

Family Life/Human Sexuality
FORMATION
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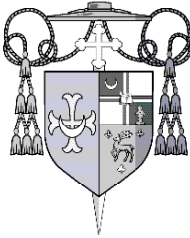
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DIOCESE OF TRENTON
701 LAWRENCEVILLE ROAD
POST OFFICE BOX 5147
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08638-0147

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 15, 2015
Memorial Feast of St. Albert the Great

DECREE

As Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, recognizing the need for clarity in teaching and handing on the Catholic faith in a variety of ecclesial and pastoral settings, I hereby promulgate these “Family Life/Human Sexuality Formation Guidelines” as normative for use throughout the Diocese of Trenton. They are to be used, as the title suggests, as “guidelines” for the preparation of teaching regarding matters of family life and human sexuality. Such teaching should be adapted, without compromising the truth of its content, to the age and developmental needs and circumstances of the learner and should always recognize and affirm the rights, roles and responsibilities of parents.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Trenton on this, November 15, 2015, the Memorial Feast of St. Albert the Great.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David M. O'Connell, C.M., J.C.D." with a cross above the first name.

*Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M., J.C.D.
Bishop of Trenton*

Family Life/Human Sexuality
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 **INTRODUCTION**

These “Family Life/Human Sexuality Formation Guidelines,” which are normative throughout the Diocese of Trenton, have been designed to assist catechists, Catholic school teachers, and parish leaders in becoming partners with parents who “are the principal and first educators of their children (The Catechism of the Catholic Church or CCC, 1653),” in presenting the Catholic faith through sound Catholic teaching and formation regarding family life/human sexuality. These “Guidelines” should also serve as the basis of the development of programs and pastoral work among adults in all stages of life.

In collaboration with the Diocesan Office of Catholic Education as well as the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection, the Department of Youth, Marriage and Family Life has revised and updated these “Family Life/Human Sexuality Formation Guidelines.”

In addition the official teachings of the Catholic Church, experts within our own Diocese who contributed to the original 2002 “Guidelines” were consulted. Although not exhaustive, these revised “Guidelines” were promulgated as fundamental and normative for all parishes and ministries within the Diocese of Trenton by Bishop David M. O’Connell, C.M., on November 15, 2015, the feast of St. Albert the Great.

✠ PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE FAMILY LIFE/HUMAN SEXUALITY FORMATION

“I/We believe in One God:” Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Blessed Trinity is a community of persons, each distinct but united as One. Every human person, created and made in the image of the Triune God, is by nature relational, a “social being,” called by God to love and be loved.

Each human person is unique and endowed by God with an inherent dignity that must always be respected. Despite the effects of original sin and the consequent loss of the original human state of grace and justice, each human person in all physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions was created by God as good.

Each human person is, by nature, a sexual being from conception to natural death. Human sexuality is a gift of God integral to human personal identity and develops as the human person matures.

Human sexuality is experienced as a sacred human mystery to be understood, respected and lived according to the tenets of the Catholic Church through natural law, Scripture and the Church’s doctrinal and moral teachings all which constitute truth.

Parents “are the principal and first educators of their children (CCC, 1653)” and bear the primary responsibility to teach them, by word and witness, what it means to be a child of God, created in God’s image, and what it means to respect and love themselves and others.

The family home is a “domestic church” where parents pass on human virtues and Christian values. The ‘family of origin’ prepares children for their future vocation by providing role models, values and attitudes that reflect the dignity of the human person and contribute to healthy sexual development. The Diocese of Trenton affirms the following parental rights and responsibilities:

- Catechists and Catholic educators must work collaboratively with parents to help them carry out their responsibilities regarding the formation and guidance of their children especially in the areas of family life/human sexuality.

- Parents have the right to review all print, video and electronic materials prior to the initiation of programs.
- Parents will be informed of all speakers who are invited to present and address subjects related to family life/human sexuality.
- Parents may exempt their child from class during the time when the subject matter of family life/human sexuality by completing written “parental consent forms to opt out.”

The role of the Diocese, the parish, the Catholic school and religious education programs is to assist and complement the responsibility of parents to educate their children, especially in the Catholic faith as it addresses matters of family life/human sexuality.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CATHOLIC TEACHING

All those in the Diocese, the parish, the Catholic schools and parish religious education programs involved in “Family Life/ Human Sexuality Formation” must be formed in Catholic teaching regarding the sanctity and dignity of human life, marriage and family life, and human sexuality. Although not an exhaustive list, among the essential elements of Catholic teaching are included the following:

1. Marriage is a sacrament and an indissoluble covenant of life and love between a man and a woman that is faithful, fruitful and forever. Any other social union or living arrangement, even those approved in civil law, are not considered “marriage” in the Catholic Church.
2. All physical sexual expressions outside the covenant of marriage are considered grave or serious sins by the Catholic Church.
3. The use of pornography is considered grave or serious sin by the Catholic Church.
4. The use of artificial means of contraception or birth control are considered inappropriate by the Catholic Church and,

therefore, must be avoided. The Catholic Church endorses natural methods of family planning. In-vitro fertilization is not approved by the Catholic Church.

5. All human life is sacred and must be respected at every level from conception through natural death. The Catholic Church considers the following as violations of the Fifth Commandment, “Thou Shall Not Kill:” intentional murder; direct abortion or its procurement or performance; embryonic stem-cell research or experimentation; euthanasia or assisted suicide.
6. Respect for human life excludes unjust discrimination or physical, emotional and/or spiritual harm to human persons, including those who are homosexual or whose lifestyles may be at variance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Demonstration of charity and mercy are not the moral equivalent of acceptance of or advocacy for those lifestyles or perspectives.
7. Respect for human life also includes care, concern and compassion for the poor and marginalized, the sick, the immigrant and the elderly. The social teachings of the Catholic Church should be embraced and carefully explained in their fullness when appropriate to the subject at hand.
8. Respect for human life also includes care and concern for the environment as our “common home” and the proper use of the earth’s natural resources and eco-systems for the good of humanity, especially the poor.
9. Respect for life also includes the condemnation of the sexual abuse of minors and otherwise vulnerable populations and using every means possible to ensure their protection.

FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

All those in the Diocese, the parish, the Catholic school and religious education programs involved in Family Life/ Human Sexuality

Formation must aid students in the careful and continuing formation of a correct and informed conscience according to Catholic teaching. A proper understanding of grace and sin is essential to this formation. An informed conscience does not create truth but receives, discerns, accepts and lives by truth as it comes to us through the Catholic understanding of natural law and the Scriptures; Church teaching, tradition and practice; the advice of wise and learned Catholic teachers and human experience all brought to prayer. Conscience should simply not be viewed as the dictate of personal desires, opinion polls or social pressures that run contrary to the Gospels or the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

God's abiding presence and forgiveness is always available to all Catholics through the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance (confession). Catholic students in the Diocese of Trenton should be properly instructed in the method of making an integral confession and given the opportunity to do so in programs offered by the parish, the Catholic school and religious education programs.

INTEGRATION WITH CHILD SAFETY PROGRAMS

In partnership with parents and guardians, “safe environment training” through Diocesan programs approved by the Diocesan Office for Child and Youth Protection and the Office of Catholic Education for employees and volunteers, for students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools, religious education programs and youth-oriented ministries is an integral part of all the Diocese of Trenton’s programs with an outreach to youth as a commitment to foster growth towards personal maturity and living a virtuous, chaste life in relationship with God, with oneself and with others.

At the present time, the Diocese of Trenton has mandated the RCL Benzinger Family Life Program for implementation at the elementary level by 2017. At the secondary level, the Diocese has mandated the “Teen Lures Prevention School Program” by 2016.

CONCLUSION

The work of Family Life/ Human Sexuality formation, accomplished in the light of faith, is important and necessary, especially given the confusion presented by distorted messages in the secular culture. Effective formation will help Catholics to recognize the inherent dignity of each human person and to realize the sacred gift of human sexuality. Effective formation will enable the deepening of relationships with self, others and God that is at the very foundation of family life. The Diocese of Trenton through staff in various offices and departments will provide support and assistance to catechists, pastoral ministers, Catholic schools, and parish religious education programs upon request in order to aid in the accomplishment of this holy work. The Diocesan staff can also give guidance in the selection of suitable speakers on the range of family life and human sexuality topics.

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 **CONTACTS**

Department of Youth Marriage and Family Life
Department of Pastoral Care
Office of Catholic Education
Office of Child and Youth Protection
(609) 406-7400