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Deciding what to do with sexuality

Julie A. Collins/USCCB

Teaching religion at a boys' Catholic prep school for 16 years, I've spent a lot of time discussing sex with teenagers. I've come to see that what we human beings crave most is to be *competent, connected and comforted*.

What do I mean by these words? *Competent*: We want to feel that we have skills and gifts, and we have the power to bring them to fruition — to produce, to create, to serve. We also long for a sense of *connection*. We know that at a fundamental level we are social creatures who need relationships and need to be accepted for who we are. And beyond these, we look for *comfort* — for touch, tenderness, support. We want someone to be unequivocally "for us."

Now if all human beings desire to be competent, connected and comforted, these aspirations apply to our sexuality, too. We want to feel that we love someone competently — that we have the power to give love, to give pleasure and to receive it in a way that's most pleasing to them. We also want a connection with another human being that will be electric, like no other relationship we have with anyone else. And, at the core of our deepest hope, we want it to be permanent because we also desire to be comforted — to be held, supported and known. Not one night, but for a lifetime.

So, what are you to do? First, regarding your sexual choices, please **CHOOSE**. Don't let circumstances dictate your sexual behavior. Don't let alcohol, a persistent date, advice in a magazine or a loneliness that you didn't realize was there dictate what you do with your sexuality.

Reflect on it ahead of time: What does sexual touch mean to you? Does it mean anything? Are you saying anything to a young man when you kiss him? Again and again? And what are you feeling while this kissing fest is going on?

I find that as people answer these questions on what sexuality means to them, they tend to operate out of one of two sexual "models" — sexual touch is either about recreation or about love. Turn on the TV and it will take you about three minutes to see that today's culture tends to promote the recreation model. Sexual touch in this model is just like a tennis game: fun, sometimes challenging, usually pleasurable and, as soon as the game ends, the game itself "says" nothing. It means nothing.

The event is over. In the recreation model of sexual intimacy, the only real moral criterion is consent: You must have two "consenting adults." The subtext here is that there is a flip switch which will disconnect the heart from the hormones.

So who are you going to believe? The cast of "Friends" or 4,000 years of Judeo-Christian tradition which tells us there is no such switch? In the eyes of the God who created us, our bodies and our hearts form one integrated circuit. There is no "safe sex" outside of marriage. Sexually transmitted diseases happen. Condoms give little or no protection against some of the most common incurable STDs. And there will never be a prophylactic that can protect you from getting a broken heart. Sex outside of marriage can have only three outcomes:

- The fairy tale ending: The couple falls into bed casually, but wakes up passionately in love. Their fidelity never wavers and they end up at the altar, "happily ever after."

- The unrequited ending: One of the partners wants to renege on the "recreational sex" contract and hopes for true love. The other partner says "thanks, but no thanks." Significant heartbreak.

- Gold medal in the sexual Olympics: Physically and emotionally, it is the most deadly outcome. Even secular psychologists are now questioning what years of recreational sex does to our capacity for intimacy.

So what are we to do with this incredibly strong sexual drive if we hope to be competent, connected and comforted? The answer lies in the second model — sex with love. Real love. Sex with love helps us fulfill our desires to be competent, connected and comforted in our sexuality.

St. Augustine offered this advice: "Love — and do what you will." But I think that human happiness is captured in a phrase from John's Gospel: "Love one another as I have loved you." The model of love Jesus gave us is to love permanently, faithfully, completely and fruitfully.

So, as Augustine says, "Love — and do what you will." But remember that loving God, loving yourself and loving your future spouse means postponing sexual intimacy until marriage. That's where you can discover all that love is meant to be.

Julie Collins teaches religious studies and offers spiritual direction to adults and teens at Georgetown Preparatory School in North Bethesda, Md.



Nancy Wiehede/CNS

Many high-school students today are choosing to be chaste — out of respect for themselves, their dates and their future marriage partners.

Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph's Church

"THE LITTLE FRENCH CHURCH"
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Since 1868

MASS SCHEDULE

Weekend Masses:	Saturday - 4:30 pm Sunday - 10:00 am & 7:30 pm
Weekday Masses:	Monday through Saturday - 12:10 pm (With Novena Devotions for the Day)
Confessions:	Before all weekday Masses Monday - Saturday 11:30 am
Baptisms:	Sunday by Appointment
Novena:	Tuesday - St. Anthony 12:00 pm
Parish:	Wednesday - Parsonage Hall 11:00 am Friday - St. Joseph 11:00 am
Charismatic Renewal:	Wednesday 7:00 pm - 11:20 am

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