



RELIEF

Respect Every Life In Every Family

A bi-monthly pro-life newsletter

National Association for Respect For Life, C/o St. Martha's Hospital
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March / April 1997

**"Two roads diverged in the woods and I,
I took the road less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference"**

When Frost wrote these lovely lines he probably was not thinking of teenagers, still less of morality. And yet, because poetry comes so close to the truth, those who have taken even the moral 'road less travelled' are witness to 'the difference' it has made in their lives.

There comes a time in the life of every teenager when she/he is as it were, standing at a crossroads, faced with a choice. 'Which way shall I go? Shall I go with the crowd, carried along in the surge of what 'everyone' does? Or shall I opt for that 'road less travelled', assuming responsibility for my choices as I go, doing what I do, not because I have to but because I choose to?'

There is a deep hunger in us for fullness of life, for true and lasting joy. But while we all search frantically for the right thing, many do so in the wrong place. Some link joy with having, grabbing, getting. The paradox often escapes us: true joy is found only in giving, in caring, in extending ourselves for the sake of others. Words often seen on posters come to mind: 'If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you it is yours; if it doesn't, it never was'. The key word then is freedom, and the key question at every choice, 'What is the more freeing/loving thing to do?'

I recall a memorable scene from an Indian movie. The movie itself was so ordinary that I cannot even remember its title. But one scene does stand out, less because of the action depicted than because of the attitude revealed. A rich boy found himself alone with a poor girl and decided to take advantage of her. Expecting the worst she tried the only weapon available to her: persuasion.

Turning to him she said in effect, "I think I know why you have come here. But before you do anything at least listen to me. You are wealthy, educated, with social standing and a bright future to look forward to. One day you will meet a girl from a similar background and marry her. All that you have and are will be your gift to her. For my part, however, I have no education, no wealth, no social standing, and only a bleak future to look forward to. Yet I too dream of marrying one day. But I have only one single gift to give my future husband - the gift of my inviolate self. I beg you not to take that gift from me."

In the movie the boy slunk away. In real life would he have done so? It doesn't matter. What matters, I think, is the attitude of the girl. I often tell half of this incident to groups of teenagers, stopping at the point where the boy's intentions become clear, and the girl decides to use persuasion. I ask the group to complete the story. Every possible shade of reasoning emerges: "It's a sin"; "It's wrong"; "What if we get caught?"; "My mother will hammer me if she finds out"; "What if I get pregnant?"; "How can I face people afterwards?"; "I'm scared my future husband will leave me if he finds out that I'm not a virgin" ... To date no one has ever suggested the powerfully beautiful line of argument used by the girl in the movie.

I fear that we have replaced our eroded values with mere norms, and the minimum, face-saving etiquette of 'not getting caught'. Children are expected to conform to the norms but no one tells them the values that such norms are designed to protect. We owe it to our children to feed them on values, to enable them to choose life over death. When we propose, for example, that our children observe the norm of chaste living, we do it to promote the value of 'life in all its fullness'.

There was a letter recently from a girl who told me, among other things, that her boyfriend had just walked out on her. A stage had come in their relationship when he proposed sex before marriage. "If you really love me," he argued, "you will say yes". "Sorry," she replied, "It is precisely because I love you so much that I am saying no". She went on to say that in her heart there was some pain but in her mind there was a great peace. I understood her fully and found myself wishing there were many more like her.

Bro Kevin Ward cfc

Editorial

Teenage abortions on the rise



At 14, Sneha Choudhary from Delhi is the archetypal affluent Indian adolescent; lobbying with her mother for permission to attend a late-night dance party, demanding a hike in pocket money and complaining about not being allowed to do anything. But last month, Choudhary took the first independent decision of her life; she got her eight-week foetus aborted at one of the city's private abortion clinics. "I didn't ask anyone. I didn't tell anyone", she says defiantly. Despite the defences, Choudhary is disturbed; shattered by her boyfriend's breach of promise that "making love once wouldn't do anything", and by his obvious cooling off once she broke the news to him.

Eighteen-year-old Manisha Singh has grown up in just a fortnight after she took the momentous decision to terminate her three-month pregnancy. "Though I've known my boyfriend for over two years, I have no plans of settling down with him", she explains. And though Singh and her teenage friend did take precautions, "We probably didn't do it right", is her simple explanation.

Sneha Kapoor, a college-going 18-year-old from an affluent Bombay family, went in for her first abortion last year. Independent and strong-willed, Kapoor did not take anyone into confidence at home. "I wasn't worried or scared. I knew it would be over in half a day", she says. It was only after her gynaecologist insisted on an HIV test and Kapoor tested positive that she panicked. Kapoor had three sexual partners.

Statistics compiled in major metros

Psychologists term the trend "precocious sexuality". And a growing number of under-20 school and college-goers all over the country are the new and naive victims of this urban phenomenon.

Delhi Figures compiled by the Department of Health show that the number of abortions conducted in the city administration clinics in the under-20 category jumped from 278 in 1991 to 676 in December 1994.

Trivandrum Dr. Sheela Shenoy, an Assistant Professor of Gynaecology at Trivandrum Medical College, compiled a study on teenage abortions in the state and discovered that the number of cases had increased by 20% in a period of just one year.

Madras Rough estimates culled by a government-run, city-based hospital show that out of 16,000 women who got an M.T.P. (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) done in 1994, nearly 20% were unmarried teenagers.

Calcutta In 1993, the Journal of the Indian Medical Association published a study on the profile of women undergoing M.T.P.s, based on research conducted by R.G. Kar Medical College. In the unmarried category, 90.9% of the clients were teenagers, a figure which had risen from 56% in 1991.

Reasons for the rise

- Confidential abortion clinics have become easily accessible.
- Affordability - an abortion costs anything between Rs. 500 and Rs. 2500.
- A more casual attitude about pregnancy --
"A girl can have an abortion in the morning and go home in the afternoon and her parents would think all she did was attend classes in college", says Dr. T. S. Madhurambal, President of the Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' Society of South India.
- Peer pressure on kids is high --
Says Sangeetha Pande, a Delhi teenager "It's just like America. You're thought of as frigid or abnormal if you refuse sex".
- The influence of popular media - television, videos, music and movies --
"Our young people are bombarded with the message that to be trendy, they must be sexually attractive", says Bombay-based Ranjita Ojha, mother of a teenage daughter.

In a survey conducted by *Aside*, a local magazine for adolescents in Madras, teenage school and college girls were asked whether the fear of unwanted pregnancy would keep them away from casual sex. In a majority of the cases the answer was "no". The obvious next question was about what they would do if they became pregnant. The reply? Abort.

Searching for Solutions

Dr. Narayan Reddy, a sexologist offers this point of view, "Who are we to tell teenagers to stop having sex? The next best alternative is to provide them with a holistic sex education that will inform them not only about intercourse, but also about contraception".

(Excerpts from the article 'The Perils of a Permissive Age' by Charulata Joshi, *India Today*, April 1995)

Contraception is not the solution to teenage pregnancies. The only solution is CHASTITY.

Challenging teens to chastity

By Molly Kelly

HELPLINES

I suppose all of us, at some time or another, have harboured a secret desire to be something else. As a teenager, I was active in sports, and was a pretty good athlete ("for a girl", as my brothers would say). Deep down though, I always wanted to be a cheerleader: They had the spiffy uniforms, the smooth moves, and the eyes of all the boys fixed intently on them - while we huffed and puffed our way down the hockey field in our atrocious blue tunics and long black leotards!

Well, my wish has finally come true. Today, I am a cheerleader - and my team is comprised of today's teenagers. I speak to nearly 30,000 of them each year, throughout the United States and Canada, teaching them the truth about abortion - and challenging them to do something about it.

Are they receptive? Absolutely! Whenever I speak, they ask what they can do to help stop the killing. Three years ago, a National Teens for Life organisation was established, and today there are 33 state chapters!

Recently, I read this very interesting statement in a pro-abortion newspaper: "There is a new and dangerous element in the pro-life movement called National Teens for Life". Isn't that beautiful? The pro-abortionists are scared of pro-life teens! That disclosure alone should be enough to make us double our efforts in our outreach to teens.

Something Missing

About two years ago, however, I began to experience an empty feeling after my presentations. I felt I was leaving something out. And then it hit me: If abortion results from unwanted pregnancies, and unwanted pregnancies result from illicit sex, then shouldn't I be dealing with the root of the problem: promiscuity?

Thus began my career teaching chastity. My approach is a simple one: I explain that chastity means using God's gift of sexuality as He intended: that it means reserving sexual intercourse for marriage.

This message is appealing to teenagers because it makes them feel good about themselves. Sadly it's often the adults who belittle chastity talk. Some say to me, "Chastity! You don't really use that word, do you?" Others say, "You can't expect teens to say no to sex, so you better start talking contraception to them".

It's tragic that so many adults see teenagers in this degrading way; and what an impact that has on teens! I often use the example that if you tell a girl she's ugly, then she sees herself as ugly; and if you give her the pill because you doubt she can say no, then she also doubts she can say no.

The Whole Truth

The most respectful - and therefore most effective - approach to encouraging teenagers to be chaste is to tell them the truth. And that must include exposing those organisations, such as Planned Parenthood, who undermine sexual morality and get rich off of the results: contraception and abortion. If our children learn this, chastity just might come back in style - and Planned Parenthood could go bankrupt!

Let me share with you some of the exciting responses I've gotten from teenagers. In Maine, I received a standing ovation from 850 boys after telling them that the sexual act is a beautiful gift that belongs in marriage. After speaking at a youth rally in New York, I was invited by the students to be their graduation speaker. And in Canada, a young boy approached me after my talk and exclaimed: "You're awesome!"

To sum it up, I am challenging you adults to challenge teens to chastity. Teens need to hear it from adults and they need to see it being practiced by adults. Let's get on a chastity roll! Talk it up at home; bring it to school; spread it at work! How about this idea for a bumper sticker - "Chastity on board". (That should cause some fender benders.)

Remember, we have the truth. Let's not keep it to ourselves. Chastity is contagious. Help someone catch it.

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Why some teenagers adopt outrageous behavior, while others seem to move smoothly into the adult world, is a mystery that has baffled the older generation for centuries.

10 Questions all parents should ask themselves

Adolescence is a difficult age. It's as difficult for teenagers as it is for parents. If you feel that your communication channels with your child are breaking down, probably the answers to these questions will help strengthen and reinforce the relationship between you and your teenager.

1. Your teenager is not the child of yesterday. Do you still treat him/her like one?
2. Do you take time to listen, really listen to your teenager? Or do you assume you know all the answers to all his/her problems beforehand?
3. Is your relationship with your teenager restricted to what you do for him/her? Or is it measured in the time you spend together?
4. Is there an open, loving environment at home, where every member of the family is free to give his/her opinions?
5. Do you make each of your children feel truly special and remind them of this as often as you can?
6. Do you have a deep, loving relationship with your spouse? Are your children conscious of how much you mean to each other?
7. Do you look on parenting as a job with a set of responsibilities, one you can retire from once the children are grown up? Or do you see it as a continuing, meaningful relationship?
8. Do you take time to instill good values in your teenager?
9. Do you reason with him/her when you say 'I don't want you doing this or that'?
10. Are your expectations of your teenager fair or unrealistic? Do you make time for the now or tend to live in the future, as far as your teenager is concerned?

Around the Dining Table



How families can grow closer simply by sharing meals together.

Dinnertime is for food, fun, laughter and love. No financial discussions, stressful problem-solving, lectures or nagging inquiries allowed.

tip 1

Telephone calls, radios or the television are out. This is the time to hear about family happenings. World events can wait.

tip 2

No eating separately unless jobs, other activities or previous plans mandate. Even then, work out a schedule when the family can gather together for dinner as often as possible.

tip 3

Make dinnertime something to look forward to, even if the meal is little more than leftovers cleared out of the fridge. The time together will be remembered longer than the menu.

tip 4

Dinnertime may be the first haven of refuge and relief for those who left home in the morning to tackle school, jobs, pressures and peers. Make the most of it.

tip 5

Every meal begins with a prayer. Everything tastes better and conversation is guaranteed more peaceful - spilled milk and all! Food and family are God's gifts.

tip 6

Sunday meals are special. This is the one day of the week that your adult, out-of-home or married kids should have a standing invitation to come home for dinner.

tip 7

(Reprinted from the article by Mary Ann Kuharski, in the magazine, Columbia, Sept. 1996)

Your **ACTIONS**
are your **ADS**

Listen!
Your clothes
are talking!

DO RIGHT
and you'll
learn to
like it

Keep right
and you won't
go wrong

BE FREE.
STAY VIRGIN

Great
for guys too...
ABSTINENCE

LOVE
the GOOD
in others

Reserved
for
marriage

EVERYBODY
ISN'T
DOING IT.
BE SMART TOO

CHASTE
SEX
IS SAFE SEX

CONTROL
YOUR FEELINGS
OR THEY WILL
CONTROL YOU

IT HAS TO BE
CHASTITY

Teenagers As I See Them

By Brother Kevin Ward cfc

When I think of teenagers I think of this little girl who asked a hawker if black balloons would fly as high as coloured ones, and was told: "little lady, it's not the colour on the outside that makes the balloon to fly: it's the stuff on the inside."

Teenagers are like balloons. If we look at their outside, we are sure to be put off. They are often scruffy, unkempt, rebellious, all-knowing. But get inside them - which is not easy - and you will discover a world of generosity, budding dreams and honesty; plus a whole hidden reservoir of wonder and a great deal of pain.

The pain of course has its roots in the insecurity that is inherent in being a teenager. Your average teenager is neither a child nor an adult - but wishes alternately to be

each. He / she wants to be independent yet balks at the idea of responsibility.

It seems to me that the cry in the heart of every teenager is for some one with a listening ear and an understanding heart. Regard them as children with problems and not as problem children. They do not want you to solve their problems, only to listen with respect and empower them to solve them themselves.

In a word, teenagers are a lovable lot, and fun to be with. And if they get on adult nerves, it is good for us to remember who reared them!

(Bro. Kevin Ward cfc is at present on the Staff of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC). He loves people, nature, ecology, Indian Spirituality...)

I'd just like to say.....

Speaking of every human being having the inviolable right to live, I would like to give you a rather personal example. My father used to manage a tea estate, and when my mother got pregnant for the second time, they were worried how they could make ends meet. They informed a gynaecologist that they were expecting a baby... Imagine their shock when, without any apparent reason, the doctor calmly said, "I'll give you an injection, then you'll get your period again, don't worry." My parents were stunned at the coldness with which the doctor spoke. They never dreamt of aborting their child, and I'm glad.... because otherwise I wouldn't be here to tell the story.

Miss Kiran Mascarenhas

Our school had organised an exhibition "Heal the World," which covered all the subjects taught in school. Our Biology teacher, Mr. Brian Highland, had asked me to speak to the visitors about abortion..... the preciousness of LIFE and the need to preserve it.

When I visited Sr. Annuntiata to collect more information on the topic I was horrified to see

The National Association for Respect For Life is a non-profit, secular organisation of people from all walks of life, united in a common goal - which is to promote life in all its stages - from conception to death, and act against all that would lessen human dignity.

NARFL believes that every human is precious and unique in the eyes of God and the human family.

The association is concerned with issues like Abortion, Child Labour, Drug Addiction and Alcoholism, Suicide, Battered Wives, Dowry Deaths, The Plight of the Disabled, Euthanasia and AIDS.

For more information call 2275081 or write to us at the address given alongside.

Tell us how you'd like to help

- By making a contribution
- Becoming an active member
- Giving of your time
- Prayer

the pictures of babies (foeti) that were cut into pieces and drenched in blood, others burnt to death by a salt solution. I wondered how man could be so cruel? By abortion we are killing a living baby - one whose organs are formed and functioning by the third to the fourth week inside the mother's womb.

There were many people who did not know what abortion really meant and how cruel it is. During the exhibition I had the opportunity to convince parents and students alike. Some of them were really moved on seeing the pictures and I felt that I was succeeding in my work.

**Sachin Thomas, Std. X,
Bishop Cotton Boy's School**

Congratulations on your Newsletter - Jan, 1997. It is the first time that I received it. I appreciate "Help is at Hand" with phone numbers and addresses. But in the first para "Understanding the Self", you mention the various dimensions of the human person, but have forgotten to mention the spiritual dimension.

**J.M. Fuster, S.J., Ph.D., St. Xaviers College,
Mumbai.**

(We are pleased to note that you read our issue so keenly and noticed the error. We regret the slip, and would like to add, the word "Spiritual" did appear in the original script but mistakenly got left out at a later stage. Thank you for pointing it out to us) - Editor.

I am in receipt of your publication "RELIEF". Thank you very much for the same. It would be really a Relief to any of the victims who would be inclined to stray from the right path of justice and the Commandment of God and the Church. I congratulate the efforts of the publishers. May the Almighty bless your endeavour.

**Rev. Thomas K.F., Ikyaniketan Social Central,
Wayanad Dist., Kerala.**

We welcome your comments, reactions and responses to the articles in this issue of RELIEF. Do send in your own articles, letters & testimonies to the address given below.

NARFL

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For Private Circulation Only.

*Published by Sr. Annuntiata, NARFL, C/o St. Martha's Hospital, Nrupathunga Road, Bangalore 560 009, Karnataka, INDIA
Printed at Sesa Sadan, Koramangala, Bangalore 95.*