

Parenting

Experts

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Helitzer-Allen, who assisted Monroe County officials in the "Not Me, Not Now" campaign launched in March of 1994, estimated that "teens actually spend about 30 minutes a week talking to their parents" about crucial issues such as sexuality.

In an effort to increase discussion time between family members on these issues, and to decrease the hesitancy to enter into such talks, St. Helen's Church in Gates will hold its first-ever chastity program on Sunday, Feb. 5, from 4-6 p.m. Children in grades 6-9 and their parents are invited to this gathering, which will include a lecture by Baloga and a video by Kelly.

Sister Patricia Flass, SSJ, St. Helen's religious-education director, said that her top priority for scheduling the event was "so parents are informed on how to deal with this topic with their children."

"Really, it's primarily the parent's responsibility. I'm just doing this to help them carry on this dialogue," Sister Flass stated.

Proper parental influence on sexuality requires a direct and frank approach, said Michael Theisen, diocesan youth-ministry coordinator.

"That whole myth of talking about the birds and the

bees — it's not going to really happen that way," he said.

At the same time, Baloga asserted that open discussions do not mean advocating premarital sex.

"Our sexuality is a very beautiful gift. It has a very specific and beautiful purpose — to bond for life one man and one woman," Baloga said. "Kids are getting all the wrong instructions today. They're being misled and misinformed; where are they going to hear the beauty except from their parents — the people who love them the most?"

Kelly added that parents' directives should not condone the use of contraceptives at any time.

"The 'safe sex' of the world out there is not safe at all," said Kelly.

Instead, she said, contraceptives are hawked in the media simply because they're money-makers.

"What does the better job of selling — condoms or chastity? You can't sell chastity," she said.

Joe Federowicz, director of the Teens and Family Outreach in Owego, Tioga County, can cite several sobering examples of what can occur when teens are not warned of potential consequences of becoming sexually active. Much of the work in his ministry — a division of Catholic

Charities of the Southern Tier — involves assisting teenage mothers in crisis situations.

"They come from dysfunctional environments, and it's very difficult for these girls to extricate themselves from this environment," said Federowicz. "They're looking for love and they conceive, so the baby becomes a love object."

"What we're trying to do is prevent disease or another pregnancy, but it's difficult to get them to look at an abstinence situation. We're dealing with second- and third-generation single moms."

To ward off potential pitfalls of sexual activity, Theisen, who writes and lectures frequently on teenage sexuality, has created a "Top Ten Ways to Talk With Your Adolescent About Sex."

His list for parents reads as follows:

10. Educate yourself.
9. Respect confidentiality.
8. Avoid comparisons and putdowns.
7. Love the sinner and hate the sin.
6. Be clear and firm about values and expectations.
5. Hold regular family discussions.
4. Live what you preach and preach what you live.
3. Seek common ground.
2. Actively listen.
1. Trust.

Parents are responsible for moral sex education

By Stephen Kent, Catholic News Service

OMAHA, Neb. — Catholic parents should not permit their children to participate in public school sex education courses which emphasize technologies for "safe sex," Omaha Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss said in a pastoral, released last March.

Those technologies do not present a moral or Christian approach to sexuality, he wrote. "This means that parents and parishes must collaborate to present sound moral education and training to students in public schools," he said.

The pastoral letter, dated March 1, 1994, was entitled, "We Must Face the Growing Sexual Crisis with Adequate Moral Education for Our Youth." It was the first pastoral by Archbishop Curtiss since he took the Omaha post.

"Parents have the primary obligation to see that their children and teenagers receive proper moral and religious education about human sexuality," he said. "Parents have a right to expect their Catholic parishes and schools, and the archdiocese, to support them in this responsibility."

The archbishop noted two approaches to sex education. The first, he said, stresses the human and spiritual values of a permanent and exclusive marital fidelity between husband and wife. It emphasizes reasons to postpone sexual activity until marriage and outlines the moral and Christian way to live sexually and healthfully.

The second, he said, is pragmatic and technological, stressing "safe sex." It promotes contraception and gives tacit approval to abortion for those who are foolish enough to get pregnant or those whose protection fails.

Even though many public school districts claim that they stress abstinence with their students, they are not able to make the case for abstinence on religious and moral grounds since they are forced by the courts to take a nonreligious and value-free approach to human life issues," he wrote.

Archbishop Curtiss said that for this reason they opt for the "safe sex" approach to face the growing sexual crisis.

"This is an inadequate and immoral approach to human sexuality for those who want to live as disciples of Jesus," the archbishop said.

Parents are the primary educators of their children, he said. "This is the reason that Catholic parents cannot leave the education of their children completely to a school, especially a public school."

The pastoral outlined the responsibilities of various groups. Catholic parents need to take an active role in their schools to influence public policy so their values and concerns about sex education programs are heard and respected.

Catholic school administrators have an obligation to provide adequate sexual education programs. Parents must take the initiative for these programs and participate in them with their children.

Parishes have an obligation to provide adequate sex education programs for public school students, begin with parental involvement.

"It is not enough to decry the efforts of public school administrators to address the sexual crisis; they must work with sex education programs geared to protect young people," Archbishop Curtiss said. "We Catholics must take the initiative to provide opportunities for our youth to understand from a religious and moral perspective what it means to be sexual persons called to lives of love and commitment to others, to lives of holiness," he said.

Kathleen Chesto to offer local workshops

Kathleen Chesto, founder of Family Intergenerational Religious Education (F.I.R.E.) and author of a number of books on family and faith, is scheduled to deliver a series of workshops in the diocese March 10-11.

On Friday, March 10 Chesto will deliver two in-services on the theme, "Respecting and Incorporating the Role of the Family in Catechesis." The sessions are intended for family-education coordinators, catechetical leaders and youth ministers.

The first in-service will take place from 9 to 11 a.m. at St. Catherine of Siena Parish, 26 Mendon-Ionia Road, Mendon. The second is scheduled for 2-4 p.m. at St. Mary of the Lake Parish, 901 N. Decatur St., Watkins Glen.

On Saturday, March 11, Chesto will lead a "day of discovery" focusing on the themes "Holiness:

Family Style," from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Guardian Angels Parish Center, 2061 E. Henrietta Road, Rochester. According to a press release on the event, the all-day program will offer parents a chance to gather and consider how their life as a family is a holy endeavor.



Cost for the two in-services on March 10 is \$10 per person. The deadline for reservations is March 3.

The program at Guardian Angels costs \$10 per person, \$15 per couple. Child care will be available at \$5 for one child and \$10 for two or more children. Reservations are due by Feb. 12.


For information about the in-services or the day of discovery, contact Mary Ellen FitzGibbons at the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, or call 716/328-3210, ext. 201.

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