual maturity and are capable of reproduction, a more detailed and individualized information can be provided about the physiological and psychological changes they are experiencing. The witness of adults who have successfully integrated their own sexuality assists the young person to successfully integrate his or her own. Adults can also provide information about physical, social, and emotional changes linked to puberty and the value of chastity according to one's state in life.<sup>33</sup> Building on trust and dialogue established in the pre-adolescent years, parents and educators can also dispel false or harmful contemporary ideologies that counter Christian principles. These explanations, says the Congregation for Catholic Education, should always be provided at the level of the developmental understanding of the adolescent:

Explanations must not be distorted by reticence or by lack of frankness. Prudence therefore requires of the teacher not only an appropriate adaptation of the matter to the expectations of the pupil, but also a choice of language, mode and time in which the teaching is carried out. This requires that the child's sense of decency be taken into account.<sup>34</sup>

This guidance is reiterated by the Pontifical Council for the Family, which requires that such programs be explicitly rooted in Church teaching, delicately deal with the subject matter, and safeguard students' innocence and purity:

In an atmosphere of prayer and awareness of the presence and fatherhood of God, the truths of faith and morals should be taught, understood and deeply studied with reverence, and the Word of God should be read and lived with love ... Only information proportionate to each phase of their individual development should be presented to children and young people... Parents and all who help them should be sensitive: (a) to the different phases of development, in particular, the 'years of innocence' and puberty, (b) to the way each child or young person experiences the various stages of life, (c) to particular problems associated with these stages.<sup>35</sup>

Sexually explicit material, images, and language should always be avoided to prevent creating an occasion of sin, threatening chastity, or causing scandal to impressionable young students. Information about sexual activity, anatomy, and hygiene should always be within the context of a Christian view of life<sup>36</sup> and not simply be reduced to an explanation of genitalia and genital

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<sup>33</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 88.

<sup>34</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education* (1983) 87.

<sup>35</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, 63, 124.

<sup>36</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, 94.

activity. Information should not lead to emotional disorientation, unhealthy curiosity, or sin. Some misguided programs may seek to expose children to explicit sexual information and material early in an effort to de-mystify human sexuality. In so doing, they "...[refuse] to recognize the inborn weakness of human nature" and thus pose "grave danger" to students:<sup>37</sup>

Some school textbooks on sexuality, by reason of their naturalist character, are harmful to the child and the adolescent. Graphic and audio-visual materials are more harmful when they crudely present sexual realities for which the pupil is not prepared, and thus create traumatic impressions or raise an unhealthy curiosity which leads to evil. Let teachers think seriously of the grave harm that an irresponsible attitude in such delicate matters can cause in pupils.<sup>38</sup>

The Pontifical Council for the Family stresses that "no material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people of any age, individually or in a group."<sup>39</sup> And Pope Francis also expresses the need to safeguard modesty:

A sexual education that fosters a healthy sense of modesty has immense value... Modesty is a natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves from being turned into objects to be used. Without a sense of modesty, affection and sexuality can be reduced to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviours that distort our capacity for love.<sup>40</sup>

Pope Pius XI also warns that "every precaution must be taken" to refrain from details which might actually induce sin:

Such is our misery and inclination to sin, that often in the very things considered to be remedies against sin, we find occasions for and inducements to sin itself. Hence it is of the highest importance that a good father, while discussing with his son a matter so delicate, should be well on his guard and not descend to details, nor refer to the various ways in which this infernal hydra destroys with its poison so large a portion of the world; otherwise it may happen that instead of extinguishing this fire, he unwittingly stirs or kindles it in the simple and tender heart of the child. Speaking generally, during the period of childhood it suffices to employ those remedies which produce the double effect of opening the door to the virtue of purity and closing the door upon vice.<sup>41</sup>

He explicitly warns that serious scandal can be given by inappropriate, detailed, or salacious sex education, which can introduce temptation to students.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929) 65-55.

<sup>38</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, 126.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Latetia* (2015) 282.

<sup>41</sup> Pius XI 67.

<sup>42</sup> Pius XI 69.



**Principle 4: Human sexuality programs in Catholic education are taught in collaboration with parents.**

“*Personal dialogue between parents and their children, that is, individual formation within the family circle,*”<sup>43</sup> is the primary method for education in human sexuality proposed by the Pontifical Council for the Family. The Council states that there is no substitute for this familial setting where a dialogue of trust and openness based on the child’s developmental readiness exists:<sup>44</sup>

Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents.<sup>45</sup>

The Council also states that if parents need assistance in presenting the Church’s teachings on human sexuality to their children, others who are qualified and experienced in this area of human love can be consulted. Through this consultative process parents can better learn the Church’s teachings and correct vocabulary, as well as enrich and deepen their own understanding of “the community of life and love in marriage.”<sup>46</sup>

To ensure parental involvement and the presence of qualified and trained Catholic teachers in this area, schools and other educational programs should be very attentive to discussion of human sexuality that may arise in other subject areas like literature, history, social studies, and biology. Instruction in the nature and meaning of the marital act should not occur in such settings. Policy implications such as population control, contraception, and other moral issues around same-sex sexual activity should always be in complete harmony with Catholic teaching. Regarding literature in sexuality programs, there should be no explicit description of sexual activity or sexual fantasy. The material should not diminish the student’s innocence or lead the student to sin.<sup>47</sup> The instructor should be equipped to provide a Catholic perspective on content. Parents should be made aware if significant issues of sexuality arise in class texts or discussion, so that they might fulfill their role as primary educators and ensure no student error or confusion.

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<sup>43</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 129. [italics in document]

<sup>44</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 129.

<sup>45</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 43.

<sup>46</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 134.

<sup>47</sup> Pius XI 87.

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## Standards for Policies Related to Sexuality Programs

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In Catholic education, policies involving human sexuality programs:

- are grounded in a clear and convincing Christian anthropology that respects man's God-given nature as a body/soul unity which cannot be manipulated at will.
- fully reflect, without ambiguity or reservation, the moral precepts of the Church regarding human sexuality throughout the program, especially as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- address and negate (at an appropriate age and in the appropriate context) practices and behaviors contrary to Christian morality, including sexual activity outside of marriage (and same-sex activity), contraception, abortion, transgenderism, masturbation, and pornography.
- present the sacramentality of marriage as between a man and a woman and ordained by God.
- teach a Catholic worldview of the beauty and dignity of the marital act and its use only within the confines of marriage for the procreation of children and the bonding of the spouses.
- specifically and clearly promote the virtue of chastity.
- promote self-control, modesty, temperance, fortitude, and respect for self and others.
- counter harmful or false information students receive from mass media, social networking, and peer groups which may be beyond their comprehension, or which may lead them to premature assumptions about their sexuality.<sup>48</sup>
- present all information at an age-appropriate developmental level, carefully protecting a child's natural latency period and prudently introducing relevant material during adolescence to guide a child through development and change.
- when possible, separate students by biological sex when offering instruction on human sexuality.
- exclude any sexually explicit materials, images, or language and anything that might create emotional disorientation in students or unhealthy curiosity which may lead to sin.

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<sup>48</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, 83-84.

- protect student modesty and purity by avoiding any flippant, cynical, ambiguous, or indecent approaches to the topic.
- are delivered under the attentive guidance of a student’s parents with their knowledge, collaboration, and approval.
- are delivered by well-trained, well-formed staff knowledgeable and faithful to the Catholic teachings on human sexuality in the proper environment.
- fully supplement any carefully screened secular materials with Catholic moral principles and Christian anthropology and teach the saving power of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

## **Operationalizing the Standards**

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To meet these core standards, policies and practices such as those below can be of assistance:

- Require signed parental consent forms and keep them on file for students receiving instruction in human sexuality programs.
- Parents and guardians are catechized or presented with the Church’s teachings on human sexuality so they can reinforce or instruct their children on them at home.
- Train or ensure appropriate training for instructors in areas of human sexuality and select instructors who are themselves models of sexual integrity.
- Ensure that the beauty of human reproduction is not trivialized by the use of worksheet activities such as crosswords, word searches, matching, and so forth, or misrepresented by the use of non-human images such as animals or aliens.
- As appropriate, use multi-modal instruction—role-play, discussion, stories, skills that students practice, homework—which invites students to make a personal commitment to chastity and abstinence outside of marriage.
- Present content in a clear, positive and direct way without apology or backsliding on Church teaching.

*This document was developed with substantial comment and contributions from education, legal, and other experts. The lead author is Denise Donohue, Ed.D., Vice President for Educator Resources and Evaluation at The Cardinal Newman Society. Special thanks to Dr. Leisa Marie Carzon for her contributions.*

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## Appendix A: Possible Questions

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**Question:** Why are Catholic educators involved in teaching human sexuality? It seems this should just be left to the parents.

**Response:** The Catholic Church and school affirm that parents are the original and primary educators of their children and have the “irreplaceable and inalienable” right to provide education in the areas of affectivity and sexuality.<sup>49</sup> The Congregation for Catholic Education writes:

Education, in the first place, is the duty of the family, which “is the school of richest humanity.” It is, in fact, the best environment to accomplish the obligation of securing a gradual education in sexual life.<sup>50</sup>

But the Church must also fulfill her divinely prescribed mandate of promoting “the welfare of the whole life of man, including his life in this world insofar as it is related to his heavenly vocation.”<sup>51</sup> Catholic education, as a key means of evangelization in the Church, assists in this mandate by providing for the integral formation of the human person—which includes areas of affectivity and sexuality.

The Congregation noted that “openness and collaboration of parents with other educators who are co-responsible for formation will positively influence the maturation of young people,”<sup>52</sup> whether they be specially trained Catholic school educators,<sup>53</sup> doctors, priests, or others formed in the Catholic perspective of life and love.<sup>54</sup>

**Question:** Can parents opt their students out of such programs?

**Response:** Yes. If Catholic educators choose to incorporate a human sexuality program into their curriculum which includes discussion about human physiology and the specifics of the marital act, parents may opt their child out of the program. Church documents are replete with instruction that all programs of human sexuality in Catholic schools are presented in collaboration with parents.<sup>55</sup> It is then assumed that parents will exercise their responsibility in this most sensitive area of human life and love.

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<sup>49</sup> St. John Paul II (1981) 36.

<sup>50</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) 48.

<sup>51</sup> Pope Paul VI (1965) Preface.

<sup>52</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) 51.

<sup>53</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) 71,79-82.

<sup>54</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family 131.

<sup>55</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1983) 15, 17, 58; Pontifical Council for the Family 41-47, 129; St. John Paul II (1981) 37.

Should a school or other educational service choose to include instruction on human sexuality in its course offerings, in the spirit of full disclosure and professional courtesy, parents should be educated about the instruction's contents. This should occur at specific entry points, such as during the admissions process, at the beginning of the school year when the program is offered, and before the program begins. A letter home to parents concerning the program contents and an option for the parent to opt-out the student should be offered. The key here is *collaboration* between the parents and the school. Parents are asked to cooperate with the school for the good of the student if such a program is offered, and the parents choose to enroll the student at the school.<sup>56</sup>

**Question:** Are Catholic schools required to teach human sexuality?

**Response:** No. Because of the sensitive nature of the information, Catholic schools need not provide instruction in human sexuality; however, they should encourage parents to provide such instruction at a time the parent deems most appropriate. Schools may choose to provide resources for parents to aid in this task in the effort of providing language and concepts from the mind of the Church. Parish-based, after-school programs such as mother-daughter teas and father-son nights have also proven effective. Catholic schools are not required to teach the mechanics of human sexuality, but they are required to provide moral formation in areas of human sexuality for mature adolescents. This will require some discussion in the meaning of human sexuality; if it concerns the mechanics of human reproduction or other areas of human physiology, then parents should be notified.

**Question:** What if an educator is forced to talk about human sexuality? For example, if a student draws obscene pictures or shows pornography to others, contributes or participates in loose talk on the playground, or brings up the topic in a science class that is talking about animal or plant reproduction?

**Response:** Schools should be careful to respect the latency period of younger students and not seek a comprehensive response to isolated incidents. At such times a very minimal or short response is sufficient, and then the teacher can move on with instruction. However, in such a case the teacher should report to the administration and parents the nature of the incident, so that they can follow up individually with students who may have had the most exposure or need significant parental interaction and attention given the particulars of the situation. The key is open, honest communication among adults who can then provide targeted and proportionate information to particular children based on their individual needs.

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<sup>56</sup> Vatican II, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) 8.

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## Appendix B: Selections from Church Documents Informing This Topic

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### General Principles

The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) 121-127.

121. In the light of these recommendations, education for love can take concrete form in four *working principles*.

Informed by Christian reverence and realism, this *doctrinal principle* must guide every moment of education for love. In an age when the mystery has been taken from human sexuality, parents must take care to avoid trivializing human sexuality, in their teaching and in the help offered by others. In particular, profound respect must be maintained for the difference between man and woman which reflects the love and fruitfulness of God himself.

122. 1. Human sexuality is a sacred mystery and must be presented according to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church, always bearing in mind the effects of original sin.

Informed by Christian reverence and realism, this *doctrinal principle* must guide every moment of education for love. In an age when the mystery has been taken from human sexuality, parents must take care to avoid trivializing human sexuality, in their teaching and in the help offered by others. In particular, profound respect must be maintained for the difference between man and woman which reflects the love and fruitfulness of God himself.

123. At the same time, when teaching Catholic doctrine and morality about sexuality, *the lasting effects of original sin* must be taken into account, that is to say, human weakness and the need for the grace of God to overcome temptations and avoid sin. In this regard, the *conscience* of every individual must be *formed* clearly, precisely and in accord with spiritual values. But Catholic morality is never limited to teaching about avoiding sin. It also deals with growth in the Christian virtues and developing the capacity for self-giving in the vocation of one's own life.

124. 2. Only information proportionate to each phase of their individual development should be presented to children and young people.

This principle of timing has already been presented in the study of the various phases of the development of children and young people. Parents and all who help them should be sensitive: (a) to the different phases of development, in particular, the "years of innocence" and puberty, (b) to the way each child or young person experiences the various stages of life, (c) to particular problems associated with these stages.

125. In the light of this principle, the relevance of timing in relation to specific problems can also be indicated.

(a) In later adolescence, young people can first be introduced to the knowledge of the signs of fertility and then to the *natural regulation of fertility*, but only in the context of education for love, fidelity in marriage, God's plan for procreation and respect for human life.

(b) *Homosexuality* should not be discussed before adolescence unless a specific serious problem has arisen in a particular situation. This subject must be presented only in terms of chastity,

health and "the truth about human sexuality in its relationship to the family as taught by the Church".

(c) *Sexual perversions* that are relatively rare should not be dealt with except through individual counselling, as the parents' response to genuine problems.

126. 3. No material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people of any age, individually or in a group.

This *principle of decency* must safeguard the virtue of Christian chastity.

Therefore, in passing on sexual information in the context of education for love, the instruction must always be "*positive and prudent*" and "*clear and delicate*". These four words used by the Catholic Church exclude every form of *unacceptable content in sexual education*.

Moreover, even if they are not erotic, graphic and realistic representations of childbirth, for example in a film, should be made known gradually, so as not to create fear and negative attitudes towards procreation in girls and young women.

127. 4. No one should ever be invited, let alone obliged, to act in any way that could objectively offend against modesty or which could subjectively offend against his or her own delicacy or sense of privacy.

This *principle of respect for the child* 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 "dramatized" 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.

## Christian Anthropology

Congregation for Catholic Education, '*Male and Female He Created Them:*' *Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education* (2019) 30.

It is clear that if we are to provide well-structured educational programmes that are coherent with the true nature of human persons (with a view to guiding them towards a full actualisation of their sexual identity within the context of the vocation of self-giving), it is not possible to achieve this without a clear and convincing anthropology that gives a meaningful foundation to sexuality and affectivity. The first step in this process of throwing light on anthropology consists in recognising that "man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will".

Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983) 35.

In the Christian anthropological perspective, affective-sex education must consider the totality of the person and insist, therefore, on the integration of the biological, psycho-affective, social and spiritual elements...A true 'formation' is not limited to the informing of the intellect, but must pay particular attention to the will, to feelings and emotions. In fact, in order to move to maturation in affective-sexual life, self-control is necessary, which presupposes such virtues as modesty, temperance, respect for self and for others, openness to one's neighbor.

## Morality

St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) 37.

In view of the close links between the sexual dimension of the person and his or her ethical values, education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as the necessary and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality. For this reason the Church is firmly opposed to an often widespread form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles. That would merely be an introduction to the experience of pleasure and a stimulus leading to the loss of serenity – while still in the years of innocence – by opening the way to vice.

## Developmentally Appropriate

Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983) 84-85.

Affective sex-education, being more conditioned than others by the degree of physical and psychological development of the pupil, must always be adapted to the individual. In certain cases it is necessary to advise the pupil in preparation for particularly difficult situations, when it is foreseen that the pupil will have to encounter them, or forewarn him or her of imminent or permanent dangers.

It is necessary therefore to respect the progressive character of this education. A proper gradual progress of initiatives must be attentive to the stages of physical and psychological growth, which require a more careful preparation and a prolonged period of maturation.

## Collaboration with Parents and Others

The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) 129-133.

129. The normal and fundamental method, already proposed in this guide, is *personal dialogue between parents and their children*, that is, *individual formation within the family circle*. In fact there is no substitute for a dialogue of trust and openness between parents and their children, a dialogue which respects not only their stages of development but also the young persons as individuals. However, when parents seek help from others, there are various useful methods which can be recommended in the light of parental experience and in conformity with Christian prudence.

130. 1. As couples or as individuals, parents can *meet with others who are prepared for education for love* to draw on their experience and competence. These people can offer explanations and provide parents with books and other resources approved by the ecclesiastical authorities.

131. 2. Parents who are not always prepared to face up to the problematic side of education for love can take part in meetings with their children, guided by expert persons who are worthy of trust, for example, doctors, priests, educators. In some cases, in the interest of greater freedom of expression, meetings where only daughters or sons are present seem preferable.

132. 3. In certain situations, parents can *entrust part of education for love to another trustworthy person*, if there are matters which require a specific competence or pastoral care in particular cases.

133. 4 *Catechesis on morality* may be provided by other trustworthy persons, with particular emphasis on sexual ethics at puberty and adolescence. Parents should take an interest in the moral



catechesis which is given to their own children outside the home and use it as a support for their own educational work. Such catechesis must not include the more intimate aspects of sexual information, whether biological or affective, which belong to individual formation within the family

## **Rights of Children**

The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) 118-120.

118. 1. Since each child or young person must be able to live his or her own sexuality in conformity with Christian principles, and hence be able to exercise the virtue of chastity, *no educator — not even parents — can interfere with this right to chastity* (cf. *Matthew* 18: 4-7).

...119. 2. It is recommended that respect be given to *the right of the child and the young person to be adequately informed* by their own parents on moral and sexual questions in a way that complies with his or her desire to be chaste and to be formed in chastity. This right is further qualified by a child's stage of development, his or her capacity to integrate moral truth with sexual information, and by respect for his or her innocence and tranquility.

...120. 3. It is recommended that respect be given to *the right of the child or young person to withdraw from any form of sexual instruction imparted outside the home*. Neither the children nor other members of their family should ever be penalized or discriminated against for this decision.

## **Methods and Ideologies to Avoid**

The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) 139-141.

139. Another abuse occurs whenever *sex education* is given to children by teaching them all the intimate details of genital relationships, even in a graphic way. Today this is often motivated by wanting to provide education for "safe sex", above all in relation to the spread of AIDS. In this situation, 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. Parents must insist on continence outside marriage and fidelity in marriage as the only true and secure education for the prevention of this contagious disease.

140. One widely-used, but possibly harmful, approach goes by the name of "values clarification". Young people are encouraged to reflect upon, to clarify and to decide upon moral issues with the greatest degree of "autonomy", ignoring the objective reality of the moral law in general and disregarding the formation of consciences on the specific Christian moral precepts, as affirmed by the Magisterium of the Church. Young people are given the idea that a moral code is something which they create themselves, as if man were the source and norm of morality.

However, the values clarification method impedes the true freedom and autonomy of young people at an insecure stage of their development. In practice, not only is the opinion of the majority favoured, but complex moral situations are put before young people, far removed from the normal moral choices they face each day, in which good or evil are easily recognizable. This unacceptable method tends to be closely linked with moral relativism, and thus encourages indifference to moral law and permissiveness.

141. Parents should also be attentive to ways in which sexual instruction can be inserted in the context of other subjects which are otherwise useful (for example, health and hygiene, personal

development, family life, children's literature, social and cultural studies etc.). In these situations it is more difficult to control the content of sexual instruction. This *method of inclusion* is used in particular by those who promote sex instruction within the perspective of birth control or in countries where the government does not respect the rights of parents in this field. But catechesis would also be distorted if the inseparable links between religion and morality were to be used as a pretext for introducing into religious instruction the biological and affective sexual information which the parents should give according to their prudent decision in their own home.

Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983) 76

Some school textbooks on sexuality, by reason of their naturalist character, are harmful to the child and the adolescent. Graphic and audio-visual materials are more harmful when they crudely present sexual realities for which the pupil is not prepared, and thus create traumatic impressions or raise an unhealthy curiosity which leads to evil. Let teachers think seriously of the grave harm that an irresponsible attitude in such delicate matters can cause in pupils.