



DESIRE OF THE EVERLASTING HILLS

*DOCUMENTARY DISCUSSION GUIDE*

## **A Word or Two Before You View This Film**

*You design your life. We all design our lives.*

So says Rilene, one of the figures in the documentary you are about to watch. Rilene's insight is profound: The choices that we make change us—they don't merely change the world around us, they change us. Her insight is as humble and courageous as it is profound, because while it acknowledges freedom—a gift we all treasure—it also acknowledges responsibility.

We can't design our lives in every respect. For instance, most of us will not make careers as professional musicians or athletes, no matter how appealing we might find such prospects, and no matter how strong our desires. Talent, timing, relationships, all these things limit our power. Some things lie beyond our control, and it takes humility and courage to accept this fact.

It also takes humility and courage to face certain questions about our lives. One such question is, "How do I know if I am designing my life well? By what standard can I come to a conclusion?" This question is closely linked with another, "What is the purpose of my life? What does it mean to be fulfilled and at peace?" And these are the central questions around which the film *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* turns. The film does not claim to answer these questions completely. They have been mulled over, talked over, even fought over, for as long as humanity has found its home in this world. Anyone who has ever thought about whether he or she has "done the right thing," has started to think about these questions.

One way we might approach the subject of whether or not we are designing our lives well is to think about the people we admire and why we admire them. If "to admire" means something other than "to envy," if it means that we value someone's self-forgetfulness, someone's generosity of heart, someone's sacrifice, then we may have the beginnings of a way to resolve the question of a well-lived and well-designed life.

I admire the three people whom you will see in this movie—Rilene, Dan and Paul. I admire them because of their humility and courage. I realize—and more important, they realize—that some viewers may be troubled, offended, or even angered by their stories. No one involved in making this film wishes to cause anyone distress. On the contrary. But if we are free to design our lives, then each of us will have a story, and whether or not this story is welcome, it deserves respect. It deserves respect not only for the unique mind and heart the story reveals, but also for what it may contain for others.

Rilene, Dan and Paul do not claim that their stories are just like the stories of all other people or even of any other people. Yet do their stories share unifying themes? Yes, they do. So has this film been made for a purpose? Yes, it has. Indeed, it has been made for a dual purpose, because the film takes up not just one of the questions I mentioned, but both of them: What it means to design one's life well, and how to know when we have really found peace and fulfillment. For in the end, finding peace and fulfillment is what the precious gift of freedom is for.

*- Fr. Paul N. Check, Executive Director, Courage International*

## Presenting the Documentary

Thank you for presenting “Desire of the Everlasting Hills,” a documentary featuring three people, three children of God with same-sex attractions (SSA), who discuss their journeys to chastity and peace through the love of Christ. After viewing this film, audiences will be eager to discuss it; some may need guidance in understanding the Church’s teaching on homosexuality; others may want to understand more about chastity; some may wish to discuss the stories that Dan, Paul and Rilene have shared. We hope this guide will assist you in leading these discussions.

We’ve divided this guide into three sections. The first offers bullet-point questions you might propose to the viewers in small group discussions. Each bullet point is followed by reflections related to the question that might help enrich the discussion. The second section suggests questions that might help viewers contemplate their own lives and identities. The third section is a compilation of Church teachings about homosexuality and chastity. The guide concludes with an afterword by Fr. Paul N. Check and a list of additional reference materials.

### Part One: Discussing the Film

- *How would you describe this documentary to someone? What is its purpose? How did the documentary accomplish that purpose?*

**Reflection:** In creating this film, we wanted to focus on several themes, but primarily on the concept of identity. Too often men and women with SSA hear from secular societies that in order to be happy they must “come out” and live a homosexual life. The men and the woman in this film followed this path and it left them unfulfilled. The story of our true identity begins in the book of Genesis and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are children of God, made in His image and likeness, as male and female. To reduce our identity to “gay” or “straight” does injury to the dignity of the human person. The Church distinguishes three things: the person (always good), the same-sex inclination (which is not a sin, but is “objectively disordered”) (CCC 2358), and the action (intrinsically disordered homosexual acts). (CCC 2357) We are all sinners in need of grace and redemption, but we are all in need of embracing our true identities as children of God, first and foremost.

This documentary also attempts to put a human face on a very controversial topic—homosexuality—and thereby foster empathy and understanding for those persons who live with SSA. While the stories in this film give us insight into the unique and specific experiences of Paul, Dan and Rilene, many men and women living with SSA experience similar pain and suffering, but their pain may be hidden from us. Dan sometimes thought life would be better if he didn’t wake up in the morning. Although surrounded by many people, he often felt isolated and alone. Rilene felt that as a young woman she’d been rejected by men. All three individuals

experienced feelings of loneliness, confusion, guilt and despair at different times in their lives. We hope the documentary will open our hearts, enabling us to love and show authentic compassion to those men and women in our community who live with SSA. As Pope Francis said, the Church is a “field hospital for the wounded.” As we view this film, we might ask ourselves, how can we love our neighbors with SSA as Christ loves them?

Finally, the film celebrates the “good news” of chastity, a virtue necessary for Christ-like love for all of Jesus’ disciples. (CCC 2348) Although in this film chastity is portrayed as the achieving of self-mastery in respect to homosexual acts, we are all bound by the sixth commandment. We must not think of chastity as something that only those with SSA need to practice! The persons interviewed in this film give a heroic witness to the healing power of God’s grace and the peace and joy that comes from living the virtue of chastity in mind, heart and body. We may not all share their particular circumstances, but we can all be inspired by their example to live and love chastely.

- *Who did you feel most drawn to in the film: Dan, Paul or Rilene? Who most touched your heart? What was it about that person’s story that especially moved you?*

**Reflection:** Often we are drawn to others who in some way represent aspects of our own lives, beliefs, and struggles or whose personalities seem to mesh with ours. Sometimes we are drawn to those whose actions or stories teach us lessons about our own lives and choices, or to those whose stories are different from our own. When viewers respond to this question, it’s important that they try to identify what it was specifically that resonated with them. This insight may spur continued discussion and increased self-knowledge.

- *Dan, Paul and Rilene all exercised their freedom in making choices about their lives. And over time they discovered that their use of freedom in living a homosexual life did not bring them peace or fulfillment. They learned that true freedom has a structure; it points to a plan and to the person of Christ. Were there moments in the film when you saw how Dan, Paul and Rilene used their “free will” in ways that brought them pain rather than the true freedom God intends for us?*

**Reflection:** In this film, Dan, Paul and Rilene all make choices about their lives. They reflect upon their choices and, in the end, they come to understand that free will alone is not enough. As Fr. Check noted in his introduction to this guide, our ability to design our lives “acknowledges freedom—a gift we all treasure—it also acknowledges responsibility.” True happiness comes when we use our God-given freedom to design our lives properly and in keeping with the Gospel and the example of Jesus Christ. In order that we might find fulfillment, our free will must

be guided by our well formed consciences to know and follow the truth of God's commandments and the teachings of Christ's Church. (CCC 1783) We might also consider how society's values and pressures can shape our choices.

Dan, Paul and Rilene chose to act on their homosexual attractions, believing that in doing so they would be happy. They exercised their freedom and chose the path of what they saw as a sign of "sexual liberation." Eventually, they came to understand that living in concert with the Church's teaching was the only path to true freedom and human flourishing. As Dan said, quoting St. Clement of Alexandria, "the commandments of God lead us to the blessed life." In what ways do we exercise our free will either in accord with or against Church teaching? Do the choices we make about Church teaching on chastity, pornography, masturbation, fornication and contraception lead us toward or away from true communion as God wills? (CCC 2396 and 2399)

- *Our secular society's view of homosexuality, gender and marriage has been changing over the past several years. You may have heard people say that the Catholic Church is "behind the times" and that contraception, divorce, homosexual activity, IVF, and gender manipulation should be embraced. This film shows us, personally and persuasively, that when we ignore what St. Paul called, "the law written in our hearts" (Romans 2:15) also called the Natural Law, (CCC 1954ff) we find only sadness, shame, suffering and, ultimately, separation from God. Have we ever yielded to external pressure to choose anything contrary to the teachings of Christ's Church? How does this film help us to respond to society's arguments?*

**Reflection:** Some argue that Christ never spoke against homosexuality, therefore it's acceptable. We must remember, however, that Christ spoke against the danger of lust, which is the beginning of all sexual sin as covered by the sixth commandment. (Matthew 5: 27-30) In addition, Christ spoke of the natural physical and emotional "joining" of man and woman, what the Church calls "complementarity." When asked by the Pharisees if divorce was lawful, Christ replied, "Have you not read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one?" (Matthew 19: 4-5) There are only two sexes: male and female. They are biologically, physically and emotionally meant "to complete" each other and to be open to the creation of new life. It is impossible for two men or two women both to realize the complementarity expressed by the "one flesh union" and by themselves, to create new life. (CCC 1610)

- *Dan, Paul and Rilene all lived for a time away from the Catholic Faith. How did their lives differ before and after they returned to the Church? How would you describe their change in mind and heart?*

**Reflection:** Sometimes a person experiences conversion as an "opening up" to a

new world, a new way of life, for example, embracing God and His Word for the first time. Conversion can also mean “coming home” to a relationship with God and the Church that an individual once rejected but now sees in a new light. The three persons in this film began their lives as Catholics but drifted away, eventually finding that living a homosexual life wasn’t compatible with living in relationship with Christ. Their discoveries of the importance of the Church as Christ’s Mystical Body and of the Sacraments should inspire us to take these gifts more seriously. Are there obstacles in our lives that might be keeping us from a relationship with Christ such that we require conversion of heart? With God’s grace, Dan, Paul and Rilene each experienced a return to the Church. Conversion doesn’t always come suddenly with lightning flashes and trumpets. Often it is a slow and even painful process.

- *As we saw in the film, an essential part of conversion for Paul and Rilene was going to Confession. Why was it necessary, both spiritually and theologically, for them to go to Confession?*

**Reflection:** On their return to the Church, Paul and Rilene longed to receive the Eucharist. In fact, they each developed an overwhelming hunger to receive Christ into their bodies and lives. When a person is conscious of having committed mortal sins, making a good Confession and receiving absolution is an essential step before receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion. (CCC 1415, 1446 and 1457) This film highlights the beauty and joy of Confession for all of us and shows the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to heal mortal sins, take away venial (daily) sins, and strengthen our resolve to live and love more faithfully.

The Ten Commandments were also of prime importance to the three individuals in this documentary. Paul confessed to breaking all of them—except murder—and Fr. Bob led Rilene through each commandment in order to ensure that she made a good Confession. Remember that Dan’s favorite saint, St. Clement, tells us that, “the commandments of God lead us to the blessed life.” Don’t we feel that the commandments are written on our hearts, even (or perhaps especially) when we choose to ignore them, because we feel the sting of conscience?

- *Dan has decided to live without an intimate relationship outside of marriage. Paul continued to live in a chaste relationship with his long-term male partner, and Rilene implied that she might be open to a relationship with a man if that should be in God’s providence. What are your thoughts about their choices?*

**Reflection:** Often, when the topic of homosexual relationships or marriage comes up, we hear people say, “But doesn’t everyone deserve love?” or “Why shouldn’t you marry the one you love, no matter if he or she is the same sex that you are?” or “Why should homosexuals be singled out and made to suffer by

living without sexual love?” This reaction might be called “misplaced compassion” or sentimentality: we feel for others and we want them to be happy, but we forget that only living in accordance with God’s commandments brings lasting happiness and peace. We forget that Jesus both forgives us and calls us to conversion, to a change of life. (John 8: 11) We forget also that we are all called to chastity, no matter our sexual inclinations. After embracing chastity, Dan, Paul and Rilene were free to love as Christ shows us. Paul remained in a fraternal relationship with his long-time partner, loving each other “rightly” in chaste friendship. But in order to love others rightly, we need to understand first “who we are,” and in whose image we are made. We need to understand when love is truly loving. We must also realize the importance of giving a good example and avoiding scandal. One of the gifts of chastity is to see others as they really are, loved children of God. Through the virtue of chastity, we are led to answer Christ’s call to love others as He has loved us. (John 13:34)

- *After embracing chastity, Dan, Paul and Rilene speak of enjoying new contentment, peace, safety, and a feeling of being “home.” That doesn’t mean, however, that their lives were free of loneliness or suffering. Watching the film, were you aware of their suffering? Why is suffering sometimes necessary?*

**Reflection:** As Catholics, we are often called to suffer alongside Christ in order to participate in His work of salvation. (CCC 1508 and 1521) The Church is aware that “our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice, and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it.” (CCC 165) Therefore, the Church in her maternal love offers us, through the Sacraments, the means to accept all things in Christ, who will strengthen us. (Phil 4:13)

Suffering can lead us to find genuine happiness by separating us from things that harm us. Happiness follows when we align our lives and actions with the reality of our identities as men and women who are first and foremost loved children of God and when we follow the example of Christ’s virtues. (John 15:9-12) Accepting our true identities does not mean, however, that there will be no loneliness or hardship in our lives or that chaste living will come easily.

- *Many people comment on the authenticity and the vulnerability of the three people profiled. What do you think would motivate someone to reveal this very private, personal and painful part of his or her life?*

**Reflection:** Dan, Paul and Rilene have taken a great risk by sharing their stories in this documentary. Their transparency meant letting acquaintances and co-workers learn intimate and previously unknown details of their personal lives. Because we live in a technological age, Dan, Paul and Rilene have become known to strangers as well, and not all viewers will greet their stories with charity. The real reason these three persons have taken this risk is out of love and gratitude for graces

received. They are aware that others might welcome their stories in the hope that grace will help heal their hearts as well, and that they will receive the same welcome in Christ's Church. Are there areas where we are willing to step out of our comfort zone in order to help share the good news of the Church and of the Gospel? Imagine taking such risks in our own lives!

- *The title of the film is Desire of the Everlasting Hills. Why do you think this title was chosen for the film? Is it a good title? Why or why not?*

**Reflection:** Many people will recognize the phrase "Desire of the Everlasting Hills" as an invocation from the Litany of the Sacred Heart: "O Jesus, Desire of the Everlasting Hills, have mercy on us." However, this phrase first appears in Genesis 49:26, as the patriarch Jacob blesses his progeny with the prophetic announcement of the coming of the desire of the everlasting hills, who will be Jesus Christ: "The blessings of thy father are strengthened with the blessings of his fathers: until the desire of the everlasting hills should come; may they be upon the head of Joseph, and upon the crown of the Nazarite among his brethren." (Genesis 49:26 Douay-Rheims Catholic Edition) The Church interprets "the desire of the everlasting hills" as the fulfillment of every human heart in Jesus Christ. While we will ultimately receive this fulfillment in eternity, how have the men and woman in this film shown us a fulfillment of this desire on earth?

## **Part Two: Questions for Personal Thought and Contemplation**

- Has the film changed the way I think about homosexuality or about persons who live with same-sex attractions? How? Have I been guilty of judging others by their identity as "gay" or "lesbian" individuals, rather than seeing them as children of God?
- Have I avoided loving those I perceive as being different from me, rather than following the Catechism's teaching that we must treat persons with SSA with "sensitivity, compassion and respect," not simply with sentimentality? (CCC 2358)
- Have I been indifferent to another's life choices and therefore not shared with him or her the truth of the good news about chastity? Have I come to understand, as did Dan, Paul and Rilene, that sexual intimacy is properly ordered only when it occurs within marriage and is open to the possibility of life?
- Am I sometimes silent about the sinful behavior of others because I carry



personal guilt for my own sins? Do I tend to turn a blind eye to sin so that others won't judge me? What is the best way to approach someone who is involved in sinful behavior?

- How is my relationship with my conscience, that inner voice that often knows when something is “not right?” (CCC 1776) In the film, Rilene was shocked when she saw twin sisters “lovin’ on each other”—her conscience was telling her that something was wrong—but Margo warned her that if she and Rilene judged the twins, then others might judge them. Rilene tried to ignore her conscience, and for a while she could. When my conscience whispers to me, do I listen or do I shut that voice out?
- Is there a difference between shame and guilt? Did I pick up moments of both shame (“You’re worthless; you’re bad”) and guilt in the movie? Can guilt ever be “good,” in that it spurs us to make changes in our lives? Have I ever felt shame for my actions? Have I ever felt guilty because of my actions? What was my response in both cases?
- When and how do I resist the Lord? In the movie, as Paul was driving to get the results of his HIV test, he heard God’s voice speaking to him as if that voice came from the very center of his being. He listened, and his whole life changed as a result. Has God ever spoken to me in my heart? Have I resisted or embraced that message? Do I make excuses in order to keep “doing my own thing” rather than following Jesus?
- Gradually, Dan, Paul and Rilene’s conversion of mind and heart deepened. In the film, a therapist gives this advice: Get your relationship with God in order first. When any life changes are in order, this is always the first step. Unless our relationship with God is honest and true, nothing else will help us. How is my relationship with God? Do I need to get this relationship right in order to make other important changes in my life?
- The Sacraments, particularly Confession, are at the center of the movie. Rilene knew that she could not receive Holy Communion unless she was in a state of grace. How often have I received Communion when I was not in a state of grace? What changes can I make to bring the Sacraments to the center of my life?
- When has Jesus invited me to follow Him? What is Jesus calling me to do in my life today? In what ways have I been faithful to His call? In what ways have I not been faithful?

- What do I want God to change in my life? How can I be receptive to this?
- In the end, Dan resolves to accept certain suffering because he knew he had to follow God's will, no matter how difficult it might seem. When have I known that suffering was necessary if I was going to follow God's plan for me? How has suffering strengthened or weakened my relationship with God? In what ways am I now being called, or have been called, to take a risk, to embrace uncertainty in order to step out in faith to do God's will? How do I understand what the Church teaches about suffering? (CCC 1508 and 1521)
- Do I realize that God is with me, even in the dark and painful times of my life?
- What in the movie most disturbed or shocked me? Why?
- What most touched my heart in the movie? Why?
- A question for men: have I ever mocked or been cruel to men who appear effeminate? Do I engage in "gay jokes" with male friends? Many men with SSA long for close friendships with other men with whom they can be "just one of the guys." This longing can be stronger than sexual desire. Are there men in my life who live with SSA? Might I be called to be a brother to them, to become "Christ" in their lives and walk with them on their journey?

### **Part Three: Church Teaching about Homosexuality and Chastity and Other References**

How do we know that the tomb was empty on the first Easter Sunday morning? How do we know that the seventy-two books of the Bible are inspired by the Holy Spirit? How do we know that when the priest says, "I absolve you from your sins ..." that our sins are truly forgiven? How do we know that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ? We believe these truths and many others because our mother, the Catholic Church, has been given the authority by Jesus Christ to assure us of their veracity. The Church was founded by Christ to be the kingdom of God on earth, the custodian of divine revelation, the universal Sacrament of salvation, and the sure and certain beacon of truth about the human person. If we can believe, on the authority of the Church, that Jesus rose from the dead, that Sacred Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that the Sacraments are meeting points between God and man, then we can trust that what the Church teaches us about chastity and homosexuality are true. Jesus gave the Church a

divine mandate: to lead us on the narrow path to Heaven and to give us the means to live holy lives. (Matt. 7:13-14)

851 Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth.

890 The mission of the Magisterium [the living teaching office of the Church (CCC 85)] is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals.

Fidelity to Christ's truth, entrusted to the Church, softens hearts, illuminates consciences, deepens hope, builds charity, and helps us to avoid misplaced compassion. Let us remember the great priestly prayer of Jesus, "That all may be one." (John 17:11, Acts 8:31 and Matthew 16:19) The truth will both set us free (John 8:32) and will unify us in the heart of Christ. We may not always understand what is best for us, but in our mother, the Church, we have a sure, faithful and loving teacher.

### **Excerpts from "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care (The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2006)**

- There are a variety of acts, such as adultery, fornication, masturbation, and contraception, that violate the proper ends of human sexuality. Homosexual acts also violate the true purpose of sexuality. They are sexual acts that cannot be open to life. Nor do they reflect the complementarity of man and woman that is an integral part of God's design for human sexuality. (CCC 2357)
- While the Church teaches that homosexual acts are immoral, she does distinguish between engaging in homosexual acts and having a homosexual inclination. While the former is always objectively sinful, the latter is not.
- The homosexual inclination is objectively disordered, i.e., it is an inclination that predisposes one toward what is truly not good for the human person. (CCC 2358)
- For some persons, revealing their homosexual tendencies to certain close friends, family members, a spiritual director, confessor or members of a Church

support group may provide some spiritual and emotional help and aid them in their growth in the Christian life. In the context of parish life, however, general public self-disclosures are not helpful and should not be encouraged.

- Persons with a homosexual inclination should not be encouraged to define themselves primarily in terms of their sexual inclination, however, or to participate in “gay subcultures,” which often tend to promote immoral lifestyles. Rather, they should be encouraged to form relationships with the wider community.

### **Excerpts from “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986)**

- To choose someone of the same sex for one’s sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator’s sexual design. Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves; but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent. (7)
- The human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation. Everyone living on the face of the earth has personal problems and difficulties, but challenges to growth, strengths, talents and gifts as well. Today, the Church provides a badly needed context for the care of the human person when she refuses to consider the person as a “heterosexual” or a “homosexual” and insists that every person has a fundamental identity: “the creature of God, and by grace, his child and heir to eternal life.” (16)

### **Excerpts from The Catechism of the Catholic Church**

2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection. (2347)

## Afterword

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:32) We can never be more pastoral than Jesus. Good God that He is, He knows well the weaknesses to which we are prone, especially in matters relating to love and affection. But He also sees the dignity in every human heart, because He placed it there. He sees the potential for great nobility in each heart, too, because He knows the transforming power of His grace. The Communion of Saints bears witness to the goodness of God at work in the humble and trusting human heart.

“Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived,” writes the Pope Emeritus in his last encyclical. (*Caritas in Veritate*, 3) “Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality.” God is both *Agápe* and *Lógos*, Pope Benedict reminds us.

- To love people with same-sex attractions is to love them for their God-given and Christ-redeemed dignity. They are not less than any of the Father’s children. Like everyone, they deserve more than sentimentality. They deserve compassion...compassion founded on the truth of their humanity.
- The story of our humanity begins in the book of Genesis. The two-fold expression of our nature is not heterosexual and homosexual, but male and female. God made Adam, but the first man was “blessedly incomplete,” as aptly put by Dr. J. Budziszewski. (see Additional References) Eve completes Adam...the two become one...each giving to the other what he or she did not possess in themselves.

So that life could be shared, Adam and Eve together were given by the Lord the power to co-create with Him. According to the story of our origin and our identity, sexual intimacy is integrally bound with fertility. That the contraceptive industry exists testifies, in a negative way, to this reality.

We can falter in embracing chastity—self-giving, self-forgetful love—as part of the “good news.” We can deliberately try to set aside, to our own detriment, God’s wisdom “from the beginning,” which does not mean so much a point in time, as it indicates a guiding and generous hand that crafts the human identity, an identity that reflects, and through grace can share more deeply in, the divine identity.

God’s pastoral, shepherd’s heart for spousal love, according to the testimony of Sacred Scripture, reveals itself in the complementarity of the sexes and the procreative potential of the sexual faculty. Only a man and a woman together have a “reproductive system,” in the words, again, of Dr. Budziszewski. Male and female genitalia only make sense in light of their complements. The sexual organs are best described as procreative organs. Through procreation, the union of husband and wife

shares in the divine power to bring life into God's kingdom. By the Creator's design, sex is ordered toward the family.

When we are unchaste in any way, we come into collision with ourselves, with "our story," as told by the sacred writer in Genesis, and confirmed by Jesus in the Gospel. When the Church asks two people of the same sex to avoid being unchaste, she does so with the compassionate heart of Christ, because she believes the words of Christ: only the truth will liberate us—from ignorance, confusion, fear, neglect, pain, selfishness, malice—because only the truth fulfills us.

Our fallen nature can be especially vulnerable to many forms of unchastity: masturbation, fornication, contraception, adultery, pornography...and homosexual activity. Each of these actions falls outside the limits of the humanity of which God is the author. As a result, they can never bring the fulfillment for which every human heart is made, despite the intense physical pleasure and satisfaction to which they may lead. If we fail to guide people away from any of these sins, we fail first in truth and then in compassion. We lose our trust in Jesus as *Agápe* and *Lógos*. Our attempts to be compassionate without truth will not be Christ-like love.

Pope Francis has wisely recalled that the Church is a field hospital for sinners. His predecessor of saintly memory, John Paul II, spoke of the "law of gradualness" in leading souls to Christ. In their pastoral charity and prudence, these good shepherds steer us away from sentimentality and self-destructive behavior. They are loyal sons of the Church who trust in the goodness of God and the efficacy of His grace. They are confident that there is a human nature that unites all God's children.

To welcome people into the Church, into our homes, into conversation—to "accept them" in an authentic Christ-like way—would never call for a compromise of the truth, i.e., to say to someone in some form, "Well, that's the best you can do." At the same time, we can only share the truth if we first share a relationship with someone, and that takes time and trust to establish.

Our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 offers a helpful pastoral model. A mutual human need—water—opens the door for a conversation about a topic of mutual interest: God. Jesus leads the conversation, in truth and in compassion, to the topics of grace, eternal life, and chastity. He does not begin with the moral question, but He does not avoid it. And for her part, the woman later describes the encounter with joy, because another heart took a deep interest in hers, and the truth that Heart conveyed set her free.

*-Fr. Paul N. Check, Executive Director of Courage International*

### **Additional References**

**Church Documents** (those noted in this guide as well as others) can be viewed at <http://couragerc.org/resources/#church>

**Courage website:** [www.couragerc.org](http://www.couragerc.org)

**“Desire of the Everlasting Hills,” a one-hour Courage Documentary:**  
[www.everlastinghills.org](http://www.everlastinghills.org)

**“Homosexuality and the Catholic Church: Clear Answers to Difficult Questions”**  
by Fr. John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S. (Ascension Press 2007)

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