



LIFE MATTERS

The Newsletter of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford
Patricia Pitkus Bainbridge, Director ❖ Rev. David A. Peck, Spiritual Director
555 Colman Center Drive ❖ Rockford, Illinois ❖ 61108 ❖ 815.877.LIFE
pbainbridge@rockforddiocese.org

June 2010

vol. ix • no.9

Safeguarding the Heart of Marriage

By Theresa Notare, Ph.D.

At a family party one of my relatives, a wife and mother, made an outrageous statement. She said there is “nothing wrong with *Playboy* magazine.” She actually called it “innocent.” I had to spend the rest of our conversation helping her understand that pornography—any pornography—is not only wrong, but a potential marriage breaker.

My relative’s perspective is not unusual. Today’s culturally accepted sexual promiscuity has desensitized the general public to harmful depictions of sexuality. Tabloids discuss the sexual exploits of the rich and famous. TV and movies showcase sexually active unmarried characters who typically “hook up,” cohabit, or, if married, engage in adulterous affairs. Pop music celebrates sexual promiscuity while mocking virginity

The escalating use of pornography on the Internet reveals that we are in troubled waters. About 1.5 billion pornographic downloads occur each month from “peer to peer” file-sharing websites; 2.5 billion pornographic e-mails are sent each day; and online pornographic products and services are sold for \$2.84 billion dollars annually in the United States. Most of this traffic is conducted by men.

Pornography is never “innocent.” Pornography is wrong for many reasons. It objectifies the human person, especially women, turns the sexual activity of others into raw entertainment, and exploits vulnerable women and children for tremendous profit. Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons of the Institute for Marital Healing says that people who regularly use pornography develop a “disordered view of beauty, goodness, the human person and sexuality.” This is especially poisonous for married couples. The porn user becomes obsessed with his own pleasure. Authentic self-giving to one’s spouse is decreased and spousal communication is diminished. The

bottom line is that pornography strikes at the heart of spousal intimacy. It does harm to the marital friendship.

A wise bishop who was concerned with strengthening marriages once said that the two-in-one flesh union of married couples is “not an empty symbol.” He said that spouses “have not become the image of anything on earth, but of God Himself,” (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 12). This is a very far cry from the twisted image of self-serving pornographic sex.

The Church teaches that the conjugal embrace is “noble and worthy” (*Gaudium et spes*, #49). Sexual intercourse is not “something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person” (*Familiaris consortio*, #11). The key to understanding the nature of conjugal sexual intercourse is that it is both *unitive* and *procreative*. It is meant to build up the spousal communion of persons, and to cooperate with God to bring new life into the world. It concerns the whole person, who is called to love like God: “The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person . . . is present” (*FC*, #11).

Spouses need to safeguard their union and reject anything, like pornography, that will compromise their love. They must strive to love each other well—reverently, joyfully, and yes, passionately, always in the light of God’s loving embrace.

Theresa Notare, PhD, is the Assistant Director of the NFP Program, Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. To learn more on how pornography harms marriage and to read other marriage building articles, visit www.ForYourMarriage.org