

- 864 Every person is called from early childhood to love both God and neighbour. The essence of Christian sexual education is in teaching one how to love. The goal of such education is to help a maturing young person discover in himself or herself God's gift of sexuality and learn to value the personal character of this gift.
- 865 A child's parents have a particular responsibility for Christian sexual education. It is precisely they who are called to be gentle and wise guides. It is they who must lead the child on its path of discovering God's gift of sexuality in himself or herself, revealing its nature and meaning in a manner appropriate to the age, needs, and depth of the child's inquiry. The Church and society should assist parents in the realization of this vocation, but they can never adequately replace them.

3. Marital Fidelity

- 866 An essential characteristic of Christian marriage is fidelity. It is based on Christ's faithful love and not merely on the human efforts of the spouses. Marital fidelity flows from God's faithfulness to his promise and Christ's fidelity to his Church. To be faithful means to know how to be courageous in one's choice and responsible for one's promise (vow). Fidelity is strengthened through participation in the Holy Mysteries (Confession and Communion), joint prayer, mutual understanding, support, trust and forgiveness, as well as constant spiritual battle against temptations. "Joint prayer by the entire family preserves it at least partially from disagreement and argument ... If a husband and wife were thus to pray together every day, they would be compelled to forgive each other every offence, day in and day out."⁵³⁴
- 867 Marital fidelity is weakened and even ruined by deception, insincerity, jealousy, and thoughtless behaviour. These in turn can lead to marital betrayal and the squandering of the graces received in the Mystery of Marriage. Christ equates even lustful thoughts with adultery: "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).
- 868 The Church, faithful to the words of Jesus Christ, emphasizes the indissolubility of marriage: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mk 10:11-12).

⁵³⁴ METROPOLITAN ANDREY SHEPTYTSKY, Пастирське послання 0 супружестві і родині [*Pastoral Letter on Marriage and Family*] (February 17, 1902).

4. Marital Fruitfulness in Love

- 869 The most important aim of marital life is the communion of a man and a woman in love so that, abiding in it, they may come increasingly to know God, who is Love. Abiding in God's love, their love will also be fruitful: "What the soul is for a human being, love is for the family. Where the soul is no more, life also disappears; there will be a body, but it will be dead. A family without love is like a body without a soul."⁵³⁵ Marital love exists first of all for the good of the spouses themselves.
- 870 In marriage, a man and a woman are called to co-creation with the Lord in the birth of children: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (*Gn 1:28*). The Lord is the source of human life, so in accepting the gift of a new life, spouses become partakers of this Source. This is why the gift of fertility is God's blessing for a marriage and strengthens it in love. Marriage is an icon of Christ's Church, which gives birth to people for eternal life.
- 871 The marital love of a man and a woman is expressed in their sexual life together. In the sexual act, spouses are joined in love, expressing the indissoluble unity of marital life. True marital love is fruitful love, therefore the bodily union of spouses is open to procreation. The sexual act has a double aspect: unitive and procreative. Only such a conjugal act is virtuous and pure. The loss of one of these aspects of the sexual act distorts its substance, destroys the virtue and purity of marital life, and is therefore a sin.⁵³⁶
- 872 In bearing and raising children, a man and woman are co-workers of God's love. This is what characterizes responsible parenthood in marriage. A particular responsibility in marriage lies in the planning of births, which is related to the parents' ability to provide their children an appropriate upbringing, having ensured their proper physical and spiritual development. Thus, it sometimes occurs that a husband and wife decide to delay temporarily the birth of children. However, such a decision should not be based on selfish and consumerist motives; it should not completely exclude childbearing, which is a fundamental good of married life. In other words, it ought not to become a rejection of fatherhood and motherhood per se.⁵³⁷
- 873 The Venerable Metropolitan Andrey teaches: "If God has given someone children, that person has been given a great responsibility to raise

⁵³⁵ METROPOLITAN ANDREY SHEPTYTSKY, Пастирське послання 0 супружестві і родині [*Pastoral Letter on Marriage and Family*] (February 17, 1902).

⁵³⁶ See PAUL VI, *Encyclical Humanae vitae [On Human Life]*, 12.

⁵³⁷ See VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Constitution Gaudium et Spes [The Church in the Modern World]*, 51.