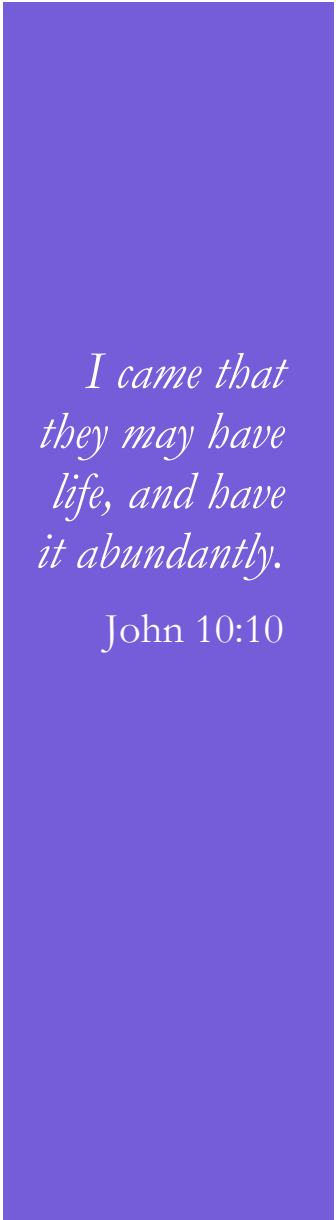




The Human Person, Love, and Sexuality

A Resource for Catholic
Educators

Education Commission of the
Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario



*I came that
they may have
life, and have
it abundantly.*

John 10:10



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Introduction

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. John 10:10

With these simple words, Our Lord sets before us the ultimate promise of the Christian life and of all that the Church does and teaches: that we might have life abundantly. St. Paul describes this promise in remarkable words: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). St. Peter describes this life as “incredible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8).

It is this promise that for centuries has motivated Christians to reach out to the marginalized, to teach and found schools, to care for the sick and abandoned in her hospitals and orphanages, to accompany the dying, to seek out the lost and lonely and bring them friendship and hope. It is for the sake of this abundant life and joy that countless Christian martyrs have been willing to follow the example of the Good Shepherd even to laying down their lives that others might know the one who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). And it is this promise of joy and abundant life that lies at the heart of the Christian vision of the human person, love, and sexuality.

Our culture is marked by many voices promising happiness and freedom in exploring and expressing one’s sexuality. For young people this can be especially confusing as they begin to mature and develop both physically, emotionally, and spiritually. At the same time, we are aware of the reality of broken families and hurt lives that have resulted from infidelity and divorce, the impact of social media and the widespread use of pornography, the decriminalization of prostitution, promiscuity and the promotion of a casual “hook up” approach to sexuality, and the scourge of sexual assault. All of these realities in our society reveal that sexuality and sexual expression, when broken, can deeply injure the human person and leave lasting wounds.

Sexuality and its expression touch the deepest realms of the human person - how we relate to ourselves and others, and how we are called by God to love. The Church cares deeply about the human person and sexuality because she cares about our call to image God in our human relationships of love. God is love (1 John 4:8). It is ultimately from this understanding of God that the Church’s vision of the human person, love, and sexuality emerges: a vision that reveals that every single human being without exception has immeasurable value; a vision of human love and sexuality as a vocation to love as God loves - revealing in the creation of the human person, body and soul, male and female, our deepest meaning and identity. Far from being closed-minded or exclusionary - a mere set of rules and prohibitions - the Christian vision of the human person and human sexuality offers the fullest possible understanding of the human person - a union of body and soul, created out of love, to fulfil a purpose revealed by God, that promises fullness of life now and which will be eternal with God. It is a vision that reveals the beauty and wonder of our life and destiny as human beings, one that we shape and form through our free choices and actions, in cooperation with grace, into the image of the one who is the way, the truth, and life itself - Jesus Christ.

At the same time, the Catholic Church is not unaware of the challenges and obstacles to those who desire to live this vision of human love and sexuality. The Church is not a community for the perfect - for those who have no faults, struggles or weaknesses, who seek only to condemn and lay heavy burdens

on others. It is to be a community of healing and strength by which God the Father welcomes all his children - calling them to a life beyond their imagining (Ephesians 3:20) and providing the means to reach this life, with grace that abounds infinitely more than the effects of weakness, struggle, and sin (Romans 5:20). Every member of the Church has inherited the brokenness resulting from original sin - the fall. Every member of the Church is a sinner in need of healing, mercy, and forgiveness. It is this that Jesus Christ - the Good Shepherd - came to give, and it is this that we must give to each other.

THE AIM AND STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended as a resource for Catholic educators in their work of teaching the Human Development and Sexual Health elements of the 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum. Its aim is to present and explain the vision of the human person, love, and sexuality that underlies the teachings of the Catholic faith, setting this vision within the broader framework of the moral and spiritual life.

This document is divided into two parts. In the first part we will present the Catholic Christian vision of human life and love, including the meaning of sexuality, chastity and marriage. This is the essential context for understanding the Church's teaching in the area of same-sex attraction and gender identity, and we hope that it might assist Catholic educators not only in their work of handing on the Catholic faith to their students, but also as a guide for providing pastoral care. In the second part of this document, we will consider how the integral vision of the human person, love, and sexuality shapes the Catholic faith's approach to questions of sexual identity. We will also consider the meaning and purpose of the Church's approach to pastoral care, as well practical guidance for offering pastoral care to those who are experiencing feelings of same-sex attraction or in some way questioning their sexual or gender identity.

The Human Person, Love, and Sexuality: The Vision of the Catholic Faith

The Church cares deeply about the dignity of the human person, love and sexuality because God is love. This foundational perspective ultimately leads to the beautiful vision of the human person and the gift of human sexuality in God's plan for our happiness and joy. Unfortunately, too often, questions of sexuality do not begin with this vision and thus the understanding of the Catholic faith is not presented from this perspective, but rather simply as a list of rules and prohibitions. Disconnected from the vision of the person and God's plan and promise for human life, the specific teachings of the Christian faith that deal with these realities can become, as St. John Paul II warned, "a mere set of principles which are increasingly difficult to understand and rules which are increasingly hard to accept."¹

Thus, to understand the Christian meaning of human sexuality, one must first step back and see the larger vision of human life revealed by God that underlies what the Church believes and teaches. In essence, the Catholic Christian vision of human life serves as a guide for the fundamental questions of the Church's moral and spiritual teaching: Why is the Church concerned about morality at all? How can we know if anything is right or wrong, good or bad, if our care and support will ultimately be helpful or harmful? How do we know the meaning and value of the human person and thus what it means to care or love?

To answer these questions, all people of good will, whether Christian or not, must first ask about the ultimate horizon or vision that allows us to understand our lives most fully. What are our lives for? What are we to do with them? Only an adequate moral horizon can help us see our way clearly through the challenging moral and pastoral realities that are part of human life. Like any journey or task in life, to know what we are to do with our lives, and how we can help each other when life presents challenges and pain, we must first know what our lives are for, where we are going, and the way and means to get there. Only then can we know what, along the way, will be helpful or harmful to us. If we lose sight of the moral vision or horizon, not only is it hard to understand the specific moral teachings of the Church, but it is also becomes impossible to know how we are to care for people in a manner that upholds their true value and dignity. Everything that the Catholic faith proposes about morality comes out of these first and fundamental realities.

THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE MORAL LIFE

The starting point of the Catholic vision of the human person is the simple but profoundly important fact that we are made by God. Our life is not a product of mere chance or impersonal forces. It is, in its most ultimate origin, a free and personal choice of life-giving love by God. God's love creates life. Human life comes from God. It is a gift to us, and is always, without exception, a good.

In this first work of our creation, at our origin, our mother and father became cooperators and co-workers in God's own work as Father and Creator. Through them, God formed us in the womb (Psalm 139:13). In the great wonder and design of his Creation, there is something of our parents in us. With

¹ Pope John Paul II, Address to the Young People of Eurasia University in Kazakhstan (September 23, 2001), n. 4.

Adam, a mother or father, gazing on their child, can exclaim: “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” (Genesis 2:23)

This joyful exclamation further reveals that the human being is an embodied being, created as a union of body and soul. As honest reflection on our own experience confirms, the body is not something that we merely *have* - to be freely used and manipulated by the “real,” interior person. Rather, it is part of who we *are*. This reality of our creation takes on its fullest meaning and importance when we realize that into this very union of body and soul God has deeply imprinted something of himself. As the book of Genesis tells us, we have been made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27) - the Most Holy Trinity - who is in essence a community of life-giving love - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This image of inseparable life and love - of God’s own inner life - has been imprinted into our very bodies. How this image serves as the guide and meaning of human sexuality, we will consider shortly, but already we can begin to see how it is that what we do with our bodies matters greatly in God’s plan. Our fundamental identity comes from this image of God’s life in us, present in every human being. And it is this image in us that makes human life sacred, and that grounds each person’s inviolable dignity.

But this is only the beginning of the Christian vision of the human person. The image of God - so central to the entire meaning of our life, our identity, and purpose - is not simply something *already* in us, it is also something that we must *become*. God’s creation of us is not yet finished! In a sense, God not only *has* made us, he *is* making us. And in this ongoing work of creation, we are called to cooperate. Here we see the first hint of the entire meaning of the moral life, of God’s law and commandments, conscience, grace, and the virtues. Our life is a work that has been entrusted to us. Freedom is the gift given to us that we might share in our own interior creation. It has a purpose and guide: that we might freely cooperate in completing the image of God in us - life-giving love - and so enter into communion with God and know the joy and abundant life that is his.

This is the call to holiness. That God, who first asked our parents’ cooperation in our creation, now asks our own cooperation to complete his work, to deepen and perfect his image in us. As St. Gregory of Nyssa said: We become in a certain way our own parents. We create ourselves by the choices we make. Our choices and actions don’t just bring about consequences outside of us, they form in us profound and lasting spiritual traits, for good or ill.² Every time we act, every choice we make, every good we do or sin we commit, every time we seek forgiveness, we are forming in ourselves deep and lasting traits of our moral and spiritual character. We are moving ourselves toward or away from the image of the life and love-giving Holy Trinity, toward or away from the indescribable and glorious joy of being filled with the utter fullness of God (cf. Ephesians 3:19). This is beatitude - happiness - communion with the very source of life and love forever. It is for this that we were made.

Already, we can begin to see why the Church cares so deeply about people and the moral life. It is not about following an arbitrary or antiquated set of rules. It is about becoming a kind of person. It is about

² “It is precisely through his acts that man attains perfection as man, as one who is called to seek his Creator of his own accord and freely to arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him. Human acts are moral acts because they express and determine the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them. They do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits. This was perceptively noted by Saint Gregory of Nyssa: [...] ‘we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions.’” Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church’s Moral Teaching (August 6, 1993), n. 71.

using our freedom to shape ourselves after the image of God in which we have been made. Our life is a work. It is entrusted to us by the One who loves us dearly and wants us to share in making it. It is in understanding this connection between our free choices, our ultimate destiny, and the part we play in shaping our lives in the image of God revealed to us in Scripture and Tradition that we gain the understanding and desire to take up the task of the moral life with courage and perseverance, even when it is challenging.

This vision of the image of God - of God's desiring to draw us into the very work of our creation through the gift of our freedom - is a beautiful testament to God's love for us - that he would make us to share so closely in his own life-giving love. Unfortunately, our faith reveals, and human experience amply confirms, that this divine image within us has been profoundly wounded and obscured. This is the tragic reality of sin and evil - that the very gift of freedom given that we might shape and guide our actions after the image of God could be turned toward a rejection of the very source of life and love. That the very gift of God that alone brings unity and flourishing to the many dimensions of the person - body, soul, freedom, and desires - could be rejected, with the disastrous consequences of disintegration, obscurity, weakness, and chaos within the human person.

This is the reality of "original sin" that the book of Genesis recounts, and which has marked in each of us a deep wound - a profound spiritual disability - that now, together with our own personal sins, both obscures our ability to recognize the plan and image of God imprinted in our body and soul - the very image that we are called to become - and disrupts the integrity, harmony, and direction of our desires and freedom. The entire history of salvation - from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Israel - is one continuous story of God's gradual work to restore his Creation - to teach us anew who we are and what our life is for. In his work to draw his people back, God made covenants with them, gave them the law - his great plan for them, his means of caring for them and showing them their dignity. But the disintegrating and obscuring power unleashed by Adam and Eve's denial of God's gift of himself could not ultimately be overcome by humanity's own efforts. There was nothing that we had in our own power that could restore the image of God in us. So the Father sent the full and perfect "image of God" - his own Son - to reveal the plan that had become obscured, and even more, to enter in the very heart of the disorder of sin and death - to bring restoration and re-integration. The true image of God - Jesus Christ - restores the image of God in us from within.

To become the image of God, then - which is the very call to holiness and fullness of life - is ultimately to become like Christ - the one and true "image of God." This allows us to understand the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, so often emphasized by St. John Paul II, that it is only Jesus Christ who "fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling."³ Jesus Christ - fully God and fully human - is the image of God, and it is only in communion with the life he offers and the strength he gives that we are able to take up the task of shaping our lives after the image of God. Ultimately, this opens the door to the entire understanding of the spiritual and moral life - the sacraments and prayer, the law and commandments, our own sacrifices and crosses. Each, in different ways, is given by God to powerfully assist us in the work of shaping our lives after the image of Christ. United to him, we come to see as he sees, we gain grace - Christ's own life and strength - to go out with him to continue his work among our brothers and sisters. We become his hands and feet, his messengers of Good News.

³ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, On the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965), n. 22.

It is only in this whole truth of the image of God - as both a gift given and a work to be done, obscured, weakened, and disintegrated by sin, redeemed by the true image of God - Jesus Christ - that we can understand the vision that guides our moral life and the Church's teaching and pastoral care. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concisely captures this vision.

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfilment. By his deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. With the help of grace they grow in virtue, avoid sin, and if they sin they entrust themselves as did the prodigal son to the mercy of our Father in heaven. In this way they attain to the perfection of charity.⁴

BECOMING THE IMAGE OF GOD: COMPLETING OUR CREATION IN COOPERATION WITH GRACE

But the question naturally remains: How do we know what to do with our freedom in order to take up the task that is entrusted to us, to cooperate in completing this work of our creation? How can we know, especially in the area of human sexuality, and especially in the midst of the weakened and obscured vision caused by original sin, what reflects and forms the image of God in us - thus leading to lasting joy - and what does not? Amidst all the voices that promise happiness, how can we recognize the way that leads to true peace and abundant life?

The Meaning and Purpose of Law: God's Map Leading Us to Life

In the Church's constant tradition, the response to these questions, which are none other than the fundamental questions of morality, can be known by reason and faith, or, in other words, by the natural law - which guides our reason - and by Divine Revelation - God's Law revealed in Scripture and the Tradition of the Church and accepted through faith. Before elaborating on these sources of truth which attune our lives to the Good Shepherd's voice, however, it is important first to say something about the meaning and value of law in general. At first glance, the idea of law and commandments can seem the polar opposite of all the goods we have been speaking of so far: abundant life, joy, and freedom. Law is often misunderstood and described as something that takes away or limits freedom, rather than enabling and protecting it. Nothing could be further from an authentic Christian moral vision and understanding of the meaning and purpose of law. Neither, moreover, is this the way in which laws and rules are generally understood in our everyday life.

To use a rather common example, a trip from Ottawa to Toronto in a car is possible because of the order created by the rules of the road, traffic lights, lane markers, signs, and guardrails. These "laws and commandments" of the road do not limit our freedom. Rather, they facilitate it and, moreover, they protect the common good of our life together in society. Similarly, the flourishing musician, whose music brings joy, is not the one who ignores the rules of music and simply does whatever he wishes. Neither is the excellent athlete the one who ignores or invents the rules of a game, but rather the one who aims all her skill and drive toward the purpose of the game. For the musician and athlete, flourishing, freedom, and joy are the fruit of years of development, growth, and of hard and persevering work following an ordered and wise plan, reflected in the laws of music and sport. These are simply analogies, but

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1700.

fundamentally, they help to illustrate what is at heart an essential characteristic of morality: the laws and commandments of morality reflect a wise ordered plan aimed at freedom and flourishing, abundant life and joy. Authentic human freedom is clearly not the ability to do whatever we want. This is not true for music, for sports, and it is not true for life. Our free choices can certainly promote our flourishing and fulfillment. But if not guided by the authentic good, they can just as easily lead us to evil and enslavement to harmful practices.

But just as the rules of the game of hockey might seem obscure and even arbitrary if all we ever did was read the rule book - if we never saw the beauty of the game being played - so also to isolate the laws and commandments of morality from the vision of a flourishing life of deep and lasting joy - reflected most clearly in the lives of the saints - obscures the meaning and beauty of the moral and spiritual life, making the law and commandments seem obscure and arbitrary.

With this understanding of and appreciation for the meaning and value of the law and commandments, we can see a hint already of why God's Law is praised in such unequivocal terms in the Sacred Scripture. It is described as the product of wisdom and intelligence (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Speaking of God's laws, Psalm 19 says: "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10).

In essence, the law becomes a map for our journey in life. It guides one toward one's destination. It is meant to facilitate freedom and warn against and protect from danger. The purpose of God's Law - the Commandments - is to form our freedom - to enlighten it - according to the true and wise plan of our Creator for our flourishing and happiness, enabling us to live that truth through our free moral choices.

Returning then to the question with which we began: How can we know this wise and providential plan of our Creator? How do we know the laws and commandments - the true map - that lead to life? The Church's conviction is that the answer to these questions can be found through reason and faith - from the natural law and from Divine Revelation in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

The Natural Law: God's Plan Imprinted in Creation and Known through Reason

What is the natural law? If law in general is like a map of God's wise and providential plan to direct us toward flourishing and abundant life, the natural law is the dimension of this map or plan imprinted into Creation by God and into the very gift of our human reason. It is the intelligible plan and wisdom imprinted by God into his Creation, including the creation of the human being (cf. Proverbs 8:12-26). Reason is one of the gifts given to us by which we grasp this intelligible plan. This is what we mean when we speak of human nature and the natural law. Human nature and the natural law do not simply refer to our physical or biological dimensions as if these could somehow be separated off from the rest of the human person. Natural law is not simply laws of human biology made into laws of morality. The human person is always and at all times a unity of body and soul. We are neither angels nor mere animals, we are human beings. In everything we do, we are fully both an embodied being and a spiritual being.

Thus, when we look at ourselves and at the creation around us, we are able to discern more than simply the physical laws of nature. By virtue of the union of body and soul and the intelligible plan of the Creator imprinted into this union, we are able to discern in ourselves and in creation signs of a more

profound plan and ordering.⁵ The natural law is precisely our sharing, through our reason, in the Divine Reason itself - God's wise and providential guidance of all things for their flourishing.

Divine Revelation: God's Plan Known through Sacred Scripture and Tradition

But human reason alone is not a perfect conduit of the divine plan and order. Simple observation tells us that while people often agree on a significant range of human conduct, there remain important issues of moral action relevant for society as a whole on which agreement proves more difficult. Why is this? There are a few reasons why human reason alone proves an imperfect means for understanding the divine ordering of human life. First, because human beings are ultimately made for a life that surpasses the purely natural order. As we have seen, each and every human being is called to communion with God, made to share in the utter fullness of God - what eye has not seen nor ear heard. Human beings need an assistance that goes beyond reason alone to navigate the path toward their divine destiny - the fullness of life.

But even remaining within the realm of human reason, the further away one moves from the most basic principles of the natural moral law such as "do good and avoid evil," and the more one has to reason about specific scenarios, the more careful and diligent one's reasoning must be. This requires time and the necessary effort of seeking knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. At the same time, our reasoning and judgment (as even common experiences of daily life confirm) can become obscured by sin and by strong emotions that have become unhinged and out of sync with the good, obscuring our ability to recognize and choose the good. As we will see, it is virtue that helps to develop in us the capacity to orient our emotions, reason, and will toward the good, thus enabling us to see and choose the good more readily.

For all of these reasons, God supplements the natural law - that imprinting of his wise and providential plan for our flourishing into our very creation - with divinely revealed law through both the Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Church, together with her teaching magisterium. Reason and faith. This is how we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, the map that guides us to living waters and green pastures, to abundant life.

Conscience: Connecting God's Plan to the Concrete Circumstances of Life

But how do we navigate by this map of natural and revealed law in the midst of the concrete and particular scenarios of daily life, complete with their many variables and unique circumstances? How does this map become a personal guide for the many choices we must make every day? This is the role of conscience. Our conscience is ultimately how God enables each of us to connect the natural law and divinely revealed law to the actual concrete circumstances of our daily life - where we actually live out the moral and spiritual life day by day. In a way, God's gift of conscience is like a GPS receiver that helps us position ourselves and navigate by the map of God's plan. The analogy of the GPS is simply that - an analogy. But it can help illustrate some fundamentally important elements of conscience. For example, GPS coordinates are always specific to a point in time, here and now. They tell you where you are, right now, always relative to an underlying map. Similarly, conscience is a judgment about the good to be done at a particular moment in time. In a sense, it asks: Where am I on the map of God's providential

⁵ "The person, by the light of reason and the support of virtue, discovers in the body the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator. It is in the light of the dignity of the human person... that reason grasps the specific moral value of certain goods towards which the person is naturally inclined." Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993), n. 48.

plan of natural and revealed law, and in what direction must I move with this choice or action to continue on the path of the Good Shepherd? Like a GPS, conscience is always and inseparably dependent on the objective underlying map of God's plan, which is held in trust and passed on by the Church and her pastors - the magisterium. Just as the coordinates of a GPS point to a position on a map, and do not invent the map, so too the judgment of conscience offers a position relative to an objective map - the natural and revealed law of our Creator - the objective wise and providential plan of God for our lives known through the Church. Conscience does not create the map.

Thus, similar to a GPS, if one's knowledge of the map is incomplete, or if it has become damaged or obscured, or if something is wrong with the GPS unit itself, its position can be erroneous. What is worse, one may travel for a long time in a wrong or dangerous direction before realizing the original erroneous bearing. So too can a judgment of conscience be erroneous and lead one into harm. Thus the critical need to form and inform one's conscience. Conscience depends on our diligent seeking to learn and understand the map that guides the Christian life.

Virtue: Strength to Face the Obstacles that Can Obscure God's Plan

But law and conscience are not the only elements necessary for recognizing and navigating by the voice of the Good Shepherd. Just as fog, wind, and storms can interfere with navigation even when one's maps and GPS are in order, so too can sin and strong emotions that have become unhinged and out of sync with the good obscure our ability to recognize and choose the good. It would be like having the map, and even a functioning GPS, but there are storms raging that make it barely possible to read the map or to accurately judge where you are or where you are to go. You end up carried along by whatever is the strongest wind hitting you at that moment.

To understand the Catholic moral vision, and the work entrusted to us of shaping our interior creation after the image of God, one can thus never simply speak of the law and commandments. For these are inseparably tied to and dependent on the virtues. The virtues clear out the fog and storms that affect our ability to navigate. At the same time, they sharpen our focus on the details of the map, making clearer our location and direction. Just as the traveller rejoices in the absence of storms and fog, so too the virtues make living the moral life not only easier, but profoundly joyful, even when it is difficult.

Our emotions and drives are given to us precisely to propel us toward the good. When they are focused in on the good and in sync with it, they are powerful forces for good. But sin (both the effects of original sin as well as our own personal sins) and vice (the opposite of virtue) throw our emotions and drives into chaos - obscuring the good and making it very difficult to choose the good even when it is recognized. Virtues bring all the powers of the human person together to become strengths - intellect, will, and emotions - harmonizing them with the good. As a result, it becomes easier to both recognize and do the good. When this happens, our will, emotions and intellect become powerful forces carrying us on the path of life.

Grace: Sharing in the Life and Power of Jesus Christ

It is precisely because of our divine destiny and because of the utterly debilitating and obscuring wound of sin that one more essential piece of the moral puzzle has been given by God - grace. As we have seen, the work entrusted to us, the completion of our creation in which we participate, is ultimately to be formed into the image of Jesus Christ - the Son of God - the one who alone is able to destroy all that separates us from the Father. Our prayer, acts of charity and fasting, and most importantly and substantially, the sacraments, all unite us to Christ. By our growth in and fidelity to these pillars of the

spiritual and moral life, Jesus Christ begins to act in us, helping us to see as he sees, judge as he judges, and find joy as he finds joy. From within, he helps form us into his image. This is the whole of the Christian life!

Our Catholic faith speaks of three virtues that our union with Jesus Christ gives to us: faith, hope, and love. These theological virtues, then, literally lift our eyes to the stars, so that we do not simply navigate by the limits of this world, but rather have our eyes set on the divine life for which we are made. Furthermore, the seven-fold Gifts of the Holy Spirit act as wind in our sails, propelling us forward in the spiritual and moral life toward our goal.

By grace, most especially the sanctifying grace of the sacraments, the Holy Spirit who is the very Spirit of Jesus Christ and the Father illumines the intellect and enflames the heart so that we can truly see and desire what is good. This is what our Catholic faith calls the “New Law.” It is not new in that it replaces a previous moral law, but new in that it offers to us a new and divine source of power and vision. It is the kind of law reflected in the Beatitudes, where we read: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8). With purity of heart, we shall see God. This is the very fullness of life - indescribable and glorious joy.

SEXUALITY AND THE LIVING IMAGE OF GOD

We come now to the question of how sexuality and our sexual identity and expression are to be understood within this vision of human life and the human person. Why is the Church concerned about sexuality at all? Why does it matter what we do with our bodies, or how we express our identity, desires, and attractions? We have seen that the image of God, which stands at the centre of the meaning and dignity of human life, is both something imprinted in us in our creation as body and soul, and also something that we must become by our free actions, guiding ourselves by the “maps” of God’s plan (his natural and revealed laws), by conscience, the virtues, and grace.

To know who God is, then, is to learn both our own truest identity - made in his image - and the person we are to become by our actions. In St. John’s first letter, God reveals the fundamental essence of his identity: God is love (1 John 4:8). Love and the expression of love - to which human sexual expression is closely tied - are therefore at the heart of the very meaning of human life and the Christian faith. The Church’s concern for sexuality ultimately arises from her concern for love.

In essence, to say that God is love is to say that we have been made by love, in the image of love, and for love. As St. John Paul II wrote in his very first letter to the entire Church: “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”⁶ He would confirm these words many years later in his letter on the Gospel of Life: “The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and in this light human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance.”⁷

Understood in this light, one can appreciate why the meaning and moral implications of questions of sexual identity can become a charged and sensitive topic. For any question that touches the meaning and expression of human love, touches close to the heart of who the human person is. It is precisely for

⁶ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (March 4, 1979), n. 10.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life (March 25, 1995), n. 81.

this reason, also, that questions of sexuality are not trivial. Reflection and dialogue within a community about appropriate and inappropriate expressions of sexuality are reasonable and necessary. Love is never purely private. In varying ways, it touches and affects relationships of friendship and of family life, especially the relationship of parent and child, even relationships between strangers in a community. We owe questions of sexual identity and expression serious reflection, dialogue, and a serious effort of understanding. At the very centre of this reflection, then, is the question of the meaning of love, and the place of sexuality in the plan of love.⁸

Sexuality, Self-Giving Love, and Marriage: The Image and Sign of the Fullness of God's Love in Jesus Christ

If God is love and we are made - body and soul - in the image of God, then something of the image of God's very life, and the guide for our path to abundant life and joy will be revealed and lived through the human body. Far from being a purely "spiritual" reality, the book of Genesis reveals to us that the image of God has been inscribed deeply into our very bodies as male and female: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27-28).

The human body - male and female - thus reflects something of God. It speaks a "language about God" (literally, a "theology"), revealing something of our Creator and Father and his plan for us.⁹ Speaking of this reality, St. John Paul II wrote: "The body, in fact, and only the body is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it."¹⁰ What is the invisible mystery communicated by the human body, made male and female? That the life of God itself is a communion of persons - free, total, faithful, and fruitful self-giving and life-giving love - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That God himself is an inseparable communion of life and love, of pure gift, and that we have been made to image and share in this!¹¹

Speaking of the communion of man and woman in marriage, St. John Paul II once said: "In this entire world there is not a more perfect, more complete image of God, Unity and Community. There is no other human reality which corresponds more, humanely speaking, to that divine mystery."¹²

By making us male and female, our Creator has imprinted into our very bodies an image - an icon - of his own life - calling man and woman to a communion in love that is so powerful that, imaging his own love, it can give birth to new life! Just as God, who is total self-giving love, gives new life through that love, both in the original creation of man and woman and in Jesus Christ's re-creation in redemption through the Cross, so too the full use of the powers of sexuality, by which the total love of husband and wife -

⁸ Clarity in the meaning of love is all the more important given the general imprecision of the word 'love' in the English language. We 'love' everything from food, to music, to people. Such disparate uses of the word love cannot possibly mean the same thing.

⁹ It is important to be clear that when we speak of the love of the Holy Trinity as being reflected in the love of husband and wife, we are discovering an image - a sign - that is intended to express and point to an infinitely deeper reality. We are not saying that the love of the Holy Trinity is a sexual love. Rather, we are saying that the total body and soul expression of love lived in marriage has been shaped by God to reflect and reveal to us something of the total and inseparable life-giving love that is the heart of the life of God.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Pauline Books, 2006, n.19, §4.

¹¹ "God is love: God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §221

¹² Pope John Paul II, Homily on the Feast of the Holy Family (December 30, 1988).

body and soul - is expressed, must always be inseparably open to the creation of new human life. This inseparable connection of the unitive and procreative meanings of the sexual act, so foundational for Catholic moral teaching in sexuality, far from being an arbitrary or merely biological imposition, reveals the full depth of the image of God imprinted within our body and soul. God is a communion of life-giving love. And this is the image he has imprinted in us and the image that we must become.

St. John Paul II speaks of it in these words: "The fact that man 'created as man and woman' is the image of God means not only that each of the them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a 'unity of the two' in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God... Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16)."¹³

The astounding conviction of Christianity is that the human body is imprinted with an image of the divine. It reflects the meaning of human sexuality in God's plan and the essence of human life - that we are made for gift - self-giving love. What we do with our bodies, thus, matters greatly.

Christ Restores and Redeems God's Plan for Human Sexuality

But our faith also reveals, and human experience amply confirms, that this noble and divine image has been profoundly wounded and obscured by sin. The effects and disorder introduced by original sin as well as by our own personal sins obscure the meaning and use of our sexuality and its connection to the very image of God's own love in us.

In his wonderful response to sin, God once again reveals the essence of self-giving love that brings new life. He sends his own Son, Jesus Christ, to restore and redeem the wounded and obscured image of God within us. The Good Shepherd "lays down his life for his sheep." Out of love, Jesus Christ gives himself completely on the Cross - Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity - and from this love comes new life - our redemption and re-creation in grace. But what is more, just as God imprinted an image of his own love into man and woman in the beginning - in the first creation of humanity - so too, at the moment of our re-creation, God once again turns to the union of man and woman in marriage to express his life and work. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul reveals that Christ's complete gift of himself on the Cross finds its fullest reflection in the union of husband and wife in marriage: "'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5: 31-32).

The love of a man and woman in marriage which opens to new life now becomes an image of Christ's love for his bride, the Church. As St. John Chrysostom explains: just as the first bride, Eve, was fashioned from the side of Adam as he slept a deep sleep, so too the Church, the bride of Jesus Christ - the new Adam - was fashioned from the blood and water that flowed from his side as he slept the deep sleep of his death on the Cross. Blood and water, which are the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism.¹⁴ The Eucharist becomes a living continuation of this total love. Jesus Christ continues to give himself completely for us, uniting himself to us - Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - every time we receive Holy Communion, and at the same time forming us gradually ever more into his image through the new life of grace. Moreover, marriage itself becomes a sacrament. Not only does Christ make it the very image of

¹³ St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (August 15, 1988), §7, See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1702.

¹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, Homily for Good Friday, from the Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings for Good Friday.

divine love imprinted in our very bodies, but through the love of marriage, as through each of the seven sacraments, he literally continues the work of redemption and re-creation! (cf. Ephesians 5: 31-32)

The human body - male and female - is literally taken up into the plan of redemption and salvation. Jesus Christ, the true image of God, becomes the meaning and model of human love. Through marriage, as St. Paul tells us, Christ reveals an image of the fullness of God's love for us - his own total self-giving on the Cross, by which we receive new life. The full use of our sexual capacities is a true and authentic reflection and continuation of God's love when it speaks truthfully the "language" of this image imprinted in the union of our body and soul, when it is an expression of the total love of a man and woman in marriage, and open, as Christ's love is, to the gift of new life. Thus, far from being an arbitrary conviction of the Catholic faith, this is why the inseparably free, total, faithful, and fruitful union of man and woman in marriage is the measure of all sexual expression. It has been made the fullest image of the very life of God and of the plan of our salvation!

It is the conviction of the Catholic faith, confirmed in the lived experience of countless Christians, that living our sexuality according to this plan and image of our Creator and Redeemer is the path that leads to abundant life and joy. The image of God within us, thus, calls us away from all uses and expressions of our sexuality that do not reflect the total and life-giving love of God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ for his Bride. Pornography, prostitution, masturbation, contraception, promiscuous or casual sexual encounters, adultery, and same-sex sexual expression: each obscures in some manner the image of life-giving love that God desires us to express and form through our sexual capacities, and thus each impedes the truest joy and life that our hearts desire.

But even the full expression of sexual love between husband and wife, even the great reality of marriage, is but itself a sign and image pointing to a more fundamental and essential love. Marriage, in fact, is meant to be a sign to every human being of the total life-giving love that God has for each person he has created.

Our Hearts are Restless Until They Rest in God: The Fullness of Love

Marriage is an image of the love of Jesus Christ for his Church. It is a sacrament - a sign and source of grace. But the fullness of life and love is not found ultimately in another human person - not even in marriage. Sexual expression is not the height of human life and love. The fullness of human love is found only in God himself. Here we recognize the truth of St. Augustine's words: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." We are made for God - to love him with all our heart and mind and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27), and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, the one who loved us and gave himself for us (cf. Galatians 2:20). This is the call to love at the heart of every single human life - whether a person is single, married, or in a celibate religious vocation, and whether a person experiences same-sex attractions or not. Only this love ultimately brings the peace of heart that each of us desires.

All authentic expressions of love, whether they involve sexual expression or not, must be shaped by the image of God - love's truest meaning - a sacrificial gift of oneself, a gift that is inseparably life and love-giving. For this is the image of Christ's love. Here the Scriptures give us many examples of this love: the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), or our care for the sick, imprisoned, naked, and hungry - the least of Our Lord's brothers and sisters (Matthew 25:31-46). So too our love of God is measured by this image. Christ gives himself to us completely in the Eucharist, and by this union with him we become fruitful in our love, in our acts of charity, prayers, and friendships.

This is the authentic vision of human love and sexuality - known by reason and faith - in which the human person finds his true and full identity: only Jesus Christ, only his love, fully reveals us to ourselves and makes our true calling clear.¹⁵ Only by modelling our love after the image of Christ's love can we fully find ourselves.¹⁶

Chastity, Interior Freedom, and Peace of Heart

This vision of love and sexuality also helps us to understand the fundamental meaning of the virtue of chastity. In speaking of the virtues in general, we described their work of re-aligning or harmonizing with the good the powers of the person: the emotions, attractions, and drives, and the intellect and will. These are given by God to propel us toward the good, but can also be thrown into chaos and misalignment by the effects of both original sin and our own personal sins and vices.

From the meaning of virtue, we can see that chastity, like all of the moral virtues, is not, in its flourishing form, merely about controlling or containing desires, but about bringing them into harmony with the plan God has for our good. Chastity is the moral virtue that gradually heals and harmonizes all the elements of human sexuality so that they direct and drive a person toward true and full love and joy. As we described, the moral virtues clear out the fog and storms that prevent us from seeing clearly our position on the map of God's plan, and the way to navigate toward our destination.

If love is ultimately a gift of oneself, chastity wins for a person mastery over the many dimensions of the self precisely so that we are truly able to give the gift of ourselves. Without mastery over oneself, without a true self-possession, one cannot fully give of oneself. This is the work of the virtue of chastity. It brings the person interior freedom, peace, and integrity as all of the person's powers are gradually harmonized with the work of love according to the image of God.

Chastity cannot be gained without sacrifice and struggle. It will require the support and development of other virtues - courage, perseverance, honesty. Nor can one grow in chastity without continual recourse to the grace of him whose love is perfectly chaste - Jesus Christ. Christ will never allow the one seeking pure love to walk alone, and will always meet us in love when we fall along the way. In the end, God's love working in the virtue of chastity will form in us an interior beauty, the beauty of purity of heart, which allows us to see God (Matthew 5:8). Whatever the difficulty, however long the struggle, the fundamental conviction is that chastity is ultimately the path to interior freedom, joy, and peace of heart.

¹⁵ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, On the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965), n. 22.

¹⁶ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes* (December 7, 1965), n. 24.

Approaching Questions of Sexual Identity

OUR TRUEST IDENTITY: SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD BY GRACE

In the first part of this resource, we traced the vision that shapes the Catholic faith's understanding of the human person, love, and sexuality. It is only within this integral vision that the deepest identity of the human person can be discovered and questions of sexual identity most fully understood. Without this whole vision of the person and of human life, seen in light of our origin and destiny, and the integrity of our creation as a union of body and soul in the image of God who is an inseparable communion of life-giving love, it becomes difficult to understand the specific teachings of the Church on questions such as homosexuality and gender identity, let alone to see how those teachings might ultimately prove a path to joy and life.

From this vision of the whole person, we have seen that sexuality and sexual expression in God's plan is deeply connected to our creation as a unity of body and soul in the image of God. The human body itself - precisely in the complementarity of the male and female bodies - has been deeply imprinted by God with an image of Holy Trinity's own communion of life-giving love, as well as the love of Jesus Christ for his Bride the Church. Moreover, it is by living in truth the "language" of the image of God in our body that we cooperate in shaping this divine image of love within ourselves, which alone is the path to fulfillment and joy.

This integral vision of the human person stands in contrast to the view of the human body that underlies many approaches to sexuality in our time. Often, the human body is seen not as holding any meaning or purpose in itself, but rather, simply as one part of the "real" person whose interior experiences, thoughts, and desires offer the sole measure of how the body should or should not be used. As such, the human person is divided and reduced to one or more isolated aspects of their identity (e.g. sexual attractions or desires, gender expression, etc.), obscuring the vision of the whole person and the path to joy, often with serious consequences.

In this view of the human body, questions of gender and sexuality are often presented as pure social constructs, disconnected from any meaning in the human body, that can and should be manipulated by the individual based on his or her own experiences, attractions, and desires. In contrast, a full vision of the human person recognizes that sexual identity, gender expression, and gender roles do indeed have a social dimension to them to which a person and the surrounding culture contributes. However, it is precisely the work of human growth that sees the integration of these cultural and psychological factors with the total and integral vision of the human person's identity - a union of body and soul in the image of God, created male and female - recognizing that so often the social and cultural dimensions surrounding us are also marked by the obscuring and disintegrating effects of original sin.

Understanding gender as a mere social construct, thus, proves deeply incomplete and dissatisfying. It is imprecise and misleading, and does not express accurately how the various dimensions of the human person are integrated in the work of human growth. In a Catholic vision of the person, sexual and gender expression is deeply connected to the meaning of the human body - for we are inherently a union of body, mind, and spirit.

At the same time, and as we have traced in more detail, the Catholic faith reveals the dis-integrating, obscuring, and wounding effect that set into the human condition after the fall - this rejection of the image of God that led to a disrupted ability to see and live the meaning of the human body, a loss of harmony and integrity within the person - between one's body and one's desires, freedom, and experiences. It is precisely because of this wounded and disintegrated human condition - so amply reflected throughout human history - that the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, came to restore and heal the loss of unity, integration, and the obscuring effects in all of us brought about by original sin.

God is love. In this image we were made, and into this image we shape ourselves by our freely chosen actions. Obscured and dis-integrated by sin, Christ gradually restores and redeems the image of God's love in us and reveals to us the fullness of the Father's love for each of us. Jesus Christ thus fully reveals us to ourselves and makes our life's calling clear. By our free actions, and in cooperation and union with Christ through the sacraments, we share in shaping this image of love within us.

This is our truest identity. As close as they touch to the reality of human love, our sexual attractions and inclinations themselves do not define our deepest identity. Rather, we must understand our attractions and inclinations in light of the vision of who we are - our truest identity. We do not understand who we are in light of our attractions. To establish our identity based on our sexual attractions is to limit our horizon, to reduce the human person, and consequently, to obscure the fullness of love which alone fulfills the restless desire of the human heart. Our sexual identity can never be separated from the image of God deeply inscribed in the union of our body and soul.

The vision of the Good Shepherd for life, love, and sexuality touches deeply the core of the human person. It is not about protecting mere rules. Neither is it about giving simplistic answers to the realities and challenges of human life. It is about protecting our truest identity and source of joy - that we are loved uniquely and individually by God the Father and by his Son, Jesus Christ, "who loved us and gave himself for us" (Galatians 2:20). St. Paul himself, in the very passage in which he reveals Jesus Christ's love for his Bride - the Church - as the model of human love, calls this love a profound mystery. Throughout the letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul points to the need for wisdom, prayer, and conversion to fully enter the mysteries of the faith. This is our work. All of us, without exception and no matter what our individual experiences of sexual identity and attractions may be, have had our deepest identity as sons and daughters of our Creator and Father obscured by sin.

But the conviction of the Christian faith, and one that is confirmed in the lives of countless Christians who live it, is that there is nothing, absolutely nothing that can match the joy of love lived according to the plan and image of the one who first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:19). There is nothing at all that can match the truly abundant joy and life that comes when we resonate with the love for which we were made.

This is the whole truth of the human person that guides the Church's pastoral care, marked, as we will see, by unconditional love, welcome, and accompanying. Sexual and gender identity concerns remain complex and not fully understood. They are not experienced in exactly the same way by all who navigate such concerns. This can create a certain complexity even in the terminology that is used. It is critical to remember, however, that at the heart of these issues lie persons - loved by God, and desiring love - whose experience of navigating gender identity questions can often be isolating, accompanied by fear and anxiety. Into this potentially painful reality, the Church's pastoral care must enter, meeting these persons in the midst of the difficult terrain they face, accompanying them with an understanding heart, accurate knowledge, and a sound and whole vision of the person on the path to holiness and fullness of life and joy that Christ promises and makes possible to all.

In this final section we would like to speak to some of the practical questions of welcoming and accompanying the students entrusted to our care who are navigating questions of sexual identity - whether these be questions of same-sex attraction or gender identity. We will set these questions within the larger context of the Church's vision of pastoral care.

PASTORAL CARE AND SEXUAL IDENTITY: WELCOMING AND ACCOMPANYING WITH THE HEART OF CHRIST

The image of God as shepherd of his people recurs throughout the Sacred Scripture and forms for us the meaning and model of pastoral care. Ultimately, the work of pastoral care is the work of God the Son - Jesus Christ - the one Good Shepherd who is always working to gather his beloved flock back to the Father through himself.

From the image of God as shepherd in the Sacred Scripture, there are a number of important and ultimately inseparable dimensions of pastoral care that emerge. First, there is the deep care and unconditional love that God has for each and every member of his flock. He is the one who knows the sheep and calls each by name (John 10:3). He seeks out even the one lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7). He has compassion on the people who come to him "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). In the final book of the Bible, the shepherd himself promises to "wipe every tear from [our] eyes" (Revelation 7:17).

Driven by this great love for each of us, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, not only calls his own to himself, but goes out to all wherever they are, no matter the trouble they are in, no matter the reason, accompanying and protecting them, even carrying them in his arms when necessary. The beautiful 23rd psalm speaks of his rod and staff that comfort and protect, even in the valley of darkness. The prophet Isaiah describes God as the shepherd who gathers the young and weak in his arms (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus himself tells us that the Good Shepherd protects the flock from wolves and thieves, and from false shepherds whose voices do not ultimately lead to life-giving streams and green pastures (cf. John 10:7-15).

In this work of going out to those in need, protecting, and accompanying them, the Good Shepherd's pastoral care has a purpose, a destination. It is not aimless wandering. Jesus speaks of the true sheepfold (John 10:7-9). The 23rd psalm describes the living waters, green pastures, paths of righteousness, and ultimately, the dwelling place of God.

Finally, however much we may truly share in the pastoral work of the Good Shepherd, the true shepherd is ultimately Christ alone. He is the one sent by God the Father to invite back the Father's beloved children after the tragic entry of sin and death into human life. It is his compassionate voice that that we must hear and his merciful voice alone that can lead the sheep through sin and death. All who enter the sheepfold by him will be saved (John 10:9).

These dimensions of the Church's pastoral care form an inseparable whole. If any of the dimensions are missing, not only will our care of God's chosen ones be incomplete, but we may also, however unintended, become the voice that leads God's flock away from true and abundant life and joy. If we are not clear and committed to the full vision of human life - the flourishing of the human person and the meaning of human sexuality - we risk leading those in our care astray. As the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith firmly and rightly notes: “Departure from the Church’s teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral.”¹⁷ Continuing, the Letter acknowledges the fundamental importance of this guiding vision: “Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral.” In essence, these are but the words of Christ himself, who said: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). At the same time, if our pastoral care does not reach each and every person with Christ’s unconditional love and acceptance, we risk obscuring the great love that our Father and Creator has for each of his precious children, bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20) - the blood of his Son Jesus Christ.

From the Sacred Scriptures, then, we can say that there are four principal and inseparable elements that together form an authentic Christian pastoral care after the model of the Good Shepherd. We will use these four dimensions to organize some practical guidance for approaching the pastoral care of students entrusted to us.

1. All authentic pastoral care begins with and is continually guided by the vision of the human person, love, and sexuality.

Authentic pastoral care must always be guided by the vision of the human person, love, and sexuality passed on by the Catholic faith. Without this, our journeying with, our accompanying, our acceptance and inclusion risks not only remaining superficial, but even leading students away from the path of abundant life and joy. As the life of any healthy family can attest, unconditional loving acceptance is not opposed to offering moral and spiritual guidance. Jesus himself models such care.

And so we make this appeal to all involved in the education and pastoral care of students navigating questions of sexual identity: know and strive to understand the vision of the human person and sexuality taught by the Church. Understand how it is that the Catholic faith always offers a welcome acceptance to persons - an unconditional “yes” - even as the vision and promise says “no” to certain actions and behaviours. This is the way of Jesus Christ. This is the way of all human growth and formation. Always remember that it is the conviction of the Catholic faith and the lived experiences of countless Christians both throughout history and living today that this vision, though demanding, is the path that leads to abundant life and joy, that alone responds to the deepest longings of the human heart.

Teaching the whole truth, however, does not mean indiscriminately presenting information with no concern for how the message is communicated, in what order and quantity, and at what time. This is not the way of human formation, pedagogy, or the model given by Christ himself. Christ’s encounter with the Woman at the Well in John 4 offers us something of a model. Beginning from a simple interaction and conversation, Jesus gradually speaks to her of God, and then of grace, only finally indicating the moral dimensions of her life, which she is then able to see in light of her encounter with Christ.

The skill and discernment of educators and those who provide pastoral care is to know how to gradually unfold the Church’s vision of life and love to individuals in their concrete circumstances. To meet them in whatever circumstances they find themselves and then lead them toward Christ’s vision of the fullness of life.

¹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (October 1, 1986), n. 15.

Terminology: Finding an Appropriate Language for Speaking of Sexual Identity

As we have acknowledged, questions of sexual identity require serious reflection. They touch closely the meaning and expression of human love, which lies at the core of human life. This need for serious reflection is true even for questions of terminology. The Catholic faith sees all human beings as persons whose fundamental identity lies in God - our Creator.

Today, the Church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person when she refuses to consider the person as a “heterosexual” or a “homosexual” and insists that every person has a fundamental identity: the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life.¹⁸

This passage could also be applied to gender terminology such as transgender and cisgender. In her pastoral care, the Church encounters people - individuals - not labels and categories. Individuals are more complex than labels can reflect. This is always true, and is even more acutely true in the period of adolescence. As the bishops of Canada recently expressed:

The terms “gay” and “lesbian” are not used to define people in the Church’s official teachings and documents. Although these words are common terms in current speech, and many people use them to describe themselves, they do not describe persons with the fullness and richness that the Church recognizes and respects in every man or woman. Instead, “gay” and “lesbian” are often cultural definitions for people and movements that have accepted homosexual acts and behaviours as morally good.¹⁹

Ultimately, we speak of persons experiencing a same-sex attraction, or persons who are navigating questions of gender or sexual identity. In the developmental stage of adolescence in particular, these experiences may be episodic or transient. They may also persist past adolescence. Speaking of “sexual orientation” or founding a person’s identity in labels such as transgender in the adolescent stage of development is therefore particularly problematic and should be avoided. Not only does it fail to reflect the possibility of episodic or transient same-sex feelings or gender confusion that can accompany this period of human development, but, more generally, it tends, in a manner similar to all labels and categories, to reduce the human person to one exclusive characteristic.

Understanding the Particular Characteristics of Sexual Identity in Adolescents

This resource is not intended to address the complex and debated question of the origins and development of same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. For those involved in pastoral care, however, it is important to have access to reliable information about the general affective and psychological development and maturing of the human person through the adolescent stage, as well as the characteristics of same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria and their development in adolescence. One should be attentive that not all materials in this area will consider the human person from the holistic and unified perspective of the Catholic faith. Seeking out professionals in the field of psychology, sociology, and social work who are guided by a Christian vision of the person and sexuality can help one integrate this information into the broader vision of the faith.

¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (October 1, 1986), n. 16.

¹⁹ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine, *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction* (June 2011), n. 2.

Of fundamental importance to the pastoral care of adolescents, however, is the basic point that anxiety and confusion about sexual identity can be an expected and normal element in this period of development. The experience of a same-sex attraction or questions about one's gender identity at an adolescent stage is not, therefore, in and of itself, a confirmation of a persistent or permanent reality, and any suggestion or practice tending to confirm or reinforce these attractions as permanent and enduring would be premature and thus a disservice to the student's ongoing growth and development.

The most appropriate pastoral care at this stage of development is thus individual - one-on-one care - and not group settings. Emphasis should be placed on growth in the foundations of the spiritual and moral life, and on the normal affective growth and maturing that come to all through solid and chaste friendships, acts of charity, and community involvement. Those involved in the pastoral care of adolescents should be particularly attentive to the pervasive exposure of students to a cultural view of sexuality marked by a certain superficiality and an attractive permissiveness, ultimately lacking in the foundational connection between human sexuality and marriage.

2. The pastoral care of the Church must reach out to all with an unconditional love.

There are no exceptions to this. There is no one who falls outside the love and saving power of God. And there is nothing at all that a person can do that would make God love him or her more or less.

In our actions and attitudes, the starting point of all pastoral care is the inherent value of each and every individual human being and the response of unconditional love that this value demands. This, in fact, is the distinctly Christian vision: that every person, from the child in the womb to the dying person, no matter what, is uniquely created and loved by God. It is because of his love that God holds out for each of us, as the prophet Jeremiah says, "plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Pope Benedict XVI in his first letter to the whole Church spoke of the "look of love" that each of us craves, insisting that only by our own ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ - coming to see with his eyes - can we offer this look to others.

Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern... Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave... If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God.²⁰

This is the disposition for we must pray when we stand before every one of our brothers and sisters.

Understanding the Experience and Perspective of the Student

In approaching this work of pastoral care, it is important to understand as best one can the experience and perspective of the student who is navigating questions of sexual or gender identity. In the midst of often charged cultural and political debates one must never lose sight of the person, who can often be in a vulnerable and painful situation.

²⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* On Christian Love (December 25, 2005), n. 18.

Facing confusion about one's sexual identity can be an isolating experience, accompanied by feelings of fear and anxiety, even shame and guilt. Without support, this experience can be a very difficult event for a young person. They are sometimes victims of rejection and abuse, both within and outside of school. When issues of prejudice and bullying are not addressed or when little or no support is offered, schools can even be a hostile place. Without the support of family, friends, the local parish and school communities, young people can feel isolated and overcome by the challenges presented by same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. They can feel isolated from intimate human relationships and constantly in fear of being discovered and rejected. While feelings of isolation and rejection may at times be experienced by all adolescents, for students facing questions of sexual identity, these feelings can be more prevalent and intense, placing them at risk.

The experience of confusion and fear, isolation and rejection in this area can lead a person to fundamental questions about their self-worth and ability to love. Is my entire capacity for life and love fundamentally broken? Am I incapable of love? Am I even worthy of love? Am I worthless? In an attempt to escape the pain of isolation, fear, and anxiety, some students may choose to leave their homes, schools, and community to live in volatile situations where violence, illness and exploitation are common realities. Even for those who do remain at home, they can experience depression and other mental health issues. For these reasons, these students are at a higher risk for suicidal thoughts and attempts.

It is into this potentially dark and painful experience that the Church's pastoral care must enter. Here, the words of Pope Francis ring true.

I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.²¹

It can take a long time and much accompaniment to heal wounds and to lead people to the fuller perspective of life that our Creator offers to each of us in love. But this is the work of pastoral care. It is marked by an understanding heart, unconditional love, accurate knowledge, a sound vision, and a gentle guidance toward Jesus Christ himself, who alone can truly reveal to us the love that defines our life and identity, and our irreplaceable place in his plan.

Condemning All Forms of Hatred, Abuse, and Violence

It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.²²

With these strong words, which apply just as firmly to any question of sexual or gender identity, the Church's magisterium states a fundamental teaching of the Catholic faith: The only acceptable attitude toward another human being is love. There are no exceptions.

²¹ Pope Francis, "A Big Heart Open to God," *America Magazine*, September 30, 2013.

²² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (October 1, 1986), n. 10.

Catholic teaching on human life, love, and sexuality, is in no way an obstacle to building a safe, inclusive, and welcoming school for all students. On the contrary, the Catholic faith offers a substantial account of human dignity, respect, and acceptance, of moral action and character, in defence of the right of students to attend school without fear of harassment and violence.

Derogatory remarks or jokes, name-calling or harassment in the school are not to be tolerated. The school should enforce clear policies against any form of harassment and act immediately when it happens, with the necessary and appropriate disciplinary response. It must be clear, at the level of policy as well as overall school culture that no form of harassment, abuse, cruelty, or bullying against students navigating questions of sexual identity is acceptable within a Catholic school community. While this commitment to the dignity of the person is broad-based and includes all students who may be marginalized for any reason, harassment of students experiencing same-sex attractions or gender identity questions will not be tolerated in staff rooms, classrooms, in hallways, or anywhere on school property. The imperative for such a commitment is grounded not primarily in legislation, but in the Catholic vision of the human person.

Following the counsel of the Canadian bishops, it is important also to be conscious of the effects of even subtle forms of exclusion, rejection, or reproving silence.

Take the time to examine your own interior dispositions towards people with same-sex attraction. With the help of God's grace, work hard to remove whatever may prevent you from welcoming them warmly. Be aware that your language and attitudes can inadvertently communicate a message that has nothing to do with the Church's authentic teaching.²³

Christians must not only actively work to overcome hatred and violence with a firm stand of love, but they must also work to heal the wounds and harm caused by this violence, recognizing the tragic consequences that befall vulnerable students when harassment and violence are left unchecked.

3. Pastoral care must meet a person wherever they are along the path of their spiritual and moral life.

In the midst of whatever pain, confusion, sin, or weakness a person is experiencing, charity calls us to pastorally go out and address their needs. Then, with its sight firmly set on the vision of the flourishing human person set before us by our Creator - a vision of holiness and perfection in charity - our pastoral care accompanies the person along the path of spiritual and moral growth, healing, and transforming union with Christ. Along the way, authentic pastoral care protects from dangers and false paths, providing at the same time the means of encouragement and strength for the journey - the living water and support of the sacraments, prayer and the reading of Scripture, spiritual direction and spiritual reading, friendship, and growth in the moral and theological virtues.

Friendship

As John Paul II wrote: "Man cannot live without love." All human beings need relationships marked by intimacy. Unfortunately, intimacy is too often equated with romantic or sexual activity. But as healthy family relationships and friendships attest, intimacy is much broader than sexual contact.

²³ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine, *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction* (June 2011), n. 13.

In our pastoral care, helping students experiencing same-sex attractions to grow in mature, chaste, and strong friendships with both sexes is of tremendous importance. The alternative is potential isolation, with all the negative fruits that this will bring. It is precisely such isolation that can lead students to seek out others, both within and outside of the school, who will simply affirm their sexual and gender experiences as their core identity, offering them an immediate feeling of emotional relief and acceptance. All human beings need the growth and intimacy that come through deep friendships. In fact, the formation of friendships, together with the opportunity for maturation and development they offer, is characteristic of adolescence - this period of life before marriage is an imminent prospect for any person. Friendship, of course, is not something that can be implemented by policy. However, schools and parishes can create opportunities for bringing students together that enable friendships to form. It is a work that requires time and wisdom, but lies at the heart of healing wounds.

Students in our Catholic schools are still growing up, and marriage is not an imminent prospect. They are called to develop true friendships, marked by genuine love and affection, with members of both sexes. This involves learning to communicate about important things, developing their own gifts and learning to cherish the gifts of others, and engaging in a wide variety of wholesome activities together. This time should also be devoted to discerning the future unfolding of personal vocation.²⁴

Growth is Gradual

As is true in all human life, it is important to remember that rarely, if ever, does a person go from hurt to healing, or from a life marked by vices and sins to one of virtue and grace in one step. The moral and spiritual life is a work that involves time and gradual growth. This can make pastoral care quite challenging, as there can often be more failures than successes, more stalling than movement.

The Church speaks of the pastoral law of gradualness, which does not at all mean that God's law applies only gradually or piecemeal to different people at different times. Rather, the law of gradualness requires a decisive "break with sin together with a progressive path towards total union with the will of God and with his loving demands," leaning always and at every moment on the pillars of the spiritual life that we will outline below.²⁵ This applies especially to the work of growing in the virtue of chastity. There are no quick solutions to serious human challenges.

Assessing Moral Responsibility Along the Path of Growth

As we have noted, the path of gradual growth always and of necessity requires first a decisive break with sin. For sin, by its very nature, is an act that turns us away from the path to God. In the pastoral care of students experiencing same-sex attractions, we must be clear that acting on such attractions, engaging in sexual activity, pornography, and masturbation are never acceptable actions.

²⁴ Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Letter to All Involved in Catholic Education* (March 31, 2003), p. 3.

²⁵ "The pastoral 'law of gradualness,' not to be confused with the 'gradualness of the law' which would tend to diminish the demands it places on us, consists of requiring a decisive break with sin together with a progressive path towards total union with the will of God and with his loving demands." Pontifical Council for the Family, *Vademecum For Confessors Concerning Some Aspects Of The Morality Of Conjugal Life* (February 12, 1997), n. 9. The *Vademecum* here cites the following passage from *Familiaris consortio*: "'the law of gradualness' or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with 'gradualness of the law', as if there were different degrees or forms of precept in God's law for different individuals and situations." Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (November 22, 1981), n. 34. See also Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993), nn. 103-105.

At the same time, an individual's moral responsibility for a given sin is always connected to its being chosen in freedom. The complexity of the affective and psychological dimensions of the human person can lead to varying degrees of freedom behind the choices we make, and thus varying levels of moral responsibility, or culpability, for the actions we do. As the Church's magisterium writes:

Here, the Church's wise moral tradition is necessary since it warns against generalizations in judging individual cases. In fact, circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance; or other circumstances may increase it. What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behaviour of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable.²⁶

This is ultimately why our Lord tells us not to judge others. Jesus Christ always judged concrete behaviours and actions as good and evil. He continually warns people against sin, and he continues this work through his Church. At the same time, knowing that only he - God - could fully know and judge the interior freedom with which a person acts, and thus their individual moral responsibility for the action, he reminds us that we are not to judge the hearts of any person, no matter their action. This is a great mercy for us all.

On the Assistance of Counselling

The human person is an essential unity of body and soul. Care we give to the body redounds to the soul, and spiritual care always redounds also to the body. To care for a human person, in other words, is always to care for someone who is a union of body and soul. And so, there are times when the pastoral caregiver must be alert to the need for specialized forms of care that can better address the different and complex dimensions of the person. Counselling is one such form of care. As the Canadian bishops write in a passage that can be applied equally to students facing gender dysphoria:

Counselling can be a valuable tool for struggling youth, who may experience a crisis as they grow increasingly aware of homosexual feelings. Young people, particularly adolescents and young men, may be tempted to commit suicide once they can no longer deny or ignore their deep-seated same-sex inclinations. Everyone must be alert to offer hope and assistance to these young people lest despair obscure their judgment. Ensure that professional counsellors or psychologists who see young people are distinguished by their sound human and spiritual maturity. They must be committed to the Christian vision of the human person and sexuality, as well as the Church's teaching on homosexuality and chastity. Their interventions can help your child discern the meaning of a same-sex attraction in a way that leads to greater clarity about sexual identity and the inherent dignity of all children of God.²⁷

²⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (October 1, 1986), n. 11.

²⁷ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine, *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction* (June 2011), n. 15.

4. For pastoral care to be effective, Jesus Christ, the true shepherd, must be known and his voice heard.

It is the voice of the Good Shepherd alone that has the words of life (John 6:68). The importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ cannot be overstated. This is the essential meaning of the new evangelization and a point that Pope Francis has emphasized on numerous occasions, including in reference to the challenging teachings of Christ. Without a relationship with Christ, it can be difficult to recognize Christ's vision for the joy and flourishing of the human person - the aim of his moral and spiritual teachings and of his Church's pastoral care. Pope Francis' words echo those spoken by St. John Paul II: "Religion itself, without the experience of wondrous discovery of the son of God and communion with him who became our brother, becomes a mere set of principles which are increasingly difficult to understand and rules which are increasingly hard to accept."²⁸

To the extent that our pastoral care does not ultimately aim at a relationship with Jesus Christ - to know him and hear his voice - our work is at best incomplete, and at worst misguided. As Catholic educators and as the Church's pastors, this would be our greatest failure - that Jesus Christ was never known by the students entrusted to our care. This also means that we who take up the work of pastoral care must seek ourselves to know Christ more fully and deeply. If Christ is to be our model of pastoral care, if we are to model our love after his, then we must know him intimately.

The meaning of human sexuality that the Church holds in trust is not a set of arbitrary rules based on antiquated notions of the human person. It is a promise from our Creator that will be heard most clearly and convincingly when it is the very voice of the Good Shepherd that speaks it directly to the heart.

If we are to heal wounds, if we are to accompany students, we must know the medicine that truly heals and the food that truly strengthens. We must teach them the spiritual life. Living the elements of the spiritual life requires guidance and direction. The foundations of this life should be proposed to students with the same wisdom and discernment that guides all of our efforts at forming the young. They are offered gradually, proportioned to each student, and always in the context of a relationship of trust.

- **Daily Prayer** - from the simplest of memorized or vocal prayers to the depths of meditation on Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and in the Blessed Sacrament, a set time of daily prayer - even fifteen minutes a day - will gradually reveal wonderful fruit in a person's life.
- **The Mass** - The Mass is the source and summit of the entire Christian life. The Eucharist is fully and truly the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. By this Communion with the Good Shepherd himself, we are formed in his image and come to know ever more clearly the abundant life and joy he gives.
- **Reading the Sacred Scripture** - The Bible is our personal history. It is the fullest story of our life and its meaning. But most importantly, it is the living Word of God. Reading and meditating on the Scriptures is a sure means of coming to know Jesus Christ. As St. Jerome rightly wrote: "Ignorance of Scripture, is ignorance of Christ."
- **Spiritual Reading** - Carefully chosen classic and contemporary works that open up the spiritual life can offer great strength and wise insight into the struggles and challenges of faithfully living the Gospel.

²⁸ Pope John Paul II, Address to the Young People of Eurasia University in Kazakhstan (September 23, 2001), n. 4.

- **The Sacrament of Reconciliation** - Here is the great “field hospital” of the Church. Here is where Jesus Christ himself, through his shepherds, heals wounds and warm hearts. A regular confessor with whom to celebrate the sacrament of Penance, or Reconciliation, is an absolutely indispensable pillar of the spiritual life.
- **Devotion to Our Blessed Mother Mary and the Saints** - The rosary can be a most wonderful and powerful means of gaining peace of heart and the comfort of our one Mother. The lives of the saints reflect most clearly what it means to shape our lives after the image of Jesus Christ. Moreover, their prayers for us sustain us in our own work of becoming the image of God.
- **Concrete Works of Charity and Sacrifice** - This can be in the school, parish, or even within the student’s own family. Such concrete acts of self-giving and sacrifice build the virtues in us little by little. They can also offer an authentic sense of contribution to something outside of and bigger than oneself - an essential element of gaining a true perspective on our lives.

Finally, in all things and at all times, no matter how often we fail or how hard the struggle becomes, we must never grow discouraged! This is the wisdom of the saints and of Christians throughout history. We keep our eyes set on our goal, and we pray that gradually, as we grow in union with Christ, we may know the fruits of having his Spirit in us - the fruits described by St. Paul in the letter to the Galatians: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

Conclusion

In this document we have attempted both to offer concrete pastoral guidance for the care of students navigating questions of same-sex attraction and gender identity, while at the same time, setting this guidance within the broader context of the Catholic understanding of human life, love, and sexuality. It is our hope that this resource might help you in your work of education, formation, and pastoral care of the students entrusted to you.

In the end, a document such as this cannot by itself completely fulfill the challenge of implementing authentic pastoral care. Thus an integral element of this resource document will always be the ongoing close cooperation between the pastors of the Church, educators, and parents. Neither can such a document adequately acknowledge and thank the countless Catholic educators in Ontario who, responding to a true vocation as a teacher, have given so much of their lives to their students out of love, in the hope that they too will come to know the surpassing joy of knowing Jesus Christ, and of seeing the fullest horizon and possibilities of their life.

One could say that Christianity is about many things – being good, helping others, loving God. These are all absolutely true. But at the heart of the Catholic Christian faith lies a promise. It is a promise given by our Father and Creator of abundant life and indescribable and glorious joy. This promise is for every single person that God has made. No matter what. No matter what challenges or failings, strengths or weaknesses one has. No matter what one has done or left undone. As St. Paul so forcefully reminds us: nothing “in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

This is the guiding star of the entire moral and spiritual vision that Christ has left to his Church, and it is the guiding star of the Church's pastoral care. The Christian vision of sexuality *is* challenging. At the same time, it is the path to life-giving joy and peace of heart. This is the conviction of the Catholic faith - witnessed to by Christians throughout history and alive today. The Christian message of sexuality is about life-giving joy. This is why the Church proposes it and defends it. This is why it is worth living for and sacrificing for. Most importantly, it is a promise that, with Christ's assistance, is possible to live. Speaking to those who would present the Church's vision as merely an ideal, one that practically might even be impossible to live, John Paul II echoes the words of St. Paul: Do not empty the cross of its power! (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17)

Only in the mystery of Christ's Redemption do we discover the "concrete" possibilities of man. "It would be a very serious error to conclude... that the Church's teaching is essentially only an "ideal" which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called concrete possibilities of man, according to a "balancing of the goods in question." But what are the "concrete possibilities of man?" And of which man are we speaking? Of man dominated by lust or of man redeemed by Christ? This is what is at stake: the reality of Christ's redemption. Christ has redeemed us! This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing the entire truth of our being.²⁹

This is not a promise of an easy path through life. But rather, a promise that Christ is with us at every step (Matthew 28:20), helping us to carry our burdens and even making them his own.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light (Matthew 11:28).

²⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993), n. 103.

Resources

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, 1999.

The *Catechism* is the sure and definitive reference point for articulating what the Catholic Church teaches and believes. In its structure and content it is intended to be comprehensive and complete while remaining concise. The second edition, published in 1999, was revised in accordance with the definitive Latin edition, and is thus the standard edition in use today.

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2005.

The *Compendium* is essentially a shorter summary of the contents of the full *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Faithfully reflecting the full *Catechism* in structure and content, it is intended to synthesize - using a very accessible question-and-answer format - the beliefs and life of the Catholic Church.

Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church (YOUCAT), Ignatius Press, 2010

The [YOUCAT Catechism](#) is similar in many respects to the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. With reference numbers back to the original *Catechism*, it presents the beliefs and life of the Catholic Church in language geared to young people. As such, it can be an excellent teaching resource.

Pontifical Council for the Family. *Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive. A Preparatory Catechesis for the World Meeting of Families 2015*. Our Sunday Visitor, 2014.

[Freely available online from the World Meeting of Families website](#), this short book serves as an excellent introduction to the Catholic vision of sexuality and love. Very highly recommended.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* (May 31, 2004).

This excellent document presents a succinct and accessible summary of the meaning of the human person's creation as man and woman. In doing so, it provides a short synthesis of the catechesis of John Paul II on the meaning of the human body, love, and sexuality in the divine plan.

Pope John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor*, Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching (August 6, 1993).

Veritatis splendor is an important magisterial document on fundamental concepts of morality, including: the meaning of the moral life and its relation to Jesus Christ, the meaning of freedom, law, sin, conscience, and grace.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (October 1, 1986).

An excellent and concise summary of the Catholic vision behind the Church's teaching on homosexuality, as well as the key dimensions of the pastoral care of persons with same-sex attraction.

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine. *Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction* (June 2011).

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine. *Pastoral Letter to Young People on Chastity* (January 2011).

Pontifical Council for the Family. *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family* (December 8, 1995).

A comprehensive treatment of the education and formation of the young in human sexuality, including: the meaning of human love and sexuality, chastity and growth in chastity, the work of parents in educating their children in human sexuality and chastity, with concrete principles on communicating these messages at the various stages of childhood development.

RESOURCES ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

Christopher West. *Theology of the Body for Beginners*. Revised Edition. Ascension Press, 2009.

An excellent introduction to the main themes of St. John Paul II's teachings on human life and sexuality in the Theology of the Body.

Butler, Brian, Jason Evert, Colin Maclver, and Aimee Maclver. *Theology of the Body for Teens: Discovering God's Plan for Love and Life*. Ascension Press, 2011.

Excellent resource for connecting John Paul II's teachings to high school students.

Yarhouse, Mark. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

An important Christian writer in the area of gender identity is the clinical psychologist Dr. Mark Yarhouse. Yarhouse writes with professional competence, humility, and pastoral insight. This work offers a helpful overview of both terminology and the complexity of factors that contribute to gender dysphoria. InterVarsity Press offers [the first chapter of this book as a free sample here](#). Yarhouse has also written extensively on same-sex attraction.

Living the Truth in Love: Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction. Edited by Janet Smith and Paul Check. Ignatius Press, 2015.

An excellent resource for teachers featuring a selection of the most important Catholic voices on the topic of homosexuality, including a number of Catholic men and women who themselves live with same-sex attraction.

Courage Apostolate - <http://couragerc.org>

The Courage apostolate website offers an extensive selection of resources related to the topic of the Church's pastoral care of persons with same-sex attraction. Three resources to note in particular are:

1. [Desire of the Everlasting Hills](#) - An outstanding documentary video from the Courage apostolate featuring the stories of three men and women navigating their faith and same-sex attraction.
2. [Invited to Courageous Love: The Catholic Church and Homosexuality](#) - A new 5-part catechetical series covering the full range of Catholic teaching, from the meaning of human sexuality to pastoral care.
3. [Authentic Truth and Compassion](#) - A helpful introduction to the Catholic vision of pastoral care and same-sex attraction.

Chastity Project - <http://chastityproject.com>

Offers a wealth of practical resources for the work of education and formation in chastity and human sexuality.

Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) - www.colf.ca

Co-founded by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Knights of Columbus, COLF offers a wealth of material on topics of family life and sexuality.

Appendix: Some Foundational Terms and Concepts in the Church's Moral Teaching

In this section we offer a brief selection of passages from the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a reference for some of the fundamental moral concepts that we have presented over the course of this document. As we noted in the Resources section, the *Compendium* is essentially a shorter summary of the contents of the full *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Faithfully reflecting the full *Catechism* in structure and content, it is intended to synthesize - using a question-and-answer format - the beliefs and life of the Catholic Church. In addition to these passages from the *Compendium*, references are provided to the even fuller descriptions offered in the full *Catechism* as well as other important teaching documents of the Church's magisterium.

The Dignity of the Human Person and the Meaning of the Moral Life

We begin by recalling the concise yet comprehensive summary of the meaning of the Christian moral life that is found in the full *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 1700.

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfillment. By his deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. With the help of grace they grow in virtue, avoid sin, and if they sin they entrust themselves as did the prodigal son to the mercy of our Father in heaven. In this way they attain to the perfection of charity.

See also: *Gaudium et spes* nn. 12-22

The Natural Law (also called the Natural Moral Law)

Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 1949-1960

Veritatis splendor nn. 35-53

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 415-416

415. What is the moral law?

The moral law is a work of divine Wisdom. It prescribes the ways and the rules of conduct that lead to the promised beatitude and it forbids the ways that turn away from God.

416. In what does the natural moral law consist?

The natural law which is inscribed by the Creator on the heart of every person consists in a participation in the wisdom and the goodness of God. It expresses that original moral sense which enables one to discern by reason the good and the bad. It is universal and immutable and determines the basis of the duties and fundamental rights of the person as well as those of the human community and civil law.

The New Law (or Law of the Gospel)

Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 1965-1974

Veritatis splendor nn. 22-24

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 420-421

420. What is the New Law or the Law of the Gospel?

The New Law or the Law of the Gospel, proclaimed and fulfilled by Christ, is the fullness and completion of the divine law, natural and revealed. It is summed up in the commandment to love God and neighbor and to love one another as Christ loved us. It is also an interior reality: the grace of the Holy Spirit which makes possible such love. It is “the law of freedom” (Galatians 1:25) because it inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity. “The New Law is mainly the same grace of the Holy Spirit which is given to believers in Christ.” (Saint Thomas Aquinas)

421. Where does one find the New Law?

The New Law is found in the entire life and preaching of Christ and in the moral catechesis of the apostles. The Sermon on the Mount is its principal expression.

Grace

Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 1996-2005

Veritatis splendor nn. 22-24; 102-105

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 423-425

423. What is the grace that justifies?

That grace is the gratuitous gift that God gives us to make us participants in his trinitarian life and able to act by his love. It is called habitual, sanctifying or deifying grace because it sanctifies and divinizes us. It is supernatural because it depends entirely on God’s gratuitous initiative and surpasses the abilities of the intellect and the powers of human beings. It therefore escapes our experience.

424. What other kinds of grace are there?

Besides habitual grace, there are actual graces (gifts for specific circumstances), sacramental graces (gifts proper to each sacrament), special graces or charisms (gifts that are intended for the common good of the Church) among which are the graces of state that accompany the exercise of ecclesial ministries and the responsibilities of life.

425. What is the relationship between grace and human freedom?

Grace precedes, prepares and elicits our free response. It responds to the deep yearnings of human freedom, calls for its cooperation and leads freedom toward its perfection.

Conscience

Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 1776-1802

Veritatis splendor nn. 54-64, 73-74

Gaudium et spes nn. 16-17; *Dignitas humanae* nn. 3, 14

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 372-376

372. What is the moral conscience?

Moral conscience, present in the heart of the person, is a judgment of reason which at the appropriate moment enjoins him to do good and to avoid evil. Thanks to moral conscience, the human person perceives the moral quality of an act to be done or which has already been done, permitting him to assume responsibility for the act. When attentive to moral conscience, the prudent person can hear the voice of God who speaks to him or her.

374. How is a moral conscience formed to be upright and truthful?

An upright and true moral conscience is formed by education and by assimilating the Word of God and the teaching of the Church. It is supported by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and helped by the advice of wise people. Prayer and an examination of conscience can also greatly assist one's moral formation.

Virtue

Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 1762-1770, 1803-1832

Veritatis splendor n. 64

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church nn. 377-390

377. What is a virtue?

A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. "The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa). There are human virtues and theological virtues.

378-379. What are the human virtues?

The human virtues are habitual and stable perfections of the intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They are acquired and strengthened by the repetition of morally good acts and they are purified and elevated by divine grace. The principal human virtues are called the cardinal virtues, under which all the other virtues are grouped and which are the hinges of a virtuous life. The cardinal virtues are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

384-385. What are the theological virtues?

The theological virtues have God himself as their origin, motive and direct object. Infused with sanctifying grace, they bestow on one the capacity to live in a relationship with the Trinity. They are the foundation and the energizing force of the Christian's moral activity and they give life to the human virtues. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity.

389. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are permanent dispositions which make us docile in following divine inspirations. They are seven: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

390. What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit?

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are perfections formed in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (Galatians 5:22-23, Vulgate).