

PARENTS LIVING & TEACHING CHASTITY

Chastity is sexual self-control. It means placing sexual intimacy within one relationship and one relationship only – marriage. Love, real love, is willing and acting for the good of the other person, and chastity is the virtue which makes love possible. In real love, we look out for what is best for the other. That is what chastity helps us to do. Chastity teaches us that our sexuality is God's gift for use in a certain context, the context of committed marriage. Sexual activity, more correctly called reproductive behavior, outside of marriage causes damage. Other people are used for self-pleasure without commitment. We see this damage everywhere in our society. Chastity, the Church's teaching on sexuality, provides a true 'owner's manual' for our bodies.

Parents, as part of their spiritual leadership, can help their children by teaching chastity. Our children need to know about God's incredible plan for love. There is a hunger for love in all of us, and chastity directs us to real love.

Become informed. There are excellent materials you can use to learn about Church teaching on sexuality and marriage. Do this first for yourselves as parents. Your marital love will be enriched. You will be an example of what you want your children to become. By informing yourselves, you will gain the knowledge you need to help your children. Again, there are excellent resources available. You will learn that chastity assists human persons to channel sexual desires and to use sexual powers to pursue Christ-like love in relationships. Chastity recognizes each person as having great value and made for authentic love. If taught and lived, chastity would change culture, honor human dignity, respect the total person. Chastity and its perspectives would channel the power of sexual energy to the good of one another and society. A young woman in her 20's stated, "My high school and college years were the best years of my life. I learned that no to sex meant yes to fun. My reputation as a virgin got out fast. I had more dates, better grades, and good, quality friendships. Guys knew they didn't have to perform (sexually) for me, so we could concentrate on getting to know each other and having a great time."

What are some other advantages of living chastely? Many of the advantages have to do with freedom – freedom *from* a negative lifestyle and freedom *for* a positive lifestyle. For example, chastity gives you freedom from:

- guilt, doubt, worry, and regret
- having to wonder, "How far will I go with this person on this date?"
- being used by others and using other people
- sexually transmitted diseases and (for girls) the possibility of not being able to bear a child because of a STD
- pregnancy
- having to choose between raising a child you aren't ready for and giving up your baby for adoption
- the trauma of abortion, loss of reputation, pressure to marry early or to marry the wrong person
- the ghosts of past sexual relationships invading your marriage.

Also, chastity gives you freedom to:

- exercise control over your life
- develop real friendships based on mutual respect, shared thoughts, and feelings
- develop self-respect and self-control
- finish your education and achieve financial stability before having to marry
- find a potential mate who values you for the person you are
- enjoy greater trust in marriage (because you don't have to worry, "Is he/she going to fool around with someone else, the way we fooled around before we were married?")

- stay out of sexual sin and grow in your relationship with God.

We encourage parents to go to the diocesan marriage website (www.ourcatholicmarriage.org) to obtain information to enrich your lives as married couples and to share this beautiful teaching with your children. Adolescents, in developing their identity and forming their beliefs and moral principles, need your authentic parental leadership. It is a time to encourage them to develop their relationship with God as they learn to integrate their sexuality into a chaste, Christ-like love and understand more and more who they are as male and female, made in God's image.

JAMES F. COLLINS, MSW, LCSW
CHRISTINA ROSARIO, MSW, LCSW
CECILIA REISING, BS