

Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor: Lutheran Youth Talk about Human Sexuality

Youth



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Living in God's amazing grace

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**Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor:
Lutheran Youth Talk about Human Sexuality**

Youth



August 2007

Dear Partners in Mission and Ministry:

Since the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly mandated that this church prepare a social statement on human sexuality, we have together been on a journey of conversation and deliberation. As part of the process for developing this social statement, now due to come to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2009, the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality has published three documents for congregational study. These have focused on a wide range of issues related to human sexuality, including homosexuality. Their intention has been to help this church engage in a full discussion of sexuality, and to inform the preparation of the social statement.

As part of their discernment, the task force has been profoundly aware of the many ways in which the subject matter of these studies matter to and impact youth. Guiding the formation and Christian vocation of youth is a sacred trust that this church seeks to fulfill. Therefore, in the course of writing these studies, the task force has identified the need to seek out the perspectives of youth.

This study, an adaptation of the third task force study *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk About Human Sexuality* is intended for use by senior high youth together with parents, pastors, and youth leaders. Its principal author, youth worker and youth and family therapist Kari Lyn Wampler, is owed a particular debt for her creative approach to adapting the complex material from the original study. The rich variety of appeals to learning styles is her doing, as well as the hours required to make the youth study so accessible.

It is the sincere hope of the task force that this study will invite the participation of youth in the discussion and deliberation leading to the formation of a social statement on human sexuality. Responses may be given using the form at the back of the study, and through the discussion forums on the accompanying Web site at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth The deadline for the response form is December 15, 2007. However our experience is that the conversations generated by these studies continue after the deadlines for response. Therefore please note that the online forums will be live until 2009.

I am pleased that we can offer this resource for the youth of this church. The work of the task force will be greatly informed by their knowledge, insight, and experience.

Kind regards,



Rebecca Larson, Executive Director
ELCA Program Unit for Church in Society

Table of Contents

Letter from the Executive Director i

What is this Study? 1

Leadership Guide 3

Parents on Board 7

Session 1. Created as Sexual Beings..... 11
Session 1. Handout for Parents 19

Session 2. The Voices of Influence..... 21
Session 2. Handout for Parents 31

Session 3. When is Sex Okay?..... 33
Session 3. Handout for Parents 41

Session 4. Sex, Power, and Abuse..... 43
Session 4. Handout for Parents 51

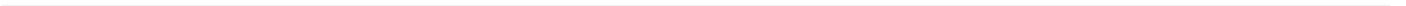
Session 5. Selling Sex 53
Session 5. Handout for Parents 61

Session 6. Sex for Money 63
Session 6. Handout for Parents 71

Conclusion for Study 73

Appendix A: Monthly Budget..... 75





What is this Study?

Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor: Lutheran Youth Talk About Human Sexuality is a youth-centered adaptation of the adult congregational study *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality*. (2006) That study was the third in a series offered by the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality. Those three and this youth study have all been designed to help Lutheran Christians think and talk faithfully about sexuality.

All these studies are part of the church's response to directives from the 2001 Churchwide Assembly, including the authorization of a social statement on sexuality which will be proposed to the 2009 assembly. The task force was established by the ELCA Church Council for the mandated studies. *Journey Together Faithfully: Part One* (2002) helped participants consider "A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions" (ELCA, 1996). *Journey Together Faithfully: Part Two* (2003) asked members of the ELCA to consider how this church should respond to the requests to bless same-sex unions and to ordain, consecrate, or commission people in committed same-sex unions.

The third study explores broad and deep principles for Christian thinking about sexuality and specific issues not considered in the first two studies. The task force hopes the approach integrated into that third study will encourage a fresh look, a means to reframe the conversation, and a nurturing way to listen to the Holy Spirit and to one another in a quest for Christian wisdom about human sexuality for this time.

The task force has provided supplementary materials of various kinds to these congregational studies, and *Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor* represents yet another example. This youth study was produced at the request of members of the task force, but the need for youth curriculum on faith and sexuality has been expressed repeatedly. As early as 1991 the ELCA social statement on abortion stated: "Our congregations and church schools ought to provide sex education in the context of the Christian faith." (Section III. The Church as a Community Supportive of Life.) Through *Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor* we hope to engage senior high youth specifically to encourage them to give feedback to the task force while it writes the first draft and proposed social statement on human sexuality.

As this document is based on *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor*, we recommend that anyone leading this study also read that resource thoroughly. *Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor* is not meant to replace it, but to supplement it as a way for youth to respond to the concepts presented in the adult congregational study. The same assumptions that underlie *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor* underlie *Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor*. [FICTSN, p. 1]

LEADING THE STUDY

It is vitally important to do this study in cooperation with parents. We include a suggested script for a meeting with parents and discussion sheets for their children to take home after each session. Some parents may appreciate the opportunity to help them talk with their children about sexuality in the context of faith. Parents may find some of the lyrics of the songs recommended for discussion dismaying. We should all find some of the lyrics dismaying. Yet these words accurately represent much of the popular culture to which youth are being exposed. If we want to teach them what's healthful and what is harmful about our culture, we have to help them discuss elements of culture in a faith context. Such engagement is consistent with the Lutheran tradition. We are called upon to be as discerning about the world around us as we are about our faith, because God works through the civil order as well as through the church. In short, use of these lyrics is not an endorsement of them, it is precisely to help youth learn to test what they see and hear.

The nature of the person who leads a study with youth will affect the outcome tremendously. Be sure to choose someone who will know how to lead a discussion that is at the same time free and well-managed. Because sexual abuse is so prevalent in our society, in all economic strata, the leader should anticipate that the group may include survivors. He or she should know how to deal sensitively with any revelations that come about, as well as being able to fulfill legal obligations to report abuse of minors. Some youth present will likely already be engaged in inappropriate and unhealthy sexual activity, and the leader should know how to contend with that as well. And many of the youth will not have any sexual experience and will be wondering if they are alone in their inexperience, which they most certainly are not. It's important to choose a leader who can make all of these youth with different experiences and their associated feelings of shame and discomfort comfortable enough to engage their faith and sexuality. We want our youth to learn the process of making faithful, healthy decisions about their sexuality so that they can become adults who make faithful, healthy decisions.

RESPONDING TO THE STUDY

The study will also feature an accompanying Web site, available at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth. Youth may respond online to the questions developed for each session and be part of a forum. Encourage the young people who do the study to visit the Web site after each session and be part of the ongoing discussion. Youth are asked to fill out the response form at the back of the booklet, which may also be found online, to submit to the task force. As *Free in Christ to Care for the Neighbor* represents a particular effort to hear from youth on matters relating to sexuality, the task force is hoping that many youth will participate in the study and fill out the response forms. The deadline for response forms will be December 15, 2007. The Web site has no deadline, and we will continue to encourage youth to consult it.

In Galatians, the apostle Paul declares, “in Christ Jesus...the only thing that counts is faith working through love.” (5:6) May this bold statement guide your preparation and leading, and the participants’ listening and speaking with one another.

Leadership Guide

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

Since 2001 the ELCA has been engaged in a conversation regarding sexuality, which is leading to the writing of a social statement on human sexuality. Three studies have helped members of our congregations enter into conversations within the context of this church's faith and life. These conversations and the feedback from them will inform the social statement on human sexuality due to come before the Churchwide Assembly in 2009. This study is directed at senior high youth to encourage them to respond to the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality.

This study doesn't only benefit the task force. For a long time there has been a need in our church to have a guide for entering into conversations about sexuality with our youth. Adolescents receive information about sexuality on a daily basis. If the church hopes to have any influence in their understanding of sex and sexuality, we adult Christians need to be talking with our youth. This study can also benefit us by engaging adolescents in these important conversations within the community and faith life of our congregations.

TALKING ABOUT SEX

Perhaps the most challenging thing about this curriculum is that you are going to have to talk about sex with your youth group. For some leaders this isn't going to be difficult, but for others, this is going to be very uncomfortable. Ask yourself...on a scale of 1-10, 1 being totally uncomfortable and 10 being totally comfortable, how do I feel about talking about sex? If your answer was a 7 or higher, chances are you'll be okay with the context of this study. If your answer was 3, 2, or 1, we might have a problem. This is a significant point for this study because the group will only be as comfortable with the material as you are. Here are some helpful hints:

- Live with the idea for a while; mentally prepare yourself for the impending conversations.
- Don't lead a session without having read it over carefully. That way things are less likely to come up that will surprise you.
- Imagine yourself talking through difficult subjects and practice saying the things you feel most uncomfortable with; things like "sex," "oral sex," "masturbation," "homosexual," "pornography," etc.
- The more prepared and at ease you are with the material, the more effective the conversations will be.

Get additional background to help you clarify your own thinking. This youth study is based on *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality*, the study resources that are part of the process for preparing for a proposed ELCA social statement on sexuality. It will be very helpful to you to read carefully through that entire study. Session one of this study corresponds roughly to the first two sessions in *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor*, session two of this study corresponds to session three of *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor*, session three to session four, etc. It will be even more helpful if you can take time to engage other adults in that study before you begin working with the youth.

Be aware of your own biases and values. The primary purpose of this study is to help youth think about their opinions and values and the values of our culture in the light of Christian faith. If our presentations are clouded with our own opinions we are much less likely to hear honestly from young people. If you can be honest with yourself about your own biases you will be less likely to lead with your own opinions.

Expect that young people may ask you personal questions about your sexual activity, experiences, values, and beliefs. Before you begin the study, think about how much, if any, personal information you feel comfortable sharing with your group. In the midst of a conversation, when we are put on the spot, we often do not respond in a way that we feel good about. Thinking this through in advance will help you feel confident with your responses to the group and that you were able to maintain your own personal boundaries.

Because of the nature of this study it is entirely possible that things will come out during conversation that will require additional attention. For instance the odds are that someone in the room, or someone they know, will have been sexually abused. It is also possible that you will hear about pregnancy, STD's, poor and potentially dangerous sexual choices of those in your group or their friends. It is a good idea for you to know how you will address these things if they come up. Gather names and contact information for local agencies that are able to help in the event of a pregnancy, sexual assault or abuse, phone numbers of adolescent and family therapists in your area, and drug counselors. Know what you are legally mandated to report in the event that one of your youth is being abused. Speak with the pastors, other staff, or congregational leaders to get an understanding of how they would like you to react in these critical situations. There is a covenant writing process in session one. During that process it is ethical and advisable for you to describe how you will handle issues like these if they come up. That way, there isn't a breach of confidentiality or trust if you need to go beyond the confines of the group to help someone.

PARENTS' MEETING

In the following section we have included an outline for a parents' meeting. There are two primary goals for this meeting. First, we hope to get parents invested in the process and discussion about sexuality. Our greatest hope is that these conversations have been happening at home, but if they haven't perhaps we will be able to stir them into action by raising the subject and giving them tools to have these discussions. Secondly, parents are bound to be anxious about what their kids will be talking about and learning about throughout the study. This meeting will answer questions and concerns they have about their child's participation in the study. **This meeting is an essential part of this process and we greatly encourage you to meet with the parents of your group before you begin the study.**

WEB SITE ACCOMPANIMENT

The study will be accompanied by a Web site (www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth) that will include a forum where youth can respond to the study and see the responses others make. Each session in the study corresponds to a section on the Web site, and each section has a question that drives it. You'll find these questions at the end of each session. Encourage your youth to go online to read what others have to say and submit their own responses.

LEADING THE STUDY

There are several components to each session. Each begins with a narrative that introduces the topic. This information is primarily for the leader, as you begin to prepare for the conversations of your group. The "Gathering" is the start of each session. It is comprised of a "Thought to ponder" and a "Welcome diversion." Both of these are designed to keep the group busy while they wait for the study to begin. Have the questions of the day written on a flip chart or white board and encourage them to discuss the questions with each other as they gather.

After the opening prayer there are vignettes for each session. The vignettes are scenarios of people who are dealing with situations relating to the subject of that session. They are meant to put a face on the topic at hand. “Discussion points,” “A word from the church,” and scriptural references are meant to open up the conversation and make connection with our church faith traditions. There are also activities, movie clips, and songs to help bring home the point of the session.

“Differing views” will help youth group members articulate their thoughts and values about what was just discussed. The most effective way of communicating different views with your group will be with the online piece. For each lesson there are downloadable short video clips of youth discussing different views about each topic. The Web site will walk you through the process of burning a DVD that you can play for your group during the “Differing views” section. This will be a very useful tool in helping youth articulate how they feel about the subject matter.

One of the most important pieces of the study doesn’t take place during the session. At the end of each session there is a take-home sheet for the participants to give to their parents that outlines what they talked about in the session. It is meant to be a conversation starter between parents and children, so that parents are able to participate in the conversation and help influence and encourage the developing values. Use whatever means will be the most effective at getting this resource into the hands of the parents.

Finally, at the end of each session, there is a contemplative devotional piece to help focus the thoughts and discussions back to our God. The intent here is that the members of your group will be able to end each session led by the Holy Spirit and reflect on the things that have been discussed that day.

There is **a lot** of material here that is aimed at many different styles of learning. As you prepare to lead your group through each session, choose the pieces that will work the best for your group.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you lead your group through the study:

- The material that is written here will work best with, and is intended for, senior high youth.
- Not everyone has experience with sex or with talking about it. Talk about the broad spectrum of experience as much as possible and avoid making generalized statements or assumptions about the experiences of youth and families. If nearly fifty percent of high school students have had sex that also means the other half have not.
- There are going to be very different views among your youth. The intent of this study is to hear the different thoughts and values from all of them and discuss them in light of our Christian faith and Lutheran theology. Encourage the diversity and the reflections of those who aren’t sure what they think and believe.
- A covenant will be written in session one to establish guidelines and ground rules for the group. It is important that confidentiality be upheld as a part of that covenanting and group process. If the group feels like this is an unsafe conversation they won’t talk. Refer to the covenant regularly during the study and encourage the group to do that as well.
- With this material it will be important to challenge the comfort zone of youth (and yourself), but pressing slightly beyond that is probably too far. Be aware of where their “too far” zones are, as well as your own.
- Encourage your group to use “I” statements when sharing with the group. For instance, “You need to be married before you can have sex” puts others on the defensive and may shut down further conversation or turn it into divisive confrontation. They are, in essence, being told that if you don’t agree with me you are wrong—end of conversation. Encourage statements such as “I feel that it’s important to be married before having sex.” The “I feel” being the operative part of that statement.

- It would be ideal if each group could be co-led by a male and a female leader who work well together with youth. This gives representation to both sexes and equal leadership voice to the subject being discussed. During session four, where we discuss the abuse of power in relationships, we have suggested that you split the group because of the different experiences males and females have in regards to sex and power. It will be necessary to have a male and a female leader for that session.

IF YOU HAVE A LARGE GROUP:

It is important for your large group to connect as a whole, but often intimacy and ease of conversation are challenges. Consider starting as a large group and then breaking into smaller groups for the discussion pieces, and gathering back as a large group again to share highlights of those smaller discussions. Gathering, activities, movie clips, and songs, can be done together, but break the group up for the discussion and sharing pieces.

IF YOU HAVE A SMALL GROUP:

Small groups can be a great blessing when it comes to leading discussions, and they can sometimes be a little intimidating. A more relaxed environment can be helpful in establishing good rapport, lively discussion, and trust. Try something like playing quiet music and have the group share snacks they bring (no television though, it's too obtrusive). It will also be imperative that the leaders be willing to share of themselves in appropriate ways. These things will hopefully help get the ball rolling.

IF YOU HAVE A QUIET GROUP:

Be sure to ask open-ended questions, those are questions that cannot be answered with a one-word answer. For instance, "Do you think that prostitution is wrong?" can be answered yes or no, which ends the discussion. You can reword the question and get much more feedback by asking, "What issues get raised, or are we afraid to raise, when we talk about prostitution?" As with the small group suggestion, it will also be helpful for you to share as long as it doesn't dominate the discussion and it encourages others to talk. For quiet groups, allowing silent time after you ask a question is imperative. Someone will often speak up after a short time of silence.

IF YOU HAVE A TALKATIVE GROUP (OR A TALKATIVE MEMBER OF THE GROUP):

Occasionally it will be difficult to manage the lively conversation of your group. Although this is a preferred problem to have for many, groups can quickly get out of control with wandering conversations or become driven by one or two outspoken people. Staying on task will help you get the most out of your time. Simply being aware of the flow of conversation will help you move the conversation along and stay on task. Ask directive but respectful questions of youth who are hanging back in the discussion or deferring to the more outspoken participants. Try, for example: "Alex how do you feel about that?" or "Thanks for sharing so much about your feelings about this issue. Who has another perspective on this or something to add?" Or, "Megan, you've been pretty quiet for awhile. In all this discussion, what have we been missing or not talking about?"

Parents on Board

PARENTS' MEETING

There are bound to be a number of questions and opinions about this study. It is, therefore, going to be important that the parents of your youth are on board with you and their children during this process. We encourage you to have a meeting with the parents before you begin the study to help alleviate any anxieties about the process.

Begin the meeting by asking parents to remember how they learned what they know about sex and sexuality. Ask if anyone is willing to share how he or she learned about it. Did they get most of their information from their parents? Their schools? Their peers? Their church? Explain to them that this study is part of a church wide study on sexuality and that the ELCA is in the process of writing a sexuality statement. The conversations that take place among our youth will help inform that statement. But its purpose can be two-fold. By opening up and encouraging the subject of our spirituality, in relation to our sexuality, we are able to inform and encourage positive, healthy, biblically-based sexual values in our youth.

Share the points below with them and then, afterward, allow some time for questions. You may also want to outline a session for them. It is not recommended that you go through a session with them; simply inform them of what the elements of each session are. That may help ease some concern as well.

HERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT POINTS TO MAKE AT THE MEETING:

- Families are very different in the ways they communicate about sex and sexuality. Some families are very open about sexuality and speak of it on a regular basis. A lot of families have “the talk” only once and don’t bring up the subject again. And a considerable number of families don’t have conversations at all, reporting that they leave this discussion up to their schools.
- Sexuality for a young person is mysterious. Before they have become sexually active it is dangled out there beyond them as one of the last unknown frontiers. They’ve figured out many of life’s mysteries, but sexuality continues to elude them.
- Adolescents go in search of an understanding of and framework for what sex and sexuality are.
- Today, with the sexualized nature of our culture and the prevalence of sexuality in the media there are many more influences on our youths’ understanding of sex and sexuality.
- They can get the mechanics or biology of sex from their sex education class at school.
- There’s a lot more information that kids need to have about:
 - ▶ sexual intimacy
 - ▶ the effect sex has on a relationship
 - ▶ the impact it can make on your personal life
 - ▶ the relationship to our faith and scripture
- What results are gaps in their understandings of sexuality. These gaps will be filled one way or another.
 - ▶ They will be filled in by the media with its exploitive nature of sexuality in music videos, advertising, or movie and TV program content.

- ▶ They will be filled in by their peers, who may know little more or even less and whose information can be more damaging or misleading than helpful.
- ▶ They will be filled in by pop culture with fashion trends, exaggerated social interactions, and definitions of self worth.
- Often the way these gaps are being filled in is contrary to the values we want for them around sex and sexuality.
- The reality is, if we aren't talking to our young people about sex, someone else is. And our youth are going to pick up messages that we don't want them to hear or we consider to be misleading.
- As families and as a church we need to speak out about these things. If we aren't one, or don't become one, of the significant voices in their lives we cannot hope to have much influence in their development, maturation, and learning.
- Our best hope for influence over decisions involving sexuality is to be proactive in helping them understand and define sexuality. We need to be the ones filling the information gap for them.

HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL THOUGHTS AS WE ENTER INTO THESE CONVERSATIONS:

This youth study is a part of the larger Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's effort to talk carefully about the connections between our faith and our sexuality. This church is in the process of developing a social statement on sexuality. All aspects of this effort intend to look carefully at the teachings of the church and at the world in which we live.

Our sexuality is a beautiful part of creation. A healthy, balanced person is someone who fulfills all the aspects of his or her being; physical, vocational, intellectual, spiritual, relational, and sexual. There is nothing to be embarrassed about; there is no need to feel ashamed. We know that we are both saint and sinner, and that sexuality is affected by our sin as much as any other part of us.

- The earlier you start talking to your children about sex, the easier and more natural it will be. Encourage questions when they are young and when they become inquisitive about their own bodies or curious about others. Speak openly with them. Encourage questions.
- It is never too late to begin the conversation, no matter how old your children are. Look for opportunities to talk about sex; you'll find them if you are looking for them. Opportunities present themselves in a myriad of ways, but you will most definitely find them in news stories and current events, during movies and television programming and in the life events of people around you. For instance, if you hear a teenager in your neighborhood is pregnant, use that as a springboard to talk about your values surrounding teen pregnancy and the realities of being a young parent.
- Often parents say, "My child knows they can come and talk to me if they have any questions." The truth is most kids won't come to you. Why? Because they have so many questions they don't know where to start. They may also harbor feelings of embarrassment or uncertainty about what the response will be. Parents need to be proactive in their child's understanding of sexuality. Be the initiator, not a passive bystander in the conversation.
- This study is an opportunity to open the gates for these conversations to happen.
- This study is not an attempt to replace the conversations you have at home about your values. In fact, it is an opportunity for you to be sure that your children understand what your values are in regard to these issues, and that you have a deep, loving concern for their lives, relationships, well being, and faith.

- It is not a course or series of discussions taking place behind locked doors or in secret apart from family or parents. “We’re in this together.”
- We’ll work to make it as easy as possible for you to continue these conversations at home.
- Each session has with it a take-home sheet for parents that will inform you of what we discussed that session, the scriptures we looked at and a few suggestions about how you can talk with your young person about the subject of the day.
- Use this as an opportunity to help influence and develop your child’s understanding of sexuality.
- By discussing sexuality and faith, and helping our children understand themselves as sexual beings created by God, we’ll build with our young people a solid foundation and more opportunity to act responsibly in matters of sex, sexual activity, and relationships.

SOME ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS:

- Have available several copies of *Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality* and encourage parents to take one home to read. Better yet, arrange for someone to lead a parent conversation on that study during the same period that the youth sessions will take place.
- Have a list of local resources available for parents and families, i.e. phone numbers for crisis lines, family or adolescent therapists in your area, school counselors, Lutheran social service organizations, etc.
- Encourage parents to be in conversation with you during the process. Ensure them that you do not have all the answers, but that together you can work to figure these things out.
- Parents may have questions about how some concerns might be handled. For instance, what you will do if it comes out during the study that someone is pregnant or being sexually abused? As mentioned before, have a plan so that you can reassure them that you know how you will handle this.
- The take-home parent sheet is an important part of this process. It builds trust and enables parental involvement. You know your group, so use whatever method will ensure the sheet getting into the hands of the parents. You could give it to the youth at the end of the meeting, give it to their parents when they pick them up, mail or e-mail it to them, make it available online, whatever works. Just be sure that they get it.



Session 1.

Created as Sexual Beings (opening the conversation)

Session goal:

To help us understand that our sexuality is a gift from God, and how we are supposed to use that gift.

Young people in our society are subject to many influences. Schools, peers, family, pop culture, and media are just a few. As a church we are called to have a central role in that influence. The sessions of this study can be an opportunity to consider the many influences on the lives of young people and for the church to make a difference. Guided by the teachings of our church and biblical interpretation we help youth develop and mature through relationships, congregations, ministry with youth, active learning experiences, worship, and studying the Bible. Through these things we create an environment to encourage a faithful life that integrates faithfulness into every part of their being. Through our conversations and actions we have taught our children the importance of caring for one another, lifelong faithfulness and global responsibility. But for the most part, we have done too little to guide our young people in the area of sexuality and relationships. Where we have chosen to speak in a whisper, the contrasting voices are loud and persuasive. Our culture is inundated with sex and sexuality. If we don't raise our influential and caring voices and enter into these conversations regarding sexuality, the values and beliefs of our young people will be shaped without us.

Studies about sexual activity among teens do indicate that worship attendance and church involvement seem to have an impact on young people's sexual behavior. Still, few congregations seem to be able to offer much in-depth attention to helping youth think about sexuality. Further, while church teachings do matter to young people, the answers are not easy and it is no longer persuasive, if it ever was, to say: "Well, that's the way it has always been" or "The Bible says do it." Teens, like most adults today, desire explanations and want good reasons. (summary of FICTSN, p. 19)

The youth of our church are also yearning for us to step up and take on the subject. At the 2003 convention of the Lutheran Youth Organization, where almost 300 youth delegates from across the ELCA gathered, a resolution was passed requesting "a congregational youth ministry resource that promotes a faith-based, youth-oriented study of sexuality."¹

How fitting then, that as a part of the church wide process to develop a statement on sexuality we should provide them with a study resource that will solicit their thoughts and, at the same time, encourage the conversations they are hungry for.

Throughout this study we will encounter conversations that address what it means to be a sexual being and how to integrate that understanding into our faith. Our sexuality isn't something that needs to be set apart from our faith. Our sexuality is a part of our whole being, a being that was made good and in the image of God. Sex is good. No part of our created being is ugly or shame-worthy in God's sight.

"The first word Scripture uses to describe humans, including their bodies, is "very good" (Genesis 1:27, 31), and so the first theological statement affirms the goodness of the body and sexuality as part of God's good creation." (FICTSN, p. 19)

At the same time, Lutherans believe that everything we do, we do as both saint and sinner. Just like everything else, sexuality is marred by sin. Betrayal, self-gratification, and aggression are some of the marks of sexual sin. It is impossible to be perfect in our sexuality (just as it is impossible to be perfect in anything else), yet God still entrusts us with caring for those around us. We have been freed by Christ **from** worrying about being perfect, but we have been freed **into** wanting and doing what is best for others (The Bible calls this "serving the neighbor."). This study uses this idea of wanting what is best or "serving" the neighbor as a way to think about how God intends us to use our sexuality.

This study is an opportunity for us to embrace the sexual being that God has made us to be and to seek guidance and understanding through biblical reflection and church traditions. As we begin this journey we ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we seek to understand God's intention for us as sexual beings.

What does the church say?

The 1996 ELCA social message, “Sexuality: Some Common Convictions,” states, “Human sexuality was created good for the purposes of expressing love and generating life, for mutual companionship and pleasure.” The 1996 document brought together points of consensus on sexuality that were gathered from predecessor church bodies.

The message emphasizes the emotional and unifying dimension of sexual relations and maintains the commitment to marriage as the exclusive framework for the fullness of sexual expression.

It also states that, “mindful of the sin to which we all succumb, Christians are called to:

- **Respect the integrity and dignity of all persons, whatever their age, gender, sexual orientation, or marital status;**
- **Discern and provide guidance for what it means to live responsibly as sexual beings;**
- **Support through prayer and counsel those facing questions about their sexuality;**
- **Heal those who have been abused or violated, or whose relationships are broken.”**

Overall, the ELCA message, like this study, provides a basis for Lutherans to discuss sexuality rooted in both the gospel and “the law of love” whereby “through words and actions Christians seek to build up one another and the whole Christian community. (FICTSN, p. 24)

Many are calling for the church to speak clearly on sexuality, due in large part to the fact that the message on common convictions did not address some of the pressing issues surrounding sexuality. Sexuality in childhood and adolescence, sexual expression for those who are single, sexual abuse and the economics of sexuality are a few which call for attention. Additionally, cultural emphasis on the purpose of sexuality has moved away from procreation and toward an emphasis on love-making or relationship-building and sensuality. Addressing this fundamental shift in the perception of the purpose of sexuality is vitally important. This study charts a course to begin thinking about these changes in the context of our faith. We return constantly to the question: What does it mean to lovingly seek what’s best for the neighbor in terms of sexuality?

GATHERING

Thought to ponder:

How did you end up coming to this small group? How do you feel about being a part of a sexuality discussion?

Welcome diversion:

Have play dough or clay out for the group to fiddle with as they are gathering. Ask them to make something out of the clay.

Opening prayer:

Give 30 seconds for silence as you pause and connect with God. Then pray this prayer:

Lord, we praise you for the opportunity to be a part of your church in this way. As we begin this journey we ask for your Spirit’s guidance and understanding of who you intend us to be as sexual beings. Amen.

ACTIVITY

As you start this activity encourage them to continue “creating” something with the clay/play dough.

- Ask the group who their favorite artist, or favorite painting, sculpture, or photograph is.
- What have you created that you feel really proud of? Have everyone share.

After everyone has shared bring out the pictures from famous artists. (*See the suggested Web links.*²) Have you seen any of these pictures before? Which ones? Which artists can you identify?

- Look closely at the paintings. Notice the colors. How do you think they did this work (with a paintbrush, hands, or computer)? What do you think the artist was trying to do with the work (i.e. create an emotion, challenge a thought, or replicate an image)?
- Would you tell the creator of this project that they did something wrong? Used too much color or made one of the parts is too big?
- What if someone were to critique or criticize your work of art or creation (or the clay formation you are currently creating) that you told us about earlier? How would that make you feel?

Points to make about the activity and our sexuality:

- The artist creates, to her best imagination, what her vision is for the project.
- God creates all of us, including our sexuality.
- God intends for us have sexual desires.
- No part of our created being is ugly or shame-worthy in God’s sight.

Opening the conversation:

- During this study we will be looking at the gift of our sexuality, how we can use it to glorify God, and at the many issues that arise in relation to our sexual expression.
- We are not fixated on being “perfect” in our sexuality, we are concerned with how we use the gift of sexuality and as we care for our neighbor.
- Appreciating our sexuality is, in part, an understanding of ourselves as Christians.
- We are seeking God as we seek to understand.
- We seek guidance and understanding through the Bible and church traditions.

COVENANT WRITING

- Have the group think of someone they can talk to when there are significant things going on in their lives.
- What qualities does that person have? (i.e., listens to me, can be trusted, takes me seriously, etc.)
- Write on a flip chart the qualities that the group mentions. Some to watch for and add if they don’t come up with are: trustworthy, confidential, non-judgmental, good listener, respectful, helpful, etc.
- Once they have compiled a list of qualities ask, “What would you need from this group to feel comfortable sharing your opinions, thoughts, and feelings with one another?”
- Many of the qualities will be those that were just listed.
- Ask the group if there are qualities on the list (flip chart) that you wouldn’t need from the group.

- Do we need to add any qualities to the list because we are having conversations about sex and sexuality?
- Once you have agreement on the qualities, propose that this be your covenant and the standards you want to uphold for one another in the midst of these conversations.
- Have all sign the covenant.
- Display the covenant at each of the meetings as a reminder of whom they have chosen to be during these sessions.
- Do not be afraid to refer back to the covenant if it feels like these agreements are being violated.

DIFFERING VIEWS

Abbey and Billy

Abbey is a confident and expressive sophomore at Central High School who is very involved with school theater and her church youth group. While many of her peers struggle with self-image issues, Abbey appears to “have it all figured out.” But this is not the whole story. Ever since she started junior high, she has struggled to deal with her own developing body and sexual identity, and she has questions because she feels that she is given conflicting messages about sexuality from her church, parents, friends, and the media. Abbey loves listening to her mom’s “vintage” Madonna albums from the 1980s and admires Madonna’s strong, self confident female sexuality. A lot of her favorite female singers seem to share this sense that sexuality is powerful and something to be proud of or even flaunt. Abbey would be the first to admit, however, that not all her music has positive images of women’s sexuality. She loves the beat and rhythms of rap music, too, even though she knows that a lot of her favorite songs have really negative, even abusive, images of women.

Even the church seems to have conflicting views of sexuality. Sometimes it seems that the church and her parents are simply “against” sexuality. Her parents have brought up concerns about her dating and sexual activity. In church, she hears Bible verses that say the “flesh” is bad, and that seems to imply that our bodies and sex are bad. The adults at church seem so uptight about sex. They either avoid talking about sex or simply see her sexuality as a “problem.” Once in confirmation, however, Pastor Debbie talked about how God created human bodies and sexuality, and that they were “good” in God’s eyes. Frankly, it reminded her of her mother’s five minute “birds and the bees” talk after she got her period for the first time. That was awkward and slightly embarrassing. Nonetheless, she remembered what her pastor said, and, while Abbey didn’t want moral lectures, she did want more information on how Christian faith looks at human sexuality and sexual actions.

Beyond Abbey’s feelings and questions about her own sexuality, she is interested in being more sexually active with her boyfriend, Billy. But she has some faith questions here as well. Billy is a junior soccer player at her high school. His family, like Abbey’s, goes to a Lutheran church. With a little encouragement from friends who told them they made a great couple, they started “going out” four months ago. They really care for each other, and even their parents seem to approve of their dating. Last Saturday, after a movie, Billy and Abbey were alone in his car when Billy suggested that they should take their physical relationship a step further and have oral sex. Abbey thought this question would come up eventually, but told Billy that she didn’t know if she was ready to go that far. Billy said that was fine. He wanted her to be comfortable with it, but he also said that a lot of his friends have received oral sex, and it is supposed to be safe. Abbey knows that some of her friends have had oral sex and she would like to please him. Still, she has some questions. One of those is whether there is anything right or wrong about this. Abbey wants to know what her faith, or even the Bible, says about such actions. She knows intercourse is wrong, but oral sex doesn’t seem the same because she and Billy would both still be

virgins. And Abbey feels relieved because she definitely can't get pregnant this way. What's more, a lot of her friends say oral sex isn't really sex. The more she thinks about it the more she is confused. (FICTSN, p. 17)

Ben

In the midst of his junior year of high school Ben was pleased with all of his accomplishments. He had a ton of friends and was on the B honor roll. He was the lead in the school play and appointed the captain of the boy's varsity basketball team for his senior year. He was proud of the person he had become and felt like he was on top of the world.

In the spring of his junior year it suddenly felt like all of his friends started coupling up. Everyone seemed to be dating someone except him. On the weekends, when Ben used to have plenty of things to do, he no longer had invitations. Everyone was going out on "dates" or "group dates." His feelings were hurt as he realized he was being left out of a lot of the fun. Although he wasn't that interested he thought he might want to have a girlfriend too, because that's what everyone else was doing. However, when he made advances in that direction he constantly felt rejected. It seemed like the girls didn't like him. He was certain that he was one of those guys that girls only like to be friends with. Ben knew that a lot of the kids in his high school had started having sex. It seemed like everyone was talking about it now that they were all "dating." Maybe if he were more assertive the girls would be more interested in him. He felt like he was the only one not dating or having sex. He was sure he was unattractive and that he would spend the rest of his life alone.

But deep down, he doesn't believe it's right to have sex before marriage. Ben's parents had taught him that sex is something that should take place in marriage only. He got the same message from his church and friends in his youth group. He wasn't about to abandon his beliefs. Besides, he thinks to himself, there so many other things that he's more interested in doing.

- What information do you think Abbey needs to make a good or healthy decision?
- Where might she go to get that information?
- If Ben talked to you about his struggles, what would you say to him?
- How could each of these youth use their sexuality in a way that serves his or her neighbor?

Discussion points:

- Studies about sexual activity among teens do indicate that worship attendance and church involvement seem to have an impact on young people's sexual behavior (FICTSN, p. 19).
- Our sexuality is a part of our whole being; a being that is made good and in the image of God.
- God intends for us have sexual desires.
- Each of us is both saint and sinner, so like every other part of us, sexuality and sexual behavior can also be distorted by sin.
- This study is a part of a life-long process of learning how to use the traditions of our church and scripture to help us learn to serve our neighbor.
- This study is part of an on-going discussion in the ELCA about how its teachings about sexuality will be stated in a social statement.
- Sexual sin often shows itself in betrayal, self-gratification, and aggression.
- God does not expect us to be perfect.
- We seek to understand God's intention for our sexuality and how we can glorify God by caring for our neighbor.

- How can we show that we value a person through wanting what is best for them and us in terms of sexual actions?
- What does it mean to you that God creates sexuality good?
- How can sinfulness taint sexuality?

THINKING TOGETHER

Movie clip

“The Devil Wears Prada” (2006, PG)

Start cue: “Hi. I have an appointment with Emily Charlton” (Chapter 2: Set counter at 3:35)

End cue: “Andrea” (Chapter 4: End counter at 10:15)

Andrea is looking for an internship and lands an interview at a very high profile fashion magazine with one of the fashion industry’s most prestigious people, Miranda.

- Andrea doesn’t know much about the fashion industry, but she still gets the job. Why do you think Andrea gets the internship?
- What do you think Miranda admires about Andrea?
- Andrea realizes that she is a valuable person despite her looks and fashion sense. What can we learn from Andrea about being a beautiful creation?

Scripture

Galatians 1:6-10

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed! Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

- What do these biblical texts tell us about our sexuality?
- As we begin a study about sexuality, how can we seek God’s Word and will as the Galatians text suggests? How will we know something is pleasing to God or what God really desires for our lives?
- What does the Genesis text tell us about our sexuality? In what ways is the Genesis description different from what media and pop culture might tell us?

What does the church say?

- The body is a good creation.
- The long-standing consensus in church social teaching is that marriage is the place for the fullness of sexual expression.
- The church is always challenged to speak to our changing social environment.
- Our sexuality, like everything else, is clouded by sin. We, therefore, need to teach what is right, protect the vulnerable, and seek to discern what God's love calls for in every situation.

Song

"Wind It Up" by Gwen Stefani

http://www.songlyrics.com/song-lyrics/gwen_stefani/Miscellaneous/Wind_It_Up/256344.html

- How do you think Gwen Stefani, the singer, feels about herself?
- How do you think she feels about her sexuality? Do you think she needs someone else to feel good about herself and her sexuality? What lyrics lead you to believe that?
- In your opinion, are there any problems with the way she presents herself in this song?

Conversation points:

- God creates us good. Every part of us is created good, including our sexuality.
- God intends for us to have sexual desires.
- How might the confidence in God's good creation change our actions?
- Sin can also be present in sexual behavior; i.e. self gratification and self assertion at the expense of others.
- What are some ways you see sin in sexuality?
- If we understand our sexuality to be a gift and that we are meant to serve others with that gift, how does that change us? How do our relationships change?

WORSHIP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Begin by placing a lot of candles or tea light candles in the center of the group. Read each of the three statements aloud. Before you read each statement, light a candle. Have the students meditate on each statement in a worshipful manner and allow some silence between them. After you have completed the three statements invite the group members to lift up a prayer petition as well. Inform them that you will be doing this beforehand and instruct them to light a candle before they pray. Light the final candle right before you read the closing prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Read: *Our sexuality is a part of our whole being; a being that is made good and in the image of God.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From a High School Student: Everyone seems to be having sex, but I'm not. Can I stay true to my own values and still fit in?*

- Silence
- Light a candle
- Read: *From Galatians 1: 10 - Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*
- Silence
- Candle lighting and prayer petitions from the group.
- **Closing Prayer:** *Thank you, God, for the gift of our sexuality. Help us to feel your Spirit as we discuss what it means to be a sexual being in our world today. Amen.*

GO TO THE WEB

Want to see what other youth think? Visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth and contribute your thoughts on this question: What is the most important thing to think about as we discuss sexuality and how to care for our neighbor? (FICTSN, p. 25, q. 2)

¹ Resolution #1: Youth Ministry Resources: Human Sexuality

Title: Youth Ministry Resources: Human Sexuality

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is an organization supportive of the positive personal and spiritual development of its youth, and

WHEREAS, a necessary piece of youths' personal and spiritual growth process is the study and discussion of human sexuality in a Godly circumstance, and

WHEREAS, modern culture actively bombards the youth of today with negative, worldly, and sinful perspectives with relation to human sexuality, and

WHEREAS, human sexuality in a Godly context is comprised of more than physical sexuality, but even more so includes the emotional and spiritual aspects of sexuality, and

WHEREAS, the Holy Bible offers wisdom in reference to human sexuality which is open to personal interpretation,

WHEREAS, an obvious and apparent need is seen for the development of youth ministry resources relating to human sexuality, therefore it be

RESOLVED that the Lutheran Youth Organization calls for the development, within the Division for Congregational Ministries, of congregational youth ministry resources that promote a faith-based, youth-oriented study of sexuality in all its implications.

Source: Resolution was passed at the Lutheran Youth Organization's 2003 convention. The text can be found on page 9 of the pdf located at www.elca.org/lyo/pdf/convention%20minutes.pdf

² Links for artwork:

Flowers by
Andy Warhol, 1964
www.warholprints.com/portfolio/flowers.htm

The Starry Night by
Vincent van Gogh, 1889
<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/gogh/starry-night/gogh.starry-night.jpg>

Lavender Mist by
Jackson Pollock, 1950
<http://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/lm1024.jpg>

Last Supper by
Leonardo da Vinci, 1495
http://www.cofc.edu/hettinger/images/DaVinci_Last_Supper.jpg

Session 1. Handout for Parents

Today's topic:

Created as Sexual Beings (opening the conversation)

Session goal:

To help us understand that our sexuality is a gift from God, and how we are supposed to use that gift.

Opening the conversation:

- During this study we will be looking at the gift of our sexuality, how we can use it to glorify God in serving our neighbor and the many issues that arise in relation to our sexual expression and relationships.
- Appreciating our sexuality is, in part, an understanding of ourselves as Christians.
- We are seeking God as we seek to understand.
- We seek guidance and understanding through biblical reflection and church traditions.

Discussion points:

- Our sexuality is a part of our whole being; a being that was made good and in the image of God.
- God intended us to be sexual.
- We are both saint and sinner, so sexuality is marred by sin.
- Under a sinful influence sexual behavior can manifest itself in self-gratification and assertion which is, all too often, hurtful to others.
- As people of faith we are in service to each another, constantly on the lookout for injustice.
- We seek to understand God's intention for our sexuality and how we can glorify God with that gift.
- This study is part of the lifelong process of learning how to integrate our faith and sexuality.

We read these scripture verses:

- Galatians 1:6-10
- Genesis 1:26-31

What does our church say?

- The body is a good creation.
- The consensus in church social teaching is that marriage is the place for the fullness of sexual expression.
- The church is being challenged to speak to our changing social environment.
- Our sexuality, like everything else, is clouded by sin. We, therefore, need to teach what is right, protect the vulnerable, and seek to discern what God's love calls for in every situation.

Talk it through with your kids:

- Ask what they thought was interesting about today's discussion. What was difficult to talk about?
- Ask your kids where they have learned what they know about sex (e.g., friends, family, school, media, etc.).
- How do you feel about talking about sexuality with your kids? Let them know how you feel about it. If it's a difficult subject for you, tell them, but also let them know that you feel it's important and you'll keep working on it.
- The most basic question for a Lutheran to ask in making ethical judgments on sexuality is this: What does it mean to lovingly seek what's best for the neighbor in terms of human sexuality? Give some examples from your life and relationships where this was a principle you applied.
- What are some situations in which moral codes give good guidance in struggling with an issue related to sexuality (i.e., the temptation to infidelity)? What are some situations where moral laws may not be as helpful or as clear (i.e., your spouse has deserted you but won't cooperate with divorce proceedings, and you would like to begin dating again)?

Session 2.

The Voices of Influence

Session goal:

To raise awareness of the varying values, beliefs and opinions in regards to sex and sexuality. To think about how the church can offer a perspective.

There are a lot of voices regarding sexuality in our culture. Voices tell us that sex is the answer for happiness. Voices tell us that God's way is sexual modesty. Voices tell us that certain orientations are immoral. Voices tell us that we should do whatever feels good. Voices tell us that experimentation and promiscuity are fulfilling.

The voices that influence how we view and understand sexuality come from a variety of people in our lives. We are primarily influenced by our families: how our families interact and talk about sexuality is the foundation of our cultural understanding. In some families sexuality is something to be proud of and it is embraced as a beautiful part of our being and talked about as a gift from God. In other families, the topic of sexuality might be embarrassing, so what gets said or talked about revolves around necessity, crisis, or awkwardness. Conversations take place with messages like "don't get pregnant," "don't let anyone force you," or just "don't." But often little is said or discussed about why or what it means to be a sexual being created in God's image. Many times nothing is said about how we are to integrate our faith with our sexuality. Sometimes sexuality is an instrument of power, and children are taught to use sexuality to get what they want out of life. Messages indicate that you can use your sexuality for acceptance, self worth, money and social position. This makes sexuality something to be bought or traded instead of a gift given away to someone who will treasure it. On occasion you'll run across a family where sexuality and all things related to sex are shameful. People who feel this way live in a paradox of desire and condemnation. Sexuality is never talked about in some families and so the children's perceptions of what is right and wrong become almost completely influenced by voices from outside the family.

Although families are the primary factor of influence for most people as they grow, there always are other voices as well. Beyond our families we are also influenced by peers and by the "communities" in which we live. That includes the communities we live in and the communities we belong to, such as our faith communities and schools. These voices give a variety of messages largely dependent on the accepted view. Media is another one of the most pervasive influences on our culture. It permeates our home, our entertainment, and our work. With its sometimes exploitive images and messages, media significantly impacts how we understand sexuality. All of these things: family, communities, faith, media, accepted views and more, become factors in our cultural understanding of what it means to be sexual beings. Establishing our own values and beliefs involves the deciphering of all these voices and making sense of how they all come together. This is a process that requires much deliberation and time. It is a process that our adolescents are smack in the middle of. If we aren't one, or don't become one, of the significant voices in their lives we cannot hope to have much influence over the outcome.

Faith Connection

Each of these "voices" offers us a cultural lens for looking at sexuality and the world. Making sense of the various voices can be understood also as a way of sorting through these multiple lenses. To some degree we disregard some of these cultural lenses, but the truth is that we all use different lenses at different times. Even as people of faith, like all other people, we see the world through multiple lenses at different times.

The lenses are not at all a bad thing. Think of the gifts that come to us through the various expressions of the cultures in the world—art, music, literature, civil government, and educational institutions, to name just a few. Living comfortably with a multitude of lenses is consistent with our claim to live in the world that God has created "good." (summary FICTSN, p. 29)

Just as we welcome these lenses and voices in other areas of our faith lives we welcome them into our understanding of sexuality. At the same time not all cultural lenses are helpful.

In Galatians 2 we read about how the early church struggled with a cultural lens. Paul tells us that his opponents understood circumcision to be necessary to be right with God. Paul had once thought this also because it was part of his culture, but through God's work he had come to realize that Christ has redeemed

us through faith in him, not through anything we have done. This completely changed how he viewed all of life. Paul's declaration in Galatians states that, "a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." This is the revelation that changes Paul's mind not just about the necessity of being circumcised but also about those who are not circumcised. Just as the early church wrestled with these cultural matters, so we also wrestle with contemporary culture and its views on sexuality. Living in the good news of Christ's love we find that co-existing with contemporary culture is a continual process. As we seek understanding we bring the lens of the gospel, an open heart, and the anticipation that we will influence and be influenced by the many voices.

What does the church say?

In the social statement called *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective (1993)* we are reminded that, "Faith is active in love; love calls from justice in the relationships and structures of society." (summary of FICTSN, p. 32)

It is appropriate for the church to examine contemporary culture critically because we are called by the gospel to be in the world, but to know how deeply the world is affected by sin. In our examination of the world we are looking for those relationships that are perpetuating injustice and are inconsistent with God's concern for justice and peace. Before we endorse or dismiss anything we measure how it serves the neighbor.

GATHERING

Thought to ponder:

Who can you talk to about sex? When you have questions, who can you ask?

Welcome diversion:

Have several pictures lying around, on the table or in the middle of the room, of people in various public displays of affection. For instance, have pictures of couples making out, holding hands, staring lovingly into each other's eyes, dancing sexy, leaning, etc. Ask which pictures they are okay with and which pictures are showing too much affection.

Opening prayer:

Give 30 seconds for silence as you pause and connect with God. Then pray this prayer:

Gracious God, we are surrounded by people who have the same values and beliefs as we do and we are surrounded by people who have very different values and beliefs than we do. Help us to seek you, God, as we look at the differences and discover ways to live together with respect, care, and appreciation of the gifts you have blessed us with. Amen.

DIFFERING VIEWS

Ashley's Wedding

Ashley is planning her wedding, the one she has dreamed about for years. Ashley wants a big wedding with lots of bridesmaids and groomsmen. She would like the wedding reception to be at a luxury hotel with a sit-down dinner and a dance afterward, preferably with live music. She is having some problems, however, with her family.

Her maternal grandmother was married at home with a justice of the peace presiding. The grandmother can't figure out why something like that isn't good enough for Ashley. She is especially dismayed at the amount of money that will be spent. Ashley's paternal grandmother was a mail-order bride from Eastern Europe. She had never even seen her husband-to-be until the day of the wedding, which took place in a courthouse in North Dakota. She is appalled at the weddings she's been to. "Even the simple ones," she says, "seem like make-believe. Marriage isn't supposed to be about happy-ever-after. I had no expectations when I married my husband. I didn't even know him, but we learned to love each other."

Ashley's parents want to have a nice celebration for family and friends, but they feel Ashley's plans are getting out of hand. Their own wedding took place at home the day before Ashley's father left for overseas duty with the Army. Ashley's fiancé, Cody, tries not to voice his true opinion about the wedding plans. He says, "It's her big day. If she wants to go all out, we'll go all out. All her girl friends have had big weddings so she should be entitled to one too." Cody's mother has said privately to Cody that she thinks all the money spent on a wedding is a sin when so many people are poor and homeless. Ashley's pastor is no help either. She's said a couple of things to Ashley about "the beauty of simplicity." Ashley is sure her mother has put a bug in Pastor's ear.

Today, Ashley's maternal grandmother said something that really distressed Ashley: "You know, because you and Cody live together and share a common bank account, in this state you could just declare yourself married. You don't even have to do any extra paperwork. Actually, in the eyes of the state, you've been married ever since you got your apartment together and pooled your money. There's nothing wrong with Common Law marriage."

Ashley is hurt that her family isn't enthusiastic about her wedding plans. Having the wedding she's dreamed about as long as she can remember is important to Ashley, and she thinks that the people who love her should be supportive. (FICTSN, p. 27) Why doesn't Ashley's family understand how important this is to her? Why are their views so different from hers? Is it because they grew up in a different era or are her expectations really unrealistic?

Nathan

Nathan is a 15-year-old male. He is a sophomore in high school and has been dating a girl now for about 3 months. They met at a youth group where they both are very active. They got along great and laughed a lot when they were together. Everyone in the group told them they should start dating, so they did. Their relationship is going okay, but Nathan finds that he has more fun with her when they are with a group of people than he does when they are alone.

About a year ago Nathan became interested in playing the guitar. A friend, Tony, from church said he would help him get started. They have been meeting regularly and he is getting really good. About a month after they started working together he found out that Tony was gay. He's the first homosexual Nathan has ever known, but he's really impressed with him. He enjoys playing guitar with Tony more than anything else in his life right now. They often play and hang out for hours. He has really made a connection with Tony and, in fact, he finds himself thinking about him a lot.

Recently, after they had been playing for a while, Tony told Nathan that he keeps thinking about him when they are not together and asked if Nathan ever thought about him when they were apart. The question caught Nathan off guard and he didn't know what to say to him. He sort of fumbled over his words, gathered his things, and said he had to go. Since that time he has felt awkward about talking to Tony, but can't help how much he keeps thinking about him.

To further complicate things he's feeling pressure from his girlfriend. She keeps telling him that she wants to move the relationship to another level physically. He figures it's about time to move beyond kissing and holding hands, but he just doesn't feel interested. Why does he think about Tony all the time? He likes his girlfriend; he thinks she's funny and a great person. Yet, why isn't he that interested in being alone with her or going farther physically with her?

These feelings of confusion and frustration are making Nathan crazy. He needs someone to talk to that can help him sort these things out. He knows he could never talk to his parents about it. When his cousin "came out" three years ago the family wrote him off and no one has talked to him since. Lately he has heard about a group at school for gay and lesbians. He wonders what they talk about at those meetings and if they could help him with his confusion. Because his faith is an important part of his life, he'd like to talk to someone who will speak to him from that perspective. He feels comfortable with his

youth leader but isn't sure how she feels about homosexuality. He knows there are Christians who think homosexuality is okay, but he also knows there are Christians who are really against it. What if she gets angry about his feelings? What if she says he's wrong to feel that way? Is it possible that she could be open and help him sort everything out?

- What are the differences between Ashley and her grandparents?
- How do you feel about Ashley wanting to have a big wedding?
- How do you think Nathan should proceed?
- What might happen if he talks to his parents? His youth leader? The group at school? Tony? His girlfriend?
- What should Nathan's youth leader base her advice on? (e.g., church teachings? Scripture? Experience as a youth worker? Psychological studies?)

ACTIVITY

Sex quiz

Answer multiple choice. Hand out pencils with the survey so it can be as anonymous as possible.

The best time to have sex is

- a) When you're married
- b) After high school
- c) After you've been dating for at least 6 months
- d) Whenever you feel ready
- e) I'm not sure

You are considered to be sexually active if you are: (circle all that apply)

- a) Kissing
- b) Having oral sex
- c) Having intercourse
- d) Have all your clothes off

In my family you are considered to be sexually active if you are: (circle all that apply)

- a) Kissing
- b) Having oral sex
- c) Having intercourse
- d) Have all your clothes off
- e) I don't know

What percentage of people report that they are homosexual or bisexual?

- a) Less than 5%
- b) 5-10%
- c) 10-20%
- d) 20-25%
- e) I don't know

Only girls can be raped.

- a) True
- b) False
- c) Not Sure

I have learned most of what I know about sex from:

- a) Sex Education at school
- b) My parents
- c) Media (TV, movies, music)
- d) My friends

What percentage of new sexually transmitted infections do people ages 15-24 account for each year?

- a) 15%
- b) 25%
- c) 40%
- d) 50%

What percentage of high school kids do you think have had sex?

- a) less than 10%
- b) 10-25%
- c) 25-50%
- d) 50-75%
- e) 75-100%

Scale the following. 1 = I don't agree with the statement. 5 = I completely agree with the statement.

Sex is a big deal.

1 2 3 4 5

If I have questions about sex, I can talk to my parents.

1 2 3 4 5

If I have questions about sex, I can talk to my friends.

1 2 3 4 5

It's important to save sex for marriage.

1 2 3 4 5

Masturbation is an acceptable form of sexual expression.

1 2 3 4 5

I think about God in relation to my sexual activity.

1 2 3 4 5

Teenagers should be concerned about pregnancy.

1 2 3 4 5

Teenagers should be concerned about getting an STD.

1 2 3 4 5

Homosexuality can be healthy expression of love.

1 2 3 4 5

You should care about the person you are having sex with.

1 2 3 4 5

Discussion points:

Adolescent sexual activity statistics

- In 2005, 47% of high school students had had sexual intercourse, and 14% of high school students had had four or more sex partners during their life. That represents a significant decline from 1991, when the figure was 54%.¹
- In 2005, 34% of currently sexually active high school students had not used a condom during last sexual intercourse.²
- In 2002, 55% of males and 54% of females aged 15–19 had engaged in oral sex with someone of the opposite sex.³
- “Some studies suggest that as many as 10% of Americans are lesbian or gay. Among women, about 13% have had orgasms with other women, but only 1–3% identify themselves as a lesbian... among males, about 2.8–4% consider themselves to be something other than heterosexual (either homosexual or bisexual).”⁴
- In 2004, an estimated 4,883 young people aged 13–24 in the 33 states reporting to CDC were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, representing about 13% of the persons diagnosed that year.⁵
- Although 15–24-year-olds represent only one-quarter of the sexually active population, they account for nearly half of all new STIs each year.⁶
- In 2000, 13% of all pregnancies (not abortions), occurred among adolescents aged 15–19.⁷
- 52% of ELCA youth polled said people should wait until they are married to have sex. That number went up to 57% for those who attended worship regularly.⁸

Questions

- Which of these statistics surprised you?
- Where have you learned what you know about sexuality?
- There are many different voices that influence our values and beliefs in regard to sexuality.
 - ▶ Family
 - ▶ Media
 - ▶ Communities
 - ▶ Faith Communities
 - ▶ Schools
- Different communities will hold different views on appropriate sexual behavior. What may seem to you to be universal might not be.
- Each of us is defined by our beliefs, values, practices, and social behavior. These all inform our opinions of sexuality.
- Where is the line defining what is okay and what isn't? Who draws the line? Who changes it? Who and what guides us?
- Where have you learned what you know about sexuality?
- What is different from when your parents were young? What views on sexuality have changed? What are the pros and cons of the changes?
- Do you think the attitudes and teachings of the church have changed? Why? Why not?
- Talk about the different views about sex among your peers. Do you hear people in your school who have different values and opinions than you do? What do you think has influenced their opinions?

THINKING TOGETHER

Movie clip

Meet the Fockers, (PG-13, 2004)

Start cue: “Stay with me kids, we’re almost done.” (Chapter 4: Set counter at 25:07)

End cue: “Come see the lagoon.” (Chapter 5: End counter at 30:35)

Greg is marrying someone from a very different background and is embarrassed about his parents and their lifestyle.

- What differences do you see in Greg’s and Pam’s families?
- What differences do you see in the two families and their sexual expression?
- Why do you think Greg is embarrassed by what his mother does?
- Is one of these lifestyles more right than the other?

Scripture

Galatians 2:11-21

But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore, whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

- The early church also struggled to live faithfully in the context of its culture. Here, Paul challenges his readers to live in contradiction to one aspect of their culture. How can that inform how we interact with the cultural lenses around us?
- What does it mean to be holy in regard to our sexuality?

What does the church say?

- It is appropriate for the church to examine contemporary culture critically.

- In our examination we are looking for those relationships that are perpetuating injustice and are inconsistent with God’s call for justice and peace.
- Before we endorse or dismiss anything we must measure all factors and their ability to care for our neighbor in love.

Song

“La Vie Boheme,” Various Artists La Vie Boheme (Life Cafe) Lyrics, Rent Soundtrack

Explain to the group: This song is taken from the “Rent” soundtrack. In this song they are talking about the freedom to believe what they want and do what they want.

Start song with “Dearly Beloved.....”

<http://www.songlyrics.com/song-lyrics/Various+Artists/Rent+Soundtrack%2C+Cast+Recording/La+Vie+Boheme+%28Life+Cafe%29/74054.html>

- What did you hear in the song?
- What life styles were they condoning?
- Are there risks for a life with no rules or boundaries?
- What might they be?

Conversation points:

- There are changing views around sexuality in our culture. How can we view them in relationship to the gospel?
- How can we lovingly enter into conversation with those who have differing views from our own?
- What is the most loving way to treat our neighbor who is homosexual, bi-sexual, or transgendered?

Possible views

Please note: There are views on the Web site that can be downloaded and shown to your group. This will likely be much more engaging for your youth group.

Show or read the differing views related to this subject. Allow your group the opportunity to say which view they identify with the most. What do they agree with and what do they disagree with? Encourage everyone to share.

View 1

I don’t think, as Christians, we should listen to the loud “voices” around us. I think our society is becoming so immoral, especially when it comes to matters of sex. I try to stay completely away from all of the hype around sexuality. No “R” rated movies or music with explicit lyrics. As people of faith we have to draw a line between us and all this negative thought about sexuality.

View 2

I think all the talk about sex and sexuality in our culture is very positive for people of faith. God is active in the world and we can see God in all the things that are going on around us. There are many different cultures in the world and we can learn positive things from all of them. The most important thing is justice. As long as it is a just society, we do not need to obsess about sexual immorality.

View 3

I think cultures can be wonderful and destructive to our faith. I don’t think we can remove ourselves from dominant culture and make a difference, but if we accept everything that can be dangerous. I wish society were not so loose around matters of sexuality, but I think that means the church needs to teach and educate its people about sexuality and sexual practice.

WORSHIP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Begin by placing a lot of candles or tea light candles in the center of the group. Read each of the three statements aloud. Before you read each statement, light a candle. Have the students meditate on each statement in a worshipful manner and allow some silence between them. After you have completed the three statements invite the group members to lift up a prayer petition as well. Inform them that you will be doing this before hand and instruct them to light a candle before they pray. Light the final candle right before you read the closing prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Read: *There are many different voices that influence our values and beliefs in regard to sexuality.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From a High School Student: I never thought I would be someone who would have sex before marriage, but I am really in love.*
- Silence
- Light a candle
- Read: *From Galatians 2: 19 - I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*
- Silence
- Candle lighting and prayer petitions from the group.
- **Closing Prayer:** *Loving God, we talked today about all the different values and opinions people have about sex and sexuality. Guide us as we enter into conversation with those who have differing values and beliefs from us and help us to love them as you first loved us. Amen.*

GO TO THE WEB

Want to see what other youth think? Visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth and contribute your thoughts on this question: What do you wish your parents and church understood about your life? What do you wish your peers understood about your faith? What do you find is the most difficult thing about being a Christian in relation to your sexuality?

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Strong, Bryan, William L. Yarber, Barbara W. Sayad, and Christine DeVault. *Human Sexuality: Diversity in Contemporary America*. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008, p. 195.

⁵ <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>

⁶ Weinstock H et al., "Sexually transmitted diseases among American youth: incidence and prevalence estimates, 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2004, 36(1):6–10.

⁷ <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>

⁸ *ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Journey Together Faithfully, Part Three*. p. 19

Session 2. Handout for Parents

Today's topic:

The Voices of Influence

Session Goal:

To raise awareness of the varying values, beliefs and opinions in regards to sex and sexuality. To think about how the church can offer a perspective.

Discussion points:

We looked at statistics regarding adolescence and sexual activity:

- In 2005, 47% of high school students had had sexual intercourse, and 14% of high school students had had four or more sex partners during their life.¹ That represents a significant decline from 1991, where the figure was 54%.
- In 2005, 34% of currently sexually active high school students had not used a condom during last sexual intercourse.²
- In 2002, 55% of males and 54% of females aged 15–19 had engaged in oral sex with someone of the opposite sex.³
- “Some studies suggest that as many as 10% of Americans are lesbian or gay. Among women, about 13% have had orgasms with other women, but only 1-3% identify themselves as a lesbian... among males, about 2.8–4% consider themselves to be something other than heterosexual (either homosexual or bisexual).”⁴
- In 2004, an estimated 4,883 young people aged 13–24 in the 33 states reporting to CDC were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, representing about 13% of the persons diagnosed that year.⁵
- The CDC estimates that one out of five adolescents has had a genital herpes infection.⁶
- In 2000, 13% of all pregnancies (not abortions), occurred among adolescents aged 15–19.⁷
- 52% of ELCA youth polled said people should wait until they are married to have sex. That number went up to 57% for those who attended worship regularly.⁸
- There are many different views on appropriate sexual behavior.
- There are many different voices that influence our values and beliefs in regards to sexuality.
 - ▶ Family
 - ▶ Media
 - ▶ Communities
 - ▶ Faith Communities
 - ▶ Schools
- Each of us is defined by our beliefs, values, practices, and social behavior. These all inform our opinions of sexuality.

We read these scripture verses:

- Galatians 2:11-21
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

What does our church say?

- It is appropriate for the church to examine contemporary culture.
- In our examination we are looking for those relationships that are perpetuating injustice and are inconsistent with God's call for justice and peace.
- Before we endorse or dismiss anything we must measure all factors and their ability to serve the neighbor in love.

Talk it through with your kids:

- Ask about their experience in relation to the statistics above (e.g., Does it seem many people at their school are sexually active? Do they know people who are struggling with sexual orientation? Have they ever heard of someone who had an STD at their school?)
- Ask them who has influenced their understanding of sexuality the most.
- Tell them about where you first learned about sexuality. Did anyone talk to you about it? What do you wish someone would have told you?
- Talk to your kids about what your values are regarding things like the appropriate time for sex, homosexuality, safe sex, and birth control.
- What does the knowledge that you are a forgiven sinner do for you when making decisions related to sexuality?
- Can you think of a common social practice (soccer games on Sundays, bachelor parties where inappropriate sexual activity takes place, Internet pornography that caters to adolescents) that may hinder our freedom in the gospel or our ability to love and care for the neighbor? Name some of those practices for your child and discuss how you respond.

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Strong, Bryan, William L. Yarber, Barbara W. Sayad, and Christine DeVault. *Human Sexuality: Diversity in Contemporary America*. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008, p. 195.

⁵ <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>

⁶ Weinstock H et al., "Sexually transmitted diseases among American youth: incidence and prevalence estimates, 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2004, 36(1):6–10.

⁷ <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/index.htm>

⁸ *ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Journey Together Faithfully, Part Three*. p. 19

Session 3.

When is Sex Okay?

Session goal:

To have discussion and raise awareness about the appropriate time and context for sexual activity.

One of the most burning questions in the minds of young people is “When is it okay to have sex?” Kids will hear different answers to this question. Some say it is only okay to have sex when you are married. Others say that it’s okay as long as you love the person and you are in a mutually committed relationship. And then there are opinions that state it doesn’t matter what your relationship is, that as long as you both agree to it, you can have sex with whomever you want. The ELCA has taken the stance that intimate sexuality, like intercourse, is acceptable only in marriage. In the last few generations some voices have challenged the church to rethink its stance in light of the changing cultural context.

We have seen many changes in the patterns of our culture which all impact when people become sexually active and offer challenges to the tradition of sex only within marriage. Young people are entering into serious relationships at ages younger than ever before. Thanks to a trend towards delaying the age of first marriage, the single and dating phase of life can last for a decade, or even two. Those who are married may still face the possibility of being single and dating all over again—43% of first marriages end in separation or divorce within 15 years.¹ Almost all of those who have divorced will remarry. Nearly 70% of women over the age of 25 will remarry within ten years, and 81% of women under 25 will remarry within ten years.² Cohabitation also presents a challenge. By age 30 half of all people in the United States will have cohabited,³ perhaps as a sort of trial for marriage, although couples who lived together are statistically more likely to divorce than couples who did not live together before marriage.⁴ To top it all off for many young adults there seems to be a sort of embarrassment that has become associated with remaining a virgin.

Given all these factors in regard to sex and marriage, the former prohibitions against sexual activity outside of marriage seem to have eroded for many people. As our adolescents seek answers to the question, “When is sex okay?” we need to be prepared to engage them in a conversation about intimacy and boundaries. A simple “yes/no” answer may no longer be sufficient, if it ever was. Even if it works for the time being, or the next few months, it doesn’t develop the sort of deep ethical reflection they will need when they are out of school and on their own, and making this decision.

We are left asking the question; what is the relationship between marriage and sex? At one time, at least in perception, marriage was the proper place where our sexually intimate relationships took place. Clearly, with the changing culture, that is no longer the case for many people.

Marriage offers many benefits beyond being a venue for sexual intercourse. A healthy marriage offers the best possible scenario for raising children. When both parents are present and involved in the lives of their children, children do the best. Marriage offers them the opportunity to be raised in a stable supportive environment and helps ensure that they are cared for. The bonds between family members can give us security in our understanding that we will not be alone in our times of need and provide legal responsibility for family members.

Faith Connection

What does our faith have to say about when sex is okay?

“As Lutherans, we believe that God is about doing new things in the world, and we do not want to set ourselves against the future that God is bringing to be. Yet, we are also acutely aware of the power of sin to corrupt both our individual judgments and our social and institutional structures” (FICTSN, p. 38).

We believe that our faith requires us to engage and live in our culture, but it also enables us to do so critically and actively, not just as passive people who go with the flow of things.

Paul’s letters address issues of culture in light of the gospel. We spoke last session about the controversy over circumcision.

“But even while addressing this specific issue he holds out to us a broad vision of what it would be like to be part of a new creation, that is, to be “clothed in Christ.” (FICTSN, p. 38)”

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:27 Later in Galatians Paul says that if we walk by the Spirit we will be known by the “fruits of the Spirit” which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (5:22). These words from Galatians help us understand how we are to interact with change and they inform us about how we are to treat one another in relationship, especially intimate relationships.

When we live by the Spirit and treat each other with kindness, patience, and love, we can enter into marriage with God’s help, without fearing that we will fail to be perfect. The Lutheran church asks for God’s blessing on the marriage where two people make public promises and together act as a sign of God’s loving and gracious will for the world.

What does the church say?

In the 1996 message, “Sexuality: Some Common Convictions” our church states that all of our relationships are affected by our sexuality at some level. People of all ages need help in understanding what it means to live out their sexual identity. “This church affirms the importance of ordering society and educating youth and adults so that all might live in these relationships with mutual respect and responsibility.” The message talks about how marriage is a right relationship to express sexuality: “Marriage provides a structure of security and stability within which spouses may fully enjoy and risk sexual expression.”

“As we think about the institution of marriage, we need to recognize the prior importance of relationships that are based on mutual respect and responsibility. Marriage is important because it is conducive to and supports right relationships, genuine intimacy, personal growth, as well as responsible conception of children. (FICTSN, p. 39).

The 1970 document *Sex, Marriage and Family*, describes marriage as a “mutual commitment to lifelong faithfulness” and “a covenant of fidelity” between a man and a woman. It also states that the church values families for their capacity to nurture.

GATHERING

Thought to ponder:

What do you think is the best and the most difficult thing about being married?

Welcome diversion:

Have bottles of wedding bubbles for the group to play with as they arrive.

Opening prayer:

Give 30 seconds for silence as you pause and connect with God. Then pray this prayer:

Thank you, gracious God, for making us sexual beings who need each other. As we talk today help us to understand how to honor that gift and how to bring glory to you in every aspect of our lives. Amen.

DIFFERING VIEWS

Jessi and Greg

It was the most magical night of their lives. For their entire senior year of high school Jessi and Greg had been dating and since the beginning of their relationship they had talked about how great it would be if they went to prom together. So, here they were. It was an amazing night. The limo picked them up early so they could have pictures taken and then drive around town for an hour or so before dinner. Friends asked to share a limousine with them, but they wanted this night to be just about them, no one else. They had dinner downtown at an amazing seafood restaurant. Greg picked it out because he knew how much Jessi loved seafood. They danced all night long. It was the most magical night of their lives.

At the end of the night they had planned to stay in the hotel where the prom was being held so they wouldn't have to end the night early. When they got up to their room they laughed and talked about what a great night it had been. It was everything they ever imagined it would be. In the spur of the moment Greg said something he hadn't planned on saying, but he knew he meant it when he said it. "I don't ever want to be without you. I really want to marry you some day Jessi." Swept up in the romanticism of the night they started kissing and making out. Neither of them had ever made love before, but there couldn't be a more perfect time.

Billy and Maggie

Billy and Maggie have been dating for six years. They met during their junior year of college and have been together ever since. After they graduated from college the majority of their energy was spent on establishing their careers. Maggie works in the business field and was recently given her third promotion in three years. Billy has been working in advertising and has just made the decision to go back to get his master's degree.

Maggie just bought a house and is looking for a roommate. She has been searching for a long time and isn't comfortable with any of the options. Billy, on the other hand, is considering moving back home with his parents, but can't stand the idea of living under their rules at 26 years old. He knows money is going to be tight while he's in school so he's not sure he has much of an option.

A few nights ago, while Maggie and Billy were out for dinner, they discussed the future of their relationship. They agreed that they both saw this as a lifelong commitment, but the timing wasn't right for them to get married. As they moved on to discussions about housing situations the subject came up about them living together. From where they stand it seemed like a perfect solution. Maggie would get a roommate, Billy wouldn't have to move in with his parents, and they would both be able to invest in what would probably be their first home as a married couple.

- How does someone indicate that they are in a lifelong commitment?
- Does someone's age or stage in life have something to do with that?
- What alternatives are there for these couples?
- The ELCA statements talk about relationships based on mutual respect and responsibility. How might faith shape the decisions these couples are facing? In what ways do they have the kind of commitment the church requires of marriage? In what ways do they not?

Discussion points:

- There are varying views about when it's okay to be sexually active.
 - ▶ Only when you are married
 - ▶ In a committed relationship
 - ▶ Doesn't matter what your relationship is as long as it's consensual.

- There are many changes in the relationship patterns of our culture and all of them impact when people become sexually active.
 - ▶ People marry later in life
 - ▶ Divorce is more common, and divorced persons frequently remarry
 - ▶ Dating begins earlier in life
 - ▶ For some contexts virginity has come to be regarded almost with embarrassment
 - ▶ Large numbers of young couples live together
 - ▶ Marriage serves many purposes that contribute to our well being:
 - Allows children the opportunity to be raised in a stable, supportive environment.
 - Ensures family members are cared for
 - Provides legal responsibility for family members.
 - Allows genuine intimacy and personal growth.
- Religious views of marriage allow us to make a public commitment to our partners knowing that we will not be perfect. We ask God to bless this commitment.
- How do you think most high school students feel about sex before marriage?
- What are the good things about waiting to have sexual intercourse?
- Why do you think a lot of people don't wait?

ACTIVITY:

You will need: Some dot stickers and a copy of the “Relationship Target” for each person. (“Relationship Target” form is at the end of the session)

Ask the kids to write the names of important people in their lives on the dot stickers. They should include names of friends, parents, siblings, other family members, adults in their lives and anyone else whom they would name as a significant person.

Explain to them that the center of the relationship target represents them. Each circle around the center indicates positions for how close you feel to the different people in your lives. The circles closest to you would be positions for those who have shared life experiences with you. These are the people that you trust the most and feel comfortable being vulnerable with. It isn't a measure of who you like the most; it's a measure of who has demonstrated their trustworthiness, honesty, caring, and that you feel closest to. In other words, the people in the closest circles will be the ones you know will always be there for you, the ones you are yourself around, the ones you spend the most time with, the ones you know the most about (their families, their goals, their fears, and proudest moments). The middle circles would be for those people you are getting to know. The outer circles are for those people who are just beginning to enter your life or those people that you aren't that close to.

We are going to place the stickers on the target, but think carefully about where you put the stickers.

Points to make about the activity:

- Family doesn't have to be in the middle of the target, but youth are often too quick to dismiss the strong bond and connection with their families. Invite them to think about who they would call if they were in trouble, who they count on the most, etc. This may help them see their importance.
- The amount of time someone has been in your life is a sign of where they would be on your target but not a distinct indicator.

- Often we give away too much of ourselves in new relationships. We meet someone and shortly after we have begun a relationship with them they are in one of the inner circles. We must keep in perspective the level of intimacy we have with various people in our lives and only give them as much of ourselves as they have earned.
- This is especially true in our romantic endeavors. There may be voices in our culture that disagree about whether someone should wait until marriage to be sexually active. But all would probably agree that developing sexual intimacy should come only with someone who has earned their way into our inner circle, earned our trust and we feel that it is safe to be vulnerable with them.

Process the Activity:

- Where did you put your family?
- Are there people on the inside of your target that haven't earned this important position in your life?
- What are the differences between the people in the center of your target and the people in the middle of your target?
- What did you learn or notice during this activity?
- At what point is it okay to have a physical relationship?
- At what point is it okay to have a sexual relationship?
- What do you think the church would say about who belongs in the inner circle? Why?
- How would you use the gift of sexuality to serve those in your inner circle (e.g., for parents, modesty and respect might be one way)?

THINKING TOGETHER

Movie clip

13 going on 30, (PG-13, 2004)

Start cue: "Oh my god it's the naked guy." (Chapter 13: Set counter at 43:45)

End cue: "Have fun at work." (Chapter 13: End counter at 48:45)

Thirteen-year-old Jenna makes a wish that she were 30 years old. When she wakes up the next morning as a 30-year-old woman she finds that getting everything you ever wanted isn't always what you want.

- Do you think Jenna is ready to have a sexual relationship with her boyfriend?
- How do you think most people would respond to a famous sports star wanting to sleep with them?
- Matt is Jenna's best friend from childhood. She seems upset about his move to Chicago. Why do you think that might be?
- How is Lucy (her girlfriend) helpful or hurtful in this situation?

Scripture

Galatians 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

1 Corinthians 7:1-11

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. To the married I give this command not I but the Lord that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- What do these Bible texts tell us about our sexuality? About marriage?
- What might Paul mean by saying we have authority over each other?
- In the Corinthians text, how does Paul indicate that we are to live out our sexuality?

What does the church say?

- The church affirms the importance of the ordering of society where relationships are lived with mutual respect and responsibility.
- The relationship of marriage is marked by mutual commitment and fidelity. Historically the church has maintained that marriage is the proper place for the full expression of sexuality.
- The church values families for their capacity to nurture. The family's ability to care for one another, take care of each other's needs, raise children and teach values is more influential than any other source.

Song

"My Best Friend" by Tim McGraw

<http://www.songlyrics.com/song-lyrics/McGraw+Tim/A+Place+In+The+Sun/My+Best+Friend/139411.html>

- Where do you think his "best friend" would be on his relationship target?

Conversation points:

- When a romantic relationship enters the inner circle on your relationship target, when has your intimacy reached a level where sex is appropriate? How would your parents answer this question? Your friends? Your church?

- How do you think the church should respond to couples (of any age and gender) who live together?
- Why would someone get married in a church instead of going to a judge or the justice of the peace?
- Clearly the church gets to choose which marriages it will bless, but does the church have anything to say about what constitutes a marriage? (e.g., who is in the marriage? Gender of the people in the marriage? Common law marriage, which is when people have lived together without getting married for long enough that they are married in the eyes of the state?)
- What do you see as the benefits of marriage?
- Can you see benefits to not getting married?
- How might getting married be caring for our neighbor? How do we care for our neighbor once we are married?

Possible views

Please note: There are views on the Web site that can be downloaded and shown to your group. This will likely be much more engaging for your youth group.

Show or read the differing views related to this subject. Allow your group the opportunity to say which view they identify with the most. What do they agree with and what do they disagree with? Encourage everyone to share.

View 1

I don't have any problems with the changing attitudes about sex and whether or not you have to be married. I think it's much better than feeling guilty, ashamed or bad for your sexual feelings. Our culture has changed and we have to change our beliefs too. To say you have to be married to have sex is totally outdated and if we intend to attract young people into our churches, we are going to have to lighten up on this issue.

View 2

I don't know how I feel about all the changing attitudes around sex and marriage. I mean, I don't think it's a good thing to do whatever you want, but on the other hand I think people should be free to make their own decisions. I mean, who am I to tell someone how to live their life? I think marriage is a good thing, I'm just not sure if it's the only thing.

View 3

It is wrong for people to have sex outside of marriage for any reason. Sex is intended to be inside a blessed marriage union. It's clear. There is a reason why people, for many, many years, have believed in marriage. We are too eager to dismiss lifelong marriage in our culture. People are too quick to divorce and it has been made too easy. How are we to encourage people to stay together when it's so easy to divorce?

WORSHIP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Begin by placing a lot of candles or tea light candles in the center of the group. Read each of the three statements aloud. Before you read each statement, light a candle. Have the students meditate on each statement in a worshipful manner and allow some silence between them. After you have completed the three statements invite the group members to lift up a prayer petition as well. Inform them beforehand that you will be doing this and instruct them to light a candle before they pray. Light the final candle right before you read the closing prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Read: *Changes in our culture impact when people become sexually active and offer challenges to the tradition of sex only within marriage.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From a High School Student: I have no desire to get married. Does that mean I can never have sex?*
- Silence
- Light a candle
- Read: *From Galatians 3: 23 - Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*
- Silence
- Candle lighting and prayer petitions from the group.
- **Closing Prayer:** *O God, we praise you for the gift of marriage. We also thank you for the gift of people we care about, love, and trust who bring a richness to our lives. Give our church wisdom and guidance as we come to understand who we are in relation to our changing culture. Amen.*

GO TO THE WEB

Want to see what other youth think? Visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth and contribute your thoughts on this question: What does it mean for you that God made sexuality part of who you are, but also expects you to use sexuality in a way that is caring? What are the limits that places on your sexuality?

What does it mean to you to state that God created humans and human sexuality “good”?

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/01news/firstmarr.htm>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/01news/firstmarr.htm>

³ Strong, Bryan, William L. Yarber, Barbara W. Sayad, and Christine DeVault. *Human Sexuality: Diversity in Contemporary America*. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008.),

⁴ Ibid.

Session 3. Handout for Parents

Today's topic:

When is sex okay?

Session Goal:

To have discussion and raise awareness about the appropriate time and context for sexual activity.

Discussion points:

- Your child will hear different messages from different people, culture, and media about when it's okay to be sexually active.
- There are many changes in the relationship patterns of our culture and all of them impact when people become sexually active.
- Marriage offers many benefits for society:
 - ▶ Allows children the opportunity to be raised in a stable supportive environment.
 - ▶ Ensures family members are cared for.
 - ▶ Provides legal responsibility for family members.
 - ▶ Allows genuine intimacy and personal growth.
- We make the public promises of marriage knowing that we won't be perfect, but asking God's blessing on it.

We read these scripture verses:

- Galatians 3:23-29
- 1 Corinthians 7:1-11

What does our church say?

- The church affirms the importance of the ordering of society where relationships are lived with mutual respect and responsibility.
- The relationship of marriage is marked by mutual commitment to fidelity. Historically the church has maintained that marriage is the proper place for the full expression of sexuality.
- The church values families for their capacity to nurture. The family's ability to care for its members, raise children, and teach values is more influential than any other source.

Talk it through with your kids:

- Ask what they thought was interesting about today's discussion.
- Ask them, "What different answers might you get if you asked high school students here when it's okay to be sexually active?"
- Do your kids know your views on sex before marriage? When do you think it's okay to be sexually active? Take this opportunity to talk to them about your own values concerning marriage, sex, living together, and family. If you have youth of differing ages, think through whether they are all ready to hear the same message from you.
- Tell your child what you think are the signs of the mutual commitment and fidelity that the church promotes in marriage.
- Tell your child about your faith and how it influenced your decisions about when to engage in sexual activity. Were you influenced by something you read in the Bible or experienced in the church? Were you influenced by an example of a faithful person? Did your spouse feel the same way?

RELATIONSHIP TARGET



Session 4.

Sex, Power, and Abuse

Session goal:

To discuss how the sexual power we all have can be misused. To compare abuse of sexual power to the way all Christians are to use their powers.

The very nature of an intimate sexual relationship makes us vulnerable to our partners. Our partners know more about us than anyone else does. They know our strengths and our weaknesses. They know what we're good at and what we struggle with. We share things with them that we don't share with many, like our fears and insecurities, and physical touch. We share with them the most intimate parts of who we are and we share with them our vulnerabilities. In the intimacy of our sexual relationships we give away parts of ourselves and enter into a vulnerable place.

In a good, healthy relationship a partner can help you work through many of your inadequacies. If we are uncomfortable with the way we look, another person can help make us feel attractive and encourage us. If we don't feel confident in who we are as a person, another person can validate our worthiness. If we have a deep-seated fear of being alone, our fear lessens in the presence of another. But this same intimacy that can give us confidence to move mountains can also be very destructive when someone abuses that vulnerability. Abuse happens when one of the partner's actions, involvement, or beliefs are manipulated by another through control, oppression, or violence.

In pop culture, we often see sexual power exploited in music and music videos. They glorify sexual power and assault, even rape. Pop culture also presents an overly romanticized view of being vulnerable in a relationship. Not too long ago, in the movie "Jerry McGuire" the character played by Tom Cruise romantically declares to his girlfriend that she "completes" him. Although very romantic, it perpetuates the mentality that, individually we are not complete people and we need others to make us whole.

Power issues are not just limited to media and music videos. We are confronted by the abuse taking place within our communities of faith. The Roman Catholic Church is struggling to regain its footing in light of many abuse allegations. In our own church as well we have seen far too many incidences where a clergy person or staff member has abused the power of the office and sexually manipulated, coerced, or assaulted a parishioner. The use of power to gain control over others is something that permeates all areas of life.

Especially disturbing is how this abuse of sexual power impacts adolescents. Teenagers are at the most vulnerable time of their lives. They are in the processes of figuring out who they are. They feel awkward and on display, out of place and in need of peer approval. When they look around themselves they get messages indicating the importance of being in relationship, at any costs. And so, with their vulnerabilities, they, more than any other population, fall prey to the struggle of sexual power.

All of us, but young people in particular and with special intensity, are acutely aware of the social and sexual power that comes with having a body that fits contemporary standards regarding male and female beauty. Reinforced by media and advertising, such standards are used to place the label of "sexually unattractive" on anyone who is disfigured, blemished, too short, too tall, too fat, too thin, or simply unappealing. [Billions of dollars are spent each year in the pursuit of this elusive form of power: breast implants, cosmetic surgery, liposuction, steroid treatment, diets, hair coloring, and the newest fashions. Young women and, increasingly, young men develop eating disorders in pursuit of this power, desiring the type of body images that dominate the visual media]. (summary of FICTSN, p. 45)

Faith Connection

Throughout the gospels we can see that exercising domination over another human being has no place in the life of a person who follows Christ. All of us are in essence, powerful; that fact is neutral. How we use that power is what matters.

During his ministry Jesus exemplifies how power is to be used. We see him reaching out to the woman at the well, we see him enter into the healing pools, we see him going to the homes of the outcast and we see him forgiving people. Jesus teaches us over and over again that, as people of faith, our lives are all about servanthood. You could say that exercising coercive or manipulative power over someone is the opposite of servanthood. Domination robs someone of dignity and honor and draws the center of attention to yourself, while servanthood restores dignity and honor and is mindful of the other person.

In our sexual relationships it is clear that there is no place for exploitation. Someone who desires to live a life of faith grounded in the gospel is someone who desires to be a servant. Whenever we coerce someone into doing something or take advantage of their vulnerability we are exercising power sinfully and selfishly. A servant's attitude would ask, "How can I be helpful to you?" or "How can I care for the parts of you that are the weakest?" When we have a servant's attitude in our relationships we are constantly looking out for the interest of our neighbor. Power only looks out for the interests of the self.

What does the church say?

The words from our church regarding injustice state that exploitation of someone who is vulnerable is never okay. We are to treat all people equally and to protect those who are most susceptible to harm and abuse. The teachings are clear. They say,

"To participate in God's mission, this church shall: ...Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs."
(FICTSN, p. 47)

In "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions" (p. 6) the church explicitly condemns all forms of sexual abuse. It states,

"All forms of abuse are sinful – whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether by a spouse, family member, person in authority, date, acquaintance, or stranger."
(FICTSN, p. 47)

As people who desire to live a life in the reflection of Christ, we are called to love people who are vulnerable and to protect them from exploitation by those who seek power. We are called to protect them in all situations, including what we are talking about here, sexual exploitation.

GATHERING

Thought to ponder:

What part of your identity are you willing to give up to be in a relationship? Would you give up studying? Your family? Your church? Your group of friends? The time you like to spend alone? (This is sort of a trick question. The answer should be no part of my identity. A relationship should add to our life, not take away from it. Do the activity below.)

Welcome diversion:

You'll need to prepare this before the meeting.

Make, or have some craft-loving person from your congregation make, a recipe of Rice Krispies® bars (super easy: 3 ingredients, 5 minutes, recipe on the package). Instead of molding it into a pan, mold the Rice Krispies into the form of a person. After you all discuss the above question have everyone take a small piece of the Rice Krispies person. Discuss how, with every piece that gets given away, they become less of a person. How can this be like giving away a part of ourselves in relationship? What could you give away that would not make you less, but help you to grow?

Opening prayer:

Give 30 seconds for silence as you pause and connect with God. Then pray this prayer:

O God, you have made all of us unique individuals, with personalities, gifts, interests, and talents that are all our own. Teach us to be generous with our gifts in serving others and, at the same time, careful and responsible with all that you have given us and created us to be, Help us to stay true to the person you made us to be and anchored in no one but you. Amen.

Split the group

Explain to the group that today, because of the subject we are discussing, we are going to split into two groups, girls and boys. It's not about secrecy or excluding each other; it's about trying to create comfortable and safe space for talking about sex, power, and abuse. Send one of the groups out to be with another leader.

DIFFERING VIEWS

Overheard in hall before a youth group meeting

“You’re going to wear WHAT to the party? How do you expect to get John or any other guy’s attention? You gotta show more skin. What do you think it’s for?”

Overheard in the locker room

“Really? I don’t think Ashley will do that.”

“She will, if she wants to stay together!”

Overheard in a workplace

“I’m tired of working this shift for minimum wage. Look at that model on the cover of the magazine. I wonder how much she makes. I could do that.”

(Laughing). “All I’d need to do is stop eating for about three months and get fake ones” (pointing at her chest). “I bet I’d get a raise if I walked in here tomorrow looking like that!”

Shared in the synod bishop’s office

“I let it go on too long. Nearly two years. It started with counseling sessions. At first it really helped to know he cared. I was hurting so much. When things turned sexual, I knew it was wrong, but I was too embarrassed to tell anyone. Maybe I asked for it. I don’t know. I just need it to end. What do I do? What happens next? What will happen to Pastor when this all comes out?” (FICTSN, p. 43)

- How do you see power being misused in each one of these situations?
- Who is using power over whom? What is being given up, lost, or taken in the process?

Discussion points:

- The very nature of an intimate sexual relationship makes us vulnerable to our partners.
- In a good, healthy relationship a partner can help you work through many of your struggles.
- The vulnerability that is necessary for a good relationship is abused in a bad relationship.
- Women, and occasionally men, are often seen as subjects of sexual violence in the media. What are some examples that you have seen or heard (e.g., music videos, movies, etc.)?
- Abuse is present when one of the partner’s actions, involvement, or beliefs are manipulated by another through control, oppression, or violence.

- We see power misused in the church, as well, in situations where a pastor or youth minister is inappropriate in their use of their position and authority.
- How do people use sex as power?
- How do males and females see and use sexual power differently?
- When do these things become abuse?
- Have you ever known anyone who has been abused? What happened to the relationship and the people involved?
- “One in four adolescents reports verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse each year.” (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/DatingAbuseFactSheet.pdf>) What could that statistic be saying to us?

ACTIVITY

This may be a familiar activity for some of you, but here we take on a more serious subject. Ask the group to stand in the middle of the room. Tell them that you are going to read a statement. All of these statements have to do with using sexuality to gain power in a relationship. If they think the situation is an abuse of power in relationship, have them go to the left side of the room. If they think the situation is not an abuse of power in relationship, have them go to the right side of the room. There can be varying degrees of agreement as well. If they only agree 50% they can stand somewhere between the middle and the left side of the room. Encourage them to think of the room as a continuum. After each statement, process with them why they are standing where they are. For discussion purposes it is important that they don't simply go where their friends go. Depending on your group you may want to read the statement then give them some time to process it before they move. That may encourage them to answer on their own.

Start by saying something like this, “Do you agree or disagree that these situations are misusing power in relationship?”

- Calling someone a name.
- Meeting someone online.
- Talking to someone in a sexual way that you just met online.
- Telling someone that if the relationship doesn't become more sexual you'll have to break up.
- Having sex after prom because everyone is doing it.
- Asking someone out on a date.
- Pushing someone up against a wall.
- Flirting with someone.
- Being physically intimidating; getting up in someone's face.
- Walking away in the middle of a conversation.
- Circulating to a group of friends an e-mail message, text message, or photo of a personal or sexual nature to embarrass or hurt someone else.
- Leading someone on sexually so they will be your boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Asking a friend to find out if someone likes you.
- Physically restraining someone during an argument.

- Staying in a relationship with someone because you like the things they buy you.
- Not allowing your boyfriend/girlfriend to talk to someone from school.
- Pretending you are pregnant to get someone to stay in a relationship.

THINKING TOGETHER

Movie clip

"My Super Ex-Girlfriend" (2006, PG-13)

Start cue: "You know, Matt, there are some things I don't need infra-red vision to see through."
(Chapter 11: Set counter at 47:00)

End cue: "You are so going to regret this." (Chapter 13: End counter at 53:25)

Matt Saunders decides he wants to break up with his superhero girlfriend when he finds out that she's needy, jealous, and controlling.

- In what ways is Jenny using power to try and control Matt?
- What outcome is she trying to manipulate by using power?
- How do her actions disempower Matt?
- Do you see power being used in any other way in this clip?

Song

"Face Down" by The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus

http://www.songlyrics.com/song-lyrics/Red_Jumpsuit_Apparatus/Miscellaneous/Face_Down/256584.html

- How does someone misuse their power toward another when they are physically abusive to them?
- How might that affect their sexual relationship?

Scripture

Galatians 4:1-7

My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Mark 10:42-45

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- What do these Bible texts tell us about our sexuality and relationships?
- What can the Mark text tell us about how are we to be in relationship with others?
- What does that say about how we use the power we have?

What does the church say?

- Exploitation of someone who is vulnerable is never okay.
- We are to treat all people equally and to protect those susceptible to harm.
- All forms of abuse are sinful.

Conversation points:

- As Christians we want to correct misuse of power, protect vulnerable people and prevent destructive behavior.
- How can we resist the temptation to use power over another person?
- How can we lovingly help those who are using power and abusing their relationships?
- How do you think Christ would respond to those who are abusing others?

Possible views

Please note: There are views on the Web site that can be downloaded and shown to your group. This will likely be much more engaging for your youth group.

Show or read the differing views related to this subject. Allow your group the opportunity to say which view they identify with the most. What do they agree with and what do they disagree with? Encourage everyone to share.

View 1

To me power isn't bad. I think you can use it for good and for bad. All of us have power; it's all about how we use it. The question isn't whether or not we use power, but whether it's being used in the right way. When power is used for good a lot of positive things come out of it. For instance, we can use money from our congregations to help people and congregations in areas of economic need. That's a great use of power and gifts or resources. We all choose how to use our own power.

View 2

I believe that sexuality is used as power all the time in our culture and it is affecting how we view sexuality. All the images that we see on television and in the media are unrealistic and they make us feel bad about ourselves. As a church we have to speak out against all the images, it's blurring our understanding of healthy sexual boundaries.

View 3

I don't think that anyone has the right to exercise any power over another person. The only thing that is acceptable in sexual relations and otherwise is mutual agreement. It is the only way to ensure justice and that human rights are protected. Even the church has been hurtful at times by not advocating for the importance of mutual consent. I think the church needs to work harder at eradicating power and implementing justice.

WORSHIP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Begin by placing a lot of candles or tea light candles in the center of the group. Read each of the three statements aloud. Before you read each statement, light a candle. Have the students meditate on each statement in a worshipful manner and allow some silence between them. After you have completed the three statements invite the group members to lift up a prayer petition as well. Inform them that you will be doing this before hand and instruct them to light a candle before they pray. Light the final candle right before you read the closing prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Read: *As Christians we want to correct misuse of power, protect vulnerable people, and prevent destructive behavior.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From a High School Student: It only happened one time. I know he didn't mean to hurt me. He really loves me.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From Mark 10:44 - Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.*
- Silence
- Candle lighting and prayer petitions from the group.
- **Closing Prayer:** *Gracious God, most of us struggle with the misuse of power in one form or another. Help us to look honestly at ourselves and cleanse those areas of our lives that are not a good reflection of you and your Word. Teach us to reach out, in love, to those who are vulnerable and to those who abuse. In your name we pray. Amen.*

GO TO THE WEB

Want to see what other youth think? Visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth and contribute your thoughts on this question: Where do you see sexual power misused most often? How did having this discussion make you think differently about the power of sexuality and how it's used? (FICTSN, p. 49, q. 5)



Session 4. Handout for Parents

Today's topic:

Power, Sex, and Abuse

Session Goal:

To discuss how the sexual power we all have can be misused. To compare abuse of sexual power to the way all Christians are to use their powers.

Discussion points:

- The very nature of an intimate sexual relationship makes us vulnerable to our partners.
- In a good, healthy relationship a partner can help you work through many of your struggles.
- The vulnerability that is necessary for a good relationship is abused in a bad relationship.
- Abuse is present when one of the partner's actions, involvement, or beliefs are manipulated by another through control, oppression, or violence.
- We see power misused in the church as well, in situations where a pastor or youth minister or leader is inappropriate in their use of their position and authority.
- "One in four adolescents reports verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse each year." (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/DatingAbuseFactSheet.pdf>)

We read these scripture verses:

- Galatians 4:1-7
- Mark 10:42-45

What does our church say?

- Exploitation of someone who is vulnerable is never okay.
- We are to treat all people equally and to protect those who are most susceptible to harm.
- All forms of abuse are sinful.

Talk it through with your kids:

- Ask what they learned from the study today. What did they already know or understand (that might have been affirmed)?
- Ask them if they have ever known a friend who has been in a relationship that was hurtful or abusive.
- Walk through a "safety plan" in case they would ever be in a situation where they felt they weren't safe. (e.g., never get in a car alone, who would you call, call parents at any time of day or night, don't feel pressured into a situation you feel uneasy about, etc.) For more information on protecting your children and the signs of abuse access the American Psychological Association's Web site at: <http://www.apa.org/releases/sexabuse/>
- Show them, through your relationships at home, how we lovingly treat our partners. One of the most important things we can do for our children is to offer them positive, healthy examples and role models for relationships and marriage. If you are prepared for it, ask your child what messages s/he receives from the way you treat your spouse or partner. The answer may be helpful and enlightening to both of you.

- Look up Galatians 5:19-21. How do the desires of the flesh show up in erotic expression, sexual companionship, love relationships, and family settings? How does living in the Spirit change the way we regard and express our sexuality? Give your child examples from your life of moments when you felt you were living in the Spirit.
- How do you feel about the powerful thing that sexuality is? How do you see Jesus using power in the Gospels? Should we follow his example when it comes to sexual power? How does his example apply to sexual power?

Session 5:

Selling Sex

Session goal:

To discuss and raise awareness of how media uses sex to stir our interest in products and programming. To call into question what selling sex does to our appreciation of God's gift of sexuality.

In America, sex sells. Did you know that on an average we are subject to 3000 messages a day? And a significant number of those messages use sex and sexual power to draw our interest even though most of the advertisements are selling products that have little or nothing to do with sex. Have you ever seen a car tire ad with a scantily clad woman in the picture? What does sex have to do with car tires? The bottom line is this: because we are bombarded daily with a myriad of advertisements, advertisers need to get our attention. The lowest, or perhaps the easiest common denominator is sex. We respond to sex. We respond visually, we respond emotionally and we respond physically to sex. Sadly, much of this sexual advertising is aimed at the emotionally and intellectually immature. Usually those people are young adults, adolescents and tweens, people between the ages of 8 and 24. This impacts our young people in significant ways. Of primary concern to Christians is the way sexualized advertising minimizes the value of our sexuality and focuses on a single attribute, quality or behavior of our humanity. Previously in this study we have discussed what an amazing and beautiful gift our sexuality is from God. The bombardment of so many images of sexuality numbs us to the beauty that God intended. Sexualized advertising also holds us to unreasonably high physical and sexual standards that are narrowly defined. From these advertisements all of us unconsciously construct our understandings of who we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to behave sexually. The images of the people they are selling are unattainably perfect physically; literally unattainable. Even the models these pictures are presenting don't look exactly like their pictures. Airbrushing and Photoshop™ have made even perfect people look more perfect. In addition to the impossible physical standards, these people are often seen in very sexually sophisticated and suggestive situations and positions. Because of these things there is great impact on the self worth and self esteem of many of the adolescents in our culture.

Of course, the over sexualized nature of our culture isn't simply limited to advertisements. Many of the lyrics in popular songs denigrate sexual activity and encourage the use of sex as a power tool or casual recreational behavior. In television and movies sexual promiscuity promotes a lifestyle that is detrimental, carrying with it a host of interpersonal struggles and problems. Furthermore, overt forms of sexual promotion are becoming more and more acceptable. With the broad availability of the Internet, the percentage of people viewing pornography regularly has risen dramatically. Pornography revenues are \$10-20 billion, prostitution and exotic dancing are easy to find and out in the open. Unfortunately those who participate in these activities aren't limited to a secular crowd. Clearly, these issues permeate beyond the secular/religious boundaries. Pastors.com did a survey of more than 5,000 pastors, where more than 55% had visited a pornographic Web site within the year and 33% had visited a sexually explicit sight within the past three months. There are more pornography and "soft porn" magazines available than ever before and sales have reached an all time high. Cable and pay-per-view access to adult movies and programming reaches into most homes and hotels. Access to these kinds of materials normalizes this once anti-social behavior and brings it into the realm of what's acceptable. All too quickly the lines are blurred between healthy and unhealthy sexual behavior.

Besides these overt forms of sexual exploitation there are also subtle, or covert, ways sexuality is being expressed. Without even realizing it we are participants in this process. All of us buy clothes, and many of the clothes we buy are sexy in nature. Low cut jeans, wearing pants low so that underwear or thong shows, snug tight t-shirts that show off bodies are all common ways of dressing, but when does it cross over from celebrating our bodies to participating in the selling of sex?

Faith Connection

Just as God created us intellectual beings, physical beings, and spiritual beings, God has also created us sexual beings. Just as we uphold the importance and proper use of our minds and bodies, so should we advocate for and uphold the proper use of our sexuality. When sexuality pervades our media, advertisements and pop culture, the result is over exposure and a diminishing value of our sexuality, as individuals and as a society.

In Galatians 5:1 Paul encourages us in the freedom that Christ has given us and not to fall into the slavery of sin. The integrity of our sexuality is at stake with a barrage of sexual images. We are too easily ensnared by the slavery of sex. In contrast to this slavery Luther declares in his essay on the “Freedom of the Christian” that we are both lord of all and subject to none, and yet, at the same time, a dutiful servant of all and subject to all.

In this twofold understanding about the Christian life, we are freed in order to ask legitimate questions about what are responsible choices as dutiful servants (FICTSN, p. 53).

Just as we must put on clothing each day, so must we make daily choices about how to live out our sexuality (FICTSN, p. 54).

We make these choices based on the wellbeing of others. How do we live out the gospel in relationship to those who participate in the selling of sex? How do we respond in love to those who sell products using sex or wear clothing that promotes a sexual lifestyle? How do we interact with those who are involved in pornography or prostitution? As God’s people of faith we are called to consider how we will respond in love to all people, not just to those who look and think like we do; not just to those who are easy to refer to as our neighbor.

The freedom we have in the gospel means that we are responsible for the wellbeing of others. We may decide that selling sex doesn’t affect us personally, but we have to consider how it might affect others and how we share responsibility as consumers and shapers of culture.

What does the church say?

Our church has been very clear in saying that any time sex is used for exploitation it is wrong. Exploitation is the “unfair treatment or use of someone for personal gain.” The message “Commercial Sexual Exploitation” specifies that sexual exploitation

“includes what customers do by: viewing pornographic videos, downloading pornography from the internet, visiting strip clubs, engaging in simulated sex by phone or computer, using escort services, and participating in sex tourism.” (FICTSN, p. 54)

Any time we use another person’s sexuality for personal gain it is wrong.

But once we move beyond prostitution and hard-core pornography... the answers to these questions about whether we should be worried and what ought to be done are not entirely clear. Thoughtful persons of good will can and do give different answers. (FICTSN, p. 54)

GATHERING

Thought to ponder:

When you go shopping for clothes, what do you look for?

Welcome diversion:

Have magazines you will use later in the session available for the kids to look at as they gather.

Opening prayer:

Give 30 seconds for silence as you pause and connect with God. Then pray this prayer:

O God, you have blessed us with so much. Thank you for the abundance of life that we continue to be

privileged to enjoy. Help us today, God, to see the beauty in sexuality and to honor and uphold that as a part of our abundance. Turn our hearts and minds to you, make us of one mind. In your name we pray. Amen.

DIFFERING VIEWS

Sex at the Olympics

From the Olympic Winter Games in Turin, Italy, comes this piece excerpted from the story by Juliet Macur called “Grin and Bare It! Oh, skate a little, too” (published in the *New York Times*, February 20, 2006).

...[Isabelle] Delobel, who was in fourth place with her partner, Oliveier Schoenhelder, was not the only Olympic ice dancer with a risqué outfit on an evening when there were an uncharacteristically high number of falls and a characteristically high number of flamboyant, skillfully engineered costumes, which seem to use less material every year.

“Nothing is off limits this year,” said the American Jamie Silverstein, who, with her partner, Ryan O’Meara, is in 17th place. “Everyone is trying to sell sex.” (FICTSN, p. 51)

Charles

Charles is a 17-year-old boy who puts nearly all his energy into his class work and preparation for his college entrance exams. He’d like to find time to date; he just never got around to it. In fact, he’s not sure he ever will, there are just so many other things he wants to do in life. Sometimes in the evening, when no one is home, he goes online and visits some of his regular Web sites. Although he’s sure people would disapprove of the pornographic nature of these sites he figures he isn’t hurting anyone and no one will find out.

Chad

Chad is 25 years old and a lifelong Lutheran. He was thrilled to hear from his agent that he had been chosen as the model for a big full-page cologne ad that would pay his first really big bonus. When he got to the photo shoot for the ad, he was told that he would be photographed in the nude, so “we can show off as much of your great body as possible.”

Marcus

Marcus’ music store has been doing a big business selling music he knows contains sexually explicit lyrics. He doesn’t necessarily feel great about selling the stuff to kids, but he figures if parents don’t want them to listen to the stuff, they can take it away. But hearing through the grapevine today that two of his 16-year-old customers had forced a 14-year-old girl to have sex with them in the back of a car, made him stop and think. He knew that both boys had purchased lots of the sex-laced CDs at his store. (FICTSN, p. 52)

- In each of these cases, who is selling sex and who is buying it?
- If they thought about how to care for their neighbors, what might they say or do?
- How might the ELCA statements be helpful to these individuals as they think through their situations, conflicts, or business decisions?

Discussion points:

- Most of us support the sale of “sex” by what we buy and do as consumers.
- Advertisements hold us to unreasonable standards of how we are supposed to look and act.

- Most people feel worse about themselves after looking at a fashion magazine.
- Pornography revenues are \$10-20 billion, prostitution and exotic dancing are easy to find and out in the open.
- Sex is used to sell everything.
- What are some ways you see people selling sex? (advertisers, music, drugs, magazines, pornography, clothes, prostitution, alcohol, spring break vacations)
- What are your views on these things?
 - ▶ Listening to music with sexually explicit lyrics
 - ▶ Clothing that is sexually revealing
 - ▶ Exotic dancing
 - ▶ Pornography
 - ▶ Sexually explicit photos on Myspace, You Tube, cell phones, etc.
- When does this behavior cross a line and become inappropriate?
- How might the church’s standard of calling exploitation the “unfair treatment or use of someone for personal gain” help you draw a healthy line for decision-making?
- How can we appreciate our sexuality without misusing it?
- How does the selling of sex or use of sex as a marketing tool affect us all?
- Can you see a relationship with this session and the last session we did? How does the selling of sex steal power from us? How do we sometimes willingly give it up—as consumers?

ACTIVITY

You will need: Several fashion magazines. Teen magazines will be the best, but any lifestyle magazine would work as well.

Explain to the group that we are influenced greatly by the media. Advertisers often use sex to sell their products. For instance, we frequently see commercials where girls on the beach in bikinis are selling beer or a commercial where the guy gets the beautiful girl because of his choice of cologne. In magazine advertisements we see more implied messages, but messages that get through nonetheless. Most of the messages we receive are non-verbal, probably on the order of 85%. Usually we don’t even know we are receiving them. All we know is that we want to buy that product!

As a way to heighten awareness of how advertisers are using sex to sell products, do this activity. Give the group several fashion or lifestyle magazines. Instruct them to page through the magazines and read the **non-verbal communication** of the advertisements. They will see ads that are communicating things like, “I’ll have sex with you” and “Girls/Guys are attracted to me,” or “This product will change your life!” They may also see advertisements that communicate how much fun life can be; encourage that as well. The idea is to get them to start reading the non-verbal communication that is going on, so whatever the ad says is what we want them to look for. Many of the ads they come across, however, will be ads where sex or sexual power is selling a product, which is the point we want to make with this activity. Note: Often they will read the non-verbal communication as saying, “If you buy this you’ll be sexy.” Although that is what the ad wants you to believe, it isn’t the answer we’re looking for. The non-verbal communication would be something like, “Don’t you think I’m sexy?” It won’t actually have to do with the product. You’ll need to help them through this activity because it will take them a while to catch on.

- What did you learn about sex and advertising in this activity?
- How will you look at ads differently in the future?

THINKING TOGETHER

Movie clip

“Zoolander” (2001, PG)

Start cue: “All right, now to the important stuff.” (Chapter 3: Set counter at 8:05)

End cue: “Nice come back.” (Chapter 4: End counter at 12:12)

Derek is a supermodel whose worth and identity come into question once he loses a big fashion award to his nemesis, Hansel.

- How does the movie portray models? How do you perceive models?
- What do you see them selling with sexuality and physical appearance?
- Who did Derek understand himself to be?
- How do the two models differ?
- What happens when our identity is wrapped up in our appearance and sexual identity?
- What are the parts of your identity as a Christian?

Scripture

Galatians 4:28–5:1

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.

- What do these biblical texts tell us about our sexuality?
- What does 2 Peter mean by saying lust keeps us from participating in the divine nature? How could lust keep us from participating in the freedom that Christ has given us?
- How does the selling of sex encourage us to lust?

What does the church say?

- Any time sex is used for exploitation it is wrong.
- Exploitation is the “unfair treatment or use of someone for personal gain.”
- Once we move beyond prostitution and hard-core pornography... the answers to these questions about whether we should be worried and what ought to be done are not entirely clear.

Song

"Fergalicious, Fergie"

(feat. Will.I.Am)

<http://www.songlyrics.com/song-lyrics/Fergie/Miscellaneous/Fergalicious/256342.html>

- In the song Fergie says that the boys don't get anything from her sexually. But she's still selling something. What is Fergie using sex to sell?

Conversation points:

- Can you think of a time when the use of sex for gain is okay?
- How do you think the church should respond to more covert (less obvious) exploitation, like advertising?
- How do you think the church should respond to the buying and selling of sex?
- How can we freely love our neighbors who are involved in selling or buying sex or have businesses that relate to it in some way? (e.g., store that sells porn magazines or rents porn DVDs, hotel with pay-per-view adult movies, store selling physically suggestive and revealing clothing for children, etc)

Possible views

Please note: There are views on the Web site that can be downloaded and shown to your group. This will likely be much more engaging for your youth group.

Show or read the differing views related to this subject. Allow your group the opportunity to say which view they identify with the most. What do they agree with and what do they disagree with? Encourage everyone to share.

View 1

I don't think there's anything wrong with all the sex in the media and I don't mind sex being used to sell products. I don't like hard-core pornography, prostitution, and sexual abuse, but other than that I don't think there's anything wrong with looser boundaries around sexuality. I like that people are freer to express their sexuality than they used to be. The ancient ways of thinking are over and I feel all the freedom is good for our society. Just because someone likes to dress sexy doesn't mean they are going to have sex with everyone. Actually, the most harmful sexual activity comes from having to deny yourself.

View 2

When I think of how people use sex to sell it makes me sick to my stomach. Sex is something that is supposed to be private. I don't want to hear about people's private matters in the music I listen to or television shows I watch. I can't stand that every time I turn around I see someone whose clothing makes them half naked or I see someone trying to use sex to sell me a product. Sex should be kept behind closed doors and between two people.

View 3

I am greatly concerned about how sexuality is reduced and used to sell in our society, but I don't know what I can do to make a difference. Even if I felt I could make a difference, I'm not sure I should try to. I want to respect everyone's morals and opinions, not just mine. I feel uncomfortable sometimes with the stuff I see, but who am I to tell someone else they are wrong. I think this stuff does negatively influence our culture and I have concern about that, I just don't know what to do about it.

WORSHIP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Begin by placing a lot of candles or tea light candles in the center of the group. Read each of the three statements aloud. Before you read each statement, light a candle. Have the students meditate on each statement in a worshipful manner and allow some silence between them. After you have completed the three statements invite the group members to lift up a prayer petition as well. Inform them that you will be doing this before hand and instruct them to light a candle before they pray. Light the final candle right before you read the closing prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Read: *In our culture, sex is often used to sell. In many ways, often unknown to us, we participate in that.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From a High School Student: A lot of people I know look at porn sites online so I do too sometimes. But I find that afterwards I feel really gross. What does that mean?*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From 2 Peter 1:4 - He has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.*
- Silence
- Candle lighting and prayer petitions from the group.
- **Closing Prayer:** *Gracious God, as we look at our surroundings we are bombarded by sexual images and temptations. We pray for your guidance and wisdom in understanding ourselves in the midst of this. We pray, too, for your guidance in knowing how to interact with these things in our culture. Thank you, God, for the gift of this place to discuss and explore. Amen.*

GO TO THE WEB

Want to see what other youth think? Visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth and contribute your thoughts on this question: How does the “selling of sex” impact you? How can you, as a Christian, respond to the selling of sex? (FICTSN, p. 57, q. 8)



Session 5. Handout for Parents

Today's topic:

Selling Sex

Session Goal:

To discuss and raise awareness of how media uses sex to stir our interest in products and programming. To call into question what selling sex does to our appreciation of God's gift of sexuality.

Discussion points:

- Most of us support the sale of sex just by buying consumer products.
- Sex is used to sell everything.
- Advertisements hold us to unreasonable standards of how we are supposed to look and act.
- Pornography revenues are \$10-20 billion; prostitution and exotic dancing are easy to find and out in the open.
- Most people, after looking at a fashion magazine feel worse about themselves.

We read these scripture verses:

- Galatians 4:28–5:1
- 2 Peter 1:3-4

What does our church say?

- Any time sex is used for exploitation it is wrong.
- Exploitation is the “unfair treatment or use of someone for personal gain.”
- Once we move beyond prostitution and hard-core pornography... the answers to these questions about whether we should be worried and what ought to be done are not entirely clear. Thoughtful persons of good will can and do give different answers.

Talk it through with your kids:

- Ask what they thought was interesting about today's discussion.
- When you see sex in the media or in advertisements, process the images with your kids. Help them to realize how often sex or sexuality is being used to get our attention and “buy” what they are selling.
- Share with them your views on pornography, exotic dancing, explicit dress and lyrics in music, even if you think they already know them.
- What does our church say that is relevant to your thoughts on revealing clothing and pornography? Do you think about something such as pornography differently now than when you were in high school? If so, what changed?
- As Christians, we are called to serve our neighbor in all things. How does this help you make decisions about what is acceptable and what is not in the use of sexuality?



Session 6.

Sex for Money

Session goal:

To discuss and raise awareness about the situations that impact those who benefit financially from their sexual relations. To consider how we are called to serve them.

Pointing to something and easily declaring it immoral can give us a sense of security, decency, and power; a sense that we know when someone else has crossed the line and that we are safe on the right side of the line. The unfortunate risk of putting actions into boxes is that it limits our ability to enter into the experience of the other person, have compassion on individual circumstances and recognize injustice. When we do this our capacity to love as Christ has commanded us is restricted and hearts are hardened to difficult situations and decisions that some people have to face. This rigidity binds us and makes it difficult for us to “serve our neighbor.”

There are many situations where people benefit financially from sexual acts or relationships and few of these situations are as neat and clean as we’d like them to be when it comes to passing judgment. Since the beginning of time prostitution has been a perceived answer to financial woes. Prostitution is often mentioned in the Old Testament. Jesus audaciously befriends prostituted women. Most would agree, religious and non-religious, that prostitution is not an acceptable way to earn a living; sex for money or gain is not okay. Yet, if we would seek to understand the people who have “chosen” this profession we may be surprised to find a battered wife who has no skills and two children to take care of or a 16 year old who lost his parents and is running to keep out of foster care. When we see more than right and wrong and when we lead with compassion, we begin to understand how to act more lovingly toward people and address injustice.

There are more covert ways that people may benefit financially from sex and relationships as well. There are many married couples who do not act like a couple or a family at all, yet they stay married for financial security. Spouses, usually women, may choose to stay in a loveless marriage to avoid economic ruin. There are also a growing number of couples who are deciding to live together after divorce for financial reasons. Elderly couples will sometimes live together without marriage because if they were to marry, they would lose a significant portion of their limited income or benefits. Although these situations are very different from prostitution, exotic dancing, etc., they are ways that someone’s socio-economic situation can play into their decisions about sexual behavior and acts. We cannot overlook the impact of such situations on sexual decisions.

People who enter into the shadows of prostitution, pornography, exotic dancing, escort services, etc. often come from the lower economic strata of our society. They are struggling to make ends meet. Higher education or a good career opportunity is an elusive goal for them. Faced with the realities of an impoverished life, using their sexuality can seem like a way to get out of a struggling situation and, for many, it seems like an attractive and viable option. Those who don’t come from a lower socio economic class, may have emotional deficits that make it impossible for them to make rational and logical decisions about their lives. The high rate of substance abuse and past sexual abuse associated with prostitution should make us wonder about how freely it is chosen. Many if not of us will never know the agony of being on the run, or the desperation of no food for our children, or the manipulating ramifications of addiction. As we discuss the decisions of those who choose sexual relationships or acts in exchange for money, let’s keep in mind our limited life experience and the hardship facing many of God’s children.

All of what is being said here is certainly not a suggestion for us to abandon all values and boundaries. It is instead a framework for understanding those whose decisions and life experiences may elude us. It is a call to become aware of the impact of economic forces on the options in people’s lives. The church’s discussion about sexuality must not simply be about personal decisions, but also about the social forces involved. We continue to receive our sexuality as a gift from God and how we use our sexuality is ideally an honoring of that gift. But, as is often the case, it is necessary to hold together both our understandings of the gift of sexuality and our compassion and love for God’s people.

Faith Connection

As a part of our calling as people who desire to live in the spirit we need to recognize that sowing to the flesh not only includes fornication and sexual impurity, but also judgments that we put on others (FICTSN, p. 62).

Freedom in the gospel is certainly not a license to indulge sexual power or privilege. It does not release us from responsible behavior. Rather it is God's radical call to serve one another and to love and treat our neighbors—regardless of economic situation or status—as we would want to be loved and treated by them (FICTSN, p. 62).

What does the church say?

As we seek ways to freely love our neighbor we must take their life situations into account and the limitations they may be facing financially. In our service to these neighbors we look around ourselves and find ways that we can make an impact in their situation. We look for ways we can lower the barriers that limit their options and keep them bound to a few choices.

The first social statement of the ELCA, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, states that as a reconciling and healing presence, “this church is called to minister to human need with compassion and imagination,” finding new ways to address “emerging social problems,” mediating conflict, and supporting “institutions and policies that serve the common good.” (FICTSN, p. 64)

Finding ways to reach out to them and impact their life situation brings us into their experience and teaches us to love as Christ commanded.

GATHERING

Thought to ponder:

Do you ever wish you had more money? Have you ever known anyone who struggled to have enough money to be able to afford the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, housing, medical services)?

Welcome distraction:

As the group gathers have fake money, calculators and the budget (Appendix A - page 75) sitting in the center of the room. When enough of them have gathered have them work together on a budget. You will probably have to offer some assistance with this. Start by asking how much they think they could earn monthly once they are out of high school. Once this has been agreed upon, ask them to balance their budget. Give someone in the group the amount of money they imagine they would be able to earn. Then as you go through each item have them “pay” you for each expense. After they are done, process the activity:

- Where did they end up?
- Did they have money left over?
- What were the surprises in this exercise?
- How much money would they need to earn in order to have a balanced budget?
- How much would they need to earn to be able to save money?

Opening prayer:

Give 30 seconds for silence as you pause and connect with God. Then pray this prayer:

Gracious God, too often we pass judgment on others without love and compassion. As we look today at decisions that some make in regard to their sexuality, keep our hearts tender to the many different life experiences people have and how vastly different they can be from our own. Amen.

DIFFERING VIEWS:

Gwen

It was never the kind of life that Gwen wanted for herself. Once she graduated from high school she took a job as a waitress at a “gentlemen’s club” while she went to the local community college and started working toward her lifelong goal of being a nurse. She wasn’t crazy about the job, but she found she was able to make incredible tips. A few years into her schooling Gwen got pregnant with her first child. Shortly after that her second child was born. Both of the fathers of the kids skipped town as soon as she told them the babies were on the way. Living alone and raising two kids made it impossible for her to go to school and she had to drop out. Struggling to make ends meet, she dreamed of being able to earn more money so she could work less and get back on track with school and her career. She knew that the strippers at the club earned about four times as much money as she did. She had been thinking about it for months when the owner of the club approached her and asked if she would be interested in stripping. It was an easy question for her to answer. She took the job promising herself she would only do it until she was done with school, two years at the most. It became especially easy work once someone introduced her to a “drug” that helped her forget about what she was doing and helped her feel less inhibited.

Sam

Sam’s father is an alcoholic. While he was growing up Sam would be able to tell when Dad came home drunk. He could tell by the way he walked up the stairs. He would always fear what was coming next. He knew that he would hear fighting from the room next door between his mother and father and when the argument turned into screaming Sam’s name would always come up. “Where is that stupid kid of yours?” his Dad would say. There would always be a reason for Dad to get angry with Sam. When Dad came into his room yelling he knew he was going to get a beating. On Sam’s 12th birthday, after one of those nights, he was hanging with out with some friends and one of them offered him a joint. He knew a lot of kids had talked about pot so he figured why not. His marijuana use escalated and he began using other drugs that would get him higher quicker. When he was high he was able to forget how horrible his life was. By the time he was 15 years old he was using Meth on a regular basis. One day when he was 16 he got the worst beating of his life. He had had enough and decided to run away from home. He spent the first night in a park, the second in a shelter where he couldn’t sleep, and when an older man offered to let him stay for “free,” by his third night he was ready to do anything just to sleep in a clean bed.

- How are they using sexuality for money?
- How have life situations influenced the decisions of the people in these stories?
- Can you see alternatives for them? What might prevent them from making a lifestyle change?
- How can we be of service to either of these people?

Discussion points:

- If we are concerned only about judging people we are not heeding our call to compassion and justice.
- People who use sex to get money are often of lower socio-economic status and have fewer options.
- Most of us will never know the agony of being on the run, or the desperation of no food for our children, or the manipulating ramifications of addiction.
- Drug abuse, running away from home, and childhood sexual abuse are the three main precursors to prostitution. (<http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/50/12/1606>)

- Increasingly, older adults are living together without marriage in order to avoid losing pension benefits and to care for one another.
- When we lead with our compassion and our desire to love one another, we become more concerned with justice.
- Do you agree or disagree that the lack of money or opportunity can affect your sexual decisions? When someone is faced with starvation is it okay for them to use their sexuality for money? What should they choose?
- Often people stay in relationships for financial security. What are your thoughts about staying in a marriage or other relationship for financial reasons?

ACTIVITY:

Place the scale on the floor or table in front of the group. Ask each youth to pick a small item, maybe an earring, glasses, coin, or a watch. Tell them that they are going to place their items on the scale in front of them after you read a scenario. If they think the scenario is an appropriate use of sexuality they should put their items close to the #1 on the scale. If they think the scenario is a gross misuse of sexuality they should put their items near the #10 on the scale. First read the subject, and then read the scenario that follows. For instance, “Where would you put marriage?” Allow them to place their items on the scale. Then ask, “What if someone stays in a marriage only for the financial security.” Allow them time to move their pieces if they choose. After you read each scenario discuss why they put their item where they did and if they changed their item why they changed it.

Scenarios

- Prostitution
 - ▶ Single Mom can’t feed her child and accepts a proposition, money for sex, from someone she met at a bar.
- Marriage
 - ▶ Staying in a marriage for financial security.
- Marrying someone because you love them
 - ▶ Finding a bride from another country who will marry you for U.S. citizenship.
- Staying in an abusive relationship because you are afraid of what would happen if you tried to leave
 - ▶ Accepting an offer from a pimp for protection.
- Pornography
 - ▶ Taking a pornography job while you wait for your big break in acting.
- Stripping
 - ▶ Exotic dancing while working to pay the bills.
- Living together
 - ▶ An older couple living together, without marriage, for financial security and to help make ends meet.
- Dating the boss
 - ▶ Sleeping with the boss in hopes of getting a promotion.

- Dating someone with a lot of money
 - ▶ Sleeping with someone because they just bought you something really nice.
- Sleeping with someone one time for money
 - ▶ A boy runs away from home to get away from his abusive father. He hasn't eaten for four days when someone offers him food and a place to stay.

THINKING TOGETHER

Movie clip

Moulin Rouge (2001, PG-13)

Start cue: "It's her, the sparkling diamond." (Chapter 6: Set counter at 14:10)

End cue: "I'm afraid it's ladies' choice." (Chapter 6: End counter at 18:58)

Satine is a courtesan who is looking for a big break so that she can be a "real" actress. The Duke is willing to give her that dream for a price.

- What is a courtesan?
- What is Satine willing to do to realize her dream?
- Can you think of a situation when it would be okay to accept money or status for companionship and sexual activity?

Scripture

Galatians 5:13-25

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

- According to these verses, what behaviors do we see in someone who is led by the Spirit?
- How does the Galatians text tell us to interact with others?
- How do we relate the Corinthians verses to our understanding that our sexuality is a beautiful gift from God? What does it say about how we are to interact as sexual beings?

What does the church say?

- Christ has commanded us to love our neighbor and seek justice for that neighbor.
- Keep in mind:
 - ▶ Many in these situations have economic challenges and limited choices.
 - ▶ We are encouraged to find ways to help get rid of the barriers that limit their freedom and options.

Song

"What Would You Do," by City High

<http://www.songlyrics.com/song-lyrics/City+High/City+High/What+Would+You+Do/92995.html>

- What do you think Loni's future is going to be like?
- What about her son?
- What differences do you think there are between Loni and the singer's mom?

Conversation points:

- In what ways can the church reach out to boys like Sam?
- What do you think the church's position on older couples living together should be? Would you give the same answer in every financial situation? Why or why not? Should a couple's age influence our position as a church or are there other factors to consider?
- Should the church take a stand on a loveless marriage where people stay married solely for financial reasons? How does the church draw the line?
- How can the church welcome prostituted women and men?

Possible views

Show or read the differing views related to this subject. Allow your group the opportunity to say which view they identify with the most. What do they agree with and what do they disagree with? Encourage everyone to share.

Please note: There are views on the Web site that can be downloaded and shown to your group. This will likely be much more engaging for your youth group.

View 1

I don't think a person's economic situation should have any impact on the decisions they make about their sexual behavior. I feel badly for their situations, but if they choose that path they'll end up more miserable than they were before. All of us have the same things to balance in life and most of us can figure it out without having to be an exotic dancer or a prostitute. I wish the church would take a stronger stance against these acts and teach people alternatives to these lifestyles.

View 2

I don't agree with this kind of lifestyle, but I don't have to live it. I guess I don't think it should matter to me what other people choose to do with their lives. Just because it's right for me doesn't mean it's right for someone else. We should seek what's best for a particular person in a particular situation. I trust people to make the best decisions for their lives. They are the only ones who walk in their shoes. I guess I don't think it's right to say that we should all have the same morals.

I don't know how to feel about the people that are in these situations. I think what they are doing is wrong, but I have to wonder what is wrong with our culture or their surroundings that this seems like a viable or only option. I'm concerned that these people are going to get stuck in a lifestyle that they have no hope of ever getting out of and I want our society to have better options for them. It seems to me that if we offer better options they wouldn't choose such a denigrating life style.

WORSHIP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Begin by placing a lot of candles or tea light candles in the center of the group. Read each of the three statements aloud. Before you read each statement, light a candle. Have the students meditate on each statement in a worshipful manner and allow some silence between them. After you have completed the three statements invite the group members to lift up a prayer petition as well. Inform them that you will be doing this before hand and instruct them to light a candle before they pray. Light the final candle right before you read the closing prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Read: *When we encounter people in these situations it is important to remember that we are called to compassion and justice, not to judgment and condemnation.*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From a High School Student: How can I know how to love people who are making choices that are so against my values and beliefs?*
- Silence
- Light a candle.
- Read: *From Galatians 5:14 - For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Silence*
- *Candle lighting and prayer petitions from the group.*
- **Closing Prayer:** *Thank you, God, for all that you have given us. Help us to always remember that you are the giver of all good things. Teach us not to judge those who choose to benefit financially from their sexuality. Teach us to love them. Teach us to understand them. And teach us to find ways to help them through your love and guidance and justice. Amen.*

GO TO THE WEB

Want to see what other youth think? Visit www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth and contribute your thoughts on this question: What are some things we should just never do, no matter what the economic situation? Explain your response. Why might some people give a different answer? (FICTSN, p. 65, q. 10)



Session 6. Handout for Parents

Today's topic:

Sex for Money

Session Goal:

To discuss and raise awareness about the situations that impact those who benefit financially from their sexual relations. To consider how we are called to serve them.

Discussion points:

- If we are concerned only about judging people we are not heeding our call to compassion and justice.
- People who use sex to get money are often of lower socio-economic status and have fewer options.
- Other things to consider in regard to this subject: many older couples are choosing to live together out of wedlock for financial security; today some married couples stay together for financial reasons, or for mutual care.
- When we lead with our compassion and our desire to love one another, we become more concerned with justice.
- Often the lack of money can affect sexual decisions.

We read these scripture verses:

- Galatians 5:13-25
- 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

What does our church say?

- Christ has commanded us to love our neighbor and seek justice for the neighbor.
- Keep in mind:
 - ▶ Many in these situations have economic challenges and limited choices.
 - ▶ We are encouraged to find ways to help get rid of the barriers that limit their freedom and options.

Talk it through with your kids:

- Ask what they thought was interesting about today's discussion.
- Have you ever known anyone who has struggled financially? Have you ever struggled financially? Talk that through with your child. What does it feel like to not know how you are going to pay the bills? How does it feel to be worried where your next paycheck will come from or to lose your job?
- Are there instances that have taught you to be more compassionate about others in different life situations? Share those with your child.
- As a way to enter into the experience of the other do a service project or volunteer time together. Serve at a homeless shelter; bring groceries to someone who doesn't have money; volunteer to do work on someone's home. If you need help coming up with ideas for service projects ask your pastor or youth minister for ideas.

- How do you think God is calling us to serve our neighbor in situations where people make unhealthy or destructive sexual choice under the influence of economics?
- How do Christians weigh various aspects of solving complex social problems? Should we be most concerned about the violation of moral standards? Should we overlook the often harmful effects of these violations and focus on the situation that leads the person to make these choices?
- Look up Matthew 9:9-13. Read it with your child and discuss what it means that Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners. Does it help us to decide what to do about the subjects of session 6? Living the gospel can involve lots of risks and can be difficult, if we take it seriously in our daily life.

Conclusion for Study

RESPONSE FORM

This form is also available at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth

1. How many participants were in the group?

- 2 to 5 6 to 10 11 to 20 21 to 35 more than 35

2. Who was the leader of the group?

- a pastor youth leader parent

3. How many people of the following characteristics were in the group, or which of the following describes you as an individual? If you are an individual, please put a "1" in the category that describes you. For a group, make your best estimate or ask people to raise their hands if possible. Please enter only numbers and not percentages or "X's".

- _____ female _____ Asian or Pacific Islander
_____ male _____ Black or African American
_____ Latino/Latina
_____ American Indian or Alaska Native
_____ White or Caucasian
_____ Arab and Middle Eastern

4. As you think about what you (or the group) believe about human sexuality, how well were those beliefs represented in the study documents?

- I(we) didn't see my (our) beliefs in the study documents. It didn't come close.
 The documents did a fair job of representing my (our) beliefs.
 The documents did a good job of representing my (our) beliefs.

5. Did the study experience help you better understand the views of other people within the ELCA?

- Yes, I (we) think the experience helped me (us) better understand the views of other people. I (we) learned some things.
 No, I (we) already understood the views presented or I (we) didn't learn anything new.
 Other (Please explain.)

6 . Please indicate the sessions you read and/or discussed. Then rank those sessions from 1 to 6, with 1 for the session which generated the most helpful conversation/was most important and 6 for the session that was the least helpful or least important.

Read/Discussed Ranking

a. Session 1: _____

b. Session 2: _____

c. Session 3: _____

d. Session 4: _____

e. Session 5: _____

f. Session 6: _____

7. Thinking about the topic you ranked number 1 in the question above, what makes this an important issue for the church?

8. What two concerns as a young person do you want the church to address?

Please fill out online or mail to:

ELCA Sexuality Studies
Youth Response
Church in Society
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4101

Appendix A: Monthly Budget

Fill in the Income and Balance the Budget

INCOME

Monthly Income	
Additional Income	

EXPENSES

Housing

Projected cost

Mortgage/Rent	600.00 (w/roommate)
Utilities: Phone, Internet, Cable, Gas, Electric, Water, Garbage, etc.	165.00

Transportation

Projected cost

Vehicle Payment	300.00
Insurance	120.00
Fuel	225.00

Food

Projected cost

Groceries	150.00
Dining Out	80.00

Misc.

Projected cost

Entertainment: Movies, concerts, DVD rental, going out, sports events, theater, etc.	150.00
Savings	?

BALANCE

Total Monthly Income	
Minus Total Monthly Expenses	(-)
Equals +/-	



Available online at
www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/youth

This resource can be ordered from Augsburg
Fortress Publishers' online store
(*www.augsburgfortress.org*) or by calling
800.328.4648

Cost is \$2.50 per copy plus shipping

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