

Adolescence: the best of times and the worst of times

Tips for parents on teaching their teens the Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality

Ninth in a Series
By CHRISTOPHER STEFANICK

Puberty! The very word strikes fear in the hearts of parents and educators! It inaugurates the confusing and wonder-filled era in one's life known as adolescence. It is a time of "self discovery...[when the] feeling of love awakens...[along with] the biological impulses of sexuality...[and the] intense joy of the exhilarating discovery of life" (*The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, no. 87 – hereafter only the number will be given). On the flip side, "often it is also the age of deeper questioning, anguished or even frustrated searching... dangerous introspection [and the] first experience of setbacks and of disappointments" (87). A parent helping a son or daughter navigate the waters of puberty will quickly find that the potential for disaster is as great as the potential for something beautiful to blossom in their child.

The potential disasters for a teen in the area of sexuality are obvious (sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, pregnancy, a disrespect for the opposite sex, to name a few), and the forces pulling our young people to a warped and destructive way of living out their sexuality are many.

Good old-fashioned peer pressure is still one of them. In my own public high school experience ten years ago, I can remember my entire "sex ed" class looking at me with disbelief when I announced I was going to remain a virgin until I was mar-

ried. I remember the discomfort, combined with the excitement of being a Catholic rebel, when I refused to take a test on how to use condoms and other artificial birth control devices properly.

Ten years after high school, not much has changed. The teens I worked with in Los Angeles found themselves up against high school clubs devoted entirely to promoting the lie of "safe sex" (Condoms are only 85% effective against AIDS and are not proven effective against herpes, HPV [which can later cause cervical cancer], chlamydia and a host of other diseases.). It's like saying, "I have a skydiving business and 50 percent of the parachutes work – wanna jump?"

Other clubs were devoted to programming their peers to believe that the gay lifestyle is normal and convincing them they are "homophobic" if they disagree (as if I'm adulterophobic for holding that adultery is wrong!).

The temptations do not end outside the school building for teens. Seventy percent of teens have seen Internet pornography (from a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation). Unrestricted dating is a constant and natural source of temptation. Clubbing is still as popular as it was when I was in high school. Below is an excerpt from a recent article written about a New Jersey club that was, and apparently still is, popular in my hometown:

"During a reporter's undercover visit to Obsessions foam party last month, a machine sprayed dancers with suds as teen girls wandered the dance floor in bi-

kini tops and bras.

When the event ended at 2 a.m. teens emerged in the parking lot, wearing cover-ups over skimpy club clothing...Parents waited for them in the car. [Said one parent who was waiting for her daughter] 'I've never been to any of the clubs, but I have two older daughters, and I've found that teen nights are a good way for them to meet people in a supervised environment'" (*Star Ledger* – August 2003).

Oh, how many problems could be avoided if some parents just asked more questions!

Why am I sharing these depressing tales of pubescent discovery gone bad? In order to press home a point repeated time and time again in *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, namely, that in the current cultural climate, "parents are obliged to give more detailed explanations about sexuality in context of a relationship of trust and friendship" (89), not allowing "cowardice or convenience to hinder their work" (88).

Truth and Meaning further notes, "In some societies today, there are planned and determined attempts to impose premature [and incorrect] sex information on children" (83). If parents do not form their teens in the area of human sexuality, the Internet, peers, clubs, TV, and movies will be happy to do the job for them.

It takes no effort to grow a garden of weeds (I have an impressive weed garden in my own yard.). To see something beautiful blossom during the years of puberty, constant nurturing is



CNS/George P. Matysek Jr.

Jason Evert, author of "Pure Love," discusses the sexual messages of popular toys and media with Addie Reuling (left) and Alison Binder, 14-year-old parishioners of St. John the Evangelist in Frederick, Md. in April 2002. Evert's book, according to Christopher Stefanick, is a good text for parents to complement their reading of *Truth and Meaning in Human Sexuality* as they prepare to speak to their adolescent children about their sexuality.

required. A key point to note is that *Truth and Meaning* does not say parents need to provide "detailed explanations about sex," but rather "detailed explanations about sexuality" (89). This involves so much more. While sexual intercourse is an action, sexuality is part of who we are. Formation in sexuality involves a deep nurturing of the intellect and will.

This includes instruction in self-mastery (16), bodily development (91), the beauty of masculinity and femininity (90-91), the temptation to fall into hedonism (93), the God-given purpose of sexual intercourse for procreation and unity (93), education about married love (94, 101), the call of some to celibate love (101), and the solid rationale

behind the Church's teaching on contraception and life (102). It also means parents mustering the courage to address sexually destructive and addictive behavior, especially if they see it developing in their child (102). For help in getting the full message of chastity to their teens, I heartily recommend the booklet "Pure Love," by Jason Evert. It is easy to read and very inspiring. You can find it at http://www.catholic.com/chastity/pure_love.asp.

Why is *Truth and Meaning* placing such a tall order on the already full plates of parents? Quite simply because nothing else is sufficient. Many parents and educators think their job is over once they have pointed out the negative effects of making the wrong choices. While it is important to teach young people the dangers of STDs, it is not sufficient. As long as they think having sexual intercourse is all there is to "making love," nothing will keep them from it. They'd rather be dead than not be loved. Parents need to teach their teens what true love is, that real passion is found in purity, that the Catholic Church invented romance (see Ephesians 5:25), and what it means to be a human – a man, a woman. In short, they need to teach their children the truth and meaning of human sexuality. The young people entrusted to us deserve nothing less.

Editor's note: Christopher Stefanick is the director of the Office of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of La Crosse.

To obtain a copy of "The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality" (\$2.60), call the diocesan Office of Catechesis and Evangelization at 608-791-2658 or send an email to alankford@dioceseoflacrosc.com.

WCCW conference offers host of media and health issues

By DOROTHY LEPESKA
Special to *The Catholic Times*

ST. FRANCIS – In his keynote address at the recent combined conference of Wisconsin Council of Catholic Women and the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women in Milwaukee, Father Thomas Brundage talked of the "Impact of the Media on the Family." The event was held at the Cousins Center.

The executive editor of the Milwaukee Catholic Herald stated that according to Pope John Paul II and the bishops, there is great concern about the exploitation of the most vulnerable through the media.

"In the last 20-30 years av-

enues of communication offer both tremendous hope and danger," he said. An estimate reveals that 75 per cent of traffic on the Internet is pornographic."

In the community concerns session Margaret Grabowski, RN at St. Francis Hospital, Milwaukee, discussed "Women's Health Issues."

She stated that there are seven primary health issues facing women today and listed them in order of importance. Heart disease is the number one killer of women. Women are more likely than men to have a second heart attack or stroke.

In the family concerns session Steve True spoke on "Challenges

and Changes of Today's Youth." A sportscaster for WISN, Milwaukee, he volunteers to teach religion to high school students in his parish.

As a teacher he wants his students to know what he believes.

"Kids today have to deal with so many things," he said. Variables in dealing with kids are so profound. Prayer is so important in life."

The legislative session featured Rep. Leah Vukmir of the 14th Assembly District who promoted excellence in Wisconsin schools.

Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan celebrated Mass for the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. In his

homily, he compared the quiet, continuous work of St. Joseph to the that of the WCCW.

A \$500 scholarship was awarded to Rebecca Furlano for her senior year at St. Norbert College, DePere. A \$300 scholarship was given to Sister Marlene Boden, OSF, who teaches second graders at Prince of Peace Parish, Milwaukee, a parish in the inner city. This year she is preparing 200 students for their First Communion. The area where she teaches has the highest population concentration in the entire state.

Silver Lake College, Manitowoc, will host the 2005 conference.