



Program Handbook

Revised, 2016

Fr. Jeremy Davis
Fr. Deacon Ezra Ham
Brandon Baca

Erin Ghata
Dr. Michael Morrow
Dr. Monique Naifeh

St. Elijah Orthodox Christian Church
15000 N May Ave • Oklahoma City, OK 73134
405-755-7804 • stelijah@stelijahokc.com

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Any errors or inadequacies in this work are, of course, the responsibility of the authors.

Preface

The Birds and the Bees, the Facts of Life, Making Love, Doing It, Hooking Up—there are many ways to refer to sex without actually talking about it. Speaking directly about the subject is not considered suitable for polite conversation even among adults, but when children are the audience the euphemisms and evasions abound. Of course, more often than not we just avoid the subject entirely with our kids.

Why? We all know the reasons by personal experience. We are embarrassed and uncomfortable about sex. Even if we can overcome these feelings, the task is daunting. How does one introduce children to this quintessentially “adult” subject? When should it be done? What should you say? How much information is enough...or too much?

These are all very good questions, but they would be terrible reasons for keeping silent. Puberty and its aftermath are one of the most difficult transitions children will face on the road to adulthood. They need guidance, but all too often they have miserable guides: their peers, entertainment media, their imaginations. Even the official guidance of school Sex Ed classes cannot be relied upon: at best, it is silent regarding the spiritual and moral issues that are so essential from the Church’s point of view; at worst, it aggressively promotes beliefs and values contrary to those of the Church.

The program described in this handbook is our attempt as a church to face this challenge squarely, guiding our youth through puberty toward a mature Christian understanding of sex that leads to moral choices. SaGE—the program’s acronym—represents our goal: to make our youth wise about sex. It’s not just about controlling their behavior, but more importantly about informing their thinking about sex. It is founded on the biblical teaching that repentance is a change of mind (*metanoia*) that leads to a change of life. It respects our young people’s ability to think and choose for themselves.

The team that originally prepared and presented this program, beginning in 2010, was composed of Fr. Jeremy Davis, Fr. Deacon Ezra Ham, two physicians (Dr. Michael Morrow and Dr. Monique Naifeh), and two youth workers (our Youth Director Erin Ghata and Brandon Baca). This handbook has been prepared by us in order to share our efforts with other parishes. It is not intended to be a curriculum, but rather a model. The materials in it should not be seen as definitive, but rather as an attempt to talk to the youth of St. Elijah parish in ways that are appropriate at St. Elijah parish.

Chapter 1 discusses the philosophy behind the SaGE program. **Chapter 2** describes the schedule and format of the program at St. Elijah Church. **Chapters 3-6** then describe in detail the component segments of the program, discussing the thinking behind our approach in each segment and providing discussion outlines as examples.

Our hope is that this handbook will inspire and equip you to develop a similar program in your parish. You may, of course, use any of our materials in your program, adapting them as necessary.

Advice for Getting Started

There is no one-size-fits-all solution in parish ministry. This type of educational program is no exception. You will need to consider your parish's unique circumstances as you decide how to best teach your youth a healthy, Christian understanding of sex that leads them to make good, God-pleasing choices. Please consider the material in this handbook as a starting point in developing a program suited to your parish and your youth.

As you undertake this important ministry, we offer a few suggestions:

1. **Pray throughout the process.** Ask God to guide you, your collaborators in this program and your parish. Ask Him to prepare the hearts of your youth and their parents.
2. **Assemble a team.** We believe that the key to our success at St. Elijah has been the collaborative input of the program's leadership team. The subject of sex has many interrelated aspects. No one person possesses all the necessary knowledge, experience and skills to address all of these aspects. Moreover, comparing our own observations, ideas and insights gives us a fuller understanding not only of the subject but of the world our youth inhabit. Seek out clergy, youth-workers, doctors and/or parents in your parish who are committed to Christ and His Church, and to the goals of this program.
3. **Study.** Though this handbook is light on biblical references and citations from the Church Fathers, our teaching is founded upon serious study of what the Bible and the Orthodox Tradition say about this subject. Such Christian background knowledge is essential. Knowledge of the biology of sex and of today's social and cultural environment is also important. Choose people that have some expertise, and then encourage one another to deepen your knowledge through study. An admittedly limited list of suggested resources is included at the back of this handbook. The Bible (though not listed among these resources) is of course the place to start in any Christian teaching.
4. **Adapt.** After reading through the material in this handbook, consider the circumstances of your parish: what resources are available to you, what particular challenges your teens face, etc. As a team, work out a program that fits those circumstances. Then, after you present the program, learn from the experience and adapt it for the future.

May God bless you as you undertake to help our youth overcome the temptations of this world in order to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1), thereby enjoying all the fruits of obedience.

Chapter 1

Our Four Aims

Fr. Jeremy Davis

A 2002 survey of Americans found that at age 15 (the youngest included in the survey), 44% of boys and 36% of girls reported having already had some kind of sexual contact with another person. By age 19 it was 82% and 88% respectively.¹ These statistics demonstrate a fact that most of us could have guessed: almost all American teens become sexually active before their 20th birthday.

Another survey (conducted in 2009) found that among young people ages 20-24, at least two-thirds had sex within the preceding 12 months.² The 2002 survey found that among sexually active 20-24 year olds, more than half of women and more than 60% of men had already had three or more sexual partners. Twenty percent and 30%, respectively, had more than seven partners.³ The teen years have become a launch pad into sexual promiscuity.

These trends are prompted, strengthened and abetted by the messages teens hear and see in movies, TV, popular music, magazines and even Sex Ed classes at school. Sexual self-indulgence is now pervasive in our culture, which dismisses premarital abstinence as repressive and promotes an “anything goes” ethic of pleasure seeking.

We might be tempted to hope that the teens of our parishes are sheltered from these trends. Those of us who work with Orthodox young people know that this is not the case. Sadly, our teens encounter the same temptations, pressures and messages, and often fall into the same sins. Even more sadly, teens who have been raised in our churches may not even be aware that what they have done is sin.

During a conversation with a young man who was raised in our parish, I was taken aback when he ecstatically told me how happy he was to be living with his girlfriend—they were in love. He was completely sincere and totally unaware that a priest might not be able to rejoice with him in this fact. I had to explain to him why cohabitation really isn't OK from the Church's point of view—a teaching that I had assumed even those outside the Church would be familiar with. Similar exchanges in confession have confirmed that this was not an isolated case of ignorance.

We can no longer assume that our children know the commandments of God and the teachings of Christ and His Church concerning sex. Our secular culture's sexually permissive messages continuously bombard young people, and are displacing any intuitive sense of right and wrong.

¹ Mosher, William D., Anjani Chandra, and Jo Jones, “Sexual Behavior and Selected Health Measures: Men and Women 15–44 Years of Age, United States, 2002”, **Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics 362 (September 15, 2005)** <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad362.pdf> pp. 21-22.

² <http://www.nationalsexstudy.indiana.edu/graph.html>.

³ Mosher et al., pp.28-29.

It is this realization that has led us at St. Elijah parish to develop a program for educating our preteens and teens about the meaning and morality of sex from the Church's perspective. Our aims in developing this program have been fourfold:

1. to prepare our youth for the temptations and pressures they will face, through candid presentation of the facts,
2. to make clear the connections between sex, marriage, childbearing and spiritual wellbeing,
3. to encourage our youth to internalize Christ's commandments through a positive presentation of sex as God's gift, and
4. to engage our youth in a constructive dialogue in order to establish the Church (in lieu of the locker room or slumber party) as a welcoming forum for coming to terms with their sexual development.

In this handbook, we hope to distill the philosophy and methodology that we have arrived at through God's help, and to share some of the lessons we have learned over the past six years. In this chapter I will describe in more detail the four aims that form the basis of our approach. In the next chapter, I will outline the format and schedule we currently use when presenting the program each year.

1. Preparing by Informing

Orthodox parishes, clergy and parents are often reluctant to talk to our children about sex. We might speak in generalities about maintaining purity or not "doing it," but then we leave our children to discern the Christian response to specific temptations they face. Perhaps we are embarrassed to talk about sex. Perhaps we fear overwhelming our children with adult information or introducing them to sins and temptations they might not otherwise know.

There might have been a time when such concerns were justified. From what has been said above about today's cultural climate, however, it should be clear that our children are exposed to a lot more than we imagine. As a result, they are left to fend for themselves in the struggle for sexual purity. In place of good information from Christian sources, they have misinformation from their peers, the media, and even their schools. As a result we have children who think that virginity refers only to vaginal sex, and therefore that oral sex and mutual masturbation are moral substitutes. And, as related above, we even have Orthodox young people who see no moral problem in cohabitation.

In order to preempt this misinformation and prepare our children for the temptations that are sure to come, one of our aims in developing this program has been to address the biological, emotional, relational, moral and theological aspects of sex as candidly as possible. As we prepared to present our first program in 2010, our team discussed extensively what topics to discuss with each age group. In these discussions our doctors (one of whom is a pediatrician) and youth workers provided helpful input regarding at what age children might learn of certain sexual behaviors. They rightly overcame my reticence to discuss certain topics with our youngest age group, arguing that these children already must

confront these “adult subjects.” The goal of preparing our children requires that we set aside any embarrassment or squeamishness in order to address the world in which they really live.

You will see in Chapter 4 what topics I addressed with each age group. We set parameters for what we intended to address with the youngest group, but we also agreed that no topic can be off-limits if brought up by a child in the discussion sessions. In order to avoid upsetting parents and to keep them informed, we sent a letter to parents explaining the program and advising them of what topics were to be discussed with each age group (a sample letter is included at the end of Chapter 2). This allowed them to make an informed decision whether or not their children would participate.

2. Making Connections

Today’s sexually permissive culture is the product of decades of deconstruction of sex. Not just the marital context, but even the mere relational context of sex has been cast aside as artificial and unnecessary. Sex has been reduced to mere act, to a diversion—without need of justification and without expectation of consequences.

There is an astounding dissociation of sex from relationships among today’s youth. In a *USA Today* article entitled “More college ‘hookups,’ but more virgins, too,”⁴ graduate student Rachel Curtis (22) is quoted as saying: “With the people that I know, there is a fair share of hooking up just to have sex, and the intention is to only do it once and possibly never see that person again.” Leah Reis-Dennis (19) says, “In a big way, hookups have kind of taken the place of—not exactly eclipsed—relationships, but hooking up is kind of an easier way for college students to act on their sexual desire without making a big commitment.”

Moreover, childbearing is becoming dissociated from its traditional marital context. In 2009, 41% of births in America were to unmarried women, up from 5% in 1960 and 11% in 1970.⁵ While this sometimes results from unintended pregnancy, increasing numbers of women want children but don’t think that marriage is for them. This is just another sign of a modern mentality that “disconnects the normative links among sex, parenthood, and marriage.”⁶

Decades of sexual “liberation” have also resulted in dissociating the sexual act from questions of spiritual and emotional wellbeing. The idea that sex is an emotionally powerful experience that leaves lifelong marks on a person’s soul has been rejected as a vestige of old-fashioned prudishness and repression. Young people experience social pressure to deny their intuitive sense that sex should mean

⁴ Sharon Jayson, accessed on USAToday.com on 3/31/2011.

⁵ Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, cited in “Social Indicators of Marital Health and Wellbeing,” *The State of Our Unions* 2010. 91. Accessed online at stateofourunions.org.

⁶ W. Bradford Wilcox, “When Marriage Disappears: The Retreat from Marriage in Middle America,” *The State of Our Unions* 2010. 39. Accessed online at stateofourunions.org.

something and to embrace casual experimentation as healthy. Some, however, are discovering that this culturally enforced denial—and not the sense of sex’s emotional significance— is artificial.⁷

In short, cultural forces have undermined the morality of premarital abstinence by denying the connections between sex, marriage, childbearing and spiritual wellbeing. One of our goals, then, is to make those connections explicit to our children. This is seen throughout the program. In my talk I point out the emotional bonds created by sex, and the strong foundation marriage provides for raising children. The discussion groups spend time considering what good and bad relationships are, and how to establish the good and escape the bad, with the ultimate aim of entering into a good marriage. They also discuss the importance of biblically based self-esteem as an aid in making better sexual choices. Finally, Deacon Ezra discusses with parents how they can model the healthy connection between sex and marriage for their children.

These real and existential connections, which may have been self-evident to earlier generations, are novel concepts today. By helping our children see them, we will help them understand and internalize the rationale behind God’s commandments.

3. A Positive Presentation

We cannot rely on threatening and coercion to preserve our children’s chastity. There was a time when people could be motivated to moral behavior through fear of social condemnation and divine punishment. You would, however, be hard pressed to find more than a handful of people today who are afraid of punishment for their sins—especially outside the Church, but even within her membership.

The spiritual marketplace established by Twentieth-Century Protestantism silenced “fire and brimstone” preaching in favor of the more marketable message: “come get your goodies from God.” Beside this spiritual marketplace there has sprung up an even more virulent secular marketplace of ideas, which offers to explain away God for anyone feeling pinched by religion. When we say that fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), many of those we are trying to reach (i.e., those in need of repentance) will either ignore us or go shopping for another theology or ideology. As a result, we cannot and should not depend on fear to motivate people to follow God’s commandments.

We must instead reach out to our youth through encouragement, explanation and education, relying on love and respect rather than threatening and coercion. Our aim in the SaGE program is, therefore, to persuade our youth to make God-pleasing sexual choices by explaining the rationale behind God’s commandments and the benefits of following them.

We begin by saying that sex is good because God created it. We go on to explain what God intends sex to accomplish: bonding of husband and wife in a uniquely close relationship, and procreation. We make

⁷ For young women, see Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (New York: Touchstone, 2000); for young people in general, see the *USA Today* article by Sharon Jayson, referenced above.

clear that God's commandments regarding sex are intended to help us experience these two blessings to the fullest extent and to prevent us from harming ourselves and others. We then clearly explain which sexual experiences or behaviors are sins and which are not, and in a spirit of compassionate concern note the spiritual, emotional and physical harm that can result from sinful behaviors.

It is our hope that by respecting the intelligence of our youth enough to explain the "why" behind the "dos and don'ts," we will get through to them in a way that authority and coercion no longer will. And more important than the pragmatic advantage of this approach is the implicit message it conveys to our youth about God's love and care for them.

4. Engagement and Dialogue

It is not enough to speak to our youth; we must listen to them in order to be heard. Inviting and encouraging their questions and input helps them to feel respected and involved, which makes them more receptive to the teaching. We've all been in situations where someone is "talking at" us, and we know from experience what resistance this can provoke in our spirits. This response is magnified in teens because of their urge for independence and autonomy.

There is also a practical need for this kind of dialogue. Remembering our own younger days will be little help as we try to understand the challenges today's youth face. Only they can tell us the information and help they need to meet these challenges.

Encouraging participation and dialogue also opens up the possibility of future communication with our youth. We hope that their experience of respect, care and attention in the SaGE program will make them more comfortable approaching any of us leaders with their questions and concerns throughout the year.

We encourage the youth to ask questions and participate throughout the program, but especially in the separate male and female discussion groups that take up most of our time with them. During the two preceding segments, the youth have the opportunity to write questions anonymously on index cards and deposit them in a box, to be answered in their respective discussion groups. In order to foster open communication, the group discussions are held in strict confidence. The only adults in the room for these discussions are the two leaders (a doctor and a youth director).

In conclusion, it is clear that today's youth face a vastly changed world. Many of the assumptions of previous generations no longer apply. Taking this into account, we must be candid, honest, explicit, respectful, attentive, positive, and encouraging as we talk to our young people about sex. Not only do our teens appreciate such an approach, but it is our best chance at reaching them and equipping them to overcome sexual temptation and to adopt a spiritually wise attitude toward sex.

Chapter 2

Our Schedule and Format

Fr. Jeremy Davis

After trying many different variations over the years, we at St. Elijah have arrived at the following format and schedule for our annual SaGE Program. It has three modules, addressing the following groups:

- Grades 5-7—those youth who are near to or in the beginning stages of puberty;
- Grades 8-12—teens who have hopefully gotten the basics through their participation in the previous module; and,
- Parents—not just parents of teenagers, but also those with younger children (who will eventually be teens!).

In 2016 the schedule of our SaGE Weekend (January 30-31) looked like this:

Grades 5-7 · Sunday, January 31

(begins after communion, during Sunday School—in the Teen Room)

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 11:30am | Biological Overview (boys & girls separated) |
| 12:30pm | The Priest's Talk (boys and girls together; during which the kids eat lunch) |
| 1:30-3pm | Male/Female Discussion Groups |

Grades 8-12 Lock-in · Saturday-Sunday, January 30-31

- | | |
|---------|------------------------------|
| 5pm | Vespers |
| 6pm | Dinner |
| 6:30-45 | Welcome & Icebreaker |
| 7-8 | Speaker's talk (Marek Simon) |
| 8pm | Quiz |
| 8:20ish | Discussion Groups |

Parents Seminar · Sunday, January 31

After Liturgy – 3pm (lunch and nursery provided)

We feel it is important to alert parents to the frankness of our presentations on sex, in order to preempt controversy and so that parents can make an informed decision about their children's participation. So, at least two weeks in advance of each year's SaGE Weekend we send an informative letter to all the parents of our parish whose children are in Grades 5-12. A copy of the letter is included at the end of this chapter.

Here is a more detailed description of the modules:

Grades 5-7 Session

This group's time is divided into three segments. First, the doctors on our team (Monique Naifeh and Joseph Ghata, who succeeded Michael Morrow) review the biology of sex – identifying relevant body parts, describing puberty and the biological mechanics of sex and reproduction. Next, I present the Church's teaching on the theological context and morality of sex. Finally, we split up for discussion groups: the young men go with our male youth worker (Brandon Baca) and our male doctor (Joseph Ghata), and the young women go with our female youth director (Erin Ghata) and our female doctor (Monique Naifeh).

The largest block of time is reserved for these male and female discussion groups. During the doctors' and my segments, the boys and girls are encouraged to write down questions on index cards (blue for boys; white or pink for girls) and deposit them anonymously in a question box. Those questions are then separated by color and discussed in the respective discussion groups. The discussion-group leaders also prepared outlines of important topics to bring up in the groups. However, preference is given to discussing the youths' own questions (whether written or brought up in discussion). A great deal of flexibility is necessary to direct the discussion in profitable directions, while also harnessing the energy of the young people's interest. Sometimes the groups spend most of their time discussing questions generated within the group; at other times they simply progress through the leaders' outline, if the young people are more reticent to contribute to the discussion.

Grades 8-12 Lock-in

This older group has hopefully learned the basics from a few years' participation in the Grades 5-7 module. So, in order to expand their knowledge and continue the constructive dialogue, we offer them a lock-in with a guest speaker and an extended discussion time. Before the talk, the youth play a "Jeopardy"-style game as a brief, creative way to review the medical and moral information from the Grades 5-7 module. Then the guest speaker addresses a topic that generally focuses more on the relational aspect of dating, marriage and sex. Finally, the boys and girls are split up and participate in discussion groups similar to those for the younger group. At this age, however, the youth often have many more questions and can engage in more advanced discussions, so the lock-in format allows the discussion groups to last as long as the youth remain engaged.

Parents Seminar

We overlap our Grades 5-7 Module with a seminar for parents. This is led by Deacon Ezra Ham and is aimed at equipping parents to talk to their children about sex and sexuality. This is a very important component, since (regardless of how effective our program is) parents are the strongest and most consistent influence on their children. Equipping them with knowledge and skills to fulfill this role will help to reinforce the SaGE program's lessons year-round. We offered a nursery during this discussion, so that those parents with younger children can participate.

Sample Letter to Parents

19 January 2016

Dear Parents,

“SaGE: Sex and God Education” is coming up January 30-31. This program provides a safe, Christ-centered environment for our youth to learn about sex.

Grades 8-12 will have a lock-in beginning with Vespers at **5pm on Saturday, January 30**. Along with the usual fun and fellowship of a lock-in, they will hear from **Marek Simon** of the Antiochian Village on **“blah, blah, blah. Let’s Get Real about Sex!”** They will also have the opportunity to raise their questions and concerns about sex in separate boys’ and girls’ discussion groups led by our SaGE program leaders: Erin Ghata, Brandon Baca, Dr. Monique Naifeh, and Dr. Joe Ghata. The lock-in will end with Divine Liturgy on Sunday.

The session for **Grades 5-7** will meet in the Teen Room on **Sunday, January 31, after communion** (during the usual Sunday School time). First, our doctors will explain puberty and the biology of sex and pregnancy; next, I will talk about the Orthodox Church’s teaching regarding sex. Finally, the boys and girls will each have their separate confidential discussion groups with the same leaders named above. We will finish up about 3pm. Lunch will be provided. SaGE will replace regular Sunday School for Grades 5-7 on January 31, so please keep your Grade 5-7 children with you at communion if you do not want them to attend SaGE.

Please be aware that these sessions will include frank discussions of some sensitive topics, including sexual anatomy, pornography, masturbation, homosexuality, and abortion. Also, no subject will be off limits in our discussion groups, so children may bring up other sensitive topics. Our discussion leaders will, of course, carefully direct the conversation toward an age-appropriate level.

If you have not yet talked to your children about sex, I encourage you to begin a conversation with them before the seminar. This will help them benefit more from the program, and will open up the lines of communication between you and them.

Also, make a point to attend Deacon Ezra’s seminar **“Help! We Have Children! How to Save Your Marriage,” on Sunday, January 31, 12:30-3pm** (coinciding with our Grades 5-7 session; a nursery will be provided). This seminar will include advice about how to communicate with your children about sex.

I hope you will encourage your children to participate in SaGE. It will help them navigate the moral challenges they face, in order to grow to full maturity in Christ.

In His Service,

Fr. Jeremy Davis

Chapter 3

Biological Overview: Puberty, Sex and Pregnancy

Drs. Monique Naifeh and Michael Morrow

Our Approach

This discussion about anatomy and physiology of puberty can be conducted in a coed or single sex group as desired. The individual facilitating the discussion should be well informed about the subject and comfortable talking about it as this will help put the participants at ease. This discussion is most useful when done in an interactive format especially with older age groups. During this time, the kids were given note cards and pens so that they could anonymously ask any questions by writing them down and putting them in a covered shoe box to be answered later.

It is important to lay some ground rules:

1. We will all treat each other with respect.
2. No laughing at other's questions.
3. There are no bad questions.

Our Notes

I. Puberty-

- a. Start by asking the group "What is puberty?" The time in a person's life when their body, feelings and relationships transition from a child's into an adult's
- b. Physical Changes: Can start this portion by asking the group what takes place during normal puberty ("What are some things that can change about your body during puberty?"). All of the changes that take place during puberty are a result of hormonal changes.

1. Girls

- i. Puberty typically starts between ages 8 and 13 in girls. If puberty has not started by age 16, medical evaluation should be sought.
- ii. Breast development is typically the first noticeable change during puberty for girls. Typically, menstruation begins approximately 2 years after breast development.

The remaining changes listed happen concurrently with girls typically growing taller earlier in puberty than boys.

- iii. grow taller

- iv. hips widen
- v. acne develops
- vi. stinky sweat or body odor develops
- vii. pubic and underarm hair develop
- viii. facial hair (sometimes)
- ix. voice can deepen
- x. ovulation and menstruation typically happen late in puberty.

By the time a girl starts menstruating she has completed her growth spurt and will not likely grow much taller.

2. Boys typically start puberty between the ages of 10 and 14 (if there are no signs of puberty by 16 medical evaluation should be sought)—so boys start puberty later than girls and their growth spurt happens near the end of puberty.

- i. genitals enlarge: testicular enlargement is the first sign of pubertal development in boys
- ii. Height growth spurt (usually last for boys and happens about 2 years after puberty has started)
- iii. shoulders broaden
- iv. breasts can develop (this can be a source of embarrassment for boys. If they are less than 4cm in diameter 90% will resolve on their own within 3 years.)
- v. acne
- vi. stinky sweat or body odor
- vii. pubic and underarm hair
- viii. facial hair develops/ thickens
- ix. voice deepens
- x. erections happen more frequently
- xi. sperm production and ejaculation begin
- xii. nocturnal emissions

- c. Emotional Changes for both boys and girls (“What are some emotional changes that happen during puberty?”) These are also a result of hormones and increased sensitivity/ insecurity due to a rapidly changing body.

- 1. crushes and attractions
- 2. increased self consciousness

3. concern for others increases
4. sudden mood changes
5. fights with parents may increase
6. increased independence (desire to be independent)
7. increased self awareness

II. Reproduction-- how sex works and how pregnancy begins

- a. During this section, we distributed fill-in-the-blank anatomical diagrams⁸ to the young people and completed them as a group. They should be encouraged to name the labeled parts using their anatomically appropriate name as well as slang words they know for the part. This serves a dual purpose, it helps kids be more at ease as well as defining those words that some of them have heard at school but do not understand. As each part is named, you should explain what each part does.
- c. In all age groups, Discuss mechanics of vaginal intercourse and how pregnancy occurs. (Erect penis enters the vagina and ejaculation occurs near the cervix, sperm swims through the uterus and fallopian tubes; when an egg is present it can be fertilized and grow into a baby. Most of the kids will have heard this information at least once and it is important to understand the process as it occurs and explain it precisely.) For older kids (7-12 grades) it is also important to explain the mechanics of oral sex and anal sex.
 1. see diagram of a pregnant woman and name the parts. We also invited questions about pregnancy and childbirth during this section.

III. Questions—During this portion, we encouraged kids to ask any questions they might have. We maintained an anything-goes policy and tried to answer all questions—nothing was off limits.

⁸ We used the diagrams included in Lessons 11 and 13 of the FLASH curriculum that can be accessed at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/famplan/educators/grades456.aspx>. Other diagrams are available online: for example, at <http://www.medscape.com/features/ald/repro> and <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/repro101.pdf>.

Chapter 4

The Priest's Talk

Fr. Jeremy Davis

Our Approach

I described in Chapter 1 the four aims or emphases that form the basis of our overall approach in developing the SaGE program. In this chapter I will first discuss specific considerations or problems that arose as I tried to apply that approach to my talk with the youth. After this introduction, my notes for this talk are included as an example.

My talk addresses the theological and moral aspects of sex. It serves as a basic foundation for a Christian understanding of sex and marriage. The guest speakers' talks for Grades 8-12 then help the teens to continue to grow in understanding, especially focusing on learning how to form healthy relationships with members of the opposite sex in order to prepare them for strong marriages in which sex is rightly situated.

Candid Information

Our first aim is to prepare our young people to face temptation through a candid presentation of the facts. Our young people will not face general temptations that can be addressed by general teachings like "do the right thing," or "be moral," or even "don't do it." What is the right thing? What is moral? Don't do what?

As I state in Chapter 1, we can't assume anything. So as I prepared my talks I tried to determine what specific temptations young people face at each age level, and what specific knowledge they need in order to make the right choices.

On one hand, there is a need to help them understand that spontaneous sexual feelings, desires and thoughts are normal and natural. These can be very unsettling to morally sensitive young people, so we need to reassure them that these spontaneous experiences are not immoral in themselves.

On the other hand, we need to expose specific sins that might tempt young people or with which they may already be struggling. Young people often foolishly stumble into sexual sins through ignorance, and soon find themselves engrossed in a secret, shameful habit that maintains control over them by being kept in the dark. Candid education may help to prevent the first foolish stumbling, opening the eyes of young people to the dangers of sinful choices and the blessings that come from following God's commandments. It may also help those caught in sin to realize their need for repentance, and encourage them to confess and change their behavior.

The first difficulty that I as a priest and speaker had to overcome was my own embarrassment or fear about discussing sex candidly. As much as the subject might be embarrassing to young people, they genuinely appreciate straight talk about what is for them a source of great anxiety. In particular, hearing a priest talk about sex helps them to see that the Church and the clergy are available to help them sort through these questions. It helps them understand that sex is not a taboo subject in the Church.

Another difficulty I faced was discerning the fine line between too much and too little information. We want to address the temptations that youth are likely to have at their particular age, yet we want to avoid needlessly teaching them new sins or introducing new temptation. This requires great discernment, and I don't claim to have done it perfectly. I relied greatly on the other SaGE team leaders to help me understand what sins/temptations confront today's youth at what ages. In general, it was our consensus that modern culture does not keep any secrets from young people, and therefore the danger of leaving out specific sexual sins is often greater than the danger of addressing them prematurely.

A final difficulty in this area was determining age-appropriate ways to discuss sexuality, especially with the youngest group. What do fifth graders know about sex? How do you explain it and all of its ramifications to prepubescents? Again, the advice of the other team members was very helpful.

Making Connections

Our second aim was to make clear the connections between sex, marriage, childbearing and spiritual wellbeing. Throughout my talks I point out that sexual activity deeply affects the relationships and the emotional and spiritual lives of the people involved. I also show how God's commandments describe a proper ordering of all these things, which directs sex's effects (in particular, emotional bonding and procreation) to a healthy and happy result. Disobedience, on the other hand, misdirects the "energy" of sex in harmful and hurtful directions. These connections, therefore, set the stage for the positive presentation of the Church's teaching which is our next aim.

A Positive Presentation

Our third aim is to convey a positive understanding of sex and God's commandments concerning it. We wanted to avoid the usual "Don't do that because I said so" approach, which is so off-putting to teens. The positive presentation shows respect for the teens' intelligence, and has the potential to instill an internal motivation that is much more effective than any external motivation or coercion.

In my talks I have tried to convey concisely:

- Sex is something God created, and is therefore good.
- God's commandments are for our benefit, helping us to experience His blessings and to avoid the harm that comes from sin.
- The relationship of marriage is the unique setting in which sex fulfill the purposes for which God created it—bonding husband and wife together, and procreation.

- When we disobey God's commandments and misuse sex, we cheat ourselves of the great blessing God intends and we harm ourselves and others.

As I discuss specific moral issues—teaching what is sin and what isn't—I try to make my reasoning clear, so that the young people can also learn principles that will help them discern other moral questions we don't specifically cover.

It is important to emphasize the availability of repentance and a second chance, while at the same time making it clear that not sinning in the first place is preferable.

Engagement and Dialogue

Our final aim was to establish the Church as a welcoming forum for coming to terms with sex and sexual development. I try to encourage participation by the young people, inviting them to ask questions and to help me work through particular moral questions. Most of the participation happens in the discussion groups. It is important, however, for the young people just to see that their priest wants to talk to them about these issues, and is listening to them.

My Notes
SaGE: Sex and God Education
Theological Talk – Grades 5-7
Fr. Jeremy Davis

Sex Is a Gift from God

Sex is a good thing, a blessing from God. He created sex, and “everything created by God is good.”⁹

He created our bodies with all their sexual parts. He made sex necessary for the human race to continue from one generation to the next. He designed our bodies so that sex gives us pleasure. He designed our minds so that we desire sex and are attracted to members of the opposite sex.

God made us this way for a reason: to draw men and women together into the sacrament of marriage and to encourage them to seek from Him the gift of children.

At the same time, sex is not a need. Having sex is not necessary for fulfillment or happiness. In fact, our Lord Jesus Christ, His Mother and many saints lived the most fulfilled and truly happy lives without ever having sex. They prove that growing closer to God is infinitely more satisfying than sex could ever be.

God’s Commandments are Instructions

Along with the gift of sex, God has given us commandments that are instructions for its use.

Whenever you buy something, it comes with instructions that tell you how to use it safely and for the greatest benefit. God’s commandments have a similar purpose. When He tells us to do something or not to do something, it’s because He’s trying to keep us safe and helping us to fully enjoy His blessings.

God’s instructions about how to use sex are very simple: Only a man and woman who are married to each other should have sex. So:

- People should not have sex before getting married (this is called “fornication”);
- After they are married, they shouldn’t have sex with anyone but their husband or wife (this is called “adultery”).

Restricting sex to marriage helps it fulfill God’s purposes, and thereby makes the experience of sex safer and more meaningful.

The Purposes of Sex: Bonding and Procreation

Sex has two purposes in God’s plan: bonding and procreation.

Bonding. Sex can help bond a man and a woman in a uniquely close relationship that is unlike any other—closer than the closest friendship. To fulfill this purpose it needs to be preceded and surrounded by the support of an honest, caring and committed marriage. In this way sex and marriage are like icing

⁹ 1 Timothy 4:4, RSV

and cake—the icing is overpoweringly sweet by itself, but it completes and improves the cake when added on top.

To do its job of bonding, sex also needs to be a uniquely shared experience – something these two people only share with one another. When husband and wife discover sex for the first time together on their wedding night, it becomes their special secret that can bring them much joy and keep them close to one another. Sharing that special experience is like a secret handshake between friends, confirming the love and loyalty they share.

But what if you don't wait until marriage? With each failed relationship you will experience heartbreak that is much more intense than it needs to be. Sex is a powerful experience that makes a person emotionally vulnerable to his or her partner. By having sex you share a part of yourself with the other person, and give a piece of yourself to them forever. If that person leaves you, then it causes even greater pain and sadness. The ordinary feelings of loss and betrayal when a relationship ends are hard, but if sex was involved the pain is much greater.

And then when it comes time for you to marry, sex will not be as special or as secret as it could have been. It becomes more commonplace and ordinary the more widely you experience it, and therefore will not be as effective a bond as it could have been. The bonding power of sex then becomes like a Post-it note that is used over and over again until it can barely stick to anything. It won't be as effective in holding you and your spouse together.

Procreation. Sex can also bring children into the world, and God created it for this purpose. It fulfills His desire to have more and more people He can love and who might love Him in return. As was true with bonding, procreation is happier and more secure with the support of the marriage relationship.

In His love, God made marriage a safe harbor for the raising of children. The loving, Christian marriage of parents gives children the security and guidance they need as they grow up. Children who are raised by married parents generally grow up happier and healthier than those who are not, as has been shown in scientific studies.¹⁰ This is because married parents support one another. If one parent loses a job or gets sick, the other can pick up the slack. Also, each parent has different knowledge and skills to help their children, and working together they can help them in different ways.

Don't get me wrong. With God's help single parents can do a great job, and they often make amazing sacrifices out of love for their children. But it is an extremely difficult situation, and far from ideal. Christian parents in a loving marriage provide the best support for children to mature both physically and spiritually. That's why God wants us to wait until after marriage to have children.

Finding Your Way: God's Plan for You

So far we've talked generically about God's purposes for sex in the human race. But God also has

¹⁰ *The State of Our Unions* 2010. 89-97. Accessed online at stateofourunions.org.

specific plans and purposes for each of our lives. He knows each of you, and wants to help you grow into the best possible version of you.

For most of you that plan includes marriage and children, but for some of you it might not. For Orthodox Christians, there is another path of life that is blessed by God called monasticism. Monks and nuns give up marriage and family life in order to be single-mindedly devoted to God. Let God guide you as you grow up, and His specific plan for you will become clearer year by year.

In the meantime, puberty is introducing you to a whole new sexual aspect of life, and you need to learn how to navigate through its challenges and avoid its dangers. The challenges are new kinds of feelings, thoughts and desires that can be persistent and demanding. The dangers are sins that can derail your spiritual life, and lead to other painful consequences.

Adjusting to New Feelings and Thoughts

You will start to experience sexual feelings and thoughts after puberty begins. They can be both attractive and frightening—attractive because they give pleasure, and frightening because they are new and can be insistent and strong.

As you grow up you are going to start having sexual desires. You will start feeling sexual attraction to people and sexual excitement. You will also have sexual thoughts that come into your mind seemingly out of the blue. All of this is natural and normal. God designed you as a human being to have sexual desire and to be interested in sex—it's part of our nature.

You can't prevent these feelings, desires and thoughts, nor do you need to. But be careful how you respond to them after they appear. Sex is so powerful that it can take over our hearts and minds if we aren't careful.

So don't give much attention to sexual feelings and thoughts, and especially don't seek them out. Instead try to focus on all the other important parts of your life: church, family, friends, education, sports.

If God wills for you to be married, then a time will come when you can begin to seek out relationships with potential spouses. But don't rush into that part of your life. God is preparing you to become an adult, and only after that will you be ready for marriage and sex.

Curiosity

During puberty you will also begin to feel a natural curiosity about sex. Again, don't let the subject take up too much of your time and attention. Sexual curiosity can lead us into danger.

Nevertheless, some amount of curiosity is healthy. You just need to be smart about where you look for answers. Certain sources of information are more reliable than others: a priest, parents, a doctor, or another trustworthy adult. These are people who will usually give you truthful and helpful answers.

Other sources of information about sex are usually unreliable, so avoid them:

- Internet – anybody can post anything online, even if it isn't true.

- Friends and other kids at school – your peers don't know any better than you do.
- TV & magazines – in general, TV networks and magazines are in the business of making money; their goal is not to help us, but rather to use our sexual curiosity and interest to make money.

Avoiding the Dangers of Sexual Sins

We have learned how God intends for sex to be used. Unfortunately, many people ignore God's will and give their minds, hearts and bodies to sex in ways that displease God and lead to painful consequences. These are sexual sins, and you need to be aware of their dangers and how to avoid them.

But before we get into that, I want to make an important clarification. Sometimes people force other people to do sexual things that they don't want to do. This is called "sexual abuse", or "molesting", or "rape". Anytime someone older does sexual things to a child, this is abuse. The abuser—the one who forces—is guilty of a very serious sin, but the victim—the one who is forced—is not guilty at all. It is not a sin to be made to do things you don't want to do. If someone has suffered abuse, God does not judge them but rather compassionately wants to heal them.

Returning to the subject of sexual sins, I've already mentioned two: fornication and adultery. Fornication is premarital sex; adultery is sex between a married person and someone beside their husband or wife. There are also other kinds of sexual sins.

Sexual Fantasizing

I encouraged you earlier not to dwell on sexual thoughts and feelings, and not to seek them out. Doing so is called sexual fantasizing.

Jesus Christ taught us to avoid not just impure actions, but also impure fantasizing and lustful looking: "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). So, it is a sin to daydream about sex or look at people's bodies in order to cultivate sexual desire.

Pornography

Pornography includes books, magazines, websites or movies that are designed to provoke and feed sexual desire.

Looking at pornography is dangerous. It is like throwing gasoline on a fire, since it feeds and intensifies the desires that are already in us. It is also like drinking salt water – instead of satisfying, it just makes you thirstier.

Pornography can be very addictive, and people who started looking at it when they are young can get hooked and find it very difficult to stop.

Pornography is also deceptive and distorting, it portrays a fantasy world, not reality. As a result it unrealistically portrays how peoples' bodies should look and how people should relate to one another.

Masturbation

Masturbation—acting out sex by oneself—often develops out of sexual fanaticizing and pornography. It turns sex into an individual act, separate from love and relationship, devoted instead to pleasure.

It also diminishes the significance of sex within marriage. Remember that sex is supposed to be something that only husband and wife share – their special secret. Masturbation makes the experience impersonal, ordinary and commonplace.

Masturbation can also be addictive. It affects a person’s brain the same way drugs do, stimulating brain chemicals that cause pleasure. As with drugs, some people get hooked on that pleasure. After getting hooked it’s hard for them to quit, even when they want to.

Finally, masturbation feeds a person’s sexual desires like pornography. It makes those desires stronger, focusing the mind increasingly on sex.

*The following topics are **NOT** included in my Grades 5-7 talk, but may be covered in talks with older youth:*

Mutual Masturbation, Oral Sex, Anal Sex

Some people think of these as “loopholes” for keeping one’s virginity “technically.” They might think that before marriage it’s wrong to have vaginal intercourse (what people usually mean by “sex”), but they think other sexual acts are OK, like:

- Mutual masturbation, when one person touches or rubs another person’s genitals;
- Oral sex; and
- Anal sex.

Sex is sex, and all of these sexual acts are sins. We ought to be real, and not justify ourselves with false technicalities.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is when men have sexual relationships with men, or women have sexual relationships with women. Homosexual men are sometimes called “gay”; homosexual women, “lesbians.” This can be a very confusing topic, so we will try to understand it step by step.

First, it’s important to recognize how confusing sexual feelings can be during puberty and adolescence. Many young people experience a sort of passing sexual interest in someone of their own gender at some point. What do I mean? A boy might have a feeling of wanting to be close to another boy, or curiosity about what he looks like under his clothes. An unexpected sexual thought might come into his head about another boy. Or a girl might think or feel the same things toward another girl. None of this means that they are homosexuals – that they are “gay.”

Especially during puberty, when you are curious about sex and your mind is trying to make sense of it, you might have such passing thoughts or feelings. They may shock, surprise or confuse you. But these

flukes don't define you, in fact they will generally go as quickly as they came, and you don't need to worry about them.

Some people, however, persistently feel sexual attraction toward their own gender; often this is the only kind of sexual desire they have ever known. These homosexual feelings are not sins. They do not come from God, but neither did the individual choose to have them. Their roots are psychologically complex, and we may never fully understand them. But this much is clear: we are not condemned for spontaneous feelings that we cannot control.

For us Orthodox Christians, homosexuality is defined by behavior, not by the orientation of one's desires. A person's character and identity are defined by how they choose to live, not by the random thoughts and feelings that spring up in their minds. Regardless of how we feel, we can choose whether or not to behave according to God's will.

Homosexual acts are sinful because they are contrary to God's will. They are a warped version of sex aimed merely at creating a feeling of intimacy. As we have seen, sex is meant to be more than just a fun experience of closeness. It is designed for bonding and procreation—to foster a lifelong, special bond between husband and wife that provides a foundation for bearing and raising children.

People of the same gender cannot naturally become parents together—a man and a woman are required for that. This is one key difference between marriage and same-sex relationships. Another is even more basic: unlike homosexual relationships, marriage (as defined by God¹¹) unites different genders and thereby generates a harmony of opposites that leads to personal growth. God made men and women different, so that by coming together in marriage they might balance and enhance each another. In their relationship they unite the two halves of humanity. Two men or two women can have close friendships, but their relationship can never be this distinctive union of opposites.

Regardless of how someone feels, they are free to choose how they will act. It is possible not to act on those desires, and this effort of self-control is a sacrifice for the sake of faithfulness to God.

It's very difficult for someone to deny homosexual desires in order to be faithful to God. Those who do so often feel isolated and alone in their struggle. Their situation can be confusing. I have a lot of compassion for them, and hope they will seek out me or another priest to stand with them in this struggle.

Abortion

Abortion is the sin of murder.

Many people say that a baby is just a part of the mother's body until it is born. Our Church believes that the baby is a living person from conception – from the moment it starts to grow inside the mother. So, when the baby is destroyed within the mother, then a person is killed. That's why abortion is a big sin.

¹¹ According to the Orthodox Church, a relationship between people of the same gender cannot be called marriage.

Abortion causes deep and long-lasting psychological pain. Women who have abortions often don't realize until afterward how much of a connection they had to their unborn baby. They realize their loss only when it is too late, which results in depression and guilt. And not just mothers, but fathers also express such feelings of loss and guilt after aborting their unborn children.

Repentance & Forgiveness

After naming all these sins, we must not let sin have the last word. In fact, that is the heart of the Christian gospel—God adamantly refuses to let sin have the last word. He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross in order to save us from sin. He is constantly working in the church and in our lives to save us.

No matter how much we have sinned, God loves us unconditionally and wants to forgive us and give us a fresh start. No matter what mistakes we've made, if we admit them in the Sacrament of Confession then God will forgive us and give us a fresh start.

If someone has had premarital sex, it is especially important for them to come to Confession. Sex before marriage is called a "mortal sin" because it can be deadly to one's spiritual life. Those who commit this sin may not receive Holy Communion until they take the Sacrament of Confession. This should be done as soon as possible, so that the healing can begin.

We all sin, we all make mistakes. But the biggest mistake of all would be to give up on God or on our salvation. When we do mess up (even if it seems like a terrible sin), the Sacrament of Confession can restore us and give us a fresh start. There is no sin that is too big for God's forgiveness.

Chapter 5

Male/Female Discussion Groups

Erin Ghata, Dr. Monique Naifeh, Brandon Baca and Dr. Michael Morrow

Our Approach

Erin Ghata

As Fr. Jeremy mentioned earlier, the discussion group sessions proved to be one of the most enlightening parts of our presentation. In our experience, providing a safe, open-eared environment for our youth not only to express their questions or concerns, but to receive answers from medical professionals and experienced church workers allowed for honest and open conversation. I know the boys pretty much stuck to their outlines for discussion and ran on schedule, but in each of our sessions with the girls, Monique and I always ran out of time! (This supported the information we presented on the differences in how girls and guys operate!)

Outlines

Each set of group leaders was equipped with an outline to foster discussion and conversation. (The outlines for each age group are included at the end of this chapter.) They were set up to help guide the group through discussion on the differences between sex and sexuality, what society tells us about sex, what the Church tells us about sex, gender roles, different types of good and bad relationships, self-respect and the respect God has for us. I know that seems like a long list of topics to cover in a short period of time. It is. But we cannot be so naïve as to think sex and sexuality are limited to romantic relationships. Discussing things like abuse, self-esteem and specific ways to avoid or maneuver out of bad situations is extremely important.

Of course the outlines varied among gender and age groups. The guys talked about how girls operate based on emotion and touched on appropriate strategies for “how to get a girl to like you.” The girls talked about how boys are visual, and spent a greater deal of time focusing on self-esteem.

Shooting from the Hip

Having a well planned outline really helps in the discussion section, but this isn’t a lecture. The most amazing thing about this part of the program is letting the kids talk and listening to what they have to say. Since that is the main goal here, you shouldn’t be surprised to hear me say you have to be ready to toss your outline out the window! These are kids we are dealing with! They can jump from talking about potato chips and soda to menstrual cycles in no time. You have to be willing to adapt.

Now, I’m not saying you let conversation run wild, or get too far off topic, but it’s important for the kids to know you are willing to discuss anything relevant to the day’s subject matter. It’s even more important that you stress an environment of confidentiality. What’s said in the room, stays in the room. It’s amazing what can happen when young people are put in a place where they feel comfortable and

know that what's said will remain confidential. We usually said something along the lines of "You might have a question, and be a little shy about asking it, but chances are someone else here has that question, too. There are no bad or dumb questions, and no one outside the room will know what people have asked."

The younger groups were much more timid and asked questions about their friends, while the older groups jumped in and asked more personal questions. To be honest, with the oldest girls group, Monique and I didn't even have time to touch our outlines. They were firing questions faster than we could answer them at first! It was amazing, and we all had a great time learning together. We covered questions on anatomy, myths about pregnancy, myths about the act of sex, lots of "is it normal if..." questions, "what does the Church think about..." questions, and just general medical and moral topics of conversation—most of which wasn't included in our outline.

The Bottom Line

The whole point of the discussion groups is letting the kids have a voice and giving them a chance to ask questions in a place where they can get good answers. Their minds are constantly reeling with questions and uncertainties, especially about sex and other things that are starting to play a more significant role in their lives. They need an outlet for those thoughts and feelings, and what better place than in the safety of their Mother, the Church? Of course, we also stressed the importance of communicating with their parents about their questions and concerns, and also made sure they knew we were available anytime to talk with them or answer questions.

It is important for our youth to know the Church is here to help guide and encourage them in all aspects of their life, including sex. It's not always easy or comfortable to talk about, but we should talk about it anyway!

Oh, and I almost forgot: have snacks in the discussion groups. Food brings us all together and makes things just a little less awkward. There's something about potato chips and fruit snacks that helps inspire confidence and comfort.

Our Notes
SaGE: Sex and God Education
Discussion Group – 5th-7th Grade Girls
Erin Ghata and Dr. Monique Naifeh

This discussion is meant to be highly interactive and conversation driven. In the most successful groups, questions from the group take the majority of the time and determine the course of the discussion.

I. Family - What does the word family mean?

- a. 2 or more people who love and take care of each other. Usually they are related and/or live together. Families come in all shapes, sizes and descriptions.
- b. Families meet 2 kinds of personal needs: physical and emotional
- c. Communication in families—ask the group, “How can you be a good listener?” (Discussion should be centered on how families communicate with each other. Encourage participants to give personal examples.)
 - i. Focus on the person
 - ii. Respond when appropriate
 - iii. Minimize distractions
 - iv. Use positive body language
 - v. Face the person
 - vi. Make eye contact

II. Gender Roles

- a. Have kids describe gender roles (typical roles men and women fulfill)
 - i. in family
 - 1. What are some things moms and dads usually do? (press conversation beyond stereotypes by giving atypical roles for men and women: stay-at-home dads, women can be in the military or on the police force, etc.)
 - 2. Use examples of TV characters that might fill typical and atypical roles for moms and dads.
 - ii. in society (same general idea as above)

b. Discuss Church's view of man and woman

- i. How do men serve the church? How do women serve the church? (priests, nuns, lay people)
- ii. The prominence of the Theotokos in the church and in iconography. Man = Christ, Woman = the Church

III. Good Self Esteem - it means knowing Christ made you and loves you, and therefore you are valuable.

- a. Kids who like themselves for the right reasons tend to make better decisions
- b. We are all made in the image and likeness of God – believe in yourself (God does)
- c. We are all different and are good at different things – God does this on purpose
- d. Self-esteem bank – There are people who pay into your bank and people who withdraw from your bank. You need to be careful about spending time with people who only withdraw from your bank. A good friend pays into your bank. You want good friends and you want to BE a good friend.
- e. Identify good ways to increase self esteem – ask the class. What makes them feel good? (winning a game, being able to complete a task, receiving a kind note, when people say hi in the hall, getting a good grade, etc.) We can't always win the game or get the good grade, but remembering God's love for us and recognizing and using the gifts/talents He gave us helps us feel good about ourselves.
- f. Identify things that damage self esteem – ask the class. What makes you feel low? (put-downs, criticism, not making the team, failing a class or test)
- g. Optional activity: self-esteem building – have everyone go around and say one thing they like about the person next to them

IV. Friendships/Relationships

- a. "good" friends vs. "bad" friends – ask for examples ("what makes a good friend?")
 - i. selfless vs. selfish – people who invest in you vs. people who only take
 - ii. loyal vs. disloyal – People who stick by you through good and bad vs. people who abandon you when the going gets rough
- b. Romantic relationships
 - i. Appropriate relationships – equip with responsible ways to "date" (group dating, spending time with each other's families, etc.)
 - ii. Lust vs. Love – I Corinthians 13:1-8

V. Sexual Exploitation

- a. Exploitation: one person using another to make themselves feel better.
- b. Sexual exploitation: when someone tricks a child into secret touching
 - i. What are private parts? (ask the kids) – anything your swimsuit covers.
 - ii. Kids have rights. If it's happened to you or someone you know it's important to tell someone no matter what.
 - 1. Wrong even if: the person is bigger or stronger, the person has bought or promised gifts, you liked it at first, it has been going on a long time, it happened a long time ago, or the person is in charge of you.
 - iii. 85% of the time it's someone the child knows
 - iv. What to do if a friend tells you it happened to them: Listen, Believe, show you care, don't blame, don't tell peers, do tell trusted adult
- c. Even if you promised not to tell, that's one promise you shouldn't keep

VI. Decision Making –

- a. active v. passive decisions
 - i. Active: conscious thought, choice between two alternatives where one knows the consequences of each. In making active decisions, people consider feelings, beliefs, family beliefs and the consequences. Passive decision making means you have a choice but you allow someone else, time or chance to decide for you.
 - ii. 4 steps of active decision making
 - 1. List alternatives
 - 2. Consider consequences
 - 3. Consider feelings
 - 4. Consider beliefs
- b. decision making and sexuality – impress the importance of making an active decision.

VII. Sex as God Intends

- a. If God designed our bodies...
 - i. He meant for them to experience sex

- ii. But He also meant for them to be His temple
- iii. Your body has been entrusted to you, but ultimately it belongs to God
- iv. Using it for something other than what God intended is harmful and often painful
(whether through physical, emotional, or spiritual consequences)

SaGE: Sex and God Education
Discussion Group – 8th-12th Grades Girls
Erin Ghata and Dr. Monique Naifeh

This discussion is meant to be highly interactive and conversation driven. In the most successful groups, questions from the group take the majority of the time and determine the course of the discussion.

- I. Sex vs. sexuality
 - a. Have group define sex: “What do you think of when you hear the word ‘sex’?”
 - b. Have group define sexuality: “What does the word ‘sexuality’ mean to you?”
 - c. Clearly define these words from an Orthodox perspective
 - i. Sex - physical act; gift of life from God; meant to unite a man and a woman; symbolizes emotional and spiritual intimacy
 - ii. Sexuality – What defines you as a sexual being; male vs. female; men and women were designed to be different; God’s will for us and our desires
- II. What does “Pop Culture” say about sex and sexuality?
 - a. What are T.V., internet, advertising, magazines, peers etc. telling you about sex?
 - i. Homosexuality
 - ii. Pre-Marital Sex
 - iii. Physical manifestations of feelings (PDA)
 - iv. Pornography
 - v. Abortion
 - vi. Contraception
 - vii. Peers might be lying about their experiences
 - viii. Your body is ready but your mind isn’t – it’s a cultural thing
 - b. How do we differentiate ourselves
- III. What is the Orthodox perspective on the topics covered in II?
 - a. Clearly define abstinence

- i. To choose not to do something
 - ii. Can be anytime, even if you've already done something; just don't do it again
 - b. Relate sex (and our bodies) to sanctity of the altar – not just anyone is allowed into the altar
- IV. Gender Roles – God made man and woman for a specific purpose
 - a. Have kids describe gender roles
 - i. In family
 - ii. In society- jobs/school
 - b. Discuss Church's view of man and woman – Why is it different? (readdress what was discussed already)
 - i. Man – leadership role (Christ); not superior; sacrifice; responsibility
 - ii. Woman – (The Church) helpmeet (define); partner to go through life with
 - iii. Altar example; no entrance into the altar without a purpose (nuns can serve in the altar if they are needed)
 - c. Differences between men and women
 - i. Men are visual/physical; Women are emotional/verbal
 - 1. Men more prone to pornography and masturbation
- V. Relationships and Friendships – People we CHOOSE to have in our lives; ask for examples of good and bad friendships/relationships
 - a. Good Friendships
 - i. Why do we need friends?
 - ii. What do they do for us?
 - b. Bad Friendships (is that a real thing? Meaning, if someone is a bad friend, are they really a friend?)
 - i. What effect can they have on our lives?
 - ii. What do we do about them?
 - c. Good romantic relationships; what types of relationships are appropriate?

- i. What do they look like?
 - ii. What is their purpose?
 - 1. Testing the waters and learning how to have a relationship
 - iii. Is it possible at your age?
 - iv. Equip with responsible ways to “date”
 - d. Bad romantic relationships
 - i. What do they look like?
 - ii. Why do people stay in them?
 - 1. Talk about abuse
 - 2. Ways out if you’re in one
 - e. Lust vs. Love - I Corinthians 13:1-8
 - f. Peer pressure – How to address this
- VI. Good Self Esteem - it means knowing Christ made you and loves you, and therefore you are valuable.
 - a. Kids who like themselves for the right reasons tend to make better decisions.
 - b. We are all made in the image and likeness of God – believe in yourself (God does);
 - c. We are all different and are good at different things – God does this on purpose.
 - d. Recognize and use your gifts/talents from God.
 - e. Respect for ourselves
 - i. We are the guardians of our bodies – What’s appropriate?
 - 1. We have to protect ourselves and God’s temple
 - 2. Compare sex and our bodies to the sanctity of the altar. Not just anyone goes there.
 - ii. Saying “no”
 - 1. When to say no
 - a. God designed our bodies to be sexual

b. There is a process

- i. Desire
- ii. Arousal
- iii. Release

2. Why to say no

- a. We need to respect the process
- b. Don't start something you will regret finishing
- c. Kissing as a gateway drug
- d. There's a reason they call it foreplay
- e. Do enough of it and your body will expect and want more.
- f. It's not easy to stop once you start
- g. Not just to avoid STD's
- h. Sex changes and often damages a relationship
 - i. Changes desires and clouds judgment
 - ii. Emotional damage
 - iii. Selfish

3. Ways to say no

f. Respect for others

- i. Keeping ourselves and others from temptation
- ii. Be smart! The ways we dress and act or even talk have an effect on boys
- iii. We want our actions and our presence (basically ourselves) to be a source of encouragement not struggle.

g. The respect God has for us

- i. God trusts us. Enough to live in us and let us make our own decisions
- ii. What we do with our bodies and even our minds is a reflection of how we value God's respect

- iii. We CANNOT lose God's respect. He always offers us trust and love. So even when we mess up, He's willing to give us another chance

VII. Sex as God intends

- a. If God designed our bodies...
 - i. He meant for them to experience sex
 - ii. But He also meant for them to be His temple
 - iii. Your body has been entrusted to you, but ultimately it belongs to God
 - iv. Using it for something other than what He intended is harmful and often painful (whether through physical, emotional or spiritual consequences)

SaGE: Sex and God Education
Discussion Group – 5th-7th Grade Boys
Brandon Baca and Dr. Michael Morrow

I. Discuss Family

- a. Ask the kids to define “Family.” Usually they are related and/or live together. Families come in all different sizes, shapes, descriptions
- b. Talk about what a family provides, i.e. meets physical and emotional needs
- c. Talk about communication -- how to be a good listener, and how it’s important to keep communicating
- d. Discuss “Church Family.” Have the kids define what they think a Church Family is. Discuss it as an extension of the biological or adoptive family.

II. Gender Roles – Define: God made man and woman for a specific purpose

- a. Have kids describe gender roles
 - i. in family
 - ii. in society – jobs/school
- b. Discuss Church's view of man and woman – why is it different?
 - i. Man – leadership role; not superior; sacrifice; responsibility
 - ii. Woman – helpmeet (define); partner to go through life with
 - iii. As an example, talk about men’s and women’s roles in the church, i.e. no entrance into the altar without a purpose.
- c. Discuss the differences between men and women (give examples of this in society) Use “How to Get a Girl to Like You” by Dr. Mark Mosley (see below, pp. 60-62)
 - i. Men are visual/physical, women are emotional/verbal
 - ii. Men more prone to pornography and masturbation; women need to talk about things more

III. Friendships/Relationships

- a. Discuss “good” friends vs. “bad” friends – ask for examples
 - i. good friends are selfless/bad friends are selfish

b. Romantic relationships

i. Discuss appropriate relationships and their purpose

1. equip with responsible ways to “date”

a. group dating

b. approve your date with your parents, etc.

c. see page 62 below, “How to Get a Girl to Like You”

2. Talk about what the purpose of dating is, i.e. testing the waters and learning how to have a relationship

ii. Discuss the difference between lust and love –Read I Corinthians13:1-8

IV. Good Self Esteem - it means knowing Christ made you and loves you, and therefore you are valuable.

a. Kids who like themselves for the right reasons tend to make better decisions

b. We are all made in the image and likeness of God – believe in yourself (God does)

c. We are all different and are good at different things – God does this on purpose

d. Recognize and use your gifts/talents from God

f. Talk about Self esteem as a bank – Make positive deposits into it. God is always willing to make deposits in our bank

g. Talk about good ways to increase self esteem

h. Talk about things that damage self esteem

i. Exercise – Have the boys say something nice about their neighbor/friend/relative when they get home

V. Talk about Decision Making and How it Pertains to Sexuality

a. Let them know that they *can* make decisions for themselves (often kids are susceptible to peer pressure and do something because they feel like everyone else is doing it)

b. Talk about the difference between active vs. passive decisions

i. Active: conscious thought, choice between two alternatives where one knows the consequences of each. In making active decisions, people consider feelings, beliefs, family beliefs and the consequences. Passive decision making means you have a choice but you allow someone else, time or chance to decide for you.

ii. 4 steps of active decision making

1. List alternatives
2. Consider consequences
3. Consider feelings
4. Consider beliefs

c. decision making and sexuality – impress the importance of making an active decision.

VI. Define Sexual Exploitation

a. Exploitation: one person using another to make themselves feel better.

b. Sexual exploitation: when someone tricks a child into secret touching

1. What are private parts? (ask the kids) – anything your swimsuit covers.
2. Kids have rights. If it's happened to you or someone you know it's important to tell someone no matter what.
 - i. Wrong even if: the person is bigger or stronger, the person has bought or promised gifts, you liked it at first, it has been going on a long time, it happened a long time ago, or the person is in charge of you.
3. 85% of the time it's someone the child knows
4. What to do if a friend tells you it happened to them: Listen, Believe, show you care, don't blame, don't tell peers, do tell trusted adult

c. Even if you promised not to tell, that's one promise you shouldn't keep

VII. Sex as God Intends

a. If God designed our bodies...

- i. He meant for them to experience sex
- ii. But He also meant for them to be His temple
- iii. Your body has been entrusted to you, but ultimately it belongs to God
- iv. Using it for something other than what God intended is harmful and often painful (whether through physical, emotional, or spiritual consequences)

SaGE: Sex and God Education
Discussion Group – 8th-12th Grades Boys
Brandon Baca and Dr. Michael Morrow

- I. Discuss Sex vs. Sexuality
 - a. Have the group define sex: “What do you think of when you hear the word sex?”
 - b. Have group define sexuality: “What does the word sexuality mean to you?”
 - c. Clearly define these words from an Orthodox perspective
 - i. Sex - physical act; gift of life from God; meant to unite a man and a woman; symbolizes emotional and spiritual intimacy
 - ii. Sexuality – What defines you as a sexual being; male vs. female; men and women were designed to be different; God’s will for us and our desires
- II. What does “Pop Culture” say about sex and sexuality?
 - a. What are T.V., internet, advertising, magazines, peers etc. telling you about the following: homosexuality, pre-marital sex, physical manifestations of feelings (PDA), pornography, abortion, contraception
 - i. Point out that their peers might be lying/exaggerating about their sexual experiences
 - ii. Mention that their bodies might be physically ready for sex (i.e. puberty) but their minds aren’t
 - b. Discuss how we as Orthodox Christians differentiate ourselves from the world
- III. What is the Orthodox perspective on the topics covered in II?
 - a. Clearly define abstinence
 - i. Abstinence means choosing not to do something
 - ii. Someone can choose to abstain from something at any time even if they’ve already done it
 - b. Relate sex (and our bodies) to sanctity of the altar – not just anyone is allowed into the altar
- IV. Gender Roles – God made man and woman for a specific purpose
 - a. Have kids describe gender roles

- i. In family
 - ii. In society- jobs/school
 - b. Discuss Church's view of man and woman – Why is it different? (readdress what was discussed already)
 - i. Man – leadership role; not superior; sacrifice; responsibility
 - ii. Woman – helpmeet (define); partner to go through life with
 - iii. Use the altar as an example; no entrance into the altar without a purpose
 - c. Discuss Differences between men and women
 - i. Men are visual/physical; Women are emotional/verbal
 - 1. Men more prone to pornography and masturbation
 - 2. Women like to talk about things more
- V. Discuss Relationships and Friendships as people we CHOOSE to have in our lives; ask for examples of good and bad friendships/relationships
 - a. Discuss Good Friendships
 - i. Why do we need friends?
 - ii. What do they do for us?
 - b. Discuss Bad Friendships (is that a real thing?)
 - i. What effect can they have on our lives?
 - ii. What do we do about them?
 - c. Discuss good romantic relationships; what types of relationships are appropriate?
 - i. What do they look like?
 - ii. What is their purpose?
 - 1. Testing the waters and learning how to have a relationship and understand the opposite sex
 - iii. Is it possible at your age?
 - iv. Use “How to get a girl to like you” (below, pp. 60-62) for reference
 - 1. Train your brain

2. Equip with responsible ways to “date”
 - d. Bad romantic relationships
 - i. What do they look like?
 - ii. Why do people stay in them?
 1. Talk about abuse
 2. Ways out if you’re in one
 - e. Discuss the difference between lust and love - I Corinthians 13:1-8
 - f. Discuss ways to address peer pressure
 - i. Do role-playing exercises, i.e. What do you do if you’re offered alcohol at a party; what do you do if your girlfriend wants to engage in sexual activity, etc.
- VI. Good Self Esteem – it means knowing Christ made you and loves you, and therefore you are valuable.
 - a. Kids who like themselves for the right reasons tend to make better decisions.
 - b. We are all made in the image and likeness of God – believe in yourself (God does);
 - c. We are all different and are good at different things – God does this on purpose.
 - d. Recognize and use your gifts/talents from God.
 - e. Discuss having respect for ourselves
 - i. We are the guardians of our bodies – What’s appropriate?
 1. We have to protect ourselves and God’s temple
 2. Again compare sex and our bodies to the sanctity of the altar. Not just anyone goes there.
 - ii. Discuss saying “no”
 1. When and why do you say no?
 - a. God designed our bodies to be sexual
 - b. There is a progression of sexual feelings (desire leads to arousal which leads to release) that’s hard to stop when it’s started

- c. We need to respect this process so we don't put ourselves in bad situations
 - d. So we don't start something we will regret finishing
 - e. Discuss kissing as a "gateway drug" i.e. it's not necessarily bad, but it often leads to other sexual activity
 - f. If you engage enough in even moderate sexual behavior, your body will expect and want more. (Masturbation is an example of this)
 - g. We don't abstain just to avoid STD's
 - h. Sex changes and often damages a relationship
 - i. Changes desires and expectations of a relationship
 - 2. Discuss ways to say no, i.e. discuss physical boundaries with your girlfriend
 - f. Discuss respect for others
 - i. Use "How to get a girl to like you" (see below, pp. 60-62)
 - 1. Train your eyes, ears, mouth, emotions, soul
 - 2. Girls want to be liked; don't take advantage of that
 - 3. Learn how to take "NO" for an answer
 - a. Often girls are better at setting and keeping boundaries than boys, so ask for their input
 - b. Be grateful she said "NO" because it will keep you out of a bad situation in the first place
 - g. Discuss the respect God has for us
 - i. God trusts us. Enough to live in us and let us make our own decisions
 - ii. What we do with our bodies and even our minds is a reflection of how we value God's respect
 - iii. We CANNOT lose God's respect. He always offers us trust and love. So even when we mess up, He's willing to give us another chance

VII. Sex as God intends

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For Reference: **“How to Get a Girl to Like You”¹²**

Dr. Mark Mosley

May 5, 2009

Intro

During this talk together, I want to share with you some secrets about how to get a girl to like you. First, is that girls tend to like boys that act older. Who knows what a “MIT” is? A “MIT” is a “**Man-In-Training**”. The first task is to train yourself to be a man. It does not happen by itself. There are many men my age who have never really grown up. Many of you have done sports or band or some talent that has taken hours and hours and years of training. Being a man, especially a Godly man, takes hours and hours and years of training. So here are some different exercises you can practice in order to act like an older Godly man that will attract the heart of a girl.

First Exercise

The first exercise is to TRAIN YOUR BRAIN. You must get an education in the way women think. You must also know the way men think so you can be smart when you are around girls. You may think that the biggest difference between a man and a woman is their physical bodies; but the first secret to tell you is that the biggest difference between men and women is the way they think and behave. Their brains are much more different than their bodies.

Let’s talk about men’s brains. Men are VISUAL and PHYSICAL. Imagine a hunter who looks and looks - and then attacks. He is not only capturing his prey; he is competing against other men to get the trophy of the tribe. We relate to the world with our eyes and our muscles. When you were a little boy, if you liked the way a toy looked, you just grabbed it. When you see your friends, you tackle them or hit them. When two guys in the hall see each other, they don’t say much – they just slap hands or punch and go on. When men get older, they tend to prove themselves by how hard they physically work. When men see pictures or TV shows of good-looking women, they respond physically. They want to win it. They turn into hunters. This is also why pronography is almost completely a problem with men.

Why? Because women’s brains are completely different. Women generally are EMOTIONAL and VERBAL. Women are not hunters; they are helpers. They don’t want to compete with you; they want to comfort and be comforted by you. Women cry more easily; they shriek and scream. When they get their feelings hurt, they tend to want to bury their head into your shoulder instead of walking away to be alone. Women are more intense in their desire to please others and be liked. Women believe they are liked not so much when they look beautiful, but when they feel beautiful.

Women are known for talking on the phone more. Women are the ones known for writing notes and letters. Women are known for singing and gossiping. Women feel attracted to you more by talking than being physical. Men can like a woman physically without caring for her one ounce emotionally. Most

¹² These notes were very helpful to us in developing the SaGE program, and they are referenced in our discussion outlines above. Many thanks to Dr. Mosley for his permission to include them in this handbook.

women cannot imagine being physical with a guy without believing that the man cares for her emotionally.

MEN ARE VISUAL AND PHYSICAL. WOMEN ARE EMOTIONAL AND VERBAL. MEN COMPETE. WOMEN DESIRE COMFORT. THEY MAY USE THE SAME WORDS “I LIKE YOU” BUT THEY ARE SAYING VERY DIFFERENT THINGS. YOU HAVE TO TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO KNOW THIS.

Second Exercise

The second exercise is to TRAIN YOUR EYES. Because men are visual beasts, they must learn to put on blinders like a horse running a race. Do not hunt for a girl and imagine you have captured her if God has not given her to you. Do not look at the internet, TV, magazines, and billboards with the idea that these women want you or belong to you. Eyes are the windows to the imagination. Guarding what comes into a man’s eyes will help his mind stay pure. Turn your eyes and pray in difficult situations.

Third Exercise

The third exercise is to TRAIN YOUR EARS. If you want a girl to like you, the #1 rule of thumb is to listen to her and be interested in what she is saying. It’s called active listening – and you do it as much with your eyes as with your ears.

Fourth Exercise

Next, TRAIN YOUR MOUTH. Start by keeping it silent and listening. Girls are not looking for you to give them the answer. They just want you to listen. You must resist the desire to compete and fix the problem. So when you are happy, listen quietly. When you are mad, you must resist being quiet – you must work at talking without yelling. When you talk, talk about the situation or the way you feel – try not to make statements about the person. So instead of saying “You are an idiot”, try “What you said to Steven made me so angry”. When you compliment a girl, instead of general statements about her looks like “You are hot” – try positive specific compliments about who she is, like “You are so smart in algebra – that is really awesome”. While it is easier to cut people down, it is far braver and more manly to compliment someone in front of a group.

Fifth Exercise

The fifth exercise is to TRAIN YOUR EMOTIONS. Men tend to not share any emotion except anger. Men often view other emotions as weakness. View women as more developed emotionally in the same way that women view men as more developed physically. Learn from women how to share emotions. Work at telling people that you are sad or depressed or embarrassed, etc.

Sixth Exercise

The sixth exercise is to TRAIN YOUR SOUL. Let God’s desire be your desire. God honors women. He wants you to honor women. Jesus protected women during his entire ministry. Women look different and behave differently. The Bible tells us they are equal in worth. How do we honor women? Don’t make fun of them. Don’t heckle them or tell crude jokes about them. Be their champion. Let them go first. Act the same with them or without them.

Find a girl that people make fun of and honor her by saying hi or asking her a question. Train your soul by praying to God. Do not hate yourself for having sexual desire or for being without a girlfriend. Ask God to help you control the wonderful desires you have. Ask God to help protect you from tempting circumstances.

This training to be a godly man can occur whether you have ever had a girlfriend or you have ever been on a date. Men-In-Training are six exercises that will help you at school, in your home, in your job, etc., to train your brain, eyes, ears, mouth, emotions and soul.

Now I want to talk about a few do's and don'ts about dating. The first point to make is that dating is not practice for marriage. Dating is nothing more than training yourself to understand girls. And better. Just like learning anything new, you should expect it to be confusing – and you should expect it to take a lot of work.

Here is a list of things you should do on a date:

1. Practice your Man-In-Training exercises.
2. Date in a group (it's easier and more fun).
3. Approve your date with your parents (they are much more educated on girls than you are).
4. Pray on your date.
5. Set physical boundaries with your girlfriend.
6. Talk to Godly married men for advice.
7. Date only strong Christians.
8. Think about every girl as someday being someone else's wife.

Here are some don'ts:

1. Don't date alone.
2. Don't look to Hollywood, videos, TV or other couples as your example (find Godly examples).
3. Don't train without a coach (you need counsel and confession.)

Chapter 5

Parents Discussion

Fr. Deacon Ezra Ham

Our Approach

My task in the SaGE Program was to lead a seminar with the parents whose children were participating in the SaGE Program. Specifically, my topic was—*How to Talk to Our Children about Sex*.

It seemed to me the obvious—and somewhat narrower—approach was to discuss the mechanics of “the sex talk”—at what age and what information—as well as offering how-to examples of approaching various sexual topics. Having reared seven children, I was not opposed to speaking from this narrow point of view.

However, I felt such a presentation would be somewhat redundant given that SaGE was actually designed to give “the sex talk” to our children. Knowing that Fr. Jeremy Davis’ notes for each age group (regarding the specific topics he covered) would be given to the parents, I decided not to present similar information to them.

Therefore I approached the topic of *How to Talk to Our Children about Sex* from the larger perspective of sexuality within a marriage and the home. One of the reasons many parents are uncomfortable with having “the sex talk” with their children is because they are uncomfortable with their own sexuality in front of their own children.

Rather than limiting *How to Talk to Our Children about Sex* to “the sex talk” itself, I began asking the question, “What exactly have we been saying about sex to our children since we brought them home from the hospital?” When we tell our children that sex belongs within marriage, what have they witnessed in their own parents’ marriage?

Starting from this larger perspective my seminar *How to Talk to Our Children about Sex* became a seminar about sexuality within marriage—about living a warm and loving relationship in front of our children as they are growing up in the home. It is such a home—and such a relationship—that provides the context in which “the sex talk” actually occurs naturally—progressively and accumulatively—in bits and pieces.

The response from the parents has been very positive. Many have commented that they wish this seminar had been available when they first had children. Others commented they wished their newlywed children had been there. Comments such as these—as well as the overwhelming positive response by parents and teens to SaGE —contributed to the creation of an 8-week seminar for adults, *God & Sex: Making Relationships Work in an Adult World* that also was well received.

The response to my SaGE seminar as well as the response to my 8-week seminar indicates a great need for an adult discussion of marriage, children and sexuality. Those attending these seminars offered a common Thank You—thankful the Church is talking about practical things where they live.

Below is a detailed outline of my SaGE seminar *How to Talk to Our Children about Sex*. I hope you find it useful as you engage in your own dialogue with parents of teenage children.

My Notes

SaGE: Sex and God Education

Parents Discussion – How to Talk to Our Children about Sex

Fr. Deacon Ezra Ham

I. Background Information

A. Christian understanding of human sexuality

- All sexuality is inside marriage. Draw a circle; write “marriage” inside the circle. All sexuality is within that circle
- Pre-marital sexuality is excluded
- Extra-marital sexuality is excluded

B. Two Forms of Christianity

- Monastic Christian = non-sexual Christianity
- Married Christianity = sexual Christianity
- The term “Sexual Christianity” sounds strange because we live in the West. In the West to be spiritual means to be less human and most especially, less sexual.
- God created us sexual—male and female
- Our sexuality is not an Addendum.
- It is not a secondary characteristic—like eye color or hair color.
- Our sexuality is basic to who we are
- If you are a woman, every cell in your body carries a pair of XX chromosomes
- Every cell in a man’s body carries XY

II. Let’s Re-phrase Our Question!

A. How do I tell my children about sexuality?

We’re no longer talking about “how do I have a ‘birds and bees’ talk with my child?”

B. Life Before Kids /After Kids

1. As a married couple you were a sexual couple.

Think back to when you were first married. What was your life like?

- Romantic?
- Fun?
- Sexual?
- Playful?
- Freedom?

2. How did your married life change when you had children?

- More bills?
- Less energy?
- Fatigue?
- Time pressure?
- Less fun?
- Less sexual?
- Less romance?
- Less freedom?

What just happened to us?

We stopped being husbands and wives and started being mommy and daddy

- And that's the home our kids grow up in—and call normal.
- Our children never knew us when we had a sexual marriage.
- Our children only know us in a parental marriage.

3. What's Wrong With This Picture?

- We tell our kids sex belongs inside marriage—but where is it inside our marriages?
- In fact, where is it that our kids see sexuality expressed?
 - At school

- On TV
- Movies
- Sexting
- The Internet
- Magazine covers
- EVERYWHERE BUT AT HOME!

4. So the day comes when we ask, “How do I tell my kids about sex?”

- We do not realize we have been telling our kids about sex ever sense we brought them home from the hospital.

5. Our behavior as parents has huge consequences on each child.

- But our behavior as husbands and wives also has huge consequences on our children.
- If our children only see us being mommies and daddies—and they never see us being husbands and wives—then look what we’ve taught them about sex in marriage!

6. Specific Examples of Living Married Christianity in Front of Our Children

- We say: Sex belongs in marriage. Sex is a special relationship between a husband and wife.
- But how do we demonstrate this in our marriage?

A. The Marriage Bed is not for children.

It is not a bed for the children to sleep in.

It is not a hospital for a sick child, or a frightened child.

(You can make a pallet on the floor beside their bed if an emergency requires it.)

B. The Bridal Chamber is private.

When you are in your bedroom, the door should be shut.

We must teach our children to knock on our bedroom door.

In the Church we honor “space”—the altar, the Royal Doors, the nave.

Likewise, in our home, your bedroom is an honored space—it is off limits to the children.

- C. Lingerie as a Christmas gift from the husband to his wife that is opened in front of the children signals to the children that mom and dad are also husband and wife.

I really believe that Victoria's Secret is for wives not teenage girls.

- D. Public Displays of Affection are appropriate in your home.

I'm not talking pornographic behavior.

But it is healthy for our children to see their parents

- Flirting
- Kissing
- Hugging
- Cuddled on the couch watching TV or a movie

- E. Have a Weekly Date Night

(I know, it's now a movie.)

- If you can't afford a baby sitter and a date, then plan a date in your Bedroom after the kids are down. Get you a small table; put a candle on it, and share a Big Mac.
- Remember—you were husband and wife before you became mommy and daddy. Your children need to see you as husband and wife. Your marriage depends on your relationship as husband and wife; not your relationship as mom and dad.

Someday the kids will leave home. The two of you will look at each other and realize you're looking at strangers.

In the movie *Failure to Launch* Terry Bradshaw plays Al and Kathy Bates plays Sue. Their 30-ish son Trip (played by Matthew McConaughey) won't leave home.

When the son Trip finally realizes his parents want him to move out he asks his mom why didn't she tell him? She tells him she was afraid with him gone she'd be all alone in the house with his father. And then she confesses, What if he doesn't like me anymore?

- The greatest gift a father can give to his children is to love their mother—that is, to be a loving husband in front of their children.
- Men, it's usually up to you to rescue your wife from motherhood. You must guard your Bridal Chamber. You must never stop dating your wife.

F. Adult Couples in your home

Invite adult couples to an adults-only party in your home. There are enough kiddie parties and birthday parties. Our children need to know we have a life, and friends, outside of them. They need to see us as a husband and wife in an Adult World.

7. Living Married Christianity in Front of our Children Brings Them to Adulthood as They Grow Up

- Through the years little questions will be asked. The context for your answers will be your relationship with your spouse—i.e. something they are visibly familiar with.
- Q: Mommy, What's a lesbian?
A: That's when two women try to live together as a husband and wife like Daddy and me. That's kind of silly, isn't it?
- The little questions eventually add up through the years.
- If we are comfortable with our own sexuality, and we're being a husband and wife in front of our children, we will not be threatened by the little questions, even when the little questions get larger.
- Their whole life our children come to us and ask us questions. They point to something and ask, What's this? If we are comfortable with our own sexuality, and our own marital relationship, our children will innocently ask us many sexual questions. The more we respond gently and appropriately for their age level, the more they will feel free to talk with us about the larger sexual issues when they begin to face them.

C. Puberty and Adulthood

1. Our children are biologically hard-wired to achieve puberty and adulthood.
2. Our goal as parents is to raise our children to be independent adults

3. Pre-Puberty and Puberty are great times to talk with our children pro-actively about sexuality.
 - A. “It won’t be long before your body will begin to change...”
 - B. “As a boy these kinds of changes will begin to happen...”
 - C. “As a girl...”
 - This is not a clinical, academic Sex-Ed conversation. It is a personal conversation. This is a bonding time. You are more than a parent; you are an adult guiding your son or daughter towards becoming an adult. Puberty is our time to guide them into adulthood.
 - Don’t panic. Don’t become fearful.
4. Puberty is an anxious time for our children. They have to learn how to cope with changing hormones and changing bodies. Their self-confidence may evaporate.
 - Our children need us to be calm, understanding, sympathetic and wise adults that create a place of emotional safety while all these changes are going on inside them.
5. Questions become statements with puberty.
 - “What is it?” becomes “Did you know...?”
 - Or, “Mom, nobody believes that.”
 - Or, “Mom, things are different from when you were in school.”
6. Statements are not hostile.
 - Do not feel threatened by statements.
 - Do not get defensive.
 - Respond gently and positively—No, I didn’t know that.
7. Turn statements in to questions.
 - In response to “Did you know...,” you ask, “What do you think about that?”
 - You’re not an interrogator. Be gentle. Let them teach you, guide you into their world. You can’t help them learn to be an adult in their world, if you don’t know what world they are in.

- In response to “Nobody believes that,” you say, “They don’t? What do they believe? Really? What do you think about that?”
- In response to “Things are different now,” you ask, “How so? What’s it like now? Really? Wow, I had no idea. What do you think? That’s got to be tough.”

8. Times have changed.

- The world in your head, and the world in my head, is the world we were raised in.
- The world in our heads is NOT the world our children are living in.

D Adulthood is not optional.

1. Our goal as parents is to raise our children to be independent adults.
2. From puberty on we must increasingly allow them the freedom to grow up.
3. The 500 pound gorilla in the room is pregnancy.
 - As parents we must model that sexuality belongs in marriage.
 - Remember we (and the Church) are a voice crying in the wilderness. We are the only ones in today’s world that believes sexuality belongs inside marriage.
 - Why should our children believe us if they have never seen us behaving as husband and wife in our own marriages?
4. As parents we cannot watch our young adult children 24/7. We must let them grow up.
5. We are afraid they may blow it.
 - Our fear gets in the way
 - We are afraid for them.
 - But we are also afraid...
 - A. Of our own social embarrassment.
 - B. That we will be seen as failures as parents.
 - Out of fear we threaten.

- A. I'm not sure being threatened ever kept anyone from getting pregnant.
 - B. We threaten our children with God, and the priests, and the Church.
 - C. We shouldn't do that. God is our source of forgiveness.
 - D. We should never spank our children with God.
6. As parents we need to face our own fears.
 - Our own fear of embarrassment.
 - We don't want to face the shame that our children are less than perfect.
 7. A pregnancy may happen.
 - What will we do with it?
 - What kind of relationship do we want with our children then?
 - Face the question; face the fear; face the shame now.
 8. We cannot stop our young-adult children from having sex.
 - We can model that sexuality belongs within marriage.
 - We can teach our values and morals.
 - In the final analysis, our children will exercise their free will.
 9. Remember, your 18-year-old son or daughter could be in uniform serving in Afghanistan right now.
 - How much control over their life would you have then?
 10. God bless you for being parents.
 - God bless you for loving your kids.
 - God bless you for taking the risk your kids will embarrass you, and loving them anyway.
 - God bless you for forgiving your kids.
 - But God bless you for being foremost husbands and wives that love each other in front of your kids.

Suggested Reading and Resources

Websites

The FLASH Sex Ed Curriculum. This curriculum embraces an abstinence-based approach. It was very helpful in developing our Biological Overview and Discussion Groups segments.

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/famplan/educators/flash.aspx>

National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior - <http://www.nationalsexstudy.indiana.edu>

***The State of Our Unions* journal.** Published online annually, containing studies on various aspects of the present state of marriage and interpreted statistics on marriage. stateofourunions.org.

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