The Vocation of Love reflects many years of dedicated experience by Linda Thayer in helping young people understand and appreciate God’s gifts of human life and love. I strongly encourage use of The Vocation of Love program in preparing young people for Confirmation and assisting them in accepting their vocations to be signs of Christ’s love for the Church and the world.

Seán Cardinal O’Malley, OFM, Cap.
Archbishop of Boston
THE VOCATION OF LOVE
A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Respect for Love

By Linda Thayer
RESPECT FOR LOVE

Introduction
Speak the Truth; Act with Love
Decision-Making
Finding Good Information
Media Messages
The One True Expert
Idea #1: Sacred
Idea #2: Life-Giving
Idea #3: Intimate Love
Idea #4: Commitment
Which Way to Go?
Whatever Is God Thinking?
“But We Love Each Other...”
“We’ll Use Protection...”
Sexual Pressure
To Be or Not to Be: Decision Time
Reflection
Vocation of Love – Part I, Follow-up
The Vocation of Love Prayer
For Vocations
Diocesan Resources

For Vocations as Christian business men and women
We pray to the Lord

For Vocations as Christian authors and journalists
We pray to the Lord

For Vocations as Christians who work in agriculture, construction, labor, and public safety
We pray to the Lord

Father in Heaven we give you thanks for the gift of faith. Please keep your people in your care and faithful to the Vocation you have given them, bringing the Good News of your peace and love to every corner of the world. We ask you for all these things in the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DIOCESAN RESOURCES

Pregnancy Help: ________________________________

Pro-Life Office: ________________________________

Project Rachel: ________________________________

Courage: ________________________________

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The Vocation of Love Prayer

Father in heaven, we thank you today for all of your gifts to us, but most especially, for the gift of our very own life. Without the gift of life, there is no other gift – no love, no faith, no joy – we have nothing without life itself.

We thank you too for the gift of our sexuality. For it is through the true love between a husband and wife that we see a sign of your everlasting love; it is through the love between a man and a woman that a child comes into this world.

Teach us always to respect human life and human sexuality, because these are such good and precious gifts from you. Protect us from the pressures and false promises of the times in which we live and teach us to seek the love and fulfillment that you intended to be.

We ask you for all these things in the name of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Father, we are commanded by your Son Jesus to go out into the whole world and spread the Good News of your love. By the power of the Holy Spirit, please open the minds and hearts of all your followers to fulfill the Vocation of Love You have given them, in word and deed, with generosity, in all walks of life.

Let us pray:

For Vocations to the priesthood, religious life and lay ministry
We pray to the Lord.

For faithful men and women who will honor the Vocation of Love in marriage
We pray to the Lord.

For Vocations as Christian parents, teachers and counselors
We pray to the Lord.

For Vocations as Christian doctors, scientists, and medical professionals
We pray to the Lord.

For Vocations as Christian lawyers, statesman and public officials
We pray to the Lord.

For Vocations as Christian musicians and actors, entertainers and athletes
We pray to the Lord.

One of the scribes... asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mark (12:28-31)

“Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.”

– Pope John Paul II
INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of competing visions of the meaning of human sexuality; sexual messages are everywhere – television, music, movies, the internet. Lost in most of these messages is God’s message, which alone can offer us the true meaning of sexuality and show us what the love between a man and a woman is meant to be.

The purpose of this program is to help you understand God’s gift of sexuality, and the love that should exist between a man and a woman; that all our relationships, especially those between a husband and wife, are meant to reflect the self-giving love of Christ.

Some of you may not be aware of God’s plan; some of you may know people who have made mistakes with respect to living God’s ways. But our purpose is not to pass judgment on anyone – God always offers us forgiveness; if someone has made a mistake we hope they will seek reconciliation with God and advice from a trusted adult. But we hope with this program to give you the understanding necessary to live the love that God intended, and we hope to do it in the spirit of Jesus.

How did Jesus speak? How did He treat other people?

13. When young people use condoms to prevent pregnancy, the failure rate in the first year and a half is almost one in ____. (Failure to prevent disease is even higher.)

14. Birth control pills protect against which STD’s?

15. What is meant by “selfish sex”?

16. A relationship between a man and a woman that is Sacred, Life-giving, Intimately loving and Committed is called a _______.

17. Sex for the Christian must be treated as Sacred, Life-giving, Intimately loving and Committed. All 4 must be present. Does it belong? Why not?
   - premarital sex?
   - having an affair?
   - pornography?
   - homosexual activity, “gay sex”?
   - contraception?
   - cohabitation (living together without being married)
   - divorce?
   - other?

18. (Homework) Look up the first few meanings of the word “love” in the dictionary. Give an example of each.

19. Read St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians Ch.13:4-13. Name some examples of how people show this kind of love.
RESPECT FOR LOVE - FOLLOW-UP

A good source of information regarding sexuality would be someone who knows and cares about you, has correct information and shares your values. Name one good source of information about sexuality, and explain why it is good.

1. Name a risky source of information about sexuality and explain why it is a poor choice.

2. How are the last three generations of Americans different from all those who lived before them?

3. What are the primary motivations for the excessive amounts of sexual messages in the media?

4. God is telling us 4 big ideas about sexuality. What are they?

5. __________________L________________I_________________C________________

6. What is the difference between a girlfriend and a wife? A boyfriend and a husband?

7. What is the nickname for a sexual relationship based only on attraction and lack of commitment, in which one person usually ends up being “used” and rejected?

8. When a husband and wife promise to love each other “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health”, whose love do they imitate?

9. God’s rule “to wait and marry” before sexual activity is a very difficult one in our culture. God gave us this rule to protect us. Name three ways this rule can offer protection to young people.

10. Not all statements of love are the same. Name three ways people can mean “I love you”.

11. Sexual pressure is something we all have to learn to manage. Some pressures come from within us, our own desires and need to belong; other pressures come from outside of us, social pressures - pressures from a boyfriend or girlfriend. If you were in a relationship with someone who was pressuring you to go further than you wished, what would you say?

   “Why not? Everyone’s doing it.”
   “You would if you loved me.”
   “If you don’t, we’ll have to break up.”
   “Nothing will go wrong. We’ll use a condom.”

12. What do you do if you have said “no”, and someone keeps on pressuring you?

SPEAK THE TRUTH; ACT WITH LOVE

But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do sin anymore.” (John 8:2-11)

Adultery means being unfaithful to your spouse, or having sexual relations with someone else’s spouse. In Jesus’ time, the penalty for being unfaithful was the death penalty.

The teachers did not really care about this woman; they were only using her to try to trap Jesus – only the Romans could carry out a death sentence. But also, if Jesus says, “Yes, punish her”, the people might say that Jesus had no compassion; if Jesus says to let her go, then people might say that Jesus doesn’t care about what’s right and wrong.

But Jesus sees into everyone’s heart and confronts them all with the shortcomings of their own lives. He does not condemn the woman, but tells her to go, and not to sin again. Jesus always speaks the truth, but He also acts with compassion and love.

Decision-Making

We all need to make decisions about how we will live our lives; we need to make decisions about issues involving drugs, alcohol, and sex. How do you make a good decision? Good decision-making usually involves the following:

- Evaluating the options (pro’s and con’s, consequences, values and beliefs, morality)
- Deciding
- Re-evaluating

Let’s focus on getting good information, and look at two examples of what can happen when we do not find it.

Darren was 18 years old and facing an important time in his life. One day he decided to go back and visit one of his high school teachers to discuss how his life was going. He sat down and explained that his girlfriend was pregnant, and that he wanted to help her and be a good father to his child. During the course of the conversation, he said out loud, but more to himself than to his teacher, “I don’t know why she’s pregnant. We were using protection.”

Here was a young man who thought he had made a good decision, but found out too late that no one had told him in a meaningful way that no method of “protection” is perfect.

Denise was in her high school science class. One day her teacher decided to show pictures of how a baby developed in
the womb during a class on pregnancy. The teacher explained when the heart began to beat, when the fingers and toes developed and so on. All of a sudden, Denise felt her heart sink, and she began to cry. Earlier that year, she had become pregnant, and had had an abortion. When the bell rang, and she stood up to leave the classroom, she said, “If I knew my baby looked like that, I never would have done it.”

No one had given Denise the information she needed to realize what a baby was like before it was born.

**Finding Good Information**

Two young people had made serious, life changing decisions about sex and pregnancy without good information. Where do we get good information? Who do we ask? The best sources of information about sexuality and other sensitive issues involve the 3 R’s:

- **Right person** – someone who knows and cares for you
- **Right facts** – someone who has accurate medical knowledge
- **Right values** – someone who shares values that are consistent with your Faith

Listed below are some possible sources of information about sexuality. Can you think of some reasons why some of these sources would be better than others?

- Parents
- Family
- Doctors, nurses
- Books
- Internet
- Friends
- Hot-lines
- Teachers, counselors

The Internet is very risky; you are communicating with a stranger, and there is no guarantee that the information they provide is accurate. Not all web sites share Christian values. A friend may care about you, but not really have accurate information or be embarrassed if you ask and try to make things up. A doctor or a teacher or a hotline may have good medical knowledge, but have different values than you, such as believing in abortion. Your parents know and care about you; they have had sexual experience, and are most likely to share your Faith values.

**Media Messages**

Do you realize that the last two or three generations of Americans are very different from all the generations of people who came before us? Unless we are asleep, working or in school, we are constantly bombarded with hundreds of unnecessary images and messages about sexuality every day – music, television, the internet, movies, advertising, billboards, magazines – everywhere, everyday. The average TV watcher sees thousands of sexual messages and images every year.

Many of these media images and stories provide an inaccurate or distorted picture of what the relationship between a man and a woman, what sexuality, is all about; most of them are unrealistic about the consequences of sexual activity; few people in the movies or on television seem to become pregnant, or contract a sexually transmitted disease. Can you think of some programs that are not very realistic about sex?

What is the motivation for placing so many sexual messages and images in front of us every day? Mainly...
What Will You Say?

- C’mom, everyone’s doing it.
- You would if you loved me.
- If you don’t we’ll break up.
- What’s wrong with you? Aren’t you an adult? A man? A woman?
- Nothing will go wrong. We’ll use a condom.

Some Suggestions:

- “That’s just talk. Having sex just to be like everyone else doesn’t sound like a good reason to me.”
- “If you loved me, you’d stop putting pressure on me. I already told you how I feel.”
- “I’m sorry you feel that way. But, I have to do what’s right for me…”
- “Sex doesn’t prove I’m mature. Sticking to what I believe does.”
- “Condoms aren’t 100%. The risk is too high.”

“Love can’t wait to give. Lust (sexual selfishness) can’t wait to get.”

— Jason Evert

Remember, it’s not just about sex; it’s about true love. True love is more than attraction and desire; true love goes beyond affection and caring. It is the gift of yourself in a commitment to the well-being and happiness of another, which that person in turn is willing to give to you. True love is about giving yourself to another in marriage as God gives Himself to us. True love means to live and love like Jesus.

The One True Expert

Imagine that you have invented a new type of computer chip, or an electric car. If you did, you would be the expert; people would come to you for advice and “tech” support, because you have understood your creation right from the very beginning. Who is the one true expert on sexuality? Who “invented” men and women? Who created sexuality? God did, of course, and therefore that makes God the expert on human sexuality, on what it means to be a man or a woman, and what true love is all about. Usually we find out what God has to say about life by studying His Word, or through our parents when they share our Faith, and from the teachings of the Church. What do you think that God has to say about love and sexuality? God actually has at least four big ideas to tell us about the love between a man and a woman.

Idea #1: Sacred

“God made man in his image, in the divine image he made him; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27)

Did you ever stop to think about what it means to say that you are made in the image of God? It means that you, and only you as His particular person (even the number of hairs on your head is known to God), have something unique to tell the world about God and His love. Even more than that, you are made in God’s image as either a male or female. What does this mean? It means that our sexuality is included in being made in the image of God; that there is something about sexuality that should remind us of who God is! That may sound a bit unusual. But look around you. Every star, every snowflake, every tree, every blade of grass, every bird, every creature has life and existence for one reason: the creative love of God. God had so much love that it “exploded” into the creation of the world as we know it. God is the pure love who has given life to everything. Human sexuality reflects the life-giving love of God.

When a husband and wife love each other and have sexual relations, they share life with each other, and they give life to their children. When a husband and wife pledge to give themselves to each other before the priest at the altar of God it is one of the seven sacraments, and a vocation, a call to witness to God’s love in their love for each other and for their children.

“...let us not forget that Christian marriage is a vocation to holiness in the full sense of the word…”

— Pope Benedict XVI

Idea #2: Life – Giving

“God blessed them saying, ‘Be fertile and multiply…” (Gen. 1:28)

Do you know that the first blessing in our Scripture, the Bible, is a blessing that comes through sexual love? It is the blessing of children. Children are a God-planned part of sexual love, not an “accident”; love is meant to give life. Unfortunately, we live in a culture — particularly a media culture — that denies that the creation of children is a built-in part of sexuality.
Have you ever seen the movie Titanic? It was a popular movie from the late nineties depicting a romance on board the ill-fated ship before it sank. Halfway through the movie, Jack and Rose have sexual relations in the back seat of the car in the cargo hold of the ship. Did Jack and Rose follow God’s plan? Sex is a gift from God. Sex symbolizes the total gift of a man and a woman to each other; the love between a man and woman is supposed to reflect the love of God and be open to giving life. God promises to love us always. Jack and Rose have not made these promises; they have not made a total gift of themselves to each other; they are not married.

If you saw this scene (or any other similar scene in a movie) was your first thought, “I bet at this very moment, Rose is becoming pregnant”? Probably not; most movie sex scenes are fantasies, and only rarely deal with the true to life possibility of pregnancy. Rose might very well have become pregnant at that very moment.

Remember: The media is mostly about money and fame, and is most often unrealistic when it comes to sex. Children are not an accident of sex; they are a built-in, God-given purpose of sex.

Sex is a gift from God. Sex symbolizes the total gift of a man and woman complete each other; only a man and woman by nature are capable of creating children – a built-in, God-given purpose of sex.

However, same sex relations represent an objective disorder and are not part of God’s plan; only a man and woman complete each other; only a man and woman by nature are capable of creating children – a built-in, God-given purpose of sex.

However, God does not abandon anyone; the Church offers a support group called Courage, and counseling for people who experience these feelings, but who honor God’s plan and do not wish to act upon this attraction. Why people experience a homosexual orientation is not completely understood; to date, science has not discovered a “gay gene”. Case histories of people who have sought counseling for same sex attraction frequently reveal...

Idea #3: Intimate Love

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man is alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.’” (Gen. 2:18)
As good as it is, however, it is not enough to have a sexual relationship.

SELF-GIFT AND COMMITMENT: This is when “I love you” means “I give myself to you as a gift, body and soul, the way that God gives himself to me.” Only when we say “I love you” the way God does, meaning a totally committed gift (marriage), is the love worthy of a sexual relationship.

“We’ll Use Protection…”

We live in a culture, and are exposed to a media culture, that has not honored the ways of God; it accepts all kinds of uncommitted sexual relationships as long as they are “protected”. This culture has accepted, incorrectly, the idea that there can be such a thing as “safe sex” – with respect to our emotions, pregnancy and disease. But this is a myth; it is not reality. Consider the following:

- Condoms fail about 1 in 5 young couples with respect to pregnancy in the first 18 months of use; by the end of the second year, the rate of failure is more than 1 out of 4
- About 1 out of 5 young people using all forms of birth control will become pregnant by the end of the second year of use
- Over half of high school pregnancies are due to birth control failure
- Pregnancy may occur only a few days per month; an STD can be transmitted any day
- After reviewing scientific studies on the effectiveness of condoms, the National Institutes for Health were unable to prove that condoms reduce the risk of certain STD’s – herpes, HPV, chlamydia, syphilis
- The Food and Drug Administration has recommended that warnings be included in packaging to alert the public to the limitations of condoms
- Hormonal methods of birth control - pills, patches, injections – have side effects (migraines, depression, weight gain, stroke), offer no protection against diseases, and may be abortifacient (it may prevent implantation of an embryo)
- The so-called “morning after” pill (plan B, emergency contraception) contains 50 times the hormone dose of a birth control pill, and may also be abortifacient

Birth control must be used perfectly every time. Have you ever forgotten to bring a pencil to school? A simple mistake such as this with respect to birth control could be a life – changing one, resulting in pregnancy or a serious STD. Furthermore, the relationship between a man and a woman is supposed to reflect God’s life-giving love. But contraception makes “selfish sex” – sex without love, commitment, or possible new life – very easy. Do you remember “pizza love”? Birth control makes being used for sex and being “thrown away” very easy too; it can leave you vulnerable to the depression and loss of self-esteem that results from these kinds of relationships.

Not only this, part of learning about sex, and preparing for a faithful marriage involves learning self-control. Do you think using birth control helps a person develop sexual self-control?

Sexual Pressure

We all face sexual pressure. Some of it is internal; it comes from within us. God has given us a sex drive. We have a need to seek out a life partner, and the need to belong can be a powerful one. We need to learn how to manage our internal pressures.

We also face external pressure – from the media, from our peers, from a boyfriend or a girlfriend. What does external pressure look like?

- Someone in the locker room asks you, “What’s the matter with you?” if you haven’t “done it” yet. (You don’t have to prove anything to anyone. It’s none of their business how and when you love someone else. A true friend will accept your decision to wait, even if they don’t agree.)

instances of abuse or other stresses that are sex related when they were young. Much research and understanding is still needed.

Idea #4: Commitment

“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gen. 2:24)

Up until the time that a man and a woman marry, usually the closest relationship they have is with their birth family. After they marry, this changes. They become “number one” to each other. But even more importantly, Scripture says that a man “clings” to his wife, not his girlfriend. What is the difference between a girlfriend and a wife, a boyfriend and a husband?

The key difference between a girlfriend and a wife, or a boyfriend and a husband, is the level of commitment they bring to the relationship. The commitment of faithful love between a husband and wife reflects God’s commitment of faithful love for His people.

Listen to what God says to His people:

“I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.”

Hosea 2: 21-22

So, God is telling us four big ideas about sexuality. The relationship between a man and a woman is meant by God to be:

- Sacred
- Life-giving
- Intimately loving, and
- Commited

A relationship between a man and a woman that is Sacred, Life-giving, Intimately loving and committed is called a marriage.

Which Way To Go?

Living the ways of God with respect to sexuality (Sacred, Life-giving, Intimately loving and Committed) is not always easy, especially in a media dominated culture which seems to have abandoned God’s ways altogether. Instead of God’s ways, this culture has accepted another kind of sexual relationship which has a funny nickname – “pizza love” – a term coined by Mary Beth Bonacci in her book Real Love.

“Pizza love” works something like this. Someone walks by a pizza shop and they are attracted by the look and smell of the pizza being made inside. All they can think about is pizza. So they go inside. They spend time with pizza; they spend money on pizza. They become really “involved” with pizza. However, after awhile, their feelings towards pizza change; they become dissatisfied with pizza. They place pizza in a cold dark corner of the refrigerator or they throw it away and move on – to Chinese food!

Unfortunately, when it comes to sex, some people treat other people in a similar way. They meet someone...
and are attracted to them. They spend time together. They spend money on each other. Maybe they become sexually involved. But as soon as the feelings change or disappointment and difficulties set in, the relationship breaks up – someone is rejected and the other person simply moves on to someone else. What really happens here is that someone has been used for sex and “thrown away”, because the relationship is based on attraction only, and there is no commitment.

To deliberately use someone just to have a sex partner and then “throw them away” is wrong. Remember, each person is made in the image of God, just as you are, and should be treated with respect, not as something to be used and thrown away. Being used for sex by someone can leave you feeling more empty, lonely and depressed than you can ever believe. This is because a sexual relationship involves more than just our physical self; it involves us mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Many teenagers who have had sex would willingly tell you how much they wished they had waited.

Their relationships, like most teenage intimacies, are, and should be treated with respect, not as some kind of attraction only, and there is no commitment. What really happens here is that someone has been used for sex and “thrown away”, because the relationship is based on attraction only, and there is no commitment.

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