

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality

First in a Series
By Christopher Ruff

“What is truth?”

These unforgettable words were uttered by Pontius Pilate as Jesus stood before him, on trial. They came in response to Jesus’ declaration: “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:37-38).

It seems our world today often speaks with the cynical, unbelieving voice of Pilate, doubting everything. In contrast, the Church finds herself proclaiming the message of her Lord, calling mankind to see and act according to the truth.

In doing so, the Church shows her continued trust in the promise Christ made at the Last Supper: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth...”

(Jn 14:16-17)?

One example of the Church’s confidence in Christ’s truth appeared in 1995, when the Pontifical Council for the Family published *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. It was written to dispel the propaganda, sometimes under the guise of “sex education,” that was cheapening the meaning of human sexuality and deforming our young people. And it affirmed the sacred right and duty of parents to teach their children the truth about this crucial matter.

The crisis is, if anything, more urgent today than it was nine years ago. The idea that human sexuality has no God-given meaning and purpose, that it is simply a source of pleasure to be expressed in any way we wish, has put down even deeper roots in our society. It continues to be fostered by the

courts, the media, the entertainment industry, and various approaches to sex education. The Janet Jackson fiasco at the Super Bowl and the recent Massachusetts Supreme Court decision recognizing same-sex marriage are just two reminders of the continuing crisis. With all the confusion, parents who want to do the right thing can easily feel overwhelmed.

For this reason, the Diocesan Offices of Catholic Schools, Catechesis and Evangelization, Family Life, and Youth Ministry are spearheading a series of nine articles focusing on key themes of *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. Each article will discuss one topic, including such themes as Pope John Paul II’s teachings about sexuality and authentic love, the right understanding of the virtue of chastity, the power of parents’ example, the role of parents as the primary educators of their children, suggestions for teachers, and ways to motivate teens toward chastity.

The overriding theme of the series is that parents must be given the resources and the confidence to accept their sacred responsibility for form-

ing their children according to the true meaning of human sexuality. For this reason, the first articles will focus on what that true meaning is. It is only when parents really understand the rich truth about their own sexuality that they will be able to live it more deeply and joyfully themselves, and to pass it on.

These articles are intended to help teachers, too, always bearing in mind that their responsibilities are to be carried out only, in the words of the document, “in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorization” (23). To their credit, the Catholic schools within the Diocese of La Crosse are committed to maintaining their proper role, recognizing the problems that arise when schools try to take the parents’ place as primary educators in this delicate area. Sometimes, as noted in *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, it is parents themselves who wish to delegate formation in human sexuality to the schools, because it isn’t easy and they feel unprepared. The solution is not simply to step into the gap left by the par-

ents, but for Church and school to come to the assistance of the parents—in a word: support, don’t substitute. This series of articles is intended to be one expression of that support.

Another expression of that support is to make *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* available to parents (all Catholic teachers in the Diocese have already received a copy). The document is 95 pages long and very readable. Though brief, it covers a lot of ground, beginning with a look at the meaning of human love as self-gift and how sexuality is integrated into love in marriage. One of the most valuable sections looks at the stages of human development, starting with childhood, and discusses how parents can provide formation in human sexuality in keeping with those stages. The document closes with a helpful section summarizing key practical guidelines for parents and educators.

Christopher Ruff is the director of the Office of Ministries for the Diocese of La Crosse. *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* may be purchased by mailing a check for \$2.60, payable to the Diocese of La Crosse, to the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, PO Box 4004, La Crosse, WI 54602-4004.