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The Catholic Physician and a Sex Education Program In a Catholic Elementary School

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In mid-1965, a three day symposium on *Family Life and Communication with the Younger Generation* was held in a San Francisco parish. A spontaneous and intense interest was shown when the subject of teen-age and college amorality was discussed. The parishioners expressed a desire to inquire into the possibility of starting a Catholic Sex Education Program in the parish elementary school.

Subsequently a committee, consisting of the assistant pastor, a lay theologian, four physicians, an attorney, and two nuns from the school, was formed to investigate the possibility of starting such a program in the grade school. Inquiry was made into all known programs throughout the nation. Actually, only one or two similar programs were found to exist. Their material and all available books and audio-visual aids were solicited. Such material and aids as seemed pertinent were purchased by the pastor for the use of the committee.

One valuable source of information was a program in the nearby Hayward Public School District. This program had seventeen years of experience with quite satisfactory results. A representative of this school district was invited to attend a committee meeting in our

parish house. The representative was most encouraging and even expressed envy of our parochial approach. She felt that there was an advantage in being free of such problems as they had encountered with various religious and non-religious groups. These groups subverted the obvious need for any moral overtones in the public school system. She felt that there was a definite advantage for our program to be religion oriented and related.

The physicians, of necessity, had to "carry the ball" in formulating the exact agenda. Primarily the physicians were all men in private practice. The program had to fit into their schedules as well as the school's curriculum.

The sisters in charge gave wholehearted cooperation. The program was incorporated into the religion classes of the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. The decision to exclude the 1st through the 4th grades was due partly to the shortage of physicians. Also, after several meetings of the committee and meetings with parents of the 5th through the 8th grades, the conclusion was reached to limit the program to those grades and to separate the sexes.

The physicians decided to participate on two separate days in a week devoted to the subject. For several weeks prior to the program the religion classes of each grade would study various aspects of the Sixth and Ninth Commandments, marriage, vocations, love, purity, etc. During the week of the program the parish priest spoke to each class on the first day. His special emphasis was on morality, sin and love as Catholics. On the second day the religion teachers (nuns in each instance) stressed the implications of the program and prepared the students for appearance of the doctor on the third day.

The four physicians had, by prior agreement, prepared an illustrated lecture on sex anatomy, terminology and basic physiology. In this they used diagrammatic slides. They emphasized the need of the children to communicate with their parents. The doctors felt that the prime purpose of the first lecture was to familiarize the children with proper terminology and to discuss the subject of sex openly and wholesomely in order to stimulate interest and further inquiry at home. A preliminary meeting took place with the parents of the specific grades involved. It was felt that this was an essential part of the education program.

On the fourth day two similar films were shown, explaining the maturing male and female. At the end of the film time was given to each group to submit anonymous questions. These questions were

given to the physicians, who returned on the fifth day. While the questions were numerous, each doctor attempted to answer all of them. Again the students were encouraged to pursue discussion with their parents. Each physician had a two hour period to "field" all questions, and reinstruct where necessary.

The following week a meeting was held with the parents again, to discuss the effects of the program. The results were most gratifying. Parents were unanimous in their approval. However, some of the shortcomings of the program were discussed and plans made for future improvement.

This program has been in progress now for two years. The doctors all feel that something worthwhile has been accomplished. By their participation they are helping their parish church and school. More importantly, they are helping the children themselves to grow up with a healthy understanding and appreciation of sex, its powers, and its responsibilities. Hopefully, the results will show in the behavior and moral growth of this younger generation, and still later in happier marriages and well adjusted adult life.

[Doctors Beglin and McGettigan are both graduates of St. Louis University School of Medicine. Both are in private practice, the former in urology and the latter is a general practitioner. Both are members of the San Francisco Guild. Dr. McGettigan is a past officer.]