

# ISSUE BULLETIN

Examining Critical Issues in Faithful Catholic Education

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## Encourage, Enact, and Enforce

A Residential Blueprint for Witnessing to the Church's Teachings  
on Chastity during the College Years

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Clearly, then, Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics... It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith. Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 23). In this way our institutions make a vital contribution to the mission of the Church and truly serve society. They become places in which God's active presence in human affairs is recognized and in which every young person discovers the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others."

Pope Benedict XVI remarks given at Catholic University of America, April 17, 2008

The Church has always taught the beauty of human sexuality and that each person, made in the image and likeness of God, should live chastely, according to his vocation. Although not a recent phenomenon, our society has in many ways become blind to these beautiful teachings of the Church and has espoused a radically new, secular view of the human person. This new philosophy has affected all aspects of the moral life, not only those that involve human sexuality.

The sexual revolution, heralded as liberation in the 1960s, eventually took its toll even in our Catholic institutions of higher learning.

Out of a desire to meet the needs of their ever-growing non-Catholic student population, and to keep up with their secular counterparts, Catholic universities began to abandon the various student life policies that reflected the teachings of the Church, particularly in the area of human sexuality.

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When I was a sophomore at a large Catholic university in the early 1970s, I distinctly remember when the university administration instituted 24-hour inter-visitation in the residence halls. Up to this point, all the living arrangements were single-sex, with visitation policies prohibiting members of the opposite sex to spend time in each other's residence halls. But then it all changed. From my own, first-hand experience, I can attest that these new policies had a devastating effect on campus residential life. I personally witnessed many friends and acquaintances who were deeply, adversely affected by what was perceived as the institution's approval of promiscuity. The adults/administration seemed to be saying, "You are old enough to make up your own mind about sexual morality."

After a number of years of inter-visitation, Catholic colleges and universities began to allow co-ed dormitories. Not surprisingly, there are now many Catholic institutions of higher learning whose dormitories house both sexes; in some cases men and women are separated by floors, others by wings, and even others, simply by rooms. It is not too difficult to ponder the consequences of such a policy.

One of the reasons I was attracted to come to Christendom College was the fact that, since its founding, Christendom has been faithful to the commitment to encourage and bear witness to all of the Church's teachings, including the beautiful teaching on chastity. Let me explain the reasoning behind this stance.

The rules and policies that a college enforces must truly reflect the institution's beliefs—her mission and integrity. If a college is genuinely committed to being Catholic, then every facet of the college, including the rules and regulations governing student life, must reflect Church teachings, bringing those teachings to life and incarnating them for the students.

The Catholic Church has always taught that unmarried people of the opposite sex need to exercise a prudent reserve in relationships, especially because of the goodness, indeed the holiness, of intimacy within marriage. Anyone of maturity and good sense knows that permissive rules allowing young men and women to spend hours upon hours inside each other's dormitory rooms not only contradict the Church's teachings on prudence and chastity, but also seriously jeopardize the purity of these young people. When students perceive the disconnect between exhortations by college administrators to live a virtuous life and residential policies that are not conducive to that calling, they not only lose their trust in the institution, but they also become seriously confused about what is right and what is wrong. When this happens, the institution fails in its mission to teach the whole truth about the human person.

Some voices in both secular and Catholic academia believe, since the students are generally over the age of 18, and therefore, in the eyes of the law, adults, that there is no need to implement policies affirming and encouraging chastity. Some insist that these young adults are mature and

should not be told what to do in this regard. Others maintain that the students need only encouragement and good example, that these will be sufficient inducements to their becoming virtuous men and women who live a chaste life. Clearly this reasoning is deficient as evidenced by rules governing consumption of alcoholic beverages. Rules are meant to reinforce morals and foster virtuous behavior, just as they do in the home life; they are meant to complement, not contradict each other.

Given the brutal collapse of our secular culture, we need to have the courage to embrace a “contra mundum” stance. An authentically Catholic college, one striving to do the will of the Church, as faithful disciples, should not only adopt residential policies that separate and respect the dignity of the opposite sexes, but it should also provide many examples and events that promote and illustrate the joy of virtuous living, such as pro-chastity speakers or a course devoted to St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body. This two-pronged attack offers a greater chance of success in bearing witness to the power and truth of Catholic teaching.

Our Catholic institutions of higher learning need to foster virtue and be countercultural as a corrective to our nation’s secular universities, many of which are floundering and debasing human dignity in this sensitive area. We need to bear witness to the truth and convince our beloved young people that they have a dignity and a calling far greater than that which is promoted by the secular world.

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