

# **Formation in Christian Chastity**

## **Introduction**

The work of catechesis is the task of forming a disciple of our Lord, Jesus Christ. For young people who have been brought to the Lord through baptism in their early years, this means a process of formation that accompanies them as they mature, both physically and spiritually. Programs of catechesis address the nature and demands of the Christian life. We find this special life of discipleship in the teaching of the Church, the sacraments, the moral life, our spiritual life and the wholesome integration of these diverse elements of faith by the person who believes in Christ. One of the key elements of that formation is the proper understanding of how we live out the virtue of chastity.

## **Formation in Chastity**

The virtue of chastity is how we, as disciples, integrate the understanding of our faith and life, most especially in the areas that involve human sexuality. Young people will, at the appropriate times, need to understand the intricacies of the workings of the human body, as well as the moral and spiritual imperatives that flow from the teachings of Christ and a correct understanding of the natural moral law. This program is intended to help meet these needs in keeping with the mind of the Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, starting with paragraph #2331, introduces the section that discusses the virtue of chastity under the heading of the Sixth Commandment. Here the text starts with an understanding of human persons by way of their creation as male and female. We are by our very design capable of a unique form of love in the union of husband and wife. The very differences between a man and woman create a natural complementarity between them. Human sexuality is an essential component of the human person. Through the correct understanding and exercise of our sexuality we are able to develop a capacity to love and to generate new life. The Catechism continues with a reflection on the sixth commandment that prohibits adultery and places the teaching of the Decalogue within the context of the additional teachings of our Lord in the Gospels as they relate to the correct understanding of the exercise of human sexuality in thought, word and deed.

The Catechism speaks of a “vocation to chastity”. Two key words used in the description are self-mastery and integrity. Chastity, as a virtue, is a part of the cardinal virtue of temperance. The virtue of temperance seeks to guide the passions and appetites of the human person by the use of reason. Chastity, as a specific part of the general virtue of temperance, seeks to order the exercise of our human sexuality through the use of our reason, always guided and informed by faith. Chastity also involves a gift or grace from God to help us in our following of Christ. As self-mastery, chastity involves the ability of a person to deny himself in favor of a higher good. This self-denial is an essential component of love. Integrity means that we have a respect for the human person, both physical and moral. Our body is used in ways that are in keeping with the design given

by our Creator. Morally, we direct all of our human actions in accord with the moral law and right reason.

The elements of this program do not simply look at how our human sexuality operates, or a list of the acceptable or unacceptable actions. Our goal is to provide an overview of how our spiritual, social, and physical elements are shaped by a truly Christian understanding of a life characterized by joyfully living the virtue of chastity. As a result, you will note that there are some general teachings on the mystery of God to help ground the teachings related to chastity. All things flow from our very relationship with God, and by living out that relationship as “a being at once corporeal and spiritual”. (CCC #362) Areas such as family, vocation, prayer, and a healthy environment for the development of young people all form a part of this approach.

## **A Parent Centered Program**

There are many ways in which the topics related to human sexuality have been presented. Many approaches focus on classroom instruction as the primary element or core of their program. In 1995 the Pontifical Council for the Family issued a document entitled “The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality”. This document offers guidance on how the question of forming young people in these critical, yet sensitive areas of human sexuality, should be addressed. At the very heart of this document is the understanding that parents are the primary teachers of their children. This is especially true in the formation of children for a life of healthy and holy chastity. The questions around human sexuality require a certain maturity and development on the part of the child for a proper and healthy understanding. Those best situated to know their children and what they need are the very ones who have given them life and nurture them on a daily basis.

The document specifically notes a concern for the “years of innocence”, as Pope John Paul II refers to them. These are the years generally from the age of five to the onset of puberty. Children at this time are generally not overtly interested in sexual matters, and this natural innocence should not be disturbed. They do begin to develop a personal understanding of the distinctions of male and female, especially as they observe the roles of their parents. Parents are best situated to monitor the needs of their child at this stage of his or her life, and are able to provide appropriate and sufficient information for their healthy development and their safety, without going into great details that may not be age appropriate.

The program “Formation in Christian Chastity” has been developed with the understanding that most of the human and religious concepts that revolve around the topics of human sexuality, family, and moral living, are best and most meaningful when coming directly from the parents to their child. For the first four years, parents will be provided with letters that outline a series of teaching points along a particular theme that matches with the general development of their children. For grades five to eight, there will be both parent guides and some basic classroom presentations that focus specifically on the moral teaching of the Church. However, the intimate details of human development are always reserved to parents. This is in keeping with the understanding

outlined above about the differing developmental needs of children and the essential role of parents. Safe environment topics have been incorporated into some basic lessons plans for younger children and for older children, and there are parent resources for additional support in this area.

## **Recommendations for Parish and School Programs**

A key task for the Church is to support parents in their role as the persons primarily responsible for the religious formation of their children. The best format for introducing this program to parents is to schedule parent meetings where the materials are shared with parents and their role is outlined. For parents of children in grades five to eight, it would be helpful to provide some expert assistance at the parent meeting. A Basic Parent Resource of the main moral and developmental components is available with these materials, should parents request it. (Appendix 2) The Resource is written in non-technical language. Other resources for parents are mentioned in their letters. The parish or school may want to have some copies of these books available for parents to borrow, or purchase. Parents with children in the upper grades may have some additional questions that a good Catholic doctor or nurse could help with. We suggest the following format for parent meetings:

- Parents with children in Grades 1 to 4: Handout materials for parents. Present an overview of the whole program, emphasizing the role of parents. Review the basic teachings on God and how a correct understanding of God and our relationship to Him is vital to Christian formation. Give suggestions on how parents might teach the information contained in the parent letters. Respond to any questions that parents may have.
- Parents with children in Grades 5 to 8: Handout materials for parents. Present an overview of the program for these grades. Emphasize the role of parents in introducing the intimate information on human development. Invite a Catholic doctor or nurse to review the basic biological information with parents and to help them with any questions.

## **Recommendations for Teachers and Catechists**

In working with the Formation in Christian Chastity program, educators should understand the basic philosophy that is proper in this approach to education. The parent is the primary teacher. However, parish religious education programs and schools have a valuable role to play. They will assist with the preparation and support of parents; they also provide the moral teaching of the Church for the young people in their classrooms. Educators do get questions from students that require responses. In such situations educators should ask themselves this question: What part of this child's question can be answered from the moral doctrines of the Church, and what part is personal developmental information that should be referred back to the parent? Essentially, specific questions about the physical development or strictly biological information are always appropriate for parents to deal with. If a child seems to have many unanswered

questions in this area, the teacher or catechist might want to give the parent a call and advise them of the matter.

## **Safe Environment**

The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People requires the parish or school to provide formation to children in the areas of safety and the integrity of their person. This program accomplishes this in two ways:

- (1) Parents will receive materials on teaching children about the issues of safety. This will take the form of an information sheet from a nationally recognized center on child safety, along with additional materials incorporated into the parent's letters.
- (2) Lesson plans are included with this program for both parish and school that teach children their role in maintaining a safe environment. The lesson plans are arranged for both younger children and older elementary students.

These materials are in Appendix 1, and in the respective grade level information.

### **Appendix 1:**

Information sheet (2 sides) "Know the Rules" and "Q and A"\*\*\*

Sample parent letter for first year introduction of program

Primary Grades – Lesson plan

Intermediate Grades – Lesson plan

\*\*The information is from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Copyright permission on their web site notes that these pages must be duplicated in their entirety and may not be sold. The information is provided as a service to the public and does not constitute an endorsement of our program.

## **Program Details**

Details for the program are provided by grade level. They will include both materials prepared for a classroom presentation and the materials that are to be reproduced and provided to parents. A specific outline for each grade follows:

### **Grade 1**

#### For the home:

Parent Letter with general information

Information sheet from the Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety

General information on God

#### For the classroom:

Lesson plan on safe environment

## **Grade 2**

For the home:

Parent letter with general information

## **Grade 3**

For the home:

Parent letter with general information

## **Grade 4**

For the home:

Parent letter with general information

## **Grade 5**

For the home:

Parent letter with three components and recommendations

Information sheet from Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety

For the classroom:

2 lesson plans for instruction

Safe environment lesson plan

## **Grade 6**

For the home:

Parent letter with three components and recommendations

For the classroom:

2 lesson plans for instruction

## **Grade 7**

For the home:

Parent letter with three components and recommendations

For the classroom:

2 lesson plans for instruction

## **Grade 8**

For the home:

Parent letter with three components and recommendations

For the classroom:  
2 lesson plans for instruction

## **Acknowledgements**

This program on the teaching of the virtue of chastity to young people is the result of efforts by many dedicated and talented individuals. Early work on the project was begun by a panel of teachers drawn from elementary schools in the diocese. A formal committee was appointed in October 2003 to provide the final elements of the philosophy, direction, and much of the specific content for the program. The committee members are:

Dr. Theresa Farnan, Ph.D.

Dr. Ann Marie Manning, M.D.

Dr. Faith Daggs, M.D.

Dr. William Thierfelder, Ed. D.

Mrs. Jennifer Kent-Shank

Mrs. Helen Remington, B.S.

Ms. Maria Vitale, M.S.

Mr. Michael Sweitzer, M.A.

Mrs. Livia Riley, M.EQ

The committee members, in addition to bringing a wide variety of professional competencies to this work also brought another key element; they are all parents with a keen interest in promoting a truly Catholic vision of life for their children. We are extremely grateful for the time and energy that they have given to this project.

Very Rev. Edward J. Quinlan  
Secretary for Education

Mr. James Gontis  
Diocesan Director of Religious Education

September 2004  
Diocese of Harrisburg

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms* © 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

