

Diocese of Portsmouth

# **HUMAN SEXUALITY AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: Guidelines for Catholic Schools on Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)**

In response to many requests from schools and in the light of the recent legislation, the Bishop and Diocesan Trustees issue the following policy document, "Human Sexuality and Personal Relationships: Guidelines for Catholic Schools on Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)" to the governors, head teachers, chaplains, staff and parents of the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Portsmouth.

## **THE AIM OF THIS DOCUMENT**

The aim of this document is to help each school devise its own policies, guidelines and teaching materials for educating children in the true meaning of human sexuality and personal relationships according to the teaching of the Catholic Church. The document thus endeavours to articulate the Christian vision of human happiness in a life lived in fidelity to Christ with love and respect for neighbour.

## **CHALLENGES**

In offering this vision, we recognise the challenges that everyone in our school and parish communities faces in living up to these Christian ideals and the genuine pastoral sensitivity that should always be shown to those who fall short or view these matters differently. Yet we must also recognise with thanksgiving that through his Church God has given us the manifold means of his grace, with the help needed to grow in human maturity and to aspire in practice to what Christians profess.

Many of our children have a different lived experience at home from what is put forward here and care and sensitivity will be needed in presenting SRE teaching. Moreover, the Bishop and Trustees recognise the need for Catholic schools to navigate carefully through the current statutory landscape whilst critically engaging with its requirements.

## **SUMMARY**

The document begins with a short summary of the teaching of the Church about human beings – created, fallen and gloriously redeemed – and the role of sexuality in our well-being and happiness. This will need to be studied carefully. It addresses some of the difficulties arising today both in transmitting the Church's teaching and in living up to it. It then offers some principles for schools, whilst discussing the responsibilities and guidelines involved in preparing and delivering classes. The document finishes with a note on resources and a brief bibliography.

## **THANKS**

Draft copies of this document were sent out to Heads and Chairs of Governors for consultation with staff, governors and parents at the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year. The Bishop and Trustees wish to thank everyone for their many helpful suggestions. Moreover, we thank all our teachers and governors for the magnificent work they are already doing in this area and for all they do to make our Diocese of Portsmouth proud of its schools and the education we offer.

In Corde Iesu  
Bishop Philip

Solemnity of SS. Peter and Paul, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015

## 1. SEXUALITY IN GOD'S PLAN

### *Human beings are created in God's image*

1. One of God's most wonderful gifts to man and woman is sexuality. Sexuality, erotic desires and the ability to experience physical pleasure is God's ingenious way of making us capable of entering into intimate, happy and loving relationships with others (YOUCAT 400). Indeed, the Catholic tradition teaches that loving relationship is at the very heart of God. In the Blessed Trinity, the Father and the Son give themselves totally to each Other in love, and the Love that unites Them is a Person, the Holy Spirit. As in the Blessed Trinity, so too human love involves both self-giving and self-sacrifice. In the Book of Genesis, we read that every human person is made in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1: 27) and God has 'written into' the humanity of man and woman the vocation, capacity and responsibility of love and communion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 2331). There is an immense dignity in being human! The Catholic reverence for all human life, from conception through to natural death, is rooted in this conviction. Furthermore, Genesis portrays men and women as equal partners who enjoy a relationship of intimacy with God. Every man and every woman, in acknowledging their common nature as human beings, can also acknowledge the difference and complementarity of each sex (CCC 2333). There are of course many forms of love, but the most beautiful form on earth is the love between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in marriage (YOUCAT 402).

### *... wounded by sin*

2. The intimate and happy relationship between human beings and God, established in the beginning, was wounded by sin (cf. the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3: 1-24). The account in the Book of Genesis reminds us how sin brings about isolation, division and conflict. Sin impedes our growth as loving persons. Even after Baptism, which takes away Original Sin, wayward desires remain ('concupiscence') that threaten to weaken us and to lead us away from the right path into unloving and immoral actions. Consequently, chastity and purity, that is, the "successful integration of sexuality within a person leading to their inner unity as a bodily and spiritual being" (CCC 2337), can be a life-long and sometimes challenging project, an "apprenticeship in self mastery" (CCC 2339)

### *... yet gloriously redeemed by Christ*

3. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has rescued humankind from the power of sin. The belief that 'the Word was made flesh' (John 1:14) underlines the goodness and significance of the human body. The Christian's life is a life lived in union with Jesus Christ in his Body the Church ('discipleship'). Formed by the Word of God and nourished by the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, the Christian life is an extension of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Master. Indeed, Christ has left us an example of selfless love, which both shows us the way and also empowers us ('grace') to fulfil our potential as loving human beings, body and soul. We reach true happiness through dying to self and rising to a new way of living.

### *The two sexes and the bond of marriage*

4. The Book of Genesis shows the union of man and woman in marriage as the chief purpose of God's creation of the two sexes (cf. CCC 1605). This bond between husband and wife involves total self-giving and self-sacrifice, one for the other, just as Jesus said: "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother and cling to his wife and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body" (Matthew 19: 5-6). Moreover, this bond of 'one flesh' is also meant to be fruitful and generative of children and a family. This is why the Catholic tradition teaches that marriage has a two-fold purpose: it is for love and for life. In other words, marriage is a union of one man and one woman. It is based on total, exclusive, faithful, self-giving mutual love (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 47-52) and this union is meant to be 'open to life.' it is fruitful and it leads, by procreation, to the

establishment of new life, the birth of children and the community of a family (John Paul II *Letter to Families* 7-8).

### *Developing the virtues*

5. St. John Paul II spoke of sexuality as 'saying something': that the body itself has a language (*Familiaris Consortio* 32). When we act with our bodies, we are speaking to others, and we can communicate in ways that are unhealthy as well as healthy. The key issue is how to develop the virtue or good habit of chastity. A chaste person is one who is not the slave of their drives and emotions but one who has consciously accepted their sexuality and integrated it well into their personality (YOUCAT 404-5). Chastity is for every person, young and old, alone or married (YOUCAT 406). It can involve a struggle, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. Whilst the Church is not afraid to profess that sexual union should always take place in the context of that committed love-relationship which is marriage, we all recognise that the adolescent journey toward sexual maturity can be difficult and confusing, not least in today's context. Even so, adolescents should be encouraged and actively helped to grow towards maturity and responsibility and thus to realise the Christian life. Constant prayer, frequent confession, receiving the Holy Eucharist, along with the cultivation of self-discipline and virtuous habits, are essential. Chastity can be achieved by God's grace through the supernatural means he gives us in his Church, for grace perfects nature and strengthens our weakness (cf. CCC 2338-45). Successful role models for the young, as seen in the examples of family life well lived, not least in the Scriptures and in the lives of the Saints, can be a great help and an inspiration.

## 2. TODAY'S CONTEXT

### *Different views*

1. Today, people in our society have all sorts of different views about sexuality and human relationships and often the popular beliefs of society can be markedly different from the teachings of the Catholic Church. Indeed, even many Catholics hold beliefs and views on sex and relationships that are different from what the Church teaches. In a society where divorce, same-sex partnerships, sex before marriage and cohabitation are often accepted as part of 'normal' life, the Church's teachings can appear outmoded, authoritarian and even unrealistic. Contemporary culture treats sexual morality in relativistic terms - a world of mixed messages visible in the social media and across the internet. The Catholic position, based on objective moral principles, is decidedly counter-cultural.

### *The way to true happiness*

2. In a Catholic school, our teaching should reflect the Church's teaching, since we believe that this is the sure way to lasting human happiness and fulfilment. We need to show our children and our young people that the teachings of the Church are not about restricting fun or pleasure but about helping people to find true happiness through love and responsibility. We need to enlighten them about Christian values and to explain and promote positively our teachings in everything we do, enabling them to reject damaging cultural trends or peer pressures. We do recognise that Christian love and family life require effort and self-sacrifice. We should not keep youngsters ignorant, but we must also give them an opportunity to explore and to understand the teachings of the Church, their meaning, wisdom and beauty.

### *Taking care in choosing resources*

3. Sometimes, the resource material on Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) published for use with children in schools is unhelpful. Some resources are too sexually explicit; others seem to portray casual sexual relationships as 'normal.' It is important to take care when selecting resources that they accord with the Church's teaching and the Christian way of life.

### *Developing the right ethos*

4. SRE lessons must contribute to the students' development of a positive self-image, with real respect and love of each other, whilst emphasising sexuality as a gift from God, which recognises the beauty and dignity of the human person. We need to assist students with the physical and emotional changes that puberty brings, encouraging them to think seriously about the sacredness of their body and why it is important to use respectful terminology when talking about sex, relationships and their bodies. Purity and the virtue of chastity should be promoted. We must help students recognise that the proper place for sexual relationships is within the loving and permanent relationship of marriage.

## **3. SOME PRINCIPLES FOR SCHOOLS**

1. Parents are the first educators in forming their child in developing personal relationships and specifically in matters of education relating to human sexuality. Where SRE classes are given in school, all involved in Catholic schools should accept the right, where the law allows it, for parents to withdraw their children from them.

2. In any school-based education relating to sexuality and personal relationships, emphasis should be put on the whole person and not just on the biological aspects. Any explanation should incorporate the moral dimension and information should not be imparted as if it were neutral or "value-free." Every child is unique and so the aim is to form each person in love, body, mind and spirit.

3. Chastity should be promoted as the underlying theme. To be chaste is "to love with an undivided heart" (YOUCAT 406). Chastity needs to be presented positively, not as repression but as a spiritual energy ('grace' and 'virtue'). SRE should stress Christ as the Model of chastity and dependence on the Holy Spirit through the sacramental and spiritual means provided by the Church. To be unchaste is to be torn and not free, which is why the Church has a special duty to assist and heal those who are broken or fallen. SRE should always distinguish the sinner from the sin, treating those who struggle to live up to the Christian ideals with true mercy and compassion, without being judgmental. This is the example Christ has given us in the Gospels, as when he condemned adultery but treated mercifully the woman caught in adultery who humbly acknowledged her sin and repented (John 8: 3-11).

4. The virtue of abstinence should be promoted rather than suggesting that sexual intercourse is fine as long as it is "safe sex".

5. Alternative views about sex outside of marriage, about contraception, homosexual acts, IVF and so on should not be presented as neutral or value-free information, but always in relation to the Church's teaching on marriage and loving relationships. At the same time, SRE should also be sensitive to the often complex family and relational situations within which our children and young persons live. Given that many of our young come from homes with a variety of family models, care needs to be taken to ensure that SRE is taught in the context of God's unconditional love, with mercy and compassion, so that parents and students feel supported and not judged or excluded because their family for some reason does not meet the ideal type.

6. In their day-to-day dealings with students, all staff in a Catholic school are expected to support the teachings of the Catholic Church and are accountable to parents and governors. This is especially important in matters relating to personal relationships and sexual morality, and to what is taught in SRE.

7. As stated above, parents are the first educators of their children and so the staff of a Catholic school should encourage students to seek the advice of their parents and carers when requesting counselling on issues relating to personal relationships and sex education.

8. Students should only be referred to outside agencies currently working with, or closely associated with the school. Governors and senior management should review regularly the use of such agencies and authorities in order to ensure that their policies are not contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. These agencies should first be authorised by the headteacher in accordance with the policy of the governors, before they are permitted to give an input in this field.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

Schools that offer SRE at the primary phase should do so in harmony with the diocesan policy outlined here.

In secondary schools, SRE is a legal requirement. It appears within the curriculum of several subject areas including science, PSHE and RE. Given this diversity of inputs and methodologies, it is important to avoid giving students confused or mixed messages. Regardless of the subject area, any instruction in sexuality should be presented in the context of the Church's teaching on sexuality and the sacrament of marriage.

All adults within the school community are responsible for promoting the Church's teaching. However, the RE department has the chief responsibility for teaching about personal relationships, sex education and PSHE. This responsibility lies with the RE department because it situates sexuality within its 'global' human, moral and spiritual context. The school's senior management and RE staff delegate various aspects of SRE to other departments and teachers.

## **PREPARING AND DELIVERING CLASSES**

1. SRE is an education in love and responsibility and so the moral dimension should always be incorporated. Consciences need to be formed, so that a child is able to recognise the value of his or her peers and act appropriately.

2. Each child's formation in SRE must be tailored to the needs of the individual, possibly at times with a teacher of the same sex as the students and with an emphasis on dialogue and discussion, whilst recognising the normative status of the Church's teaching.

3. Classes should refer to the Word of God. This is revealed through the Bible and the Church's Tradition, and taught by the teaching authority of the Church. The personal love of Jesus Christ should be emphasised in teaching objective moral principles.

4. We acknowledge and respect the presence in our schools of other faith-traditions and their teaching on sexuality, even though we may not be able to provide support for those communities and their teachings.

5. SRE must be age-appropriate, positive, prudent, clear and delicate.

6. Objectively, the content of classes should not offend against modesty. Subjectively, the content of classes must not offend against privacy. Materials need to be age-appropriate, respecting the maturity of the students involved.

## **FUTURE RESOURCES AND TASKS AHEAD**

These Guidelines are given to help schools select their own programmes and resources. However, we recognise the need in the longer term for the Diocese to

propose appropriate resources and even to develop its own resources for SRE. We also recognise the need to offer on-going formation and training to our teachers in SRE and in the policies outlined here, not least in relation to handling the challenges.

#### **INDICATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY** (*mostly available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)*)

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