

Human Sexuality: Knowing the Terms and Definitions in the Context of God's Love

God's love is essential for full realization of ourselves as sexual beings. In order to cherish and use God's good gift of sexuality wisely, we need to know as much about ourselves and our sexuality as we can.

Sensuality is the need and ability to be aware of others, especially a sexual partner. Sensuality is that sexual part of ourselves that lets us feel good about our bodies—how they look and what they can do—and that allows us to enjoy the pleasure our bodies can give to us as well as to others. Sensuality includes several different aspects of our sexuality:

- Awareness of our physiology—understanding and appreciating how and why our bodies function as they do.
- Body image—includes our feelings about how our bodies look and work; whether we feel satisfied or dissatisfied with our bodies.
- Attraction—an aspect of our sexuality (determined by the brain, our most powerful sex organ) that enables us to feel attracted to some people, but not to others.
- Satisfaction of skin hunger—our need to touch, to be held by, and to make contact with another person.
- Release of sexual tension—the unique human sexual response cycle that enables human beings to experience arousal, followed by a release of sexual tension through orgasm. Males and females experience this process differently.
- Importance of sensory expression—our ability to experience sensuality through our many senses, as well as through fantasy and memory. It has been demonstrated that sexual fantasies are normal and are generally unrelated to sexual behavior.

God's love fashioned the bodies housing our sensuality.

Intimacy is the ability and need to experience emotional closeness or nearness to another human being and to have these feelings returned. Intimacy focuses on our closeness to others in emotional terms, whereas sensuality relates to our physical selves and physical closeness. Important components of intimacy include the following:

- Caring—having an emotional investment in the well-being of another person.
- Sharing—giving or revealing a part of oneself to another.
- Liking and loving—having strong emotional attachments to others and desiring to be with them.
- Risk taking—being willing to risk disclosing part of oneself in order to be close to another.
- Self-disclosure—risking possible exposure by another person with whom we have been open; sharing of our secret parts.

As sexual human beings we can establish intimacy without engaging in sex. Young people, especially, need the opportunity to experience intimacy without having sex. The mature expression of sexuality includes intimacy that goes far beyond mere genital sex and is expressive of the totality of human relationships.

God's love is reflected in our loving, intimate relationships.

Sexual identity is the development of a sense of who one is sexually, including a sense of maleness or femaleness. Sexual identity develops gradually in three different areas. These include the following:

- Gender identity—a sense of maleness and femaleness that results from knowing whether one has a penis and scrotum or a vulva and breasts.
- Gender role identity—everything we do and feel that expresses our maleness or femaleness. Our development in this area often reflects society's messages about what it means to be male or female.
- Sexual orientation—whether our primary sexual attraction is to persons of the same or of the opposite gender, that is, homosexuality or heterosexuality.

All three aspects of sexual identity can have a profound effect on the well-being of a person.

God's love gave us our sexual identity.

Reproduction includes the attitudes and behaviors related to producing children and the consequences to society and individuals that result. Human reproduction includes many recognizable aspects of sexuality, which are as follows:

- The facts of life—information about reproduction, conception, contraception, and physical development.
- Feelings and attitudes—how we feel about pregnancy, birth control, abortion, and other issues related to human reproduction.
- Physiology and anatomy—what the male and female reproductive systems are and how they work.
- Sexual intercourse—the human behavior that can result in pregnancy and production of a new life.
- Teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—commonly occurring, unintended consequences of sexual activity that can have profound implications for young people.

God's love forged our capacity to create new life in God's image.

Sexualism is the use of sexuality to influence, control, or manipulate others. This last aspect of sexuality spans behaviors that range from harmless to sadistic and violent and includes such behaviors as flirting, seduction, withholding sexual intercourse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, incest, and rape. In the area of sexualism we find the potentially dark and sinister side of our sexuality—therein lies the power to destroy another human being, just as in reproduction lies the ability to create life. We cannot understand ourselves as sexual beings until we acknowledge all aspects of our sexuality, including that of sexualism. In order to avoid being sexually manipulated, each of us needs to learn assertiveness skills that can protect us from sexualism.

God's love enables us to affirm our God-given sexuality and resist the urge to exploit our sexuality.