

## **CHURCH TEACHING on SPECIAL ISSUES of CONCERN**

This section is meant to be a brief summary of the Church's teaching on topics about which there is confusion and misunderstanding of the Church's position. It should be shared with all teachers and parents. Teachers in particular, should review this annually.

"Serious concerns are identified because of their prevalence in our society today and the particular dangers they pose. In dealing with these special issues, the teaching of the Church must be presented with clarity. It should also be clear that for those who are affected by these and other similar issues, the Church responds with pastoral compassion, reaching out to support and encourage all who struggle to live moral lives."

*(Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living, USCCB, 2008)*

### **"Christian, recognize your dignity..." (CCC 1691).**

This declaration could not be more fitting as an opening statement for the section on morality, virtue, sin and commandments within our catechism. What does dignity have to do with morality? To find out, we need to reflect on how God created us to be from the very beginning.

We may have heard throughout our lives, "*You are made in the image of God*" – but do we know what that means? Before God breathed life into the first persons, He said "Let Us make man in Our image..." (Gen. 1:26). Not only is God revealing Himself to us as a Trinity in that moment, but He is setting us apart by announcing His unique *gift of Self* that no other creature has. This act grants great dignity to us as persons, a goodness that is not destroyed by the consequences of sin.

No matter how far we are from the day God created man and woman, we are still given the gift of being made in His image—made to give and receive love. Regardless of what went awry in the garden, we are still called in the very heart of our being to love as God loves. To love like God loves means that anything less than affirming the good of the other person is an affront to our dignity. All our actions should reflect God's love.

Loving like God loves may seem like an impossible goal, but if we examine our hearts, it is what we desire at our core. We know deep down that *real* love is not forced, incomplete or fruitless. The characteristics of God's love include:

- **Free:** Having been given an intellect and free will, we see that for love to be love, it must be chosen freely. This doesn't mean free to do whatever we want, but rather being free from constraint to do what is right. It means not giving in to pressure, fear or habit, but choosing what is best for the other and for ourselves, according to God's standards.
- **Total:** God does not divvy us up into a collection of body parts and then rank each as good or bad: God loves us totally. He made us and He loves us completely. Though God does not like our sinful actions, His love for us as a person is not conditional upon

what we do or don't do. He draws us to do what is good because it leads to our fulfillment in love.

- **Faithful:** God is closer than the air around us—never abandoning us even if we turn our back on Him. God's goal is always union with Him forever, and He will spend our lifetime wooing us.
- **Fruitful:** As Creator of all things, God's love is always life-giving! We can readily see our ability to love in His image through our ability to co-create life, but we can be fruitful in many other ways. Young and old, celibate, married and single, we all have the ability to give life by making a gift of ourselves. Whenever we smile at a stranger, pray for someone or help someone, we are sharing in God's life-giving love.

Knowing what defines true God-given love, we must strive to apply these characteristics to the many difficult situations we face so we can identify counterfeit forms of love. Some are obvious and some are more subtle, but know that God isn't simply trying to ruin our fun by setting commandments in place. He merely wants us to experience *real* love and *true* happiness.

## 1. The Social Doctrine of the Church

"The teaching and spreading of her social doctrine are part of the Church's evangelizing mission." —St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 41

When it comes to the social doctrine of the Church, we are talking about a broad approach to everyday human concerns. It involves the interplay of unchanging principles and the application of these principles to particular circumstances which may be provisional or a matter of prudential judgment. As an integral part of her mission in the world, the Church is attentive to the "signs of the times" and seeks through her social teaching to bring the light of Christ to bear on our contemporary culture. The key is to "think with the Church," to immerse ourselves in the social teaching of the Church and allow it to form our worldview and inform our judgments regarding social concerns.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "The Church makes a judgment about economic and social matters when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it. She is concerned with the temporal common good of men because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, their ultimate end." In addition, the Catechism states, "The Church's social teaching comprises a body of doctrine, which is articulated as the Church interprets events in the course of history, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the whole of what has been revealed by Jesus Christ...The Church's social teaching proposes principles for reflection; it provides criteria for judgment; it gives guidelines for action..." For a fuller explanation of the Church's teachings on matters of justice and love for the poor, see The Catechism, paragraphs 1897-1948; 2419 – 2463, as well as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

## **2. Equality and Differences among Persons**

The Church teaches that human equality is based on our shared dignity as human persons. We do not come into the world as self-sufficient, solitary beings. Further, we see in other people many differences, including differences based on age, ability, aptitude, and resources. God wills our interdependence based on such differences. Helping others in their need allows us to grow in charity, kindness, and generosity, and we are greatly enriched by our individual and cultural differences.

We also understand that some differences are not willed by God, but are caused by sinful human choices. Sinful social and economic inequalities affect millions of human beings and are in open contradiction to the Gospel and are contrary to justice, the dignity of persons, and peace.

The Church teaches that, “Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. “ Further, “Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without exception) as’ another self,’ above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.” Thus, any behavior or action contrary to these teachings is considered sinful. (See CCC paragraphs 1931, 1934-38 and 1945-47.)

## **3. Teaching on Immigration**

The Catholic Church teaches that since all human beings are created in the image of God everyone has a right to pursue those things required for basic human decency (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) within their own country.

However, when someone cannot acquire those things needed for human decency in his home country be it for reasons of a depressed economy or well-founded fear of persecution, then that person has a right to immigrate. The Catholic Church upholds the rights of sovereign nations to secure their borders but insists that this right is not absolute. Nations, particularly wealthy nations, have a moral obligation to accommodate immigrants in dire circumstances in ways that still maintain the common good of their own country; preservation of wealth alone is not sufficient cause to keep people out. Just as the captain of a ship coming upon the wreckage of a vessel much larger than his would have an obligation to take on as many survivors as he could but not so many that his own ship would sink so also should nations look upon respecting the rights of immigrants. Consequently the U.S. Bishops encourage U.S. officials to look at the immigration issue in humanitarian terms and support comprehensive immigration reform.

## **4. Sexual Abuse**

Though every form of abuse is a great offense to the dignity of persons, sexual abuse strikes in a particular way at the meaning of our manhood or womanhood. Men have been given the gift of bodies that image God’s love by going outside of themselves to give love and create life. Women have been given the gift of bodies that image God by receiving love into them in order to conceive life and give that gift of life to the world. Sexual abuse attacks the very heart of this exchange of love; what is meant to be a free, total, faithful and fruitful gift of self becomes a means of inflicting deep wounds upon the masculine or feminine identity of the person.

The Catholic Church makes a strong statement about the many forms of such abuse: “Any sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult on children, young people, or other vulnerable individuals causes grave harm to the victim’s physical, psychological/emotional, and moral integrity. Such actions are grave violations of God’s law. They are also criminal acts. Any occurrence of sexual abuse of minors must be reported to the proper civil authorities according to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People as implemented in each diocese. Further, reporting of abuse or suspected abuse must be done in adherence with local law. Likewise, the enslavement or trafficking of humans, especially children, to force them into prostitution or pornography; sexual abuse of adults; and marital rape are also heinous forms of sexual abuse. In addition, children need to be instructed, in age-appropriate ways, that they must never keep secret inappropriate actions by adults” (CFCL section 1, part B, 6). See also: CCC 2388-2389.

## **5. Teaching on Marriage and Family**

### **5a. Premarital and Extramarital Sex and Masturbation**

Before discussing what we could collectively call “non-marital” sex, we must first understand the definition of *marriage*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes canon law in stating that “the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (CCC 1601).

Though it may sound a little formal, we see the basic premise: the coming together of man and woman in a loving, permanent, “one flesh” union with the intention of bringing children into the world. As Christians, we look for the characteristics of God’s love to be present and therefore declare them in vows:

- 1) Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage? (*free*)
- 2) Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives? (*total, faithful*)
- 3) Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church? (*fruitful*)

It is important to recognize that, although the Christian *rite* of marriage has not always been around, the elements of it were instituted in the very beginning. In God’s first command to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28), we see how the exclusive definition of marriage was realized even by our first parents.

As reiterated in the USCCB’s document *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living* (CFCL part 1, section B, 3) the Church wishes to safeguard God’s gift to us: “Acts proper and exclusive to spouses are totally reserved for a man and a woman who are joined in marriage and committed to one another until death. All other carnal unions and sexual acts (including oral sex) between an unmarried man and woman (fornication), or between two partners of whom at least one is married to another party (adultery), violate the Sixth Commandment and are serious offenses

against chastity and/or the dignity of marriage.” Both fornication and adultery fail the “to love as God loves” test by being neither a total nor faithful gift of love. Since the two have not committed to each other with formal, public vows, they have settled for temporarily filling a desire and are being unfaithful to either a future or current spouse.

In Mt. 5:28, Jesus warns us that “whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Here He is calling our attention to how we can consciously allow impurity to take shape in our heart, even if we don’t physically act on it. Unfortunately, even the acts of premarital and extramarital sex have become so prevalent in our culture that they are not even considered immoral by some. In fact, some people think that sexual activity prior to marriage is essential in order to “test out” compatibility.

Imagine, however, if premarital and extramarital sex were obsolete. There would be an enormous reduction of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, abortion and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—all of which are on the rise since sex outside of marriage has become more acceptable. Depression among teens is directly correlated to sexual activity in these intense years of development. (See *Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids*, by Meg Meeker.) The divorce rate has climbed to 40% to 50% since we have become “sexually liberated” and more tolerant of premarital sex in our society. In their book *The Hidden Epidemic: Confronting Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, R. Eng and W.T. Butler confirm there are now more than 25 STDs raging across our population, some of them undetected but deadly (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1997).

“Married couples have always experienced problems that threaten their union: jealousy, infidelity, and conflicts. Lust and arbitrary domination can ruin a marriage. These situations can lead to mental, physical, and emotional abuse” (CFCL part 1, section B, 3). See also CCC 1643-1648, 2348-2350, 2360-2361, 2380, 394, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 287-288.

Masturbation is seen by many as normal, harmless sexual experimentation and release of tension. Masturbation takes what should be shared in love with a spouse and turns it in on oneself in order to feel temporary pleasure. As with pornography, deep problems can develop here.

Far from being a total gift of self, masturbation focuses on just one aspect of sexuality: one’s own pleasure. This, however, does not satisfy the desire for love and a real relationship; it only accentuates loneliness.

The act of masturbation, though it may be common, is a disordered action, meaning it is *out of the order that God created us for*. “Both the Magisterium of the Church, in the course of a constant tradition, and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt, and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action” (CCC 2352). “Masturbation particularly constitutes a very serious disorder that is illicit in itself and cannot be morally justified, although ‘the immaturity of adolescence (which can sometimes persist after that age), psychological imbalance or habit can influence behavior, diminishing the deliberate character of the act and bringing about a situation whereby subjectively there may not always be serious fault.’ Therefore, adolescents should be helped to overcome

manifestations of this disorder, which often express the inner conflicts of their age and, in many cases, a selfish vision of sexuality.” (TMHS, 103)

## **5b. Cohabitation**

“*Cohabitation* is a term used to describe the living arrangement of sexually active couples who are not married but are living as husband and wife” (CFCL part 1, section B, 5). Like non-marital sex, cohabitation does not involve the formal, public vows that are necessary for *marital* union to exist. God’s plan offers love via commitment and sacrifice. Too often we settle for less and take a seemingly easier route.

Conventional wisdom may hold that living together before marriage serves as a good “trial run.” However, the fact is that couples who live together before marriage are far less likely to have successful marriages. In the United States, the risk of divorce is 50% higher for cohabitators than non-cohabitators. In some western European countries, it is estimated to be 80% higher (Bumpass & Sweet, 1995; Hall & Zhao, 1995; Bracher, Santow, Morgan & Trussell, 1993; DeMaris & Rao, 1992; Glenn, 1990).

Though reasons for it seem logical, “Cohabitation does not support the good of spouses, since the marriage union does not exist. It also does not provide a stable, permanent relationship for children who may be conceived. Cohabitation implies immoral sexual activity and, therefore, scandal. Whatever the reason that may be advanced, cohabitation is not a moral or acceptable preparation for marriage. In fact, cohabitation has been demonstrated to have a negative effect on the ultimate success of a marriage” (CFCL part 1, section B, 5).

For more convincing information on the matter, go to [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org), an excellent website from the US bishops. See also: CCC 2350, 2353, 2390-2391 and *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 81, “Family, Marriage, and ‘De Facto’ Unions,” Pontifical Council on the Family, 2000.

## **5c. Contraceptive Mentality and Practice**

Through its teaching on contraception, the Church helps to illuminate our understanding of the characteristics of true love. God so wants people to experience love as He intended it that He speaks against any counterfeits that threaten this, such as contraception.

How does the use of contraception fail to be a genuinely loving act? It may seem that the Church is making it more difficult for married people to love each other and is encouraging “unwanted” children.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As we have learned, we are whole, body-soul persons. When we engage in an act that deliberately alters, blocks or shuts down the healthy functioning of our reproductive organs, we are rejecting, albeit unintentionally, a distinctive expression of our masculine or feminine persons. No longer is there a language of the body that speaks of making a total, life-giving gift of self, but instead we say, “I give myself to you, except the part of me that makes me a man or a woman, the part of me that could create life.” This not only violates our faithfulness to the third promise of our wedding vows, but it speaks of a fear or avoidance of entrusting our fertility to each other and to God.

In the marital act, the deeply bonding pleasure of union and the creation of life were put together by God. Both aspects are good, created for the sake of the couple. It is when we separate the possibility of life from sexual intercourse that it ceases to image God's love.

The Church teaches us that all children are a gift from God and that they are a fruit of married love. We are not obligated to have as many children as are physically possible—the Church recognizes that there are times when a couple must choose to avoid a pregnancy. In such cases, we are called upon to examine our consciences and to use our God-given intellect and free will. Modern methods of natural family planning (NFP) are within these principles and are scientifically based. When used correctly, they are proven to be highly effective in either helping to achieve or avoid pregnancy. All “side effects” of NFP are positive: While educating couples about their bodies and the natural rhythms of a woman's cycle, NFP fosters open communication and boasts a very low divorce rate.

Various forms of contraception have become so widely used—so “normal”—that a vast number of people have ceased to think of this as a moral question. Doctors and mothers alike are putting young ladies on some form of birth control “just in case”; others use it for acne, to regulate their periods or for other medical reasons. It is important to know that the use of a chemical contraceptive for medical reasons is not immoral, but it is equally important to know the reality of side effects that accompany them. Beyond weight gain, depression and migraines, many women who have used the “pill” into “middle age” struggle with infertility. The risk of breast cancer, heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure and blood clots are the most commonly listed life-threatening side effects.

The greatest threat to physical life is that chemical contraceptives can act as abortifacients, which means they thin out the uterine wall to the extent that a newly conceived baby cannot implant and a very early abortion occurs. Thankfully, there are alternatives to using contraceptives for medical reasons. See the resource section for more information.

Lastly, let's contemplate the effect that the separation of children from sexual intercourse has had on the world. “Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae Vitae*, prophetically identified consequences that would come about as a result of an acceptance of contraception. These include marital infidelity, a lessening of moral standards, a loss of respect for women and their dignity, governments limiting the number of births allowed, less personal responsibility toward others, more selfish individualism, harm to the family and growth in a materialistic approach to life” (CFCL section 1, part B, 2). See also CCC 2370, *Humanae Vitae*, nos. 8, 17 and *Familiaris Consortio*, nos. 89-90.

## **5d. Reproductive Technology**

It can seem confusing that the Catholic Church, which so cherishes life and encourages couples to be generous in bearing children, would be against artificial reproductive technologies. In reality, the Church is not against all forms of reproductive technologies, but only those that go against the dignity of the people involved. If a medical treatment *assists* the marital embrace at achieving its natural end, it can be morally acceptable. However, if it *replaces* the marital

embrace as the means by which the child is conceived, it's not in keeping with God's intention for human life.

We are taught that all children, regardless of how they are conceived, are an immeasurable gift from God. Obviously, this does not bless the immoral acts that sometimes lead to conception, it simply reasserts the core dignity of the child who results from the act. In the case of reproductive technologies, the key reason it fails to be an act of love is that it separates the creation of a child from the loving bond of the marital act. This separation spawns many more departures from the total gift of life-giving love that we are called to. Some examples include:

- The obtaining of sperm through an act of masturbation
- The fertilization of multiple eggs in order to choose which are the most desirable. The "extra" embryos (babies who are only a few cells big) are frozen or discarded.
- The implantation of multiple embryos in the mother's womb via syringe to see which grows successfully; the rest could later undergo "fetal reduction." This involves fatal potassium injections into the babies' hearts to allow their sibling a better chance at a healthy birth.

"Science and technology...must always be at the service of the human person in accord with God's law. The desire to have a child is a natural one, but not one that can be fulfilled by any means whatever. A child is a gift from God and should be conceived through a conjugal act of love between parents. Conception must never be separated in any way or form from the conjugal act. All forms of in vitro fertilization, [surrogacy], efforts at cloning a human person, and embryonic stem cell research are sinful" (CFCL section 1, part B, 9). See also CCC 2376-2377 and *Donum Vitae*, II B 4.

In a nutshell, a child is a freely given gift to a married couple, not something owed or to be grasped at. To believe that each couple is owed a child is to treat children as property and to compromise the dignity of each person involved.

## **5e. Same-Sex "Marriage"**

The Church's stance against same-sex marriage can seem harsh toward those who consider themselves to have a homosexual orientation. In addressing this topic, we must recall previously discussed definitions of marriage and love. It would be incorrect to say that a person who experiences same-sex attraction does not have the ability to love. What we must recognize, however, is that there is more to marriage than loving someone, and there is more to loving someone than sexual intercourse.

Even between a man and a woman, marriage is not possible if the man or woman is perpetually and definitively unable to engage in the act of intercourse. This is not because the Church is being discriminatory; it is because the very definition of marriage, as revealed by God, is for man and woman to be united as "one flesh." Since this total, potentially life-giving union of body-soul persons requires the joining of male and female sexual organs, a "marriage" cannot exist without this particular type of communion. It is literally impossible for two people of the same gender to "marry."



“Whether or not sanctioned by the state, so-called same-sex ‘unions’ or ‘marriages’ do not contain the elements essential to God’s plan for marriage. They lack the benefit of a nuptial or sacramental covenant and the ability to generate new human life. Because they are contrary to divine law and natural law, same-sex ‘unions’ or ‘marriages’ are intrinsically wrong and sinful” (CFCL section 1, part B, 8). See also: CCC 1617, 1625, 1638-1640, 1643, 1652, 1659-1660, 1664.

## **5f. Homosexual Activity**

Sexual attraction to one’s own gender is not a sin in and of itself. Why, then, is same-sex attraction considered to be a “disorder”? As persons made in the image of God, we are called to love freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully as God loves. We are not at liberty to remove or alter any of these characteristics from the definition of love. Our bodies play a significant part in speaking the language of God’s love. Any desire or attraction that is oriented away from speaking the truth of God’s love with our bodies is disordered.

Each of us struggles daily with attractions and desires that are *out of the order that God made us for*; no one is exempt from temptation. The key is how we respond to it. We have a choice to either strive toward understanding and living out our call to love as God loves or to give up on that endeavor.

Regardless of our state in life, we are all called to chastity, or purity in thought and action. When we are tempted to use another person as a means to an end, each of us must do battle against this affront to our dignity and the dignity of the other. Remember, to truly love is to choose what is best for the other person. All actions or movements of the heart that claim to be loving must be held up to this standard. When attractions that are disordered lead to activity, the activity itself is sinful, regardless of sexual orientation.

“Although the existence of [same-sex attraction] is not sinful, divine and natural law teaches that homosexual *acts* are gravely contrary to chastity, intrinsically disordered, contrary to the natural law, and closed to the gift of life; they do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity and can never be approved. Nonetheless, in her pastoral care, the Church teaches that every person be treated with respect, compassion, and sensitivity regardless of sexual orientation” (CFCL section 1, part B, 7). See also: CCC 2357-2359, 2396.

## **5g. Divorce**

In Mt. 19:3-9, Jesus tells the Pharisees that Moses allowed divorce only due to their “hardness of hearts.” He says, “In the beginning it was not so.” This points us back to the love God hoped for us when He created us. Far from being a condemnation of those who struggle with broken relationships, it affirms the pain of our separation and reminds us that God never wanted us to be divided. He created us to be united in love.

Here we must also be reminded of the definition of marriage and the binding value of the marriage vows. The Church, in upholding the totality and faithfulness of the Love we image, states that valid marriage vows are impossible to dissolve (even by the Church), because God Himself has made the couple one.

It is important to understand what is meant by “valid.” For a thorough summary, read chapter 3 in Christopher West’s book, *Good News about Sex and Marriage*. It is also important to understand that an annulment (or “declaration of nullity”) does not equal “Catholic divorce.” It is actually a process by which couples can seek counsel from the tribunal office in their diocese to determine if a valid marriage existed. Through this process, whether the annulment is granted or not, many find healing, peace and wisdom.

We live in a culture that views commitment as an unnecessary burden and marriage as a tentative relationship. Therefore, the heartbreak and difficulties associated with divorce are all too well known. It is important to know that while the Church sees divorce as something to be avoided if at all possible, a divorced person is not separated from the Church. In fact, the Church asks its members to embrace, support and approach with “great sensitivity... those Catholics who have experienced the pain of civil divorce but who wish to keep the faith and who desire to bring up their children in the Catholic faith, so they do not consider themselves alienated from the Catholic faith” (CFCL section 1, part B, 4).

Canon 1676 states, “When a marriage has broken down, there is a presumption of validity until the contrary is proven. The Church tribunal provides a process whereby an examination of the marriage can be made and possible invalidity determined. When faced with separation and divorce, Catholics should be encouraged and supported to make every effort to seek reconciliation. If even this fails, they should be assisted in seeking the services of the tribunal, if they so choose. In today’s culture, the Church’s fidelity to Christ’s teaching on marriage and against divorce should remain strong” (CFCL section 1, part B, 4).

## **6. Pornography**

“Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other” (CCC 2354). To be human is to be a unique body-soul person, which is foundational to understand Pope John Paul II’s insights on pornography: The problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of people, it is that it shows too little of them. Pornography objectifies people—it makes them a collection of body parts to be used and lusted for, rather than whole persons to be *loved*. This is an offense against the one being objectified (even if they were paid for it) and the one looking at pornography, as it encourages them in their sin. Furthermore, all of society is harmed when we create a culture in which people are treated as objects for others’ pleasure.

Pornography is a serious problem that actually causes a physical effect in the brain. The medical preoptic nucleus, the pleasure center of the brain, is easily trained to associate sexual images with sexual arousal. Children who are exposed to pornography are unable to filter or process the images that are burned into their memories. Sexual addictions and fantasy lives stunt the mental maturation of young people and when transferred onto spouses can wreak havoc on marriages. Pornography will not enhance sexual acts within marriage. The use of pornography only derails true love and replaces it with compulsion and selfish, sterile indulgence.

The USCCB states, “Any efforts to portray real or simulated sexual acts in order to display them to others uses persons as objects and betrays the meaning of sexuality. Pornography defames the intimacy of the marital act and injures the dignity of viewers and participants. Child pornography is a particularly abhorrent form of pornography that dehumanizes children for profit or perverted pleasure. Christians are to shun all participation in pornography as producers, actors, consumers, or vendors. Pornography also tends to become addictive. The ready availability of pornography on the Internet and television adds to the spread of this addiction.” (CFCL section B, part 1, 1)

## **7. Transgender Issues**

In order to discuss the Church’s teachings on this issue, it is important to clarify terms. “Sex” refers to the biological condition of being male or female, as based upon physical differences at birth. “Gender” is a person’s identity as male or female, harmonious with one’s biological sex upon birth (CCC 2333).

There is a new gender ideology today which holds that sex is no longer a given element of nature that individuals must simply understand. Instead, it is considered merely a social role that we choose for ourselves rather than have it chosen for us by reference to “nature” or societal norms. In this view, “sex” is minimized, while the cultural element, known as “gender,” is maximized and held to be primary.

The Church teaches that “God created man in his own image...male and female he created them...” (CCC 2331)... “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out.” (CCC 2333) Further, Pope Francis quotes Pope Benedict XVI in stating that “man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will.” In addition, Pope Francis adds, “The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary...It is not a healthy attitude which would seek ‘to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.’” (Laudato Si’)

Catholic schools, faithful to the teaching and mission of the Catholic Church, will interact with students according to their biological sex as based upon physical differences at birth. An individual who wishes to express a gender other than his or her biological sex is understood as functioning outside of the “reality deeply inscribed” within (CDF, Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World, 2004, no. 8). Assisting the person in his or her disconnect with this reality, however sincerely expressed, by agreeing to participate in any efforts to change natural gender expression is

contrary to the pursuit of truth. Authentic love, a gift of the self for the good of the other, requires that we compassionately dwell in the truth and assist those we love to do the same.

The Church teaches that except when performed for strictly therapeutic reasons, directly intended mutilations are against the moral law (CCC 2297). Transsexual surgery involves radical mutilation: castration and construction of a pseudovagina for the male; mastectomy and hysterectomy (sometimes also the construction of a non-functional pseudopenis and testes) for the female, along with hormonal treatments with possible serious side effects. The attempt to change a person's biological sex is never a legitimate aim of medical care.

The Church recognizes that, in exceptional cases, an individual may be born with DNA (X and Y chromosomes) that do not match his or her anatomy. These situations, though rare, require special care and assistance.

There are other situations in which individuals report what is known as "gender dysphoria." Gender dysphoria is defined as the "condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex." The Church recognizes that there may be instances in which young people experience dissonance between their biological sex and the roles and norms advocated by society (Pontifical Council for the Family, Family, Marriage, and 'De Facto' Unions, 2000, no. 8). Some young people might feel drawn to dress, act, and even manipulate their physical bodies in ways contrary to God's plan. The Church, in close cooperation with parents, urges young people to bring these types of issues to their pastors, as well as to other trained professionals who might best assist them in clarifying and defining identity issues in accord with the teachings of Christ. As the Nebraska bishops note, "Any person who experiences gender dysphoria is entitled to the respect and dignity that is the right of every human person, as well as genuine concern and the support ... Such support, however, must be provided with due consideration to fairness and the safety, privacy, and rights of all students... It would be unjust to allow a harmful and deceptive gender ideology to shape either what is taught or how activities, including admissions and continuing enrollment policies, are conducted in our schools. This would certainly have a negative impact on students' and society's attitudes towards the fundamental nature of the human person and the family."

[October 6, 2017 Leaven Column: Prayer, education and love are key to changing hearts by Archbishop Naumann](#)