

IF YOU ARE A GIRL...

Most girls reach puberty earlier than boys. Breasts begin to develop and enlarge with tissue that will produce milk if the girl becomes a mother. The girl's body begins to grow taller and her hip region widens to enable her to carry and give birth to a baby.

Body hair appears on the arms and legs, under the arms, and around the girl's external sex organs. These organs include two sets of folds called the labia that cover the urethra, vagina, and

The egg enters the uterus, which has a special lining that is ready to nourish the egg if it becomes fertilized by a sperm. If the egg is not fertilized, the uterus sheds the special lining through the vagina over a "period" of three to six days. This process, called menstruation, continues about once a month until age 45 to 50.

Menstruation is a normal part of growing into a woman. When a girl begins to menstruate, it means that she is physically able to become a mother.



SEXUALITY

clitoris. Urine passes through the urethra.

The vagina is an internal, tubelike structure made of elastic muscle tissue. The vagina can stretch to receive a penis during sexual intercourse or to allow a baby to pass from the uterus. The clitoris is a small, pea-sized organ, hidden by a hoodlike fold of the labia. When stimulated, it can be the source of intense sexual pleasure called orgasm.

Internally, every girl has a uterus, in which a baby can grow and develop. She also has two ovaries, which contain and release egg cells. At puberty, the girl's body begins to ovulate about once a month. This means that the ovaries release an egg, which can become a new human life.

It is important to understand the facts about physical sexual development. However, it is even more important to understand that your sexuality is more than sex and more than your sexual organs.

Your sexual behavior expresses who you are and reveals how you live as a human being. You always have been and always will be a sexual person. You relate to others in the world and to God as a sexual being: as a woman or as a man who is loving and lovable.

Sometimes our society or culture has a certain picture of who and what a man or a woman should be. Often this picture is at odds with the Christian ideal.

But your sexuality is in your control. You have to commit yourself to becoming the sexual person God intended you to be. Living as a sexual person means facing some tough questions that have no easy answers.

Young people wonder what kind of woman or man they will be. They wonder if they will find the right person to love and marry and be true to for life. It is good for you to be doing this kind of wondering. As you grow and learn more and more about yourself, you will have time to discover the best answers.

- * How can young people best learn more and more about themselves? Who can help them? Why?