

Should Parents Forbid Teenage Steady Dating?

By FATHER JOHN L. THOMAS, S.J.
Assistant Professor of Sociology
At St. Louis University

Would you kindly restate your position on steady dating? My wife and I read your column but don't always draw the same practical conclusions from it. Are parents doing right to let their 14 (going on 15)-year-old daughter go steady with a lad of 16? These kids go exclusively with each other and are together two or three times a week. They're good kids — daily communicants — what do you think?



As you have indicated, Joe, I've written on steady dating several times. Since steady dating means different things in different contexts, I've tried to present the basic principles and essential facts that should be kept in mind when reaching a decision about specific cases.

It should be noted that a rational decision in the practical order always represents the logical application of moral principles or premises of values to a set of pertinent social facts. Hence we must understand both the principles and the facts in reaching a practical decision.

What are the pertinent facts? Let's start with what we know about the human agents involved.

The majority of boys and girls in our culture reach puberty roughly between the ages of eleven and fourteen or fifteen. Puberty represents the initial step in the final stage of sexual development.

During this period, normal adolescents become capable of sexual arousal and the reproductive act, together with involvement characteristic of love between men and women. Frequently in the past, and in some countries even today, marriage followed immediately.

In all times and places, moreover, the period is characterized by the beginning of considerable sexual activity either alone or with others.

Consequently, if for various reasons the gap between the completion of puberty and marriage is lengthened, some provision must be made for

regulating sexual activity. Among a few relatively primitive groups, this period is regarded as a time for youthful sexual experiment and freedom.

Among civilized nations, at least until the present, social custom and family supervision carefully regulated the relationships between the unmarried in order to prevent untimely emotional involvement and to keep sexual activity at a minimum. Since our technologically advanced society can endure only an increasing proportion of young people undergoing long years of formal training and education, the gap between puberty and marriage must remain considerable, while morality and common sense dictate that the energies and interests of youth must meanwhile be directed toward formal preparation for life rather than toward emotional involvement and sexual activity.

A further fact to consider is that our society places ma-

for responsibility for the selection of a mate upon young people themselves. Hence there must be opportunities for young people to meet each other and to establish friendships leading to courtship and marriage.

The custom of dating stems from this need. Originally it involved only young people more or less ready for marriage, but recently it has been adopted as a normal form of entertainment also by young adolescents who can have no serious thought of marriage in mind.

Since these socially immature but sexually developed younger adolescents are quite capable of emotional involvements and sexual activities, it should be obvious that this practice not only diverts their energies and interests away from formal preparation for life but also entails serious moral problems.

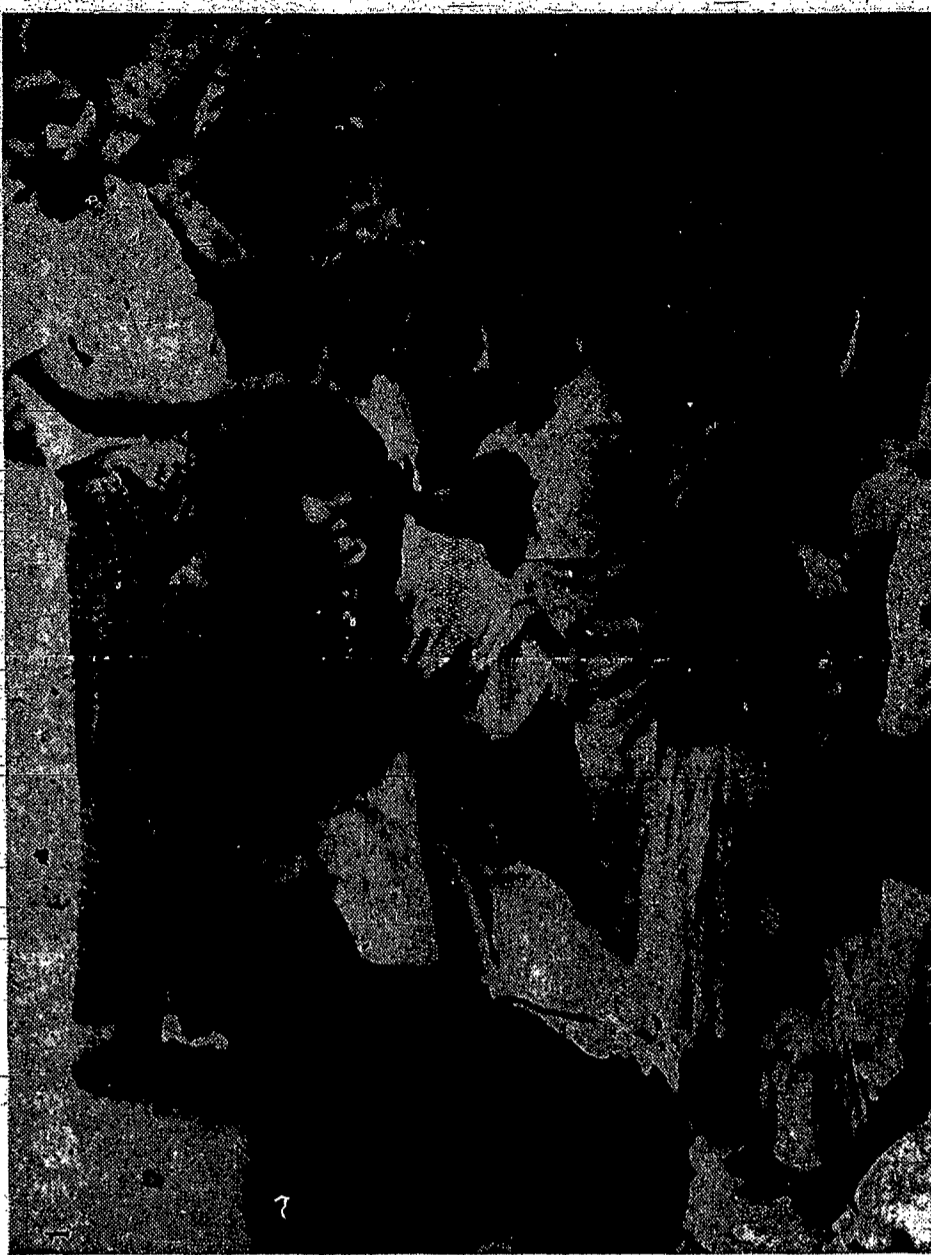
The practice of steady dating must be viewed in the context of these pertinent facts. Hence it is permissible for socially mature young people seriously contemplating marriage. There is no justification for the practice among younger age groups. However, a distinction concerning the meaning of steady dating is pertinent here.

To the extent that modern parents appear either unable or unwilling to supply sufficient entertainment for teen-agers within the extended family circle of relatives and friends, various forms of group activity sponsored either by the school, church, or other organizations have been developed. There need be little objection to such forms of group entertainment provided reasonable attention is paid to supervision, time, place and frequency.

Now if the term steady dating means no more than that a boy and girl can safely rely on each other for dates on such occasions, there can be no objection to the practice. Indeed, it represents merely a normal, convenient, often unexpressed agreement that they will attend group affairs together.

This form of steady dating differs markedly from the current fad in which immature teen-agers ape the exclusive, intimate, affectionate association of engaged couples. This latter form can have no justification.

Well, Joe, I think you know my answer to the case you presented. Parents who tolerate such an affair simply ignore the facts of life.



School Martyrs Mourned in Kerala

Trivandrum, India — (RNS) — Families of those shot during anti-Communist riots in the Indian state of Kerala gather to pray in the street. Eleven persons were killed in demonstrations against a provision of the new Kerala education law that new teachers can be selected only from a list drawn up by the government. E. M. S. Namboodripad, Communist Chief Minister of Kerala who later announced suspension of the provision, said his government thought police were justified in firing on the crowds.

Faith Sustains Cancer Victims

Delphos, Ohio — (NCY) — In 1937, the same year that Susan, now 2, had her left eye removed. Dorothy, 6, and Barbara, 5, have normal eyesight.

Retinoblastoma — cancer of the eye — afflicted the three youngest, though the parents were told there was little chance that the same thing would happen if there were more chil-

Nehru Neutral Again

Kerala Reds Bid For Peace

Trivandrum — (RNS) — A peace bid was made here by E. M. S. Namboodripad, Chief Minister of this Communist-ruled State, to allay bitter protests by Roman Catholic and Hindu Nair authorities against provisions of the new Education Act.

The protests have led to clashes with the police in which many persons have been killed or injured.

At the same time, the Communist official took steps aimed at conciliating the opposition political parties which have staged widespread demonstrations, including the picketing of government offices, in an effort to force the Red regime out of office. His actions followed a three-day visit to Kerala by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to study the situation.

Mr. Namboodripad announced suspension of what was regarded as the most controversial provision of the education law. This was a section that stipulated that new teachers to the Catholic and Nair schools must be appointed only from a list approved by the government.

It was largely because of this provision that the managers of the Catholic and Nair schools refused to reopen their schools on the date officially assigned — June 15 — and at the same time picketed the state schools in protest. Although the picketing was conducted on a non-violence basis, police in several instances opened fire on the demonstrators.

Prelates Meet India's Nehru

Trivandrum — (NCY) — Seven bishops representing the Christian churches of Kerala told India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru here that every section of the population and all democratic parties have been taking part in the present agitation against the communist government of the state of Kerala.

The churchmen — three of them Catholics and four of them bishops of other Christian communities — presented Mr. Nehru a memorandum on the Kerala crisis during a 45-minute interview here.

The meeting, which took place during the Premier's three-day visit to this state capital to study the situation, was termed "very cordial."

The Chief Minister said that Mr. Nehru would act as arbitrator in case no agreement was reached either over the education law or the opposition group's charges.

Before returning to New Delhi, Mr. Nehru said he did not approve of the picketing and other civil disobedience tactics used by the opposition against the Kerala regime. He further said it was not for him to make recommendations for elections to replace the government, although opposition leaders had urged that this was "the obvious way out" of the crisis.

Lutherans Defend Parochial Schools

San Francisco — (RNS) — Parochial schools, both elementary and secondary, were strongly defended by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod here as providing "a specifically Christian education which the public school cannot supply."

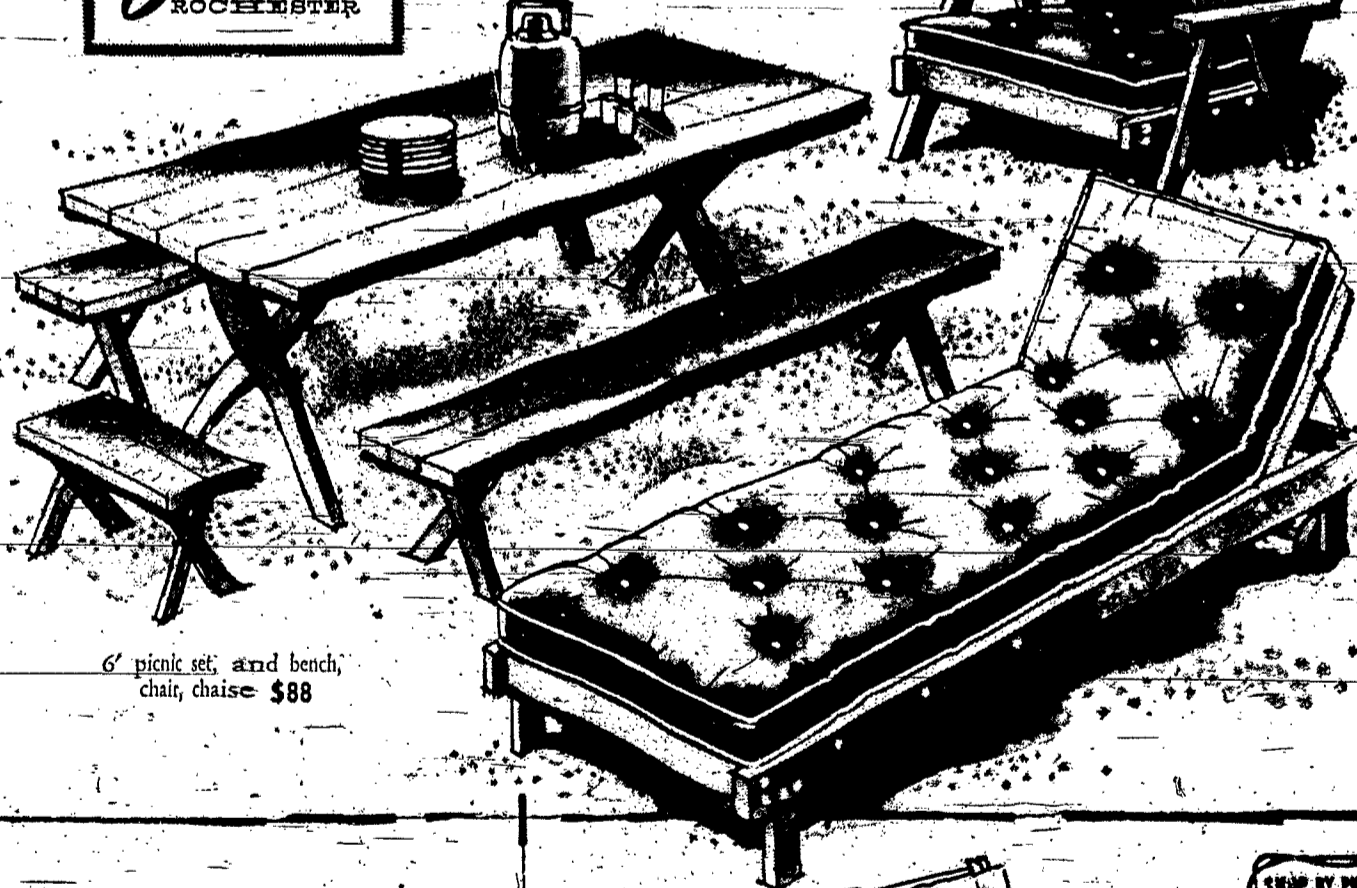
A statement approved unanimously by the synod at its 44th triennial general convention declared that the denomination's schools were not operating in competition with public schools, nor were they intended to attract the support of church members away from these institutions.

Convenient parking in the new ramp garage — with direct entrance to Sibley's

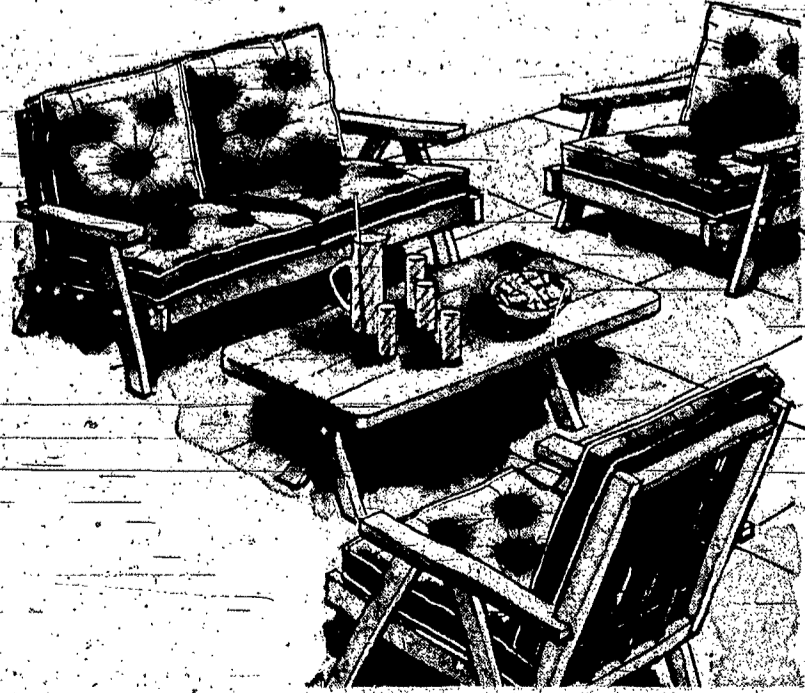
a living room as big as all outdoors calls for California redwood

\$88 EACH GROUP

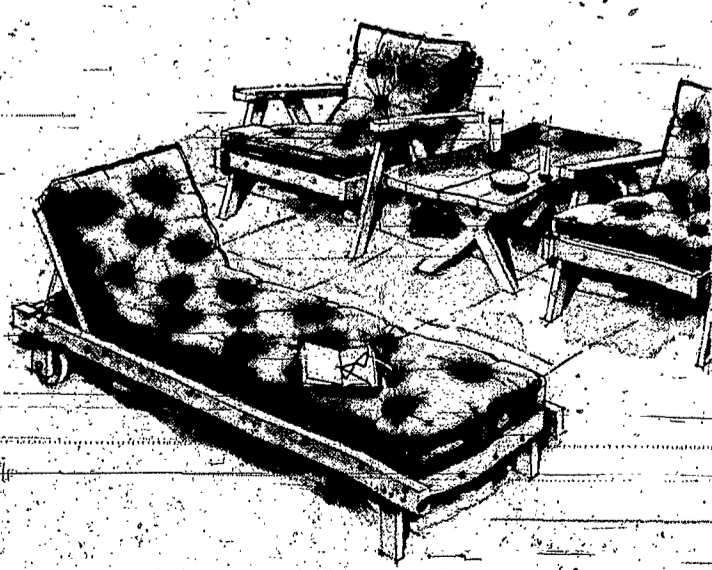
Sunshine, solid comfort and the great outdoors add up to a wonderful summertime way of life. You provide the sun and outdoors... Sibley's has the comfort at wonderfully low prices, in carefully crafted redwood that ages and weathers beautifully. The hardware is plated to be weather-resistant, the cushions are covered in green water-repellent sailcloth. Delivered in cartons, or we will assemble for \$3 per group. Sibley's Summer Furniture, Fifth Floor, selections at Irondequoit, Eastway, Southtown and Newark.



6' picnic set, and bench, chair, chaise \$88



settee, 2 club chairs, coffee table \$88



position adjustable chaise, 2 club chairs, coffee table \$88



gin tonney settee seats 2, has attached table; club chair, coffee table \$88

