

“Imitate the Purity of Christ”

Before beginning the school year at Thomas Aquinas College we ask you to think carefully about your role in fostering a healthy campus atmosphere, an atmosphere of charity that can help you and your fellow students productively seek wisdom. In particular we ask you to reflect on the need to live chastely and to show respect for the dignity of others around you. Our community is not untouched by original sin. We need to be vigilant to check behaviors that undermine our good intentions. We need to avoid sins and occasions of sin. To that end we will say a few words about sexuality, chastity, and offences against chastity. We will draw principally on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, but will also touch on our institutional commitments and legal issues bearing on this serious matter.

Sins against chastity are serious because sexuality is such a great good. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.” (2332)

The *Catechism* also says, “sexuality...is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.” (2361; see also *Familiaris Consortio* 11)

As a Catholic institution Thomas Aquinas College affirms the beauty and goodness of human sexuality and requires all students to abide by the Catholic Church’s moral teachings, among these, that men and women have been created and willed by God as male and female, that there can be no distinction between biological sex and gender, and that all life is sacred. All of us are called to live chastely according to our state in life. If we don’t we harm ourselves and others and damage our ability to love and relate to others.

What is Chastity?

Here it is worth reflecting on an extended passage from the *Catechism*.

“Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.

The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech. (cf. *Matthew* 5:37)

Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. (cf. *Sirach* 1:22) ‘Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end.’ (*Gaudium et Spes* 17)

Whoever wants to remain faithful to his baptismal promises and resist temptations will want to adopt the means for doing so: self-knowledge, practice of an *ascesis* adapted to the situations that confront him, obedience to God's commandments, exercise of the moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer. ‘Indeed it is through chastity that we are gathered together and led back to the unity from which we were fragmented into multiplicity.’ (St. Augustine’s *Confessions*)

The virtue of chastity comes under the cardinal virtue of temperance, which seeks to permeate the passions and appetites of the senses with reason.

Self-mastery is a long and exacting work. One can never consider it acquired once and for all. It presupposes renewed effort at all stages of life. (cf. *Titus* 2:1-6) The effort required can be more intense in certain periods, such as when the personality is being formed during childhood and adolescence.

Chastity has laws of growth which progress through stages marked by imperfection and too often by sin. ‘Man . . . day by day builds himself up through his many free decisions; and so he knows, loves, and accomplishes moral good by stages of growth.’ (*Familiaris Consortio* 34)

Chastity represents an eminently personal task; it also involves a cultural effort, for there is “an interdependence between personal betterment and the improvement of society.’ (*Gaudium et Spes* 25) Chastity presupposes respect for the rights of the

person, in particular the right to receive information and an education that respect the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life.

Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. (cf. *Galatians* 5:22) The Holy Spirit enables one whom the water of Baptism has regenerated to imitate the purity of Christ. (cf. *1 John* 3:3)

Charity is the form of all the virtues. Under its influence, chastity appears as a school of the gift of the person. Self-mastery is ordered to the gift of self. Chastity leads him who practices it to become a witness to his neighbor of God's fidelity and loving kindness.

The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, (cf. *John* 15:15) who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate. Chastity is a promise of immortality. Chastity is expressed notably in friendship with one's neighbor. Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion.

All the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has 'put on Christ,' (*Galatians* 3:27) the model for all chastity. All Christ's faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life. At the moment of his Baptism, the Christian is pledged to lead his affective life in chastity." (CCC 2337-2348)

This passage offers much to ponder. The Church does not pretend that lust is easily conquered. But there is a great good to be achieved and God's grace is sufficient. And we are blessing not only ourselves but everyone touched by our lives when we fight on despite difficulties and setbacks. And laboring in this field allows us to show forth God's tender and faithful compassion.

Offenses Against Chastity

When this good gift is abused serious harm is done to individuals and the community. The *Catechism* also tells us about "offenses against chastity."

"Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes...Pornography...offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit

for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense.” (CCC 2351-2354)

The *Catechism* also mentions the sin of rape, “the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act.” (CCC 2356)

Thomas Aquinas College aims to be a community of friends in pursuit of Catholic wisdom. Any disordered sexual activity undercuts one’s ability to be part of a community. It is worth your while to spend some time reflecting on the call to chastity and thinking about how to work for the good fruits of chastity and how to avoid harming oneself and others by unchastity. Living chastely as a young person helps to lay a solid foundation for a whole life lived joyfully. Living unchastely will make it much more difficult to be happy. Consider God’s plan for married love: “Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion.” (CCC 2360)

As young men and women seeking the good of Catholic liberal education you can easily see the need to live chastely and charitably. As the *Student Handbook* says, “It would be inconsistent to seek high and serious things in class and live outside of class by unruly appetites.” The *Handbook* also says that “sexual misconduct will normally entail expulsion.”

Sexual Offenses

Next we will focus a little on the offenses most directly against others. It is important to recognize the serious evil of any kind of sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. Assault here includes any kind of non-consensual sexual contact. For definitions of these offenses, please see the appendix to this document. These offenses are not only morally reprehensible, they are also legally prohibited and can carry significant penalties or consequences. These offenses cannot be tolerated by the College and will normally entail expulsion.

Furthermore, if you engage in sexual activity you may open yourself up to the very real possibility of criminal charges especially since the legal definition of consent might be stricter than you would expect. If alcohol is involved, for example, an act of fornication may be construed as rape since alcohol can diminish a person's ability to give consent. According to the legal definition of consent for sexual activity in California, which can be found in the Penal Code 261.6, "'consent' shall be defined to mean positive cooperation in act or attitude pursuant to an exercise of free will. The person must act freely and voluntarily and have knowledge of the nature of the act or transaction involved. A current or previous dating or marital relationship shall not be sufficient to constitute consent."

Sexual sin may seem very attractive when the moment of temptation presents itself, but it is helpful to be aware of the very real possibility of serious legal repercussions.

But beyond the legal considerations there is the question of offending God, of damaging your ability to relate to Him and to His beloved sons and daughters.

How to Protect Yourself and Others

We urge you to reflect on the wisdom of the Church's teaching on sexuality and chastity contained in the passages from the *Catechism* above. You might also find *Familiaris Consortio* very helpful as well as many other writings of St. John Paul II, Pope Paul VI, Pope Pius XI, etc. The Church is not a newcomer to this issue and it is very helpful to meditate on the wisdom of her proclamations of the whole truth about man.

It is also prudent to strengthen your resolve by recourse to the sacraments and regular prayer. While on campus you may find it helpful to seek guidance from one of our chaplains. They are available for spiritual counseling and can really be a rock in stormy times.

The [Angelic Warfare Confraternity](http://angelicwarfareconfraternity.org) (angelicwarfareconfraternity.org) is a resource open to all. The requirements of membership are not burdensome and by joining you receive the spiritual

benefits of having the entire membership praying for you. You can talk to the College's chaplains to learn more.

It is also wise to use good old fashioned common sense. Avoid inflaming your passions. Be cautious about what images you allow to inhabit your senses and imagination. Avoid situations that present undue temptation – think about what Joseph did in the book of *Genesis* when Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. He simply ran away. If you hate sin with a perfect hatred, of course you would flee situations that prey on your weakness.

Alcohol plays a large role in sexual impropriety among young people. Why not begin by respecting legal restrictions on alcohol consumption? If you are able to drink, be aware that you must always exercise caution. If you have had something to drink, you should recognize that your inhibitions are lowered.

With regard to the treatment of others it can be helpful to ask yourself whether you would want to see your sister or brother, or mother or father, treated in a particular way. For example, if a young lady appears to have had too much to drink and is in danger of being led away into a remote area, that would be a great time to step in and suggest that it would be a better idea to stay with the group. If your sister were in that situation you would want someone to step in. Keep in mind that such an intervention might be more effective if it you can avoid being aggressive. If it would defuse the situation it might help to get others to assist you.

Another example would be inappropriate conversation about another student. Why not let them know that you won't listen to that kind of talk. What if a student offered to show you indecent pictures of another student that they had taken on their cell phone? If that were your sister or brother would you tolerate their images being flaunted?

What if you observe menacing or controlling behavior in a dating couple? If someone is willing to exhibit such behavior publicly it seems likely that their behavior is worse when the couple is alone. It is hard to know when to intervene. But if you are disturbed by something you have witnessed you should probably bring it to the attention of someone who can do something about it, like the Assistant Dean, or at least seek guidance from someone who can help you decide whether or not to come forth.

If you would like further guidance with regard to particular situations or persons it would be wise to talk with someone that can help sort things out such as one of the chaplains. Why not seek out the advice of your parents? If you would like to talk with a prefect, a Resident Director (New England students), the Resident Assistant (California students), or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, we would be happy to listen and do whatever we can to help.

You should also be aware that the school employs licensed therapists, who can help you sort out appropriate ways to respond.

What to Do If You Have Been Victimized

If you have been a victim of any kind of sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking we hope and pray that you will have the strength to come forward so that you can receive help and so that justice might be served. You can report the offense to a prefect, a Resident Director (New England students), the Resident Assistant (California students), the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, or the Title IX Coordinator. They can assist you in seeking medical attention and also in making a report to the appropriate local law enforcement agency, though you should be aware that you can decline to have the information brought to local law enforcement. It is important, to the degree possible, to preserve evidence of such crimes. If it proves necessary or beneficial to switch dorm rooms the Assistant Dean can help work this out. The Assistant Dean, in consultation with the Dean, can also help with necessary academic or work-study accommodations. On-campus counseling is available from the College's licensed therapists. Alternately, catholictherapists.com may be a helpful resource.

Sexual offenses cannot be tolerated at Thomas Aquinas College and will normally entail expulsion. Investigation of such allegations will be fair and impartial and will be completed and resolved as quickly as possible in accordance with the College's procedures set forth in the Student Handbook. Those involved in investigating and adjudicating accusations of sexual offenses are given the annual training for investigating and adjudicating cases of sexual misconduct.

In Closing

Thank you for taking the time to read and reflect on this training document. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your campus dean (California: dean@thomasaquinas.edu, New England: dean-ne@thomasaquinas.edu), and he will be happy to be in touch with you.

Appendix

“Sexual Offense” is a broad term encompassing a range of behaviors.

1. Sexual Harassment means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when either:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment, education, on-campus living environment, or participation in a college activity or program; or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used or threatened to be used as the basis for decisions affecting employment, education, on-campus living environment, or participation in a University activity or program; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work or educational performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment for employment, education, on-campus living, or participation in a college activity or program. Sexual harassment can occur between and among supervisors or managers and subordinates, faculty and staff or students, peers, vendors/subcontractors/visitors and employees or students, or any combination thereof. Often, but not always, the harasser is in a position of authority, trust, or influence that provides the opportunity to take advantage of the unequal positions of the parties.

2. Dating Violence means violence committed by another person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim, and where the existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors: a) the length of the relationship, b) the type of relationship, or c) the frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship.

3. Domestic Violence can be defined as a pattern of abusive behavior that is used by an intimate partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.

4. Stalking can be defined as a pattern of repeated and unwanted attention, harassment, contact, or any other course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

5. Sexual assault can be defined as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs by force or without consent of the recipient of the unwanted sexual activity.