

## **Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living: An Overview for Program Leaders, Teachers, Catechists**

by Marilyn Gorun

**God's Gift** The U.S. Catholic Church's guidelines, *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living* (© 2008), recognizes that the human body and human sexuality are gifts from God. Thus: "Being created in God's image also enables human beings to share in Trinitarian or divine love, and to express love through the generation of new life and through self-donation, that is, through being a gift for one another as man and woman." Sadly, many people have never had the opportunity to learn about this sacred dimension of sexuality; they see it only as a physical and even dirty aspect of the human person. However, through their precious children, many adults come to a new appreciation of their total person.

**Role of Parents** Parents are the primary teachers of their children. Generally, parents are willing to share that responsibility with schools, but that doesn't remove their role. This is especially true in the area of catechesis in human sexuality. Through good communication and with the wisdom that comes from prayer, parents respond to their children's questions about sex and, more importantly, share their Christian values regarding sexuality.

**Role of Faith Community** The faith community—parish, Catholic school—must first set an example of living the Christian values that undergird the Church's teachings on sexuality and on moral decision making. These communities of Christian living offer support to both parents and young people. They present a myriad of good examples when it comes to moral decision making and respect for persons of the other gender and for the gift of sexuality. In the sacraments, these communities celebrate their shared faith in Christ.

**Role of Program Leaders, Teachers, Catechists** Program leaders, teachers, and catechists who teach human sexuality have an awesome responsibility and opportunity. They are the connecting link between children, the faith community, and families. "Since the Church recognizes that parents are the first educators of their children, Catholic educators do well to focus on assisting parents or guardians."

The first step is to provide parents with any materials and training they need to communicate to their children "the facts of life" in the context of Catholic faith and morals. Then, in the classroom setting, teachers and catechists must reinforce parental teaching and values compatible with Church teaching.

However, there are some parents who do not assume their responsibility as primary educators of their children when it comes to explaining sex and communicating Catholic values. Some feel inadequate and unprepared. Others may find themselves in a situation that is not in keeping with the Christian values they ought to be modeling. As a result, they avoid their responsibility out of disagreement with the Church or because they feel they would be hypocritical if they preached what they didn't live. These parents especially need to depend on the faith community and school or religious education program to take on a larger role with their children. The teacher or

catechist is in a difficult position, needing to uphold Catholic values without judging the parents—yet another reason to pray.

There is great joy ascending on children who have taken to heart the teachings and values a good teacher or catechist has shared. They are on their way to living lives that are happy, healthy, and holy.