

Chris Parker (20) and Jim Olszewski, Jr. (20), members of Hearts Aflame Youth Ministry for high school seniors and college students at St.

Bronislava Parish in Plover, Wisconsin, read this edition of *Youth Update*. They posed the questions you will find answered here. Youth Minister Greg Bergenske invited Chris and Jim to assist.

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YOUTH UPDATE



Love, Dating & BIG Decisions

by Michelle P. Thompson

Love is the theme of nearly every song on the radio and part of the plot of nearly every TV show. So how can it be so confusing? You can love your parents, your pet, friends, pizza or football. That seems clear enough. But what about romantic love?

Trying to figure out if you are in love is one of the most confusing, scary and exciting mysteries you will ever solve—or try to solve. This *Youth Update* helps you consider whether you are in love and how to express that love if—and when—you are.

Love vs. Infatuation

Whether you are already in a relationship or just hopeful, take some time to think about love. You need to know the difference between infatuation and love.

Infatuation completely takes over your thoughts. You feel passionately attracted to someone because of that person's looks, talents or popularity even though you may not know him or her personally. You might be infatuated with a movie star or a singer, or that boy or girl in your English class.

If you have ever had a crush on someone, you know what infatuation feels like. Infatuation is powerful. It can be fun, but it can also be painful if the interest is not returned. (That's why it's called a crush!)

Infatuation may or may not be part of a loving relationship. Infatuation is O.K., but friendship must also be present for love to exist. Infatuation can draw two people together, but friendship sustains a love relationship.

It may sound easy, but the big challenge in defining love is that everyone has a private definition, and your own definition grows and changes as you do. Your definition of being in love in eighth grade will differ greatly from how you define love in high school.

This change is good and healthy. It shows maturity. Recognize and evaluate these

changes as you go through high school, college and into adulthood.

Remember that love is not something you fall into. As 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 tells us, "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Love takes time, patience, thought and respect. If you think you are in love, ask yourself these important questions:

- Do I love myself? (You must love yourself before you can give love to others.)
- How does this relationship make me feel? Do I feel good (positive, happy, safe, valued, respected) when I am with my boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Do I want what is best for the person I love?
- Does that person want the best for me?
- Is friendship part of our relationship? Do we have common values, interests and goals?

If you answer no or even maybe to any of these questions, step back and take time to look at your relationship. Love is one of the most precious gifts God has given us. Don't rush into labeling your relationship as love. Give love the time and reflection it deserves.

The Great Search

Dating is one way to get to know that person you are infatuated with or to strengthen a friendship that may develop into a loving relationship. Dating helps you decide what you like or don't like in a boyfriend or girlfriend and what you may want in your future, lifelong partner.

Like love, dating can be fun or painful. If you are old enough to go out on a date, you are old enough to be responsible for your choices and your actions. Before you agree to go out on a date, be selective. Dating the football captain or homecoming queen may flatter your ego, but make sure that the person you agree to date is someone you respect and who respects you, your values and feelings.

Group dates are a good choice. By going to dances, games, shows or movies together with a group of friends, you learn how your date treats others, what they like and dislike and how you feel when you are together. You can share your interests, ideas, priorities, values, goals and problems in a low-pressure situation. With friends around, you can feel safe and a bit more comfortable as you get to know one another.

If you choose to go out as a couple, focus on getting to know one another. This can be challenging. Awkward silences and thinking, *I can't believe I said that. That sounded so dumb!* are common on first

dates. Just remember that your date feels the same way! Be yourself. You want your date to like you for who you are, not an act that you put on to impress him or her.

Communication Key

Clearly communicating your thoughts and feelings is the key to a successful date. If you communicate clearly, you can have fun and get to know each other without misunderstandings spoiling the experience—even if you and your date never want to go out with one another again!

Before you can communicate clearly with others, you must know yourself. Ask yourself, *What am I trying to say?*, and make sure your words and body language agree. For example, if you say, "Sure, you can hold my hand," but you pull away, you send mixed messages to your date. You may have pulled away because your hand was sweaty and you were embarrassed, but unless you admit that to your date you may send the wrong message.

You may think it sounds dumb to say, "I would love it if you held my hand, but I am embarrassed because my hand is sweaty." But your date will appreciate your honesty and may even admit to a sweaty hand as well!

If your date asks you if you want to go to the basketball game and you say, "Sure, that

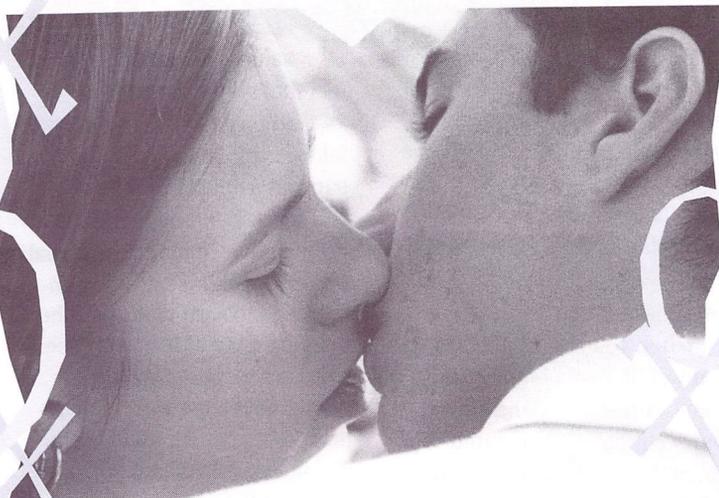
q. Girls with low self-esteem seem especially vulnerable to pleas to go further sexually. How can they keep their guard up—and how can others help them? a. Girls—and boys too—with low self-esteem often search for anything that will make them feel accepted or loved. They are more likely to be easily pressured into premarital sexual activity. They, like all young people, need to examine their values and beliefs before they get into a situation where they could be pressured. When they know that other peers do say no to sexual intercourse before marriage, they may feel more confident in expressing their feelings to a date. Confidence in the support and acceptance of family and other friends will also give them strength and courage in a vulnerable situation.

sounds great," but you are thinking, *I hate basketball!* Your date will think you like basketball and may suggest it again.

If you say, "I don't really care for basketball. How about going to see a movie instead?", your date learns that you are not afraid to be yourself and will respect you for your honesty.

Some high school students shared their thoughts on successful and unsuccessful dates. They offered these definitions of a successful date:

- having fun together
- really communicating with your date and being able to understand each other's feelings toward things



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- having a good time, being comfortable, relaxed and honest with one other
- fun, rewarding, a nice warm feeling, and going home happy
- you go to something free and don't have to spend much money and she doesn't mind
- being yourself and not having to try to impress her
- you don't have to fight off his fancy hands all evening
- you ask her out again and she says yes.

They also defined an unsuccessful date:

- you disagree the whole time
- you get bored and each minute seems like an hour
- all one partner wants to do is

q. Condoms should not be mentioned in a Catholic publication. You should say what the Church teaches about condoms! **a.** *The media and many public school systems have worked diligently to get the "use condoms" message out to teens. To pretend teens aren't hearing this message is ignoring reality. Condoms are mentioned here to challenge this message and educate teens about the moral and emotional dangers of condom use. The Catholic Church teaches that all efforts to prevent the creation of life during sexual intercourse—condoms and other forms of birth control—deny the gift God has given us in sexual intimacy. Sexual intercourse is a gift by which a married couple give themselves to each other completely and open themselves up to the gift of a child.*

make out

- you can't afford to spend much money and your date seems mad
- you go out with someone who only likes to talk about herself and doesn't care about you or

future goals before you even start dating.

If you wait until you are on a date to think about your values and the choices you should make, you most likely will not be able to think clearly. Many people have made decisions they regretted because they were caught up in the heat of the moment.

If you feel secure in your values and decisions before you date, it will be easier to communicate these to your date. If you are already dating, step back and consider your choices.

The Bible says, "This is the will of God, your holiness: that you refrain from immorality, that each of you know how to acquire a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is the only relationship in which sex can achieve the full meaning it is given by God: the committed, faithful, exclusive and total gift of one's self to another—open to love and new life.

If you haven't already spent a lot of time talking to your parents about their values concerning dating and relationships, start immediately. It may not be easy to bring up the subject. Just remember that they were in your place once.

To begin, you could ask a straightforward question or discuss a teenage relationship of a friend or of a couple in a movie. You may agree with your par-

ents or you may not. Either way, you will know what they believe, and they will know that you value their opinion.

If you are dating, you have already made some decisions about sexual contact. Deciding "I do not want her to touch me," or "If he wants to hold my hand I'll let him," may be easy decisions to make. Deciding how far to go, including decisions about sexual intercourse, requires careful thought.

With Church and family values as your foundation, imagine sexual contact as a line of progression. This line begins with hand-holding, progressing to hugging, kissing, prolonged kissing, the high-risk area of heavy petting or fondling—and ending with sexual intercourse.

Consider the facts. You may think deciding to have sexual intercourse with your boyfriend or girlfriend will place you squarely in the experienced majority. (Just remember that a lot of that undocumented majority are bluffing!)

The decision to have premarital sex exposes you to many dangers. The physical risks of STD's, AIDS and unwanted pregnancy are well publicized. Condoms help reduce the risks but do not eliminate them. Furthermore, condoms can do nothing to prevent the emotional and psychological risks one takes when deciding to have premarital sexual intercourse.

Wanting sex is not the same as love. The only truly safe way

what you might have to say

- your date only talks to other friends all night
- you wouldn't give your date what he wanted so he got really angry.

Big Decisions

Along with dating comes the responsibility of sexual decision-making.

Sexual decision-making starts when you decide whether or not to hold someone's hand or give a goodnight kiss, so you need to consider your own beliefs, values and

to have sex is in a loving, faithful, married relationship.

Choosing chastity—sexual self-control/saving sex for marriage—removes the stress from the risks of premarital sex, avoids the risks of a relationship based only on sex and promotes growth and maturity. A relationship without sexual intercourse does not mean without sexual contact. Holding each other and kissing are wonderful ways to express intimacy and your love for each other.

But if chastity is your choice, stay out of the gray area. Heavy petting or fondling leads to sexual arousal and intercourse. Don't tempt yourself or your partner.

A relationship without sex

q. Could you say more about the emotional dangers of premarital sex? **a.** All forms of sexual contact form a bond between two people. If you hug or hold hands with someone, you have made a physical connection. Your relationship is more personal than before. A kiss is yet more personal, and so on down the sexual contact line. Sexual intercourse is the most intimate bond between two people. Movies and television programs overflow with premarital sexual relationships. Often these relationships are treated as careless mistakes. Lack of trust, unequal feelings of love and commitment between partners and the pain of breaking up a sexually intimate relationship are what real people remember about premarital sexual relationships. These painful and confusing feelings and memories may interfere with future relationships.

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also leaves time to focus on each other, your hopes and dreams. It allows you to know each other better and focus on your love and friendship.

Some teens say that it is easier to have sex with someone than it is to talk to that person. How sad that they will never

know love, friendship and intimacy! The intimacy of really knowing your boyfriend or girlfriend is a key to healthy adult sexuality.

Chastity is "saved sex." The gift of sexual intercourse is very special—special enough to wait for. Choosing to postpone sex until marriage may not be a decision teens or TV often talk about, but it is definitely the safe and moral choice, one deserving the highest consideration.

When you choose chastity, you will likely find many other teens who support and agree with your values. Surround yourself with these people! It will be much easier to stand by your choices if you are surrounded by people who respect your values and choices.

Once you decide on your values about how far you feel it's right to go on the sexual contact line, talk about your choices and values with your dates. Find out what they believe. Share what you believe. Communicate your decision clearly. A boyfriend or girlfriend who loves you will respect your values and not encourage you to act against what you believe.

Temptation is powerful. If you feel uncomfortable with choices you have made in the past, remember that it is never too late to change your mind and rethink your values. Too often teens feel that a mistake is final.

God forgives you for mistakes. Forgive yourself. Seek support from family, Church and friends and begin again! Finding love, dating and sexual decision-making are all essential steps toward maturity. The responsibility of it all may seem overwhelming at times.

Acknowledge your feelings and seek to understand them. Think carefully about your feelings and the actions based on them. Seek support and act responsibly. The decisions you make now will affect the rest of your life. **YU**

Michelle Paripovich Thompson lives in Big Lake, Minnesota, with her husband and three children. When she is not spending time with her family she teaches elementary school and Catholic religious education classes.

NEXT
Using Your Bible
by Brian Singer-Towns

10 Ways to Build Good Relationships

1. Communicate with precision. Say, "I like it when you smile," or "I don't like it when I have to wait for you to meet me after school," rather than "I like you."
2. Be honest. Speak the truth within and about the relationship.
3. Treat the relationship as a friendship first. Avoid letting romance blur your vision. Ask yourself how you would respond to a friend in the same situation.
4. Be yourself. You want a friend to accept you as you are.
5. Be an individual. Do things for yourself sometimes. The "I can't live without you" attitude can be scary for the other person and harmful to you.
6. Spend time alone. If you have to see each other every day, you are not in love. You are addicted.
7. Don't be afraid to disagree. Arguing, although sometimes frightening, can clarify issues and develop closeness through understanding.
8. Remember that sex does not equal love. Sexual intercourse is God's gift to a loving, married relationship.
9. Don't be afraid to hold and touch each other. Touching is a sign of caring. Know each other's needs and limitations. It is not fair to tease each other sexually.
10. Get to know each other in many different situations. Play sports and games together. Teach each other new things. Work together to help someone else. Enjoy one another's company.

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