

Living Chastity: Psychosexual Well Being in Jesuit Life
An Essay for Studies in Jesuit Spirituality
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A life without sex makes little sense if living chastity is not understood in all of its depth and breadth. Choosing to be chaste and celibate, Jesuits profess that their way of life can be a pathway to God. And yet exploring the connection between this aspiration and its reality today is a complicated question. In a recent conversation with priests, Pope Benedict clearly affirmed the value of priestly celibacy as “a ‘great reminder’ of the priest’s total gift of himself to God and to others.”¹ His words echo the Society’s understanding of chastity as “a contemplative love that includes all human beings and makes the Jesuit open and able to find God everywhere.”² Against this understanding of celibacy and chastity as unique ways of loving God and neighbor in the world, others have argued that the Church’s celibacy requirement has contributed to the sex abuse crisis.³ As evidence of much-publicized clergy sexual misconduct has emerged, some commentators have even argued that priestly celibacy and religious chastity now appear to be a destructive way of life.

No doubt comments about the health of our lifestyle are met with varying degrees of embarrassment. When the national media were highlighting the perils of clergy sex abuse, one Jesuit scholastic described feeling conspicuous at a large family gathering. “The sight of a young man in a Roman collar in public could bring new and unsavory images to mind,” he wrote. “And

1 John L. Allen, Jr., “All Things Catholic: A round of questions for the ‘shepherd-in-chief,’” National Catholic Reporter Conversation Café (ncrcafe.org) 7, no. 47 (August 2008): 3.

2 “Chastity in the Society of Jesus,” in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), no. 238 (p.116) .

3 Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 18.

there I was in that restaurant, with six small children clambering up and over me.”⁴ Another Jesuit, a priest, recalled an awkward moment at a family party. The climax of the evening’s festivities was voting for their respective choices for “Alpha Male” and “Queen Bee” according to their own admittedly idiosyncratic criteria. Prior to the balloting, he explained how they would assess the “manliness” and/or “womanliness” of each member of the group:

If you have a cool new car, drink hard liquor like shots of Scotch, your manliness rating goes up; if, however, you lack aggressiveness, appear to be out of shape or simply too artsy, you lose manliness points big time. All of this was tongue in cheek and in good humor. However, when it came to evaluating me, a slightly intoxicated female cousin of mine started by saying that she meant the following with no disrespect, but . . . how can we really talk about the manliness of someone “who does not enjoy the companionship of a woman” (that’s her felicity of idiom, not mine). Immediately, a silence and profound discomfort seized the group, not to mention my own sense of embarrassment as I had to endure my sisters and brothers, cousins, nieces, nephews, and others talk clumsily and awkwardly about celibacy. At the moment, I felt as though something blunt and brutal was being dragged over a wound even as they tried gracefully to move past me. And yet at the end of the day, and for many days consequent, I felt a visceral sense of humiliation and personal vulnerability - of being judged and being able to offer no justification or defense for who I am.

At some point in our Jesuit lives, perhaps we’ve all experienced similar feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment, or even shame when we are innocently asked, “Are you married?” “Do you have children?” Or “What made you become a priest?” These questions can seem to translate as,

⁴ James T. Keane, S.J., “Vocation and Crisis: Entering religious life during a time of scandal,” *America Magazine*, February 4, 2008, 15.

“How in the world could you do that to yourself?”

Underlying these feelings of vulnerability might be unease about ourselves that we have yet to explore fully. At the very least, it is difficult for us to cope with public opinion that doubts religious life and/or priesthood are psychologically healthy. As a result, we can find ourselves wondering how would we even know and what we would point to as healthy indicators of our psychosexual well-being. Voices in the media and mental health profession unsettle us. Some, for instance, predict that sexual acting out and other forms of reckless self destructive behavior will be the inevitable result of a fundamentally dysfunctional lifestyle and dysfunctional church.⁵ Others suspect that the root of the problem lies deeply within us – that we have chosen celibacy and religious chastity because we ourselves are dysfunctional, hiding our own fears of sexual and interpersonal intimacy in the guise of a religious vocation and clerical ministry. To negotiate such suspicions about celibacy and religious chastity remains an important challenge for us because they cut to the core of our self- understanding as Jesuits, asking how confidently we inhabit our own skin. I believe we can and must address these questions for ourselves. Otherwise, it will be impossible for us to answer them for others: for a curious public, or more important, for someone who is interested in becoming a priest or entering religious life. If we fail to attend to questions about our psychosexual health, we risk further damaging a gift God has given the Church for centuries and which we, now in these challenging times, have been invited to embrace.

I wholeheartedly believe that Jesuits living chastity can embody psychosexual well- being. Chastity and celibacy cannot be understood solely from the viewpoint of what is given up, a life without sex or marriage. Jesuits need to understand how we actively engage living chastity and promote psychosexual well- being as a gift of our vocation. I propose five active practices of

⁵ Kenneth M. Adams, “Clergy Sex Abuse: A Commentary on Celibacy,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention* 10, no. 2-3 (2003): 91.

religious life that promote psychosexual health; together they represent a range of experiential dimensions to living chastity that can help us assess ourselves:

- I. Live close to God and our deepest desires.
- II. Develop broad and deep interpersonal relationships and communities of support.
- III. Ask for love, nurture others, and negotiate separation.
- IV. Cope with stress and recognize destructive patterns of behavior
- V. Celebrate the holy in the company of Jesus.

Over many years, these active practices have emerged as salient markers of psychosexual well-being in my own experience of our life and ministry. They are also the fruit of listening closely to Jesuits in a variety of roles: in my conversations with Jesuits from novitiate to final vows as their formation director, in coming to know the stories of victims and perpetrators of sexual misconduct as the province delegate for misconduct issues and victim outreach, and from listening to contemporaries and senior Jesuits in my role as rector of a large university community. My study and practice as a clinical psychologist have also helped me identify concrete questions that highlight how these practices are expressed or diminished in our behavior over time. Across age span and sexual orientation and throughout the various stages of Jesuit life, formation, and ministry, attention to these experiential dimensions can provide a lens into how individual Jesuits are living chastity and how the vow shapes our psychosexual health. As I discuss these markers, I hope to illustrate how they echo and amplify many of the major themes highlighted in the Society's most recent decree on the call to chastity and its apostolic character, the cost of discipleship and the life of ministry.⁶

Attention to the experiential dimensions of living chastity is especially timely. Whereas in

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“Chastity in the Society of Jesus,” *op. cit.*

recent years there has been heightened interest in the relationship between psychological dysfunction and clergy sexual misconduct, there has been little commentary on the positive aspects – psychological, social, and spiritual - of living chaste and celibate and how such a lifestyle can promote the overall health of our vocation and enhance the effectiveness of our ministry. To protect ourselves and, even more important, the people we serve, we have focused almost exclusively on studying various aspects of the sex- abuse crisis, especially topics have been addressed by scholarly collections such as *Bless Me Father for I Have Sinned, Perspectives on Sexual Abuse by Roman Catholic Priests* and *Sin Against the Innocents, Sexual Abuse by Priests and the Role of the Catholic Church*. These studies might blur our grasp of what is healthy about our experience of chastity and celibacy.⁷ We can find ourselves responding defensively to even our own community discussions about chastity and to recent efforts to monitor ourselves through explicit sex abuse policies and safety certification programs like *Praesidium* and other organizations founded to protect those in our care from abuse and to preserve trust. And yet, researchers writing on the sex- abuse crisis lament “how little we actually know about priests and their lived experiences of sexuality.”⁸

I propose these five experiential dimensions as an attempt to engage living chastity from a practical and applied perspective. These dimensions are not a theology of chastity, nor do they explain why one chooses chastity and celibacy. Rather they describe how chastity is experienced and enacted, what some of the opportunities and struggles might be, and how our experience of

⁷ Thomas G. Plante, ed., *Bless Me Father for I Have Sinned, Perspectives on Sexual Abuse by Roman Catholic Priests* (Westport, Conn.: Preager Publishers, 1999); id., ed., *Sin Against the Innocents, Sexual Abuse by Priests and the Role of the Catholic Church* (Westport, Conn.: Preager Publishers, 2004).

⁸ John Allan Loftus, “Sexuality in Priesthood: Noli me tangere,” in Plante, *Bless Me Father*, 15.

chastity can enrich our Jesuit life and ministry. To access our experience of living chastity and the feelings that might emerge even obliquely, I use literary and case examples to illustrate various aspects of these experiential dimensions and how they so often frame both our vulnerability and God's grace.

To provide an opportunity for a more personal self-assessment of engaging chastity and psychosexual well-being along these experiential dimensions, I suggest sets of reflection questions (clearly set off throughout the essay) that the reader might use to engage one's personal experience and these dimensions self-critically. The questions are also an invitation for faith sharing, community discussions, and conversations in various settings where Jesuits want to engage in a discussion of chastity proactively as a means of promoting our psychosexual health and helping one another understand our experience.

I. Live Close to God and Our Deepest Desires.

The novelist Fenton Johnson writes: "History is memory's skin, under which pulses the blood and guts of our real lives. Our stories are our way of fashioning a surface with which we can live, that we may present to our neighbors, our friends, our family, our children. The truth lies not in the facts of our stories but in the longings that set them in motion."⁹ The story of each Jesuit, then, reflects our common Ignatian spirituality which emphasizes our deepest desires as a pathway to God. Through the highs and lows of our vocational history, our deepest longings unfold. We choose this life and somehow give up what seems impossible to give up as we try to understand the ebb and flow of our desires and longings over time.

When psychologists meet with couples in counseling, whether they are working through a marriage crisis or more ordinary conflicts, they often begin by asking the couple to tell them how

9 Fenton Johnson, *scissors, paper, rock* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1993), 222.

they fell in love. They observe how easily and comfortably couples confide their stories, what longings are expressed in the narratives, and what feelings are conveyed as they tell their story here and now. Psychologists explore what the couples long for and desire from, or for, each other today. Even when marriages are in crisis because of infidelity, the heart of the story remains what has happened and what is happening in their primary relationship with each other. The power of their personal narrative can often support the couple in times of crisis and conflict.

When Jesuits assess personal psychosexual well-being, especially with respect to our celibate and chaste lifestyles, our efforts can parallel much of what psychologists ask couples about marriage. We begin by reviewing the story of our own primary relationship, that is, our relationship to God because our psychosexual well-being depends most of all on the health, of this primary bond. Recall for a moment your own vocation story. For most of us, it usually begins with a powerful longing for God. Contemporary Jesuit documents on chastity clearly assert that familiarity with God and friendship with Christ form the foundation of the Jesuit's vocation and sustain his call. Over time and through every dimension of our personal, communal, and apostolic life, Jesuits are called "to reverence the divine presence as the horizon in which they live, to apprehend the immanent providence of God that draws them into its own working for the salvation of human beings, and to hold onto God as the purpose that energizes their work – learning thus to find God in all things."¹⁰

There are volumes written on the topic of spirituality and how Jesuits and others might experience "familiarity with God." Some writers initially frame the relationship from the perspective of our longing for God while others view it from the perspective of God's longing for us.¹¹ For, the celibate, such familiarity and mutuality in one's relationship with God is especially

¹⁰ "Chastity in the Society of Jesus," 119, marginal no. 245.

¹¹ See, for example, Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing, the Search for a Christian Spirituality*

crucial. Moreover, just as assessing mutuality in a marital relationship can be complicated and carefully nuanced, one's intimacy with God can be multilayered as it unfolds over the various stages of Jesuit life. As in a marriage, the story of the Jesuit's relationship to God is likely to be a narrative of highs and lows that over time can be marked by a growing congruence, harmony, and trust. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for religious women and men to go through periods like a "dark night," when God seems less accessible, silent, or even absent. Psychosexual well-being in Jesuit life will depend on the Jesuit's discerning the meaning of these highs and lows. He asks, "Where is God?" and, "What does God want?" amid the changing circumstances of his life following the fundamental counsel of the "Formula of the Institute": "Let the one who wishes to live our life 'take care, as long as he lives, first of all, to keep before his eyes God.'"¹²

The ways Jesuits rely on God can be simple and sublime. I remember what an aging Jesuit in my community told me about how he found God at the beginning of each day. As he struggled daily with his own doubts, aches, and pains, he would have never considered himself a holy man though others did. During his battle with cancer in the last year of his life, he said that he didn't have the patience or strength to pray. But he explained that every morning when he struggled to get out of bed, he would raise his hand toward heaven and ask God for a lift. That simple gesture told me everything I needed to know about how he expressed his familiarity with God and found God mutually reaching for him.

(New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999) and William Barry, S.J., *A Friendship Like No Other: Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008)

¹² "Chastity in the Society of Jesus," 119, marginal no. 246.

- *Where is God for you today? On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel God is as close as ever or is God now more distant, less accessible, silent or even absent?*
- *How did you first find God in your life and how did God call you to be a Jesuit? How do you initiate, support, and sustain this relationship and how does God initiate, support, and sustain God's relationship with you?*
- *How has your prayer evolved over the years?*
- *What are the predominant longings and desires of your current life?*
- *How prominent is God in those longings?*
- *How do you rely upon or take advantage of the usual supports for our Jesuit religious life –spiritual direction, annual retreat, prayer, faith sharing, and community liturgy?*
- *Do you spend leisure time with God? When, how, and how often do you turn to God?*

II. Develop Broad and Deep Interpersonal Relationships and Communities of Support.

God is at the center of our promise to live as celibates, the gift of chastity is also meant to promote our interpersonal relationships. Although we are not committed to an exclusive romantic partnership nor are we responsible for a family, we do have the opportunity to develop relationships greater in breadth and number and more unique in intimacy and depth than many married people enjoy. Jesuits must remember that the pathway to God is often discovered through our human interactions. As the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber writes, “Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow-creature, by means of them and with them find the way to God. A God reached by their exclusion would not be the God of all lives in whom all life is fulfilled.”¹³

¹³ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1965), 52.

As celibates, we are not only open to close and intimate connection with others within appropriate boundaries, but over time we will depend on the quality of these ties to enhance our psychosexual health and maturity as chaste religious.

To achieve this health requires that we transcend the sexual myths of our day. In this era of Viagra and other performance enhancing medications, for instance, popular culture often reduces psychosexual well-being to sexual function. It highlights the capacity for prolonged sex, multiple orgasms, penis size, and sustained erections. It is not surprising that the most immediate question raised by the media about celibacy and chastity is how the simple lack of sex might affect us. However, genital contact does not guarantee intimacy. What the media fails to explore is how the lack of intimacy, the absence of the abiding friendship of a life partner in marriage, and living without the experience of parenting might erode our potential for psychosexual development.

Psychological literature has long emphasized the importance of interpersonal socialization over function as the critical component in psychosexual well-being. Sexual desire represents the need for intimacy and not simply genital satisfaction. Rollo May concludes: “For human beings, the more powerful need is not for sex per se, but for relationships, for intimacy, acceptance and affirmation.”¹⁴ These interpersonal dimensions of socialization play the critical role in our psychosexual development and are available to us within the limits of celibacy and chaste religious life.

Addressing the place of relationships in our lives is the first step toward constructing our psychosexual identity. Contemporary psychoanalytic literature explains how the meanings associated with these interactions constitute the core of our psychosexual identity:

¹⁴ Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co, 1969), 311.

{H}uman sexuality is indeed psychosexuality. The concept psychosexuality excludes a sexuality of blind instincts culminating in propagation of the species, as in non human organisms (though even for them this simple statement is no longer really acceptable); and it excludes a sexuality simply of erotic techniques and orgasmic adequacy. Psychosexuality means mental sexuality, that is, a sexuality of meanings and personal relationships that have developed and been organized around real and imagined experiences and situations in a social world.¹⁵

True to this understanding of psychosexuality, our Catholic faith tradition and the Ignatian spirituality at the heart of our religious commitment consider our interpersonal relationships and personal communities not only sources of support but embodiments of the reality of God in our lives. The GC 34 documents on chastity emphasize that “{a}s a true gift from above, apostolic chastity should lead to communion with one’s brother Jesuits and the people we serve.”¹⁶ The congregation also promises, “Friendships can not only support a life of dedicated chastity but can also deepen the affective relationship with God that chastity embodies.”¹⁷

Such a network of relationships provides us with the intimacy and friendship we need to thrive psychologically and spiritually. As the writer Gregory Wolfe observes, “The effort to be fully human cannot ultimately be undertaken in solitude.”¹⁸ One Jesuit physician describes how the understanding of friendships in Jesuit life has evolved. He explains that, rather than thinking

15 Roy Schafer, “Problems in Freud’s Psychology of Women,” *Monographs of the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 22 (1974): 472.

16 “Chastity in the Society of Jesus,” 120, no. 249 (p. 120).

17 Ibid, no. 261 (p. 126).

18 Gregory Wolfe, “Fully Human,” *Image* (Winter 2008-9), 6.

particular friendships threaten our work, we have realized that unless we have healthy particular friendships, individuals with whom we have an especially deep and mutual bond, we won't be able to manage the stressors of growing old as we give ourselves to the works of the Society. He concludes thus:

We seem to have learned that the crisis of intimacy which often characterized the decision by some to leave religious life can be most effectively countered not simply by having fraternal relationships with all, but by cultivating close friendships, both inside and outside the Society, in which we can know and be known, and in which with freedom and trust we can voice our fears, concerns, temptations, and aspirations.¹⁹

- *How do we initiate, support, and sustain our friendships?*
- *How does the breadth of relationships that are available to us address our need for intimacy, acceptance, and affirmation?*
- *Have our relationships grown or diminished in quality or number over time?*
- *Which relationships claim our attention and time and why? Do these relationships include family, friends, colleagues, and Jesuits - as well as relationships that might challenge us inter-generationally and multi-culturally?*
- *What is distinctive about our Jesuit relationships in friendship and community?*
- *Overall, are we satisfied with the relationships we enjoy – what are we most grateful for, what would we change?*

¹⁹ Jon Fuller, S.J., “Growth across the Ages: The Affective Realities”, presentation to members of the Detroit Province at their Province Days, June 8, 2001.

The role of relationships can be addressed more generally but for them to be truly illuminating we should also examine them from the very concrete perspective of how they help and support us. For example, when work stops and a weekend or a day off approaches, the healthy Jesuit will need to rely on friends he wants to share time with, individuals he can invite to dinner, a movie, or some other leisure activity. There should be someone who listens to the highs and lows of any given week or month of his life. His community should be a home where he can find rest and day-to-day support, understanding fellowship as well as challenge. He will want the option of spending holidays and extended vacation times in the company of others. He should expect both to initiate various social activities and to respond to invitations that come his way.

When struggling with personal difficulties or illness, the Jesuit will need to share his concerns with family, friends, and community. In the course of ministry, there are inevitable setbacks: being passed over for a promotion or new assignment, a rejected article or book, an unjust or stinging performance evaluation, an illness, disability, and diminishment. Imagine the impact of these setbacks on morale and self-esteem if there is no one with whom to share the experience of defeat, shame, or loss and from whom one can receive solace and support. In these circumstances, narcissistic injuries fester and we can become bitter and withdrawn. Similarly, without someone to share our joys and successes, even peak experiences can become hollow and meaningless. We need people with whom we can celebrate important achievements and milestones.

The simple human solace offered by relationships is highlighted by an ex-Jesuit reflecting on lessons he wished he would have learned earlier in his life. As he anticipates death, he feels challenged to grasp what he acknowledges he never learned as a priest. He hopes that the final years of life might teach him how to “love now quite specifically, simply, in little, everyday,

faithful ways.”

I was never totally present to any single relationship, nor was I really expected to be. I was always able to plead my job, my role, my being needed somewhere or by someone else. Now, if I struggle to be friend or lover, I must stay there, with nowhere else to go. It is not an easy lesson to learn, but it is an important one, one that seems determined before I can enter into whatever eternal life will be.²⁰

Success in cultivating lasting relationships and communities of support assumes healthy honest communication. Like all communication, what we convey to others about ourselves as priests and vowed religious must be supported with responsibility and integrity. As GC 34 cautions: “Every Jesuit must realistically recognize that he will be as effective in helping others to lead a chaste life as he himself is faithful in leading such a life with integrity and is aware of his own inner inclinations, passions, anxieties, and emotions.”²¹

The sex abuse crisis has made clear that we put others at risk when we are not clear with ourselves that some service we are providing – teaching, mentoring, coaching, spiritual direction – has become more about meeting our own needs for intimacy. We must be vigilant with ourselves and other community members when we are aware of one-sided relationships that seem to be driven by the need for personal gratification. In these situations, our “inner inclinations, passions, anxieties, and emotions” should be brought into the light and directed toward healing and transparency in venues that do not endanger those we are entrusted to serve. Moreover, the role we play in these “helping” relationships wields power and influence that need to be critically examined at every stage.

20 L. Patrick Carroll, “Faith is Not Theory, but Deepest Truth of Oneself,” *National Jesuit News* (February/ March 2000): 14.

21 “Chastity in the Society of Jesus,” 127, no. 266.

On the other hand, we also experience select relationships that naturally evolve into lasting friendships over time. These close associations succeed because they enjoy mutually constructed meaning, clear expectations, and reciprocity that have grown out of sharing time and common activities appropriate to each stage of development. Most important of all, these friendships reflect a healthy sense of self that includes not only an awareness of our own needs but a respect for the needs of the other as the relationship deepens and matures.

Many Jesuits enjoy growing friendships with colleagues, students, parishioners, couples, and families. In the ordinary span of priestly ministry, it is not uncommon for a Jesuit to marry a couple, baptize their children, perhaps even celebrate the funeral of the couple's parents, and later preside at their child's wedding. Through such milestones, he becomes a part of their extended family. Similarly, as students graduate and mature, they fondly remember the teachers who made a difference in their lives and often claim them as lifelong friends.

Typically, the intimate relationships that populate a Jesuit's life are quite varied: Jesuit classmates, close friends, lay colleagues, parishioners, and students. In all of these varied relationships, the Jesuit is called to love in a way that is true to his vows. Jesuits will express and receive affection through a variety of gestures that include terms of endearment and tender moments of touch and embrace. Since the Jesuit's love is not exclusive, however, he must carefully discern what gestures and words express to others both his love for them and his fidelity to his vows. He should be vigilant that these gestures are received and understood as they are intended. When sexual feelings emerge, he needs to acknowledge them to himself and carefully discern their meaning and intent, so that he doesn't hurt others, himself, or the Society by unreflective sexual acting- out.

In the novel *Eternity, My Beloved*, Jean Sullivan writes about love and freedom and

imaginatively re-creates the relationship between St. Francis de Sales and St. Jeanne de Chantal. He presents fragments of a fictional letter from Francis to Jeanne that moves from phrases like “My soul is not more dear to me than yours,” to “I cherish you as my very soul,” from “I offer only one prayer for the two of us, without separation or division...” to “My dearly beloved, my life—the truth is I was about to write ‘Sweetheart,’ but that is not fitting,” and then finally “As soon as my face is turned toward the altar to celebrate Mass, I no longer have distracting thoughts; for some time now, however, you have been on my mind, not to distract me but to attach me more strongly to God.”²² Reading between the lines, one can imagine the journey Francis travels acknowledging his attraction and affection for Jeanne while building a friendship that faithfully respects the integrity of his vows. When a Jesuit travels the same journey, whether in a heterosexual relationship or a same-sex relationship, he must carefully discern where God is calling. In some instances, he is drawn to married life and in others he is challenged to discover the solace and grace of intimate friendship that is a part of his Jesuit life, a bond that leads him closer to God just as the relationship with Jeanne de Chantal did for Francis de Sales, and other celebrated friendships did in the lives of the saints.

Similarly, in the Jesuit’s efforts to love with integrity, the ways he communicates his affection and what he promises in friendship should be supported by his life of poverty, chastity, and obedience and by the demands of his community and apostolic life. To love another within boundaries such as these can point to the horizon of God and community that mark a Jesuit’s life. Respecting boundaries can be a profound way of loving another, an invitation to others to a shared experience of God and community. As the Thirty-fourth General Congregation put it, “A love that is warmly human yet freely offered to all, especially to the poor and marginalized, can be

²² Jean Sullivan, *Eternity, My Beloved* (St. Paul, MN: River Boat Books, 1999), 103.

a powerful sign leading people to Christ, who comes to show us what love really is, that God is love.”²³ Likewise for the Jesuit, love received from others that respects the boundaries of his religious life can be a profound way of discovering love and encountering Christ as the one who reveals how God is in truth the love that fills his life.

To understand psychosexuality in celibacy and religious chastity we must explore how God, love, and lasting love contribute to more expansive meaning in our interpersonal relationships and communities of support. As the US Bishops’ guidelines for the liturgy remind us,

We do not come to meet Christ as if he were absent from the rest of our lives. We come together to deepen our awareness of, and commitment to, the action of his Spirit in the whole of our lives at every moment. We come together to acknowledge the love of God poured out among us in the work of the Spirit, to stand in awe and praise.²⁴

Our more powerful need is not for sex but for loving interpersonal and communal relationships that do not come to an end but extend into eternity. As celibates and religious, we hope love will always be with us. Our psychosexual well-being is ultimately tied to our faith and spirituality.

23 “Chastity in the Society of Jesus,” 116, marginal no. 237.

24 Secretariat of Divine Worship, “Music in Catholic Worship,” *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* no. 2.

- *What permanent loving relationships do we claim for ourselves? How do we attend to them and grow them? How do we understand these friendships and hold on to them?*
- *Do the people we love know what place they have in our lives? How do we tell them? How do we hear and receive their response?*
- *What names do we give to these relationships?*
- *When appropriate how do we move from the role of pastoral minister, mentor, or teacher to personal friendship? Are our friendships accidental or intentional?*
- *What claims do our various relationships make on us while respecting our vows?*
- *How are differences in these relationships, especially with respect to boundaries, negotiated and resolved?*
- *How are our spirituality and community life ways of holding onto the range of relationships we enjoy, and especially those that we dearly love?*

III. Ask for Love, Nurture Others, and Negotiate Separation.

“Do you love me?” (John 21:15)

In a homily to our community, a brother Jesuit told the story of accompanying his mother through the ravages of advanced dementia and the final stages of her life. His story illustrates how we sometimes find ourselves asking others how we are loved. Sitting at her bedside in what he considered a playful moment, he asked “Mom, do you love me?” To his surprise, she answered clearly, “Yes, I love you!” And so he asked, “How much do you love me?” And raising her hands and arms in a wide, outreaching gesture, she replied “I love you as much as could be in the world!”

Healthy interpersonal and sexual development requires that we learn how to ask the

question this Jesuit posed to his mother: “Do you love me?” At significant moments throughout the span of our lives, priests and religious will need to ask God and the people of God, “Do you love me?” because it is both the nature of human development and a core tenet of our faith that we are loved first. “We love because God first loved us” (1 John 4:19). For years before any of us could voice this question, we asked it indirectly in all the ways we looked to others for assistance and attention. The vulnerability we experience in asking for help and for love can be so powerful that we often defend ourselves against reaching out at all, convincing ourselves that we can live without the love we need to thrive. Celibacy and chastity can breed an unhealthy self-sufficiency when community members ask for help from one another or others only in extreme circumstances, if at all. Not infrequently, Jesuits do not develop the capacity for asking for another’s care, even in small ways. If we cannot ask for assistance from our community or friends for small favors, a ride to the airport or company for dinner and a show, we certainly can’t impose on them during times of dire need, transport to the hospital in the middle of the night, or assistance when we are unable to care for ourselves. And so, we put ourselves at risk of constructing a life of considerable loneliness and isolation.

From its foundation, however, the Society has emphasized the importance of affective connection and challenged the isolation so common among many of its members. Our union of minds and hearts is meant to be real. As the Society has declared, “It is our community-life ideal that we should be not only fellow workers in the apostolate but truly brothers and friends in Christ.”²⁵ Indeed, in a letter to St. Ignatius from India, St. Francis Xavier responds with profound emotion to sentiments expressed by his friend Ignatius. He writes as follows:

25 “Fostering Union in the Society,” Part VIII of *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 317-43.

And among the many other very saintly words and consolations which I read in your letter were these last, which said: “Eternally yours, without my being able to forget you at any time, Ignatius;” and, just as I then read them with tears, so I am now writing these with tears, as I recall times past and the great love which you have ever had and still have, for me; and as I also reflect upon the many toils and dangers from which God our Lord freed me through the intercession of your Charity’s holy prayers.²⁶

Friendship in the Society should offer Jesuits the opportunity to develop a range of relationships that communicate varying levels of intimacy and trust, including some that might approximate the intense friendship between Ignatius, Xavier, and the first companions.

Developing such intimacy among men is not the usual experience of males in our culture and is challenging for Jesuits whatever their sexual orientation might be. Heterosexual and homosexual Jesuits will both need to discover how this closeness and vulnerability can be realized as a gift of our community life and a healthy expression of living chastity. Perhaps this is one way we accept the invitation that “Jesuit community is not just for mission; it is itself mission.”²⁷

Where do we find the strength to be so vulnerable as to ask for the help and love we need from one another, family, friends, and extended community? Perhaps we can find courage from the pastoral conversations we’ve experienced throughout the years from others who found the courage to voice these concerns to us. We have so often listened to people ask how they find love: “Do my parents love me?” “Will they still love me if I pursue my dreams instead of theirs?” “Does my spouse love me – even as I age and experience diminishment in mind and body?” “Do my children love me?” “What stops me from telling them how much I love them?” “What do I

²⁶ “To Father Ignatius of Loyola, in Rome,” in *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 344, no. 97.

²⁷ “Challenges to Our Mission Today: Sent to the Frontiers,” in *The Decrees of General Congregation 35* (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Conference, 2008), 32, no. 4.

have to do to be worthy of their love?” “Will they still love me if they knew about everything I’ve told you?” Just as parents, children, spouses, and friends seek reassurance from one another that their love is understood and taken seriously, so also priests and religious need reassurance about their love. For all that we can control, whatever power we have forged, love is a gift and so too is our freedom to ask for love. In our unique circumstances, our well-being depends on growing confidence that we are loved by God and others and that we can continue to hope for as much love in our lives as possible.

Even after his resurrection Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Three times Jesus asks because he knows just how much Peter needs to be healed and that such healing would only come by Peter’s engaging this question. Like Peter, in our prayer we can also imagine ourselves hearing Jesus say to us, “Do you love me?” And, like Peter, we probably also respond, “Yes; yes of course; yes, don’t you know?” But Jesus knows he must pose the question again and again. He isn’t embarrassed to ask and with persistence and patience invites Peter and all of us into a new life of engagement – “Feed my lambs.” So too, when we say yes to Jesus or to someone else who asks for our love, we likely do not grasp immediately what this yes entails and how this commitment can transform us. Over and over again, we search for the love that can sustain us not only in the ordinary moments of our lives but especially at times of crisis.

When those crises come, our well-being could depend on how well we have learned to ask others, “Do you love me?” Such moments of crisis also offer important opportunities. As the novelist John L’Heureux reminds us, “God sanctifies us - he makes us saints - in his own way. Not in our way. It never looks like sanctity to us. It looks like madness, or failure, or even sin.”²⁸ Precisely when we feel as if we have failed or sinned terribly, the same Jesus who transformed the

²⁸ John L’Heureux, *The Shrine at Altamira* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1999), 238.

once wayward Peter enters our lives in the most unexpected ways and heals us in our darkness. For “sometimes, in that darkness, there is a single act of love, some selfless gesture, an aspiration, and we see that it's not been all waste, all hopeless, and we can ... well ... go on.”²⁹

The following reflection describes a familiar scenario in Jesuit community that most of us have witnessed or perhaps even experienced ourselves: “I have never been good at asking for help or support. I have been in the core of myself a loner, getting friendship and affection on my own terms.”³⁰ Recognizing this tendency in himself as sin and perhaps even collective sin in the Society of Jesus, this writer recognizes that where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. He concludes:

But now, broken and alone, I need and ask, often, and in agony, for love. I am amazed at how easily some come and just be present. I am equally amazed at how others shy away, resist, and, not knowing what to say or do, do nothing. Some I have known for years look the other way in my presence. Others, known well or slightly, seek out, and knock, to find how I'm doing. There is almost no middle.³¹

“Do you love me?” is the foundational question of our human development, our psychosexual well-being, and our spirituality. We Jesuits readily acknowledge “we are sinners called by God.” As one Jesuit explained to me, “In my life my vocation is God's greatest act of mercy.” And yet what we are less ready to confess is that the question “Do you love me?” is one we never outgrow although we may forget to ask it clearly or deceive ourselves into believing we are beyond it. Here, again and again, we find the core of our humanity and a pathway to God holding

²⁹ Ibid., 239.

³⁰ Carroll, “Faith Is Not Theory,” 14.

³¹ Ibid., 14.

fast to our confession: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”

(Heb. 4:12-16)

- *Who are the people in our lives – Jesuits, family, or friends - that we feel we can depend upon for help in small everyday matters and in times of great need?*
- *When and how do we ask God and others for the love and support we need?*
- *How do we avoid asking the question “Do you love me?”*
- *How do we trust God and those who love us with the good and the bad of our lives, the light and the darkness?*
- *Do we allow the love of others to free us from sin and shame?*
- *Do we hope for as much love in our lives as we can possibly imagine?*

“Feed My Lambs.” (John 21:15)

We are called to see and love the world as Jesus did. In the words of the latest general congregation,

Fundamental for the life and mission of every Jesuit's mission is an experience that places him, quite simply, with Christ at the heart of the world. This experience is not merely a foundation laid in the past and ignored as time moves on; it is alive, ongoing, nourished, and deepened by dynamic Jesuit life in community and on mission.³²

And so, we journey with Christ responding to his invitation "Feed my lambs." At the heart of the Jesuit's vocation is the promise to love God and neighbor, to be a servant as Christ was a servant. We freely open ourselves to all dimensions of human struggle, to the suffering and needs of individuals and communities. We choose a life of generosity, especially to those in greatest need. Jeronimo Nadal highlights the charism of the Society: "The Society cares for those persons for whom no one will care or who are neglected. This is the fundamental reason for the founding of the Society, this is its power, this is its dignity in the Church."³³

The interpersonal dialogue between Jesus and Peter also reflects the dialogue between us and a world that hopes for our love in return. Like all of us, the poor, the hungry, the oppressed ask directly and obliquely, "Do you love me?" Through them the Lord is inviting us to engage the world in justice and love. When we have the courage to say yes to the struggles of the world, we discover that its suffering lives not so much outside of us as within our own hearts. When we heal the loneliness and pain of others, we also heal our own. The commission of Jesus to Peter, "Feed my lambs," tells us what we most need to remember about our ministry. Chaste and celibate love needs to respond in order to find itself whole. Jesus instructs us that the meaning of

32 "Seeing and Loving the World as Jesus Did," in *The Decrees of General Congregation 35* (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Conference, 2008), 18, marginal no. 4.

33 Jeronimo Nadal, *Orationis Observationes*, vol 90a of the Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu: "Societas curam habet earum animarum de quibus vel nullus est qui curet vel, si quis debet curare, is negligenter curat. Haec est ratio institutionis Societatis, haec virtus, haec dignitas in Ecclesia" (126, no. 316).

our lives is about nurturing one another, that love cannot be complete in a vacuum. And following Christ, our love is not about our own gratification, but rather responding more and more to those in greatest need just as Jesus did when he responded to our need for love. And the love we offer others is the love we have received.

Our apostolic work and its various ministries express our love for God and the people of God. Fr. Arrupe encourages linking our deepest desires to what we do in what has become one of his most celebrated sayings:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, falling in love in a quite absolute final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.³⁴

Our psychosexual well-being will be reflected in our work for others and in how we manage the attachments that we form along the way.

Jesuits often remember with special fondness their first extended apostolic experiences during the regency period of their formation. I recall an essay by T.J. Martinez, S.J. entitled “The Jesuit’s Calling: A Heartbroken Vocation (or Emotional Investments).”³⁵ Writing in the *National Jesuit News*, he candidly describes the love he felt for his students and the realization that this love would also be the source of his pain as he left them. He remembers how honored he was to be invited to speak at their baccalaureate breakfast, and how he was moved to tell them what he’d

³⁴Kevin F. Burke, S.J., ed., *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 8.

³⁵T.J. Martinez, S.J., “The Jesuit’s Calling: A Heartbroken Vocation (or Emotional Investments),” *National Jesuit News* 33 (October 2003): 6.

been trying to tell them all year: that he loved them. He understands that “a total investment of love and the pain of letting go are part of what a Jesuit vocation is all about and sits in distinction from more typical understandings of love.” The anguish that we experience is not a sign that our attempts to love have failed but rather that “we have, in fact, succeeded.” Martinez concludes, “It simply demonstrates that we do indeed, with God’s grace, have the ability to love others or another with great emotion and depth without succumbing to exclusivity or reacting to it with insensitivity.” This poignant and insightful description of how Jesuits love others “with great emotion and depth” while still being ready to “move on when the time comes” applies not only to these first apostolic experiences in Jesuit formation but hopefully to the growing network of interpersonal relations and communities of support that a Jesuit moves through in the course of his evolving ministry.

- *How is loving and being loved played out every day of our lives?*
- *Do we have some sense of expectation each new day or even most days about how we will express our love?*
- *To whom are we giving our lives in love and service?*
- *Can we recognize when others are asking for our love?*
- *In our lives and ministry, who and what challenges us to love more generously, perhaps even to “lay down our lives”?*

“Follow me.” (John 21:19)

The capacity both to develop loving attachments and to separate from them is critical to psychosexual development for everyone and most especially for those whose lifestyle requires distance and separation from loved ones. As psychologists who study psychosexual development

explain, inherent in our experience of love throughout the life span is the negotiation between two great human longings.³⁶ One is the longing to merge with others: to be a part of, joined with, close to, held, and accompanied. The other is the longing to be separate: independent, autonomous, apart, my own person. Our social and interpersonal life is experienced as the variable tension between the longing to merge and the longing to separate. Making love is the paradigmatic example of merging with another while delighting in the other's separateness; the fascination with the other is that the other is not me but somehow merged with me. Even in relationships where our sexual feelings are not primary, the intimate attachments of our lives will reflect this tension of loving, holding on, and letting go.

To negotiate this delicate balance throughout one's life span requires great care. As children, we begin to merge at home with parents but soon separate from them and turn to significant others and host cultures: our school peers, close friends, first loves, life partners, professional guild, community, and the world at large. Early intimate relationships prepare us for future ones of greater complexity, breadth and depth. While these longings might appear to be in conflict with one another, they are meant to be harmoniously related to one another. In every significant relationship, there are very real ways we merge with and depend on the other. At the same time there are also very real ways that we internalize relationships and move on.

How successfully or unsuccessfully this balance is negotiated before one enters religious life and ministry will certainly impact one's ability to engage interpersonal relationships. One might imagine that people who enjoy connection with others would be drawn to religious life and ministry because of the attractiveness of community life and a sense of oneness with the people of

³⁶ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 113.

God. On the other hand, those who prefer separateness could be attracted to religious life and ministry because of the contemplative nature and solitude of this spiritual lifestyle. Mature psychosexual well-being assumes a reasonable balance in both yearnings, and ideally men who enter religious life and ministry are capable of achieving this balance.

Moreover, continuing psychosexual development in religious life and ministry will depend on how successfully interpersonal ties are established and internalized, while allowing for the separateness and mobility that are inherent in this apostolic life. Each separation in religious life prepares the way for the next with the possibility that our unresolved or bitter feelings will carry over as well. It is not surprising that the first vocation crisis in religious formation often centers around the realization that apostolic life and openness to mission can entail painful separation from people we have grown to love and necessitate establishing fresh relationships in their place as we move to a new assignment at a distant parish, school, or community. Another ongoing challenge is the departure of cherished companions from our communities, a loss that leaves us feeling abandoned and alone. These various separations foreshadow as well the ultimate challenge of coping with the death of family, loved ones, and even our own death.

The challenge of our various separations and departures can make us question whether we are suited for a life that has proven to be more unsettled than we realized. If we choose to persevere, we must guard against coping with separation by withdrawing from others and intentionally or unintentionally diminishing the intimacy and love we allow ourselves to experience. In the very real struggle between merger and separation, spiritual and psychosexual well-being intersect in religious life. In these moments, we recall Jesus asking not only, "Do you love me?" but also his caution "When you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go." (John

21:18) This warning can help us trust that Jesus understands the painful reality of separation. In our solitude, we can also hear Jesus inviting, “Follow me.” And our “Yes, Lord, you know I love you” takes on a poignancy and depth we had not initially anticipated.

As one writer explains, “The sexual life of a celibate person is going to manifest itself primarily in the affective bonds of permanent and steadfast human friendships which are exemplifications of God’s way of loving.”³⁷ And yet our relationships are formed by respecting the boundaries of living chaste and celibate, which often include the painful challenge of distance from those we love. Solitude can point us toward God. And so, we learn to rely upon spiritual practices like prayer and liturgy, also expressions of God’s way of loving, as our way of holding on to these cherished relationships in God’s presence and directing God’s providence to those we love. In God and with God’s grace, we express our gratitude and voice our concerns for the permanence and steadfastness of these relationships.

³⁷ Donald Goergen, *The Sexual Celibate* (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1974), 225.

- *How have we found it possible to develop such strong attachments and love for others only to be separated from them over and over again?*
- *How do we cope with the pain of separation in ways that promote acceptance and healing rather than resentment and withdrawal?*
- *Looking at our history of assignments and change, how have we been affected by the separations and departures we've experienced? Are we growing in our capacity to sustain broad and deep relationships or has this capacity diminished over time?*
- *What relationships remain still unresolved or what needs healing for us to continue to choose life and love wholeheartedly?*
- *How are prayer and the sacraments a way of ritualizing, renewing, and making the grace of the relationships we enjoy ever more explicit?*

IV. Cope with Stress and Recognize Destructive Patterns of Behavior.

An important part of any person's journey is coping with stress, especially if it is understood in its broadest and most human terms. Stress is strain, frustration, suffering, anger, pain, sadness, distress, anxiety, worry, and/or depression in all its various manifestations and combinations. Despite its ubiquitous presence in our lives, stress can be difficult to identify. To get at its source, we can ask ourselves, "What worries us?" or even more to the point, "What has hurt us?" What hurts or worries us becomes apparent in a variety of ways. Behaviorally, we might turn to alcohol, drugs, food, or sex for solace and comfort. We can become lethargic and withdrawn or desperately reckless. Physical manifestations might include anxiety, arousal, sleeplessness, and exhaustion; we can find ourselves prone to recurring somatic illnesses, mysterious viral maladies, flu and flulike symptoms, and even accident proneness. Cognitively,

we might be preoccupied with rigid and obsessive thoughts and ruminations. Our wishes and impulses can become markedly self-destructive and even suicidal or aggressively violent and homicidal. We might be aware of vague to intense feelings of guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, anger, or depression. Our worries and hurt bend our backs and burden our hearts. The stress we experience has the potential to impair our lives significantly.

As celibates and religious, we may find our stress compounded by the particular circumstances of our religious life and ministry. Consider how the story of “Martin” reflects a common experience of general malaise. Martin has been a Jesuit for more than twenty-five years and has enjoyed considerable success in his ministry. He has had several positions of leadership and most recently was appointed president of the local Jesuit high school. Recently, a faculty member confided in him that he was troubled by his marriage, worried that the passion between him and his wife had diminished over the years to the point that he was spending extra time at school to avoid going home. He is worried that they remain married for the sake of their children and wonders what will happen to them next year when their youngest child leaves their home. As Martin listens to him, he is aware that he has similarly ambivalent feelings about his priesthood and community life. He increasingly uses social and school engagements as an excuse to be absent from a community life that in his view has grown boring and routine. Sometimes he wonders whether he is simply going through the motions, especially at liturgy, where his homilies have lost their freshness and edge. As Martin encourages his colleague not to be afraid to explore the depths of his malaise, carefully weigh all his options, and find the path to restoring his hope, he realizes he should listen to his own advice.

Like dissatisfaction in a marriage, stress in celibate and religious life can grow out of ambivalence towards the lifestyle itself and feelings of being trapped in circumstances that seem

impossible to change. Celibacy was once perceived as promoting one's relationship to God, encouraging greater freedom and availability in pastoral work, building broad and deep loving relationships, facilitating prophetic advocacy in social justice, or reflecting the power and fidelity of God's relationship to the human community. But now it may be experienced as overwhelming deprivation. This mental attitude leads to deepening feelings of helplessness and hopelessness within religious life. As several observers have noted, when one cannot acknowledge deeply felt sexual frustration, "sexuality takes on a life of its own, unreal and fantasy driven."³⁸ Moreover, "Unmet needs, denial, pain – in short, the personal things that are unpleasant to deal with – get buried. Unfortunately, they do not fade, they fester."³⁹ And over time, one's sexuality and sexual behavior becomes dissociated. Adams explains this statement:

Since sexuality does not become integrated in the priest's identity, sexual impulses are now strewn with feelings of resentment, loss, and entitlement that produce a tension that leads to compulsive, and sometimes violating, discharge. Its expression is dissociated from the value system of the moral, governing self.⁴⁰

Finally, such perceived deprivation, deepening helplessness, and unacknowledged turmoil make one prone to sexual misconduct, looking for identity and healing through sexual contact.⁴¹

When one feels trapped in any commitment, whether in marriage or in religious life, one is easily prone to consciously or unconsciously absolving oneself from the responsibility for straying

38 Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992), 214.

39 Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, and Paul Meir, *Love is a Choice* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 165.

40 Adams, "Clergy Sex Abuse," 92.

41 Laura Nelson, "Sexual Addiction versus Sexual Anorexia and the Church's Impact," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention* 10, nos. 2-3 (2003): 183.

from fidelity to that commitment. Just as the choice to remain faithful is not ours neither is the choice to stray. It's not surprising then to witness what so often seems patently reckless and scandalous behavior among people who have affairs or engage in other self-destructive activities as we've observed over and over again in well-known political figures as well as clergy.

Repression and denial of conflicts involving chastity promote feelings of guilt and generate dissatisfaction with religious life and ministry. In the wake of the sex-abuse scandals, one psychologist highlights the extraordinary contradiction of this unhealthy cycle.

{J}ust as food addicts will purge after overeating, people can binge sexually and then purge by sexual self-hatred. The denial of sensual feelings, however, ends up strengthening them; it is out of this that the binge-purge cycle grows. An example of this is a pastor who preaches against pornography and infidelity, only to end up being involved in a huge scandal due to his or her sexual behavior. These people feel a tremendous amount of shame and struggle with accepting God's love for them, sensing that God has forgiven others but not them.⁴²

Less extreme examples of repression and denial are people who might take pride in tuning out their body for years, not paying any attention to their sexual desires, or, for that matter their general appearance, their health or fitness.

By contrast, healthy celibacy and chastity promote the integration of the sexual and spiritual dimensions of a person's life and do not rely on the denial or repression of sexuality.⁴³

Whatever one's sexual orientation might be – heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual - one's sexual self and attractions need to be identified and embraced, loved and understood over and over again

42 Ibid., 184.

43 Goergen, *Sexual Celibate*, 74.

so that living chastity is a free and conscious choice. Writing on developing appropriate intervention strategies for priests and religious, Gregoire and Jungers emphasize that “{t}he dynamism of celibacy means that it is a lived process, a choice that is made daily, time and again throughout a priest’s life.”⁴⁴ Living chastity will entail reframing unhealthy perspectives on celibacy and time and again identifying the positive effects of living chaste and celibate.

- *To what extent do we feel committed to chastity and celibacy as a personal choice?*
- *What evokes feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and deprivation in our lives and how do we respond to these feelings?*
- *What time and care do we give to our health, diet, exercise, personal appearance, rest, and recreation?*
- *What contributes to our sense of pride and purpose in who we’ve become and how celibacy and chastity have shaped our lives?*

An essential part of Jesuit ministry under the standard of the cross has been to expect suffering and to risk suffering ourselves. Today, a part of this suffering may well be collateral shame or damage from the sex- abuse crisis. Most of us have felt considerable pain and humiliation in the past few years, but our spiritual tradition offers considerable resources for enduring hardship. Our very vocation is a countercultural eschewing of a stress-free lifestyle, and it encourages the kind of human growth that is marked by vulnerability, solidarity, and compassion as opposed to self-protection, self-promotion, and self-preservation. In an effort to follow Christ with generosity and inner freedom, we try to work against the very human proclivity

⁴⁴ Jocelyn Gregoire and Chrissy Jungers, “Understanding the Culture of Celibacy for the Treatment of Priests and Religious,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention* 10, nos. 2-3 (2003): 175.

to stay with what is safe and secure, to keep our distance, and to run and hide from people in pain and need. And so, our way of understanding suffering is not the world's way; we are not about fashioning stress-free lives or taking care of ourselves as ends in themselves. We take care of ourselves so we can continue the journey with Christ and continue to be men on mission. In religious life, we must learn how to cope with the hardship not only in our own lives but in the lives of others we encounter in ministry. Over the years, we will experience sadness and frustration as we witness the suffering of others and face associated justice concerns that are increasingly complex and burdensome.

In addition to coping with the stress related to our lifestyle and ministry, there are the usual varieties of ordinary life events that can burden us: personal illness or misfortune, interpersonal conflicts, family struggles, aging, the death of loved ones. From time to time, friends, family, or the Society will inevitably disappoint and even hurt us. And so, independently or cumulatively we can be stressed by our lifestyle, ministry, and ordinary life traumas and find ourselves in pain and searching for solace. During these times of distress, we need to be especially vigilant that we do not use sex as a way of altering mood or as an escape. Along with other forms of gratification or socially isolating activities like extended television viewing, engaging in sexual fantasies, various forms of internet pornography, and sexually acting out can be ways of coping with sadness by medicating our pain and suffering.⁴⁵

Rather, we need to be aware of what we would consider healthy self-solacing activities and other constructive coping strategies that relieve our suffering. An important first step would be to acknowledge our pain and share it with friends, members of our community, spiritual director, therapist, and God. We need to allow ourselves the opportunity to actively grieve

⁴⁵ Nelson, "Sexual Addiction Versus Sexual Anorexia," 181.

personal loss, disappointment, and failure and to find solace in activities that are deeply renewing and recreative. We should identify positive interactions that can counteract negative interactions in our lives, activities that provide us with the rest, relaxation, and renewal we need, and people with whom we want to share these activities. Proactively, there should be periods of decompression in every day and times set aside for prayer, exercise, rest, and recreation at regular intervals in our lives. Over the long haul, we need accessible communities of support that we can turn to in times of personal crisis and need.

Moreover, our experience of suffering can be understood in the light of our faith and open us to the reality of the human condition, the discovery of God's world, and God's reach into our world. So often it is at the worst moments in people's lives and the worst places in our world we discover not only God but "us" before God, not just me. Perhaps what we discover is that it is more important to hold life - in all of its depth, breadth, and height - than to control it. And so, we follow God into God's world because no part of the world is lost to God's love.

Describing the pain chastity might entail in the life of a Jesuit, GC34 soberly cautions: "There will be times when this solitude will become a desert, as he experiences little or no satisfaction or support in what is around him; at other times, it may even become the cross, the experience of futility, anguish and death."⁴⁶ During these periods of crisis and pain, our struggles should be interpreted first and foremost in the context of our relationship to God and our Jesuit vocation. Recall Fr. Arrupe's prayer as he shouldered his crippling illness and approached death:

More than ever I find myself in the hands of God.

This is what I have wanted all my life from my youth.

But now there is a difference; the initiative is entirely with God.

⁴⁶ "Chastity in the Society of Jesus," 117, no. 242.

It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself so totally in God's hands⁴⁷

- *To whom do we turn when the tragic situations in our ministry leave us disappointed in God, when God is less than we hoped God would be? Or when we are disappointed in ourselves and we are less than we hoped we would be?*
- *How might the suffering we are exposed to on a regular basis be contagious?*
- *What are the solacing activities and constructive coping strategies that we depend on in times of stress?*
- *Does our community make us aware of the resources available to us in times of crisis?*
- *Do we trust that the community will offer us the therapy and treatment we might need and do we have the freedom to ask for other means of support that would promote our healing and freedom?*
- *Do we trust ourselves to the care and guidance of superiors and cohorts as problems and conflicts emerge and even before they develop into crisis? How do they communicate to us their openness to help?*
- *How does our discernment benefit from engaging our spiritual exercises and spiritual direction?*

V. Celebrate the Holy in the Company of Jesus.

Living celibate and chaste can promote both a deepening relationship with God and the people of God. Psychosexual well-being in Jesuit life is ultimately linked to spiritual development

⁴⁷ Pedro Arrupe, S.J., "In the Hands of God," in *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*, edited by Michael Harter, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993), 66.

and its apostolic expression. From a very human and pastoral perspective, growing capacity for broad and deep relationships as well as the growing sensitivity and compassion to sustain them are invaluable supports to the priestly ministry of service and community building. And from a more explicitly spiritual perspective, these pastoral and personal relationships give us privileged insight into how God's people discover Christ's presence and love in their lived experience. We are able to journey with others and at their invitation often help them observe and name the grace that unfolds in their lives.

The experience of God in a life of celibacy and chastity finds powerful expression in our sacramental ministry and homiletics. Conversely, in the same sacraments we deepen our encounter with God and this mutual dynamic is just as it should be. As the U.S. Bishops observe regarding liturgical celebrations, "People in love make signs of love, not only to express their love but also to deepen it. Love never expressed dies. Christians' love for Christ and for one another and Christians' faith in Christ and in one another must be expressed in the signs and symbols of celebration or they will die."⁴⁸ These signs and symbols have tremendous power, and we are privileged to live in such close contact with the consolation they offer. Reflecting on her experience of praying with her family at her husband's deathbed and again with family and friends at his funeral, one woman expressed her appreciation for the pastoral care she experienced: "Sacraments have a way of inviting the deepest needs and fears and longings of others out into the open, where they can be acknowledged, held, and ultimately offered up for healing. Sacraments create a safe space for humans to meet God, to 'taste and see that the Lord is good.'" We learn to understand and name the needs, fears, and longing of others in ministry when we journey with them along the way. Similarly, we learn from others who have shared our journey. In this shared

48 Secretariat of Divine Worship, no. 4.

search for God with us, we dare to name the holy.

As we prepare to celebrate the sacraments, we're also ministered to in the sacramental moments of ordinary life. During my first pastoral summer after ordination, I was working in a poor inner-city parish learning from a much-beloved pastor how to serve the people of God. It was impossible to go anywhere with him without someone waving or stopping to say hello. I was never with him at a restaurant or coffee shop when he paid. Either parishioners insisted on treating him or the host or owners would refuse his money. As I worked alongside him, I began to see why he was so loved. He was personally present to every dimension of his parish's life and to every member, those at the center and at the margins. Every night the police scanner would play in the background of the rectory. One Saturday night there was a tragic house fire in the parish. He was one of the first persons at the scene of the fire. He witnessed a three-year-old boy trapped on an upper floor. The boy's father had been frantically rushing in and out of the building guiding his wife and other children out of the wooden structure. Before the father could return for the boy, his young son appeared at the window with flames visible behind him. His father called to him to jump. The young boy fearfully announced that he was too scared, that he couldn't see his father or anything else through the smoke. His father spoke to him firmly and with longing: "Son, do not worry, do not be afraid. I can see you. I can see you!" And with trust in his father's voice and gaze, the young boy jumped to safety. The next morning at Sunday liturgy, our pastor recounted this compelling human story in his homily, reminding his congregation of the love and connection of the families gathered in their midst and the love and connection of their God that held them in his gaze even at times they could not see him.

This pastor's homily is an example of how as priests and ministers we are called to name the grace in people's lives and the communities we serve, to seek and find God in all things. At

our recent General Congregation 35, we were reminded that finding the divine at the depths of reality is a mission of hope given to us as Jesuits. We are called to travel again the path taken by Ignatius and find that space of interiority where God works in us. As the congregation explains:

Our mode of proceeding is to trace the footprints of God everywhere, knowing that the Spirit of Christ is at work in all places and situations and in all activities and mediations that seek to make him more present in the world. This mission of attempting “to feel and to taste” (*sentir y gustar*) the presence and activity of God in all the persons and circumstance of the world places us Jesuits at the centre of tension pulling us both to God and to the world at the same time. Thus arises, for Jesuits on mission, a set of polarities, Ignatian in character, that accompanies our being firmly rooted in God at all times, while simultaneously being plunged into the heart of the world.⁴⁹

I am reminded of the well-known ministry of a member of my own province in East Los Angeles. In a book he’s writing about his ministry with gang members, he explains that the “containers” for the stories of his ministry are his homilies: “As a Jesuit for 36 years and a priest for 24 years, it would not be possible for me to present these stories apart from God, Jesus, compassion, kinship, redemption, mercy, and our common delight in each other.” Through these stories and the hearts that hold and voice them, he tries to “simply alter how we’ve come to think that some lives matter less than other lives.” As he has lived so faithfully and intimately with these companions, he concludes: “Out of the ‘wreck’ of our disfigured, misshapen selves, so darkened by shame and disgrace, indeed ‘the Lord comes to us disguised as ourselves.’ And we don’t grow into this – we just learn to pay better attention. The ‘no-matter-whatness’ of God breaks through the toxicity of shame and tender mercy holds us as never before.”⁵⁰ And so, in all- too- often impossible and

⁴⁹ GC 35, “Our Way of Proceeding,” 8 (p. 19).

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tragic circumstances, he names the holy for them, for himself, and for us. And we see the world differently. In his life of solidarity and the lives of others who live similarly engaged lives, living chaste and celibate clearly contributes to how they are able to know and love the people of God so completely. Their witness and stories of solidarity invite us to do likewise.

Called by God, we begin our religious lives longing to follow God faithfully. As we engage the people of God, over time we discover chastity is God's gracious gift: "Together with obedience, our Jesuit vows of poverty and chastity enable us to be shaped in the Church into the image of Jesus himself, they also make clear and visible our availability for God's call."⁵¹ Later as we cope with the distance and separation from loved ones that are inevitably part of our apostolic lives and celebrate the "signs and symbols" that promise a love that never ends, we discover the solace and comfort of God's Spirit. Living chastity, the Jesuit experiences God at various times of his life in the person of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Together with their single, partnered, or married sisters and brothers, Jesuits share the hope that their way of life can free them to love and be loved ever more fully in all the dimensions and persons of God.

- *What stories of grace mark our lives and our ministry? How recent are they?*
- *What "signs and symbols" evoke and express the love we witness in the world? How often do we celebrate these "signs and symbols"?*
- *What spaces have we created to be with God and the people of God?*
- *When we pray and celebrate the Eucharist, how mindful are we of the interpersonal relationships and stories that surround us and reveal the breadth and depth of God's love?*

⁵¹ GC 35, "As an Apostolic Religious Community," 22, no. 18.

Conclusion

Why chaste and celibate? How in the world could you do that to yourself? It's a long story but it begins with the desire and longing for God. It's about how that aspiration called us to come to know the people of God in ways we would have never imagined possible. In these relationships and communities of support, we have discovered again and again how God and often the people of God love us first and how whatever love in life we receive and give back never seems to end, comforting and consoling us in solitude, suffering, and the quest to better our world. And from what we have seen and witnessed in the world and the lives of others, we come to believe God's grace is with us and with those in greatest need. "These alone are enough for me."⁵²

⁵² *Spiritual Exercises*, 234.