

HUMAN SEXUALITY

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, the United States Catholic Conference published the document *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. This document, which all involved in human sexuality education and formation must read, stresses the positive in human sexuality which is a special gift from God and explores this gift in light of authentic Catholic teaching.

In an effort to implement the teachings of this foundational document, the following Guidelines of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles call upon religious educators, teachers, youth ministers, young adult ministers, family life ministers, parents and Church leaders to collaborate in fostering among all age groups a healthy and holistic Christian attitude towards human sexuality.

Catholic Vision of Human Sexuality

Education in sexuality is a continual process, an invitation for each of us to grow and develop as morally mature sexual beings, whatever our age or calling in life. (HS, p.5). A Catholic vision of human sexuality, from childhood through adulthood, affirms that:

- All human life is created in God's image and has inestimable value.
- All persons are challenged to develop moral decision making skills that would enable them to make responsible choices in human sexuality.
- All persons, while recognizing that weakness and sinfulness are part of the human condition, are called to respond with compassion and understanding to those who misuse the gift of human sexuality.

Education in Human Sexuality

The ultimate objective of education in human sexuality is the personal realization of total sexual identity and the effective maturation of the person. (HS, p.75)

According to the document *Human Sexuality* (pgs. 74-75), the purpose of education in human sexuality, whether formal or informal, is threefold:

- To give each person an understanding of the nature and importance of sexuality as a divine gift, a fundamental component of personality and an enrichment of the whole person body, emotions, soul whose deepest meaning is to lead the person to the gift of self in love.
- To give each person an appreciation of chastity as a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of guiding the sexual instinct in the service of love and integrating it into his or her psychological and spiritual development.
- To give each person an appreciation of the human and Christian values that sexuality is intended to express and to lead all to a knowledge of, respect for,

and sincere personal adherence to the moral norms regarding sexuality that are taught by the Church.

DIRECTIVES

The document Human Sexuality encourages "...ongoing formation in human sexuality not only for children and adolescents but also for all people, particularly during major transitions in life (e.g., puberty, moving away from home, engagement/marriage, parenthood, middle age, retirement, divorce or widowhood, ordination, religious vows, aging, serious illness)" (HS, p.5).

Programs and courses in human sexuality must be holistic, positive in their approach and based on the fundamental truth that all human life is created in God's image and has inestimable value.

Programs and courses in human sexuality must be designed to assist each person in the Catholic Christian community to form a correct conscience in order to be morally responsible.

All those involved in human sexuality education and formation, while recognizing that weakness and sinfulness are part of the human condition, are called to respond with compassion and understanding when the gift of human sexuality is misused.

The Gospel mandate of love demands that, in all relationships whatever the age, calling or lifestyle, the Catholic Christian values of commitment, fidelity, chastity and abstinence must be developed and encouraged.

The persons challenged with the responsibility of assisting others in their sexual formation should be "gifted individuals, carefully chosen and well prepared for this task" (HS, p.81). Such individuals must be:

- Committed to their own growth in sexual development;
- Accurately informed with the necessary knowledge to discuss sexual issues;
- Able and willing to convey authentic Church teaching regarding sexual morality "...with authority, candor, sound reasoning and fidelity..." (HS, p.25).

Those engaged in human sexuality education and formation must demonstrate, in work and attitude, a sensitivity to gender issues by presenting the equality of the sexes as designed by the Creator God and discourage the infiltration of stereotyping and/or exploitation of the sexes.

In a multiethnic community, such as the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity must be a high priority when developing and implementing programs and courses in human sexuality.

Curriculum content and concepts must be introduced at maturity levels according to the emotional, intellectual and physical development of the person.

The promotion of Catholic Christian values in the midst of the pervasive influence of media (advertising, books, films, magazines, music, radio television and videos) requires that:

- Media be considered a valuable and effective educational tool;
- Care be taken to provide the learner with the skills of discernment in the use and evaluation of all forms of media;
- Prudent judgment be exercised in the selection and use of all media for human sexuality programs and courses.

The decision to implement programs and courses in human sexuality education must involve parents, pastors, teachers, catechists and other leaders in catechetical ministry.

Programs and courses in human sexuality formation require ongoing collaboration and evaluation involving those affected by the process.

Parental representation is essential in the setting of goals and selection of programs and courses for children and youth. All parents should be given reasonable opportunity to preview the selected materials. Having studied a program, they have the right to remove their children from any human sexuality course; however, they may not “overstate their personal objections lest the rights of equally sincere and responsible parents and the responsibility of competent Church leaders to assist them be infringed upon” (HS, p.80).

CONCLUSION

It is a fitting conclusion to these Guidelines on human sexuality to quote from the Bishops' Document:

“We encourage those involved in human sexuality education formation to continue in this ministry. This task is not easy. Lifelong learning requires commitment to a process that unfolds and deepens through the years. This ministry calls for listening, sensitivity and a passion for the truth. We ask you to continue to grow through prayer, reflection, study, and dialogue as you journey with those you serve” (HS. p.116).