

“Peace to Those Around Me”

As an incoming freshman, you read [Imitate the Purity of Christ](#), which attempted to present the beauty of God’s plan for human sexuality and the importance of respecting this gift in ourselves and in others. It touched on some evils opposed to the dignity of the human person, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, violence in dating, domestic violence, and stalking. Definitions of those offenses can also be found in the appendix to this document. Further resources and procedures for reporting such offenses can be found in the College’s Handbook.

You are about to begin another year of study in a small community of friends. It is important that you reflect on your role in preserving a culture of charity, peace, and joy.

At the beginning of his beautiful pastoral letter, [The Language of Love](#), Bishop James Conley of Lincoln, Nebraska, says:

Twenty years ago, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta stood before the President of the United States, before senators and congressmen, before justices of the United States Supreme Court. She spoke about her work among the world’s poor. She spoke about justice and compassion. Most importantly, she spoke about love.

“Love,” she told them, “has to hurt. I must be willing to give whatever it takes not to harm other people and, in fact, to do good to them. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me, and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me.”

Sacrifice is the language of love. Love is spoken in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who poured out His life for us on the Cross. Love is spoken in the sacrifice of the Christian life, sharing in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. And love is spoken in the sacrifice of parents, and pastors, and friends.

We live in a world short on love. Today, love is too often understood as romantic sentimentality rather than unbreakable commitment. But sentimentality is unsatisfying. Material things, and comfort, and pleasure bring only fleeting happiness. The truth is that we are all searching for real love, because we are all searching for meaning.

Love — real love — is about sacrifice, and redemption, and hope. Real love is at the heart of a rich, full life. We are made for real love. And all that we do — in our lives, our careers, and our families, especially — should be rooted in our capacity for real, difficult, unfailing love.

But today, in a world short on love, we’re left without peace, and without joy.

Reflecting on this passage we see the importance of recognizing that we live in a fallen world. We are wayfarers working out our salvation with fear and trembling. We have hope of perfect happiness where love need not hurt. But now it must, because we are imperfect.

But what bearing does this have on the questions that we want to reflect on today?

Motivated by justice, compassion, and most of all real love, we too must “be willing to give whatever it takes not to harm other people ... and to do good to them.” It is striking that St. Mother Teresa says that this love “has to hurt.” It makes sense, obviously, to say that we must sacrifice to do good to others, but why would it hurt us not to harm others? She can’t mean that we are really harmed when we resist the temptation to use others as though they are ordered to our pleasure. I cannot be harmed by resisting the urge to steal from my brother.

But how about that very resistance itself? If, in order not to harm others, we must say “No” to ourselves, then there must be some sense of sacrifice or self-denial. When we are blessed in Heaven, we will never have to say “No” to ourselves. But in our struggle against concupiscence and our own developed habits of sin, we must often discipline the flesh. When we resist the temptation to abuse others in thought, word, or deed, we say “No” and “Yes” to ourselves. We deny the flesh and affirm the spirit. We make possible a freer and more joyful life.

We all intend to resist inflicting the abuses mentioned. Assault, harassment, violence, stalking; these are ugly names, and it is easy to think that they could never apply to our actions — “God, I thank you that I am not like other men.” But, in order to avoid harming or objectifying others, we must persevere in chastity, and this is not a simple thing. Chastity must be fostered and maintained. It requires “an apprenticeship in self-mastery.” And “self-mastery is a long and exacting work” requiring “diligence and skill” (*Gaudium et Spes* 17, CCC 2342).

So it is our job to work in a diligent and skillful way to master ourselves so that we can “give whatever it takes not to harm other people and, in fact, to do good to them.” If we can’t “give until it hurts,” there will be “no true love in me and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me.”

In our small community of friends, it is important for you to take this responsibility of self-mastery. Cultivate in yourself the habit of charity and law-abidingness. Frequent the sacraments; pray for strength and guidance. Look on those around you as brothers and sisters in Christ. Treat them the way you would like to be treated. Treat them the way you would like your own sisters and brothers to be treated.

In addition it might be very helpful to seek regular spiritual direction. We have good chaplains anxious to help. For many it might be a great help and blessing to join the [Angelic Warfare Confraternity](#). You can talk to the College’s chaplains to learn more.

Resist pornography in its overt and less overt forms. Many mainstream television shows are not considered pornography because there are only scattered pornographic scenes in them. But scattered pornography is still pornography. Remember St. Augustine’s friend who only uncovered his eyes briefly at the circus and was almost instantly addicted to the carnal savagery on display.

Smartphones and other smart devices can provide easy access to pornography. For this reason (and for others, including the harmful effect that overuse of phones can have on community and the pursuit of virtue, including wisdom and the other intellectual virtues), the College is willing to help students cover the cost of downgrading from a smartphone to a phone that does not have access to the internet, email, or social media apps. You can contact the Assistant Dean for information on how to get a voucher towards a College-recommended phone.

We recommend that students who choose not to downgrade their smartphone consider installing “accountability software” on their smartphones to help discourage them from accessing unacceptable websites, if they have any reason to think this could pose a temptation. Accountability software works by sending internet browsing reports to an accountability partner (e.g., a friend or fellow student). [Covenant Eyes](#) and [Accountable2You](#) are two popular accountability software apps of this kind. Covenant Eyes not only has an accountability feature; it also includes optional internet filtering at no additional cost.

Use common sense; resist sin but also the occasions of sin.

Alcohol can significantly lower your inhibitions and has been involved in roughly half of all reported sexual assaults. It is essential to respect the rule of moderation. If you are not of legal drinking age, why not respect the discipline of obedience?

Protect one another. It can require courage to intervene when someone needs help, but it can be difficult to live with yourself later if you fail to do so. If a friend is impaired by alcohol, it is all the more important that you stay sober and alert. Real love inevitably involves sacrifice. As Bishop Conley says, “Sacrifice is the language of love.”

And while you are looking out for the welfare of those around you, be mindful of Our Lord’s command to “judge not lest ye be judged.” The devastation of the family, pornography, relativism, child abuse, etc. have left many wounds, especially in young people. A wounded person needs kindness and good example. The truth is crucial but it must be offered in a way that savors more of hope than of condemnation. And because these areas are sensitive and private, it is very difficult to know when you are dealing with someone who is wounded; tread cautiously and pray for all those who bear the scars of sexual sin.

Of course, often it is not easy to always know the correct way to act. Particular situations can present perplexing difficulties. You can always look for answers to these difficulties in the wisdom of the Church; don’t hesitate to consult wise pastoral chaplains; and look frequently to your parents for example and advice.

And in laboring for the sake of peace and love, we must not forget joy. Pope Francis tells us that peace, love, and joy are especially the focus of Christ’s ministry on earth and are bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit. He says that joy is “like the sign of a Christian ... a healthy Christian is a joyful Christian” (Homily at Casa Santa Marta on May 24, 2014).

May the Holy Spirit bless you with peace, love, and joy, and may God bless your efforts and grant you a fruitful year of study and learning.

See next page for an appendix containing definitions of sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault.

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.