

From Krakow to Dublin

"The Meeting Point". The Adventure of Love

(Course of Affective Sexual Education for Young People)

The Pontifical Council for the Family has the honor and joy to present, in the context of the World Youth Day in Krakow, a course of affective sexual education.

This project, published in the light of this setting, is the result of long work, patiently accomplished over time. Indeed, from this special observatory, the Pontifical Council for the Family at the service of the Pope, and in the course of the years, many institutions and individuals have expressed the need for a tool to help young people in an aspect that touches every person in the depths of his or her being: "learning to love in order to be truly happy." This is ultimately what each and every person seeks and desires: happiness. The reality is both simple and complex; and it has required remarkable effort on behalf of those who, with their talents, have contributed to making this project possible.

While numerous requests were written and deposited through time in Rome, a group of married couples in Spain had been working for years to construct this project. During the *Ad Limina* visit of the Spanish Bishops in March 2014, this issue was discussed at length at the meeting of the Spanish Prelates in our Pontifical Council. The time has now come, thanks to Msgr. Juan Antonio Reig Pla and Msgr. Mario Iceta, the Bishop currently in charge of the Family Ministry in Spain and to their predecessors, for their encouragement and confidence in the Course of Affective-Sexual Education for Young People. The Pontifical Council for the Family did not have a detailed training program, which responds in a certain sense to Spain's present situation and could be a very useful tool in other contexts. This project presents many, outstanding developments. I would like to emphasize only two now: the attention that needs to be given to the young and the particular attention that also needs to be given to the educator or the teacher. In fact, an entire inner pedagogical articulation is impregnated by the teacher-pupil dialogue, presented as one of the assets of this project that can be implemented at different stages of the life of the young.

Given this development, on the eve of the VIII World Meeting of Families held in Philadelphia in September 2015, the Pontifical Council for the Family suggested the possibility of presenting the project as part of a World Meeting which both directly and indirectly touched the issue: "Love is our mission: The family fully alive." Pope Francis' choice of this topic for his first World Meeting as Pope has been providential. Nothing could be better than making love the mission of every Christian in the construction of a project of love such as the family and to focus attention on the mystery of love as a driving force, so that the family may be fully alive. The reception of this project by the assembly of over 20,000 people gathered in those days for the Theological-Pastoral Congress in Philadelphia, was extraordinary, and the numerous requests to engage in something useful within the family was even more enthusiastic. In that international atmosphere, we clearly saw the family's primacy in the education of the children, and that emotional and sexual education is not something that exclusively or mainly pertains to the competence of institutions that are as necessary as schools are. Families expressed their right and duty in this very serious mission, and the Second Vatican Council pointed to the family cell in the pressing task of educating the new generations. This finding gave the course of affective and sexual education a broader horizon than merely the academic context.

Now, this is the first major innovation that the Pontifical Council offers us. Without changing the foundational project itself—with the exception of introducing some information coming from other countries and continents—, we consider, in view of the experience in Philadelphia, leaving behind the teacher-student format and offering this course not only to teachers but also to the families, to catechists working in parishes, as well as to church movements and civil associations working in the family field. Therefore, this online course can be used by many people who wish to serve marriage and the family in a multitude of ways. Not only the school program is enriched by this project, but also every home, each parish, and each association will have at its disposal a tool to help young people in the important quest for happiness and meaning in their lives. This is the intention of the online course, offered in five languages on the website of the Pontifical Council for the Family, which makes this useful educational material available to the widest possible audience. We want to offer it in other languages in the future, convinced that despite different cultural contexts our mission to educate our youth is of particular importance in this historical moment.

The moment has come to describe, very briefly, the plan of the project:

- 1) Introduction: where the need and timeliness of the work are motivated

- 2) General objectives of the project and objectives of each of the units of the course
- 3) The contents of the teaching units
- 4) The methodology followed
- 5) The assessment of content and results of learning

The quality, the extent and the attention to teachers, parents, grandparents, catechists, and the formators in the content of the units is truly unique. The breadth of knowledge makes it possible for each to insist on or adopt different aspects, applying them and adapting them to his audience. In fact, as we will later explain, the units correspond to different ages; yet, it is equally true that not all boys and girls who are of the same biographical age are equally developed. However, the internal, pedagogical articulation of the work as a whole, which in this regard makes it a unique project, must not be overlooked. Then, the "cards" for youth are presented; this is particularly rich time for the active involvement of young people, which can then also be assessed and compared personally and in groups. These cards are the place and the particularly suitable occasion for dialogue between the formators and the recipients, since the basis of unified language and dialogue allows both to learn through the formative adventure.

The main idea of the course is represented by the central, immediately striking image of the camping tent: the tent, the pegs, the ropes, the roof, the door with its zipper, etc., are clear images that tell us what the course is trying to convey: the adventure of camping; the importance of the group, of being together; the work involved in setting up a tent, while considering how to behave so that the tent will stay up and be a home for its inhabitants; the sun that illuminates and precedes, and without which this camping is meaningless; the risk of rupture, and the joy of beginning again when the construction project is not immediately successful.

I would simply like to mention the titles of the units:

Unit 1: I. Person

Unit 2: You. Sexuality and personality

Unit 3: I put my freedom at stake

Unit 4: The misuse of freedom: sin

Unit 5: Proper support: morality

Unit 6: A true love.

Each of these units contains a guide for the formator, cards for the pupil, and "complementary" activities, such as movies, that help in the formation. Showing films that correspond to each unit and each age group is suggested in the project. This aspect makes the communication of contents to be transmitted very attractive and instructive.

This is a rough, synthetic description of the project of affective sexual education that we decided to rename "From Krakow to Dublin." Why? First, because this project has a vocation to integrate, enhance and support precisely from Krakow onwards. With this intention, the Pontifical Council will activate an email address to receive suggestions, tips, and tools that help to complement and enrich, with appropriate experiences, the project presented in Krakow. This vocation of integrating and dialogue is the essence of the project. It is not limited to giving and receiving, but the path of communion and dialogue that are the pillars of human action, is found precisely in the interpersonal actions. That is why the project that is being presented is the beginning of a journey. It is not a closed and completed course, it is instead, an opportunity to convene a large community of people to collaborate, to work, to exchange experiences and knowledge in this special field of education. In short, it is a tool that helps convene the people of the family in putting together various materials which may help young people discover the beauty of sexuality and affective life. Secondly, we want to emphasize concretely and justly how suitable and urgent it is for youth and family ministries to be inviting and related and not therefore, become individual stagnated disciplines. The basic human experiences—that of being sons and brothers in order to become husbands and fathers—show this. These fundamental experiences, which take place in each person, occur within the existential framework of the family. Therefore, family pastoral ministry is not only or mainly called to solve post-marital problems, but also to adequately facilitate the fundamental experiences of every human being on the basis of the joy of love. And thirdly, there is Dublin's urgency. We have frequently heard talk about the educational "emergency" and "urgency". Now, we want to see if this project can help families, help in the marriage preparation of future generations, and help many people to discover the true vocation to love. The first stop—but not the only one—for reflection on this will be, God willing, the next World Meeting of Families, which is to be held in Dublin in the summer of 2018.

I just mentioned the "joy of love" in the transmission of a project that enables people to realize the truth in love. *Caritas in Veritate*, *Deus Caritas Est* and recently *Amoris Laetitia* speak diversely and in a complementary way about these mysteries of love and the family.

The course that we are presenting will have the paramount mission, in the coming months, of enriching its contents with the great gift that Pope Francis has recently given to the Church: *Amoris Laetitia* ., The Pope, beginning in the initial numbers of the Apostolic Exhortation (nos. 38, 55, 56, 80, 84 and its subsequent numbers), calls for renewed and urgent attention to education. Likewise, in Chapters 4 and 5 that constitute the heart of the Exhortation, as Pope Francis has pointed out, any reflection on education in the family acquires greater urgency and importance (148, 151), and, analogously, in Chapter V: Love made fruitful (194, 197), the Pope stresses the importance of education in the family. In Chapter VI—entitled "Some pastoral perspectives"—he again refers to the issue, to which he finally dedicates all of Chapter VII under the title "Towards a better education of children." There he gives us a full treatise of pedagogical and realistic wisdom for approaching young people. So, from no. 248 to nos. 270 and 271, there is abundant material for our work. The patient realism to which the Pope invites us, is in fact the bearing shaft in the transmission and the experiences of the adventure of love, something that it is so important to understand, to accept and cherish. The Pope continues in no. 276: "The family is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one. The task of education is to make us sense that the world and society are also our home; it trains us how to live together in this greater home." A little further on, the Pope adds: "To foster an integral education, we need to renew the covenant between the family and the Christian community" (AL no. 279). In this context, the Pope clearly speaks in favor of sex education: "... We may well ask ourselves if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge. It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished. It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. In such a way, the language of sexuality would not be sadly impoverished but illuminated and enriched. The sexual urge can be directed through a process of growth in self-knowledge and self-control capable of nurturing valuable capacities for joy and for loving encounter" (AL 280).

One can hardly find a better summary of a good part of the dynamics and objectives of this course presented by the Pontifical Council. The Pope gives us some indications that his pastoral and teaching experience, mark the path to be followed in order to help young people in this central facet of their lives.

Of particular importance for this course are the ideas that the Pope expresses in nos. 284 and 285. I transcribe them here, because I find them especially important and useful for our future work, "young people should not be deceived into confusing

two levels of reality: sexual attraction creates, for the moment, the illusion of union, yet, without love, this union leaves strangers as far apart as they were before. The language of the body calls for a patient apprenticeship in learning to interpret and channel desires in view of authentic self-giving. When we presume to give everything all at once, it may well be that we give nothing. It is one thing to understand how fragile and bewildered young people can be, but another thing entirely to encourage them to prolong their immaturity in the way they show love. But who speaks of these things today? Who is capable of taking young people seriously? Who helps them to prepare seriously for a great and generous love? Where sex education is concerned, much is at stake" (AL 284).

"Sex education should also include respect and appreciation for differences, as a way of helping the young to overcome their self-absorption and to be open and accepting of others. Beyond the understandable difficulties which individuals may experience, the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation... An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. Only by losing the fear of being different, can we be freed of self-centeredness and self-absorption. Sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it" (AL 285).

The importance given to education by *Amoris Laetitia*, to education in general and to sexual affective education in particular, is manifest. Now, this is a challenge and an encouragement for all those who, in one way or another, are involved in this service. As parents, educators, catechists, and consecrated persons, we are all called to engage in the continued formation required for the integral transmission of love's truth, which is simply an essential part of the revelation of the Trinitarian mystery that becomes palely visible in the mystery of marriage and the family open to life. The Pope's thrust should encourage us to work with realism, patience and above all joy in the transmission of the adventure of love. Hopefully the course presented today will help young people to experience the joy of love in its full dimension, as the Pope invites those who will form the future families of the world and be the protagonists not only of the adventure of love but of the civilization of love in the coming years.