

Studies show both success and approval for saving sex for marriage

Disproving nay-sayers who regard abstinence programs as unrealistic and even dangerous (it is said that they won't work and that they only encourage unprotected sex and sexually-transmitted diseases [STDs]), a study released by the Centers for Disease Control in July shows their solid success in reducing teen pregnancy.

The data shows almost a 33% decrease in pregnancy among girls ages 15 to 17 between 1991 and 2000. Fifty-three percent of the decrease is attributed by the study to increased abstinence in this age group, while 47 percent is attributed to contraceptive use.

In another study released in June, the Heritage Foundation reported that young women who make pledges to save sex for marriage "are about 40 percent less likely to have a child out of wedlock when compared to similar young women who do not make such a pledge." Data for this study came from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which has been tracking the behavior of 12,000 teens since 1994. Most of the teens are now 19 to 25 years of age.

Contraception found to increase sexual activity in unmarried youth

There is a natural contradiction between sex education programs that promote abstinence and those that promote contraception for teens. Both intend to reduce pregnancies, but in practice only one opposes sex outside marriage. Promotion of contraceptive use increases the danger of STDs as it encourages sexual activity at an early age. Many popular forms of contraception provide no barrier to STDs, and barrier methods may be used erratically.

A report in the Edinburgh (Scotland) *Evening News* in April said that academics at Nottingham University found that "expanding contraceptive services and providing the morning-after pill free to teenagers have encouraged sexual behavior rather than reducing it." They found that sexual activity and sexually transmitted diseases have risen fastest in those areas where the

Government's policy of providing free contraceptives has been most actively pursued.

Parents want their children to save sex for marriage

Early this year, a Zogby poll of more than 1000 parents of children under 17 revealed strong support for abstinence education. Ninety-one percent said they want their children to be taught that sex should be linked to the type of love and commitment found in marriage.

More than two-thirds of the parents said they want schools to teach teens that individuals who remain abstinent until marriage have the best chance of marital stability and happiness. More than half the parents polled said that information about contraception should either not be taught as a subject or taught in a class separate from abstinence.

Discussing the results of the poll at a conference in Washington, D.C., abstinence instructor Linda Klepacki, pointed out that abstinence programs emphasize the importance of marriage while comprehensive sex education classes ("safe sex" programs that emphasize the use of contraception) seldom mention marriage.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) and sex education

Presbyterians generally appear to have a high degree of agreement with all these current findings. The General Assembly in 1998

affirm[ed] to the youth of our denomination the good purpose and blessing of God in the expression of sexuality within the bonds of marriage and commend[ed] to families and congregations of the PCUSA the need to communicate to our children and youth a clear

message of sexual purity in relation to Christian discipleship, and to encourage our children and youth to take the step of making personal commitments of sexual purity.

That Assembly also made it clear that programs and curricula for youth in the denomination on the subject of sexuality should conform to biblical and constitutional standards of sexual behavior. Subsequent General Assemblies reaffirmed the action of 1998.

However, the youth sexuality curriculum produced and distributed by denominational offices promotes the use of contraception, downplays the importance of marriage, approves abortion and encourages acceptance of homosexual behavior. The Congregational Ministries Division, responsible for the curriculum, has resisted General Assembly directives to bring the curriculum into conformance with the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions. The General Assembly in 1999 instructed denominational offices "to rewrite and revise" the current curriculum to "place emphasis on abstinence and sexual purity...." To date, the curriculum remains unchanged.

The PCUSA sexuality curriculum appears to reflect the beliefs of denominational offices rather than those of General Assemblies or Presbyterians in our churches. Presbyterians should not allow the curriculum to continue as it is. Use the overture process to insist that we offer teaching on sexuality to our children that reflects the beliefs of Christian faith.

Resources for teaching sexual purity -- Churches can support parents' hopes for their children's sexual purity. There are hundreds of resources to help churches teach a biblical understanding of sexuality. A partial listing of those especially designed for children, youth and young adults is available in PPL's *Pure Hearts! Pure Lives!*