

# Parents have right, duty to teach their children chastity

Sixth in a series

By BENEDICT T. NGUYEN

The greatest heroes that I know are not athletes, movie stars or political leaders, but rather parents who take seriously their vocational right and duty to form their children in truth and dignity, many times against great odds in a world of often hostile to the family. Continuing our examination of *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (TMHS), we see that this vocational right and duty of parents permeates the document and is explicitly considered in Chapter IV.

In the education of children, the role of parents cannot be underscored enough. The Church teaches that because parents have been chosen by God to give life to their children, they not only have the duty to educate their children, they also possess the right to do so. Pope John Paul II reminds us in *Familiaris Consortio* that “the right and duty of parents to give education is essential since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others...and it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.”

This right is also clearly affirmed in canon 1136 of the *Code of Canon Law*, which legislates that “parents have the most grave duty and primary right to take care as best they can for the physical, social, cultural, moral, and religious education of their offspring.” Of course, this education must be done according to the truth of the doctrines of the faith (cf. can. 226 §2).

In the realm of human sexuality and the formation of children in chastity, this right and duty takes on a particular importance. In TMHS, the Pontifical Council for the Family clearly situates chastity education in the realm of the family. (Note that the subtitle of the document is “Guidelines for Education within the Family.”) The role of other educators is always considered in relation to the rights and duties of parents. Parents have an indispensable role in chastity formation since it necessarily includes an understanding of marriage and family.

The close link between the sexual dimension of a person and moral norms also shows that the most appropriate forum for this formation is in the family, particularly in the parent-child relationship. In fact, parents are failing in their duty if they do not give adequate formation in chas-

tity to their children or if they tolerate immoral or inadequate formation given to their children (cf. TMHS 44). Likewise, they are failing in their duty if they believe that they can fully delegate this task to others.

The Church is clear in reminding us that “no one is capable of giving moral education in this delicate area better than duly prepared parents” (cf. TMHS, no. 43). Pastors of souls, school administrators, teachers, and parish catechists must not forget that it is their role to assist parents in this most grave obligation, and not to usurp the right or take the place of the parents. Unlike in times past when the general mores of our society were strong in support of parents and families in the moral formation of their children, parents today can often feel alone and inadequate in this educational commitment that seems to run

against societal norms. This is where we who are members of the Church and of society must work to “give parents back confidence in their own capabilities and help them to carry out their task” (cf. TMHS, no. 47). Parents should never feel alone in this task (TMHS, no. 40).

In fact, parents are not alone. Our faith has always taught that marriage, by its nature, is ordered towards the procreation and education of children as one of its fundamental ends. Through the sacrament of matrimony, the spouses are sustained daily by the graces of God to be able to live out their vocation and fulfill the duties of their state in life (can. 1134). Because of this, we believe that Christian parents are given adequately the graces to fulfill the complex task of education in general for their children, and chastity formation for them in particular. In other

words, God gives them the grace to carry out their mission adequately (TMHS, no. 37).

Of course, grace builds on nature and thus parents must avail themselves to appropriate spiritual and intellectual formation, as well as good parenting skills, so that through word and deed, the formation they give to their children can be blessed by the sacramental graces of their marriage bond and be brought to successful fruition. Parishes are vital in providing parents with opportunities for such growth both on the natural level, by offering resources and learning opportunities, and on the supernatural level, by fostering a strong sacramental and devotional life. In this way, parents can truly be assisted in providing a chastity formation for their children that presents the truth and meaning of human sexuality in its full-

ness while respecting the dignity and innocence of each child at each phase of his or her development.

Regardless of whether it is the parents who are forming their children or others assisting parents in this duty, they must permeate the task with a spirit of prayer, while being “open and obedient to the moral truths of faith and reason that integrate the teaching of the Church, and always seeing children and young people as persons, children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven” (TMHS, no. 40).

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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, or call (608) 791-2658 or e-mail [alankford@dioceseoflacrosse.com](mailto:alankford@dioceseoflacrosse.com).