

Formation in Christian Chastity Grade 8

Dear Parents,

The purpose of this letter is to assist you with information on what is being covered in your child's religion class regarding Church teaching on the virtue of chastity. During the first four years of your child's schooling, the formation program in chastity is presented almost exclusively by you, the parents. As students reach the middle school years, there are some elements of formation that will be covered in the school or parish catechetical programs.

However, we operate on the expectation that parents will communicate the more intimate and personal information to their children regarding human sexuality. Since *each child differs in their needs and personal rate of development*, it is highly likely that the needs of one child are very different from the needs of another. Therefore, in the interest of preserving the innocence of those who are not ready for certain information regarding their developing sexuality, these conversations are expected to happen between parents and their children. The religious instruction on chastity intends to explore the calling God has placed on our hearts to know, love, and serve Him as people created in His image out of God's love alone.

There are three things that we are providing for you at this time. The **first section** is an overview of moral and spiritual formation topics. The **second section** deals with social aspects of development and chaste living. These first two sections summarize the key teaching points that will be covered within the Religion curriculum. We also encourage to review these first two sections with your children at any time of the year. The **third section** is a summary of the key details of personal development. It is your responsibility as a parent to judge when and how much information on human development you want to provide for your child. This summary will be provided each year for your reference along with additional references that you may find helpful in your discussions on human development with your child.

Love and Responsibility.

I. Moral / Spiritual Component – How we know the truth.

- God created man and woman in His image, with dignity, to live in relationship with each other and to make a gift of ourselves to others.
- In the sacrament of marriage, the husband and wife are called to make a total gift of themselves to each other through the marital act. (*Note: If the teacher or catechist is asked by a student what the marital act is, they should simply state that it is the act by which a husband and wife give themselves totally to one another, body and soul, and that this act is so good and powerful, that God sometimes chooses to create a new human being through it. There is additional biological information, which parents may request from the parish or school. The biological explanation is to be reserved to parents, in accordance with #133.4 of TMHS).*)
- The marital act must always be open to life and love.
- The marital act is reserved for marriage.
- Sexual acts outside of marriage are grave sins.
- Some of these sins include: adultery, pre-marital sex, and any other act intended to sexually arouse yourself or others.

- True marriage can exist only between one man and one woman.
- There can never be a true marriage between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman.
- Homosexual acts are always gravely sinful.
- If one has committed sexual sin(s) it should be confessed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament gives the grace and strength to live purely in the future.
- We have to cooperate with this grace by going to Mass, regularly seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and consistent prayer.

II. Social Component – How we live out the truth.

- God’s love for us includes freedom
- True freedom means the freedom to do what is good and right.
- Because we are free, we are responsible for our actions.
- We cannot be truly free if we are not living chastely and purely.
- Dating is unhealthy until you are able to maturely evaluate your relationships with others.
- If you begin dating too early it is difficult to resist the pressures others may put on you.
- This is the time to happily enjoy friendships without the pressures of dating.
- Avoid public discussions of private matters. If you see this happening, then politely change the subject.
- Look away from immodest images, people, and things.
- It is always sinful to use pornography in any form (i.e. pictures, magazines, Internet, etc.)
- Television, movies, and music that have immoral themes can be an occasion of sin. Search out movies and TV shows with wholesome, moral themes.
- It is always sinful to physically, emotionally, or sexually abuse anyone, or to treat them in a degrading manner.
- It is never ok for anyone to physically, emotionally, or sexually abuse you or treat you in a degrading manner. If this happens, immediately tell a parent or trusted adult.
- St. Thomas Aquinas, Patron of students and of chastity, Pray for Us!

III. Human Development and Maturity

As your child matures, it is your privilege and responsibility to communicate the truth and meaning of human sexuality to your child and to help him/her through the stages of development. The relationship and trust you establish now, will help your child to navigate his/her way from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood in a virtuous and successful way.

Our bodies express the truth of who we are. God prepares boys and girls to eventually become fathers and mothers. One of the ways that this happens is the change that occurs in our bodies. As part of God’s plan, boys and girls develop at different times. It is not necessarily a cause for alarm if a boy or girl is developing somewhat more slowly or quickly than others of the same age. You can explain to your child the changes that occur as he or she enters puberty. As you judge them ready, you can explain more fully the biological aspects of procreation along with the moral implications involved in the marital act.

As parents, the love and support that you give your children during this time of transition (childhood – adolescence – adulthood) will pay big dividends down the road. It is important to find a healthy balance between respecting your child’s increasing need for privacy *and* making sure to give them proper supervision.

Peoples' physical expression of love can never be separated from the emotional and spiritual dimensions of that love. The fullest physical expression of love takes place in the marriage of a man and a woman. The act of intercourse (the marital act) is the sacramental expression of love between a husband and wife which is founded on the marriage covenant. This act is a sign of deep love and self-giving unity between husband and wife for which God intends two primary purposes: the generation of life (procreative end) and the deepening of the union between husband and wife (unitive end). Every marital act must be open to these two ends. In marriage, the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of their spiritual communion. This bond between a baptized man and woman is sanctified in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

For further reading on these and other important questions and issues related to human growth and sexuality, we recommend the following resources:

Pontifical Council for the Family: *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995) Copyright © 1996 Pauline Books and Media, Boston, MA. (NOTE: this is free online at www.vatican.va)

Aquilina, Mike – General Editor, *Talking to Youth About Sexuality: A Parents' Guide*; Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Copyright © 1995 Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Additional Recommendations for Parents

For young people, friendships outside the home are very important. Parents should know who their child's friends are as well as where they spend their time. Especially note if your child is "hanging around" with students who are several years older. This is always a red flag for parents. Also be conscious of the adults that spend time with your children. Do they meet with your approval, and are the time and circumstances of their involvement appropriate? Media influences are very much parts of the cultural formation young people receive. Monitor movies, books, and especially computer and mobile device usage. Children alone and unsupervised on the Internet are susceptible to the activity of strangers. Mixed group activities are best for young people in the middle grades. Single dating is not recommended until much later in the high school years.

TECHNOLOGY USAGE TIPS

- Closely monitor computer use by your children.
- Computers used by children should be in a common area of the house.
- Purchase a good web filter to keep out unwanted and harmful materials (i.e. SafeEyes, BeSecure, Barracuda, etc.).
- Set your Google Image search to "strict" or use another "safe" search engine.
- Children should not be using "chat" rooms.
- Use of social networking and media sites for viewing, and especially for creating a user profile, should not be allowed (i.e. Facebook*, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). (*Be aware of Facebook guidelines for usage...they do not want to allow users who are under 13 years of age.)
- Children should protect their privacy and modesty on the computer just as in other public settings like restrooms.
- If a child has a cell phone, do not enable texting. If you deem it necessary for some reason, then periodically check your child's text history on the phone...READ the conversations.
- Smartphones for children are strongly discouraged.
- Consider limiting the number of hours playing video games and monitor the games children play for violence and sexual suggestiveness.