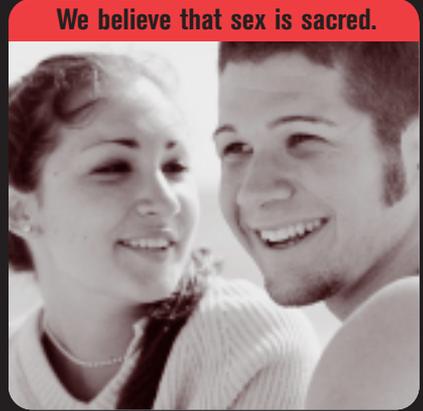
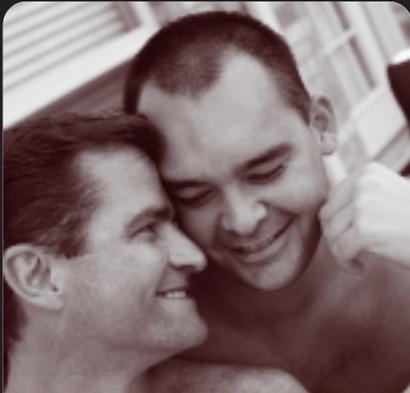


We believe in God.



We believe that sex is sacred.



We believe in caring for each other.



We believe in using condoms.

SEX IN THE HIV/AIDS ERA

A Guide for Catholics

Good Catholics Use Condoms

www.condoms4life.org | CATHOLICS FOR A FREE CHOICE

The Catholic church and HIV/AIDS

**For me, the
condom ...
question is not
simply a matter
of chastity but
of justice.**

— BISHOP
KEVIN DOWLING
OF RUSTENBURG,
SOUTH AFRICA,
U.S.CATHOLIC,
NOVEMBER 2003

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH is among the many religious institutions that, although slowly, have come to respond to the immense suffering that has accompanied the spread of HIV/AIDS. When discussing the epidemic, the church speaks out about the dignity and value of every person, the rights and responsibilities of society and the love and compassion of God. Through its health care facilities throughout the world, the church provides treatment and care for millions who are infected with the disease. Yet when it comes to prevention, the church has taken mixed positions. Most notably the institutional church has condemned the use of condoms, although some Catholic bishops and noted theologians have made a case for their use.

The primary purpose of this brochure is to assist at-risk Catholics who are struggling with questions around faith and conscience, sexuality and the use of condoms for HIV/AIDS prevention. The brochure provides information about HIV/AIDS and prevention, explores attitudes and realities regarding sex and sexuality in the HIV/AIDS era, looks at what the institutional Catholic church, bishops and theologians have said about condom use for HIV/AIDS prevention, and considers some of the comprehensive strategies needed to curtail the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The brochure is also designed to support educators, catechists and health care workers who are helping Catholics make decisions about how to live healthy, free and responsible lives in the midst of the AIDS pandemic. Since there are ways of transmitting HIV/AIDS other than through sexual intercourse, this

brochure should be used as a supplement to already existing scientific and technical information about HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention, treatment and care. We hope it will fill a gap in prevention materials to serve the needs of everyone—not just Catholics—confronting moral, religious and spiritual concerns about AIDS and condom use.

Facts about HIV/AIDS

What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, and is the cause of AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). There are two types of HIV: HIV-1 is the most common strand and is found in all parts of the world, and HIV-2, which is found mostly in West Africa. Both viruses can be prevented in the same ways.

How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is normally transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse when one partner is already infected, through transfusion of infected blood, by the use and re-use of dirty needles and medical instruments, and from mother to child during pregnancy, labor or breastfeeding.

How is HIV prevented?

There are various ways individuals can prevent the transmission of HIV. For those who are sexually active, using a latex condom can help prevent infection, as can remaining faithful to your sexual partner, limiting the number of sexual partners, asking sexual partners to be tested for HIV, and engaging in sexual acts that have no risk of transmitting HIV (sex acts when only the outsides of people's bodies touch and there is no exchange of body fluids). Other means of

We wish our people to obtain accurate information from medical sources about the contraction and spread of this disease and the normal hygienic precautions recommended in assisting people with AIDS. We say accurate, as we do not want people to panic but to assess the situation realistically.

— CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, AIDS: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE, JUNE 1990



prevention include sterilizing needles and medical instruments, not sharing needles among intravenous drug users, delaying your first sexual encounter and abstaining from sex.

If I am sexually active, is it true that condoms will prevent me from getting HIV/AIDS?

When stored properly and used correctly and consistently, latex condoms are recognized internationally as the only protection for people having sexual intercourse—vaginal sex, anal sex or oral sex—against getting or transmitting AIDS.

- A UNAIDS report drafted in 2003 concludes that condoms have an estimated 90 percent rate of protection. The ten percent failure rate does not mean that 1 in 10 condoms is defective; human error—such as condoms slipping off, breaking, or not being used early enough or at all—also contributes to the failure rate. (*Boston Globe*, “UN Report Adds to a Condom Debate,” June 22, 2003)
- Laboratory studies have established the impermeability of male latex condoms to infectious agents contained in genital secretions, including the smallest viruses. (World Health Organization [WHO], *The male condom*, 2003)
- According to the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, although condoms do sometimes fail, most condom failure is due to human factors, such as the failure to use condoms consistently or incorrect use of condoms. (CAPS, *Do Condoms Work?*, 1996)

Who has HIV/AIDS and how many have died?

- Total number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS throughout the world: **40 million**

- Number of young people (15–24 years old) living with HIV/AIDS: **11.8 million**
- Number of children under 15 years living with HIV/AIDS: **3 million**
- People newly infected with HIV/AIDS in 2001: **5 million**
- AIDS deaths in 2001: **3 million**
- Total number of children orphaned by AIDS, and living, end 2001: **14 million** (UNAIDS, 2002)

Clearly, the epidemic has reached crisis proportions.

Do Catholics have AIDS?

As Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg, South Africa, has said, “We the church community have AIDS.” Although it is difficult to find reliable statistics on how many Catholics actually have been infected by HIV/AIDS, we know from the funerals that take place in Catholic parishes around the world that Catholic people are dying and suffering from AIDS.

Sex in the time of AIDS

IT MAY SEEM ironic or inappropriate to talk about the goodness of sex and sexual pleasure in a brochure about AIDS prevention. However, since the outbreak of AIDS, language and discourse around sex and sexuality have become increasingly tainted with fear, anxiety and trepidation. This is understandable given that a primary means of the disease’s transmission is through sexual intercourse. However, much of the language around AIDS has resulted in reinforcing negative attitudes towards sex and the body leading to

Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his [and her] 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.

— NUMBER 2332,
CATECHISM
OF THE CATHOLIC
CHURCH, 1994

stigmatization and discrimination towards those who are infected with HIV/AIDS.

We are at a time in the AIDS crisis when we need to remember that sexuality is a gift from God and that the Catholic church teaches that the body is inherently good and holy. Catholic faith and tradition also inform our understanding that God is present in the human experience. Therefore a responsible and mature sex life must be one that embodies justice, respect and human dignity—one that is free from fear and anxiety, free from violence and coercion.

We live in a time when nearly half the world's population is under the age of 25 and half of all new HIV infections occur in people aged 15 to 24 (UNFPA, *State of the World Population 2003*). Young people need the information, skills and services necessary to protect themselves from HIV infection. Young people also need honest and age-appropriate information about sex, intimacy and sexuality that is respectful of their needs, sexual experiences, and desires for mature and just relationships. Rights-based comprehensive education programs for adolescents that incorporate HIV/AIDS and reproductive and sexual health are critical to the health and livelihood of young people throughout the world.

Responsible and mature sexuality in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships is essential during this crisis when people are in great need of forming bonds of communion with loved ones, expressing love and comfort while receiving compassion, affection and healing. Many studies have demonstrated the health benefits of sexual expression—such as stress reduction, longevity, decreased risk of cancer and heart dis-

ease, bolstered immune system, improved sleep patterns, decrease in risk of depression and suicide—benefits that are particularly beneficial to those living with HIV/AIDS. (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., *The Health Benefits of Sexual Expression*, 2003)

Given the reality of violence and fear of violence that women experience worldwide, discussions around healthy, mature and responsible sexuality are ever more urgent. Such violence increases women's risk of HIV infection both directly through forced sex and indirectly by limiting women's ability to discuss and consent to the circumstances in which sex takes place as well as the use of condoms. (WHO, *Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS: Setting the Research Agenda*, 2002) For women who experience sexual violence, options for preventing HIV/AIDS are limited at best, and absent at worst.

Research has also indicated that sexual abuse during childhood can lead to sexual risk taking as adolescents and adults. Individuals who have been sexually abused as children tend to initiate sexual behavior earlier in life and with more risk-taking behavior, thus making them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. (WHO, *Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS: Setting the Research Agenda*, 2002)

Violence against women, child abuse and discrimination and stigmatization must be addressed in the context of promoting mature and responsible sexuality to ensure satisfying sex lives for all women and men.



Reading the signs of the times: condoms in a changing world

If, day in, day out, month in, month out, you watch so many people dying in your arms of AIDS, then you cannot find it in your heart not to give out condoms.

— BISHOP MARTINUS MUSKENS OF BREDA, THE NETHERLANDS, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH DUTCH TELEVISION, (ASSOCIATED PRESS, "CONTROVERSIAL DUTCH BISHOP BACKS USE OF CONDOMS TO STEM AIDS WITH WORLD POP," FEBRUARY 8, 1999)

ECONOMIC, social and cultural conditions have expanded and challenged the church's view that only in a lifelong, monogamous heterosexual marriage is sexual expression morally permitted. Even those who accept this view may not be able to live their lives accordingly. But as the world has changed people have also changed and attitudes and practices around sex have become more mature, responsible and compassionate. Furthermore, not all sex within lifelong monogamous heterosexual marriage is holy and not all sex outside of such marriages is sinful. The ethical norms by which we judge the goodness of sex must expand beyond the mere technical fact of marriage.

- Unmarried people are sexually active and want and need information to act maturely and responsibly.
- Consensual sex for unmarried people can be good if it is mutually respectful and empowering.
- Same-sex commitments are rightly more accepted and the human and sexual rights of all people should be upheld regardless of sexual orientation.

Even if one strictly adheres to the current institutional church's position that sex is only moral within marriage, we must make sure that the church's prohibition does not become a death sentence for those who do not agree, for those who agree and fail or for those who are coerced into sex.

- Spouses must be able to protect themselves if their partner has been unfaithful.

- Regardless of sexual orientation, people can and do establish loving and committed relationships in which sexual expression is healthy and holy.
- Using a condom should be a sign of trust and associated with responsible and mature sex.

We also live in a world where many women are unable to consent to if, when and how sex takes place and where violations of women occur with horrifying regularity.

- Women in most of the world do not have the right to say no to sex in marriage, even with partners who are HIV positive.
- Husbands and wives can be separated for long periods of time by work demands leading to a greater possibility of sex with other partners.
- Rape continues to be an instrument of war and an expression of rage and powerlessness.
- Political persecution and natural disasters leave refugee women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence.
- Young girls are sold into sexual slavery and prostitution.

Women and girls need a church and society that protect them from diseases that can follow these outrages. The church, along with policy makers, should take measures to empower women while condemning oppression and violence against women. The church must respond justly to these realities and make available to all people comprehensive life education that includes accurate and nonjudgmental information about women's empowerment and education, condoms, abstinence, fidelity and positive sexuality.

What does the Catholic church say about condoms?

The use of a condom can be seen... as a means to prevent the 'transmission of death' to another.

— BISHOP KEVIN DOWLING
OF RUSTENBURG,
SOUTH AFRICA, 2001



CATHOLIC BISHOPS, theologians and lay Catholics need to interpret existing church teachings and apply them to the new problem of preventing this deadly disease. In reality, there is no one Catholic position on using condoms to prevent the transmission of AIDS. Some church leaders have interpreted church teachings on contraception as prohibiting the use of condoms, even in the case of AIDS. Other leaders have looked to other church teachings, such as the importance of preserving life, preventing evil and honoring the conscience of individuals as permitting the use of condoms. As Catholics we are free to choose which of these interpretations is most moral in our circumstances and to do what our consciences tell us is correct.

Institutionally, the Catholic church has taken the position that the only morally acceptable way to avoid HIV/AIDS is to abstain from sex outside of marriage, and to abstain from sex within marriage if a husband or wife is infected with HIV. Its position is based on the church's teaching that sex should only take place within marriage and should always be open to procreation. This view of sex and procreation does not promote responsible and mature sexuality as the church claims. It is important that Catholics know that we have choices and know what the church teaches about conscience, the common good, compassion and the principle of "lesser evil" so that we can make mature, responsible decisions about our sex lives:

- **Conscience:** People have the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make

moral decisions. One must not be forced to act contrary to his or her conscience. Nor must one be prevented from acting according to his or her conscience . . . (Number 1782, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994)

- **Common Good:** The common good presupposes respect for the person as such. In the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person The common good resides in the conditions for the exercise of natural freedoms . . . such as “the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience and to safeguard . . . privacy” (Number 1907, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994)

- **Compassion:** “Jesus had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless,” (Mt. 9:36). There are numerous examples in the Bible of how Jesus showed love and compassion for all without moral judgment or discrimination. We are called to have compassion for those who suffer as did Jesus.

- **The lesser evil:** If it has been determined that if a person is going to commit a sin, it is permissible that the person be counseled to choose the lesser of two evils, thus committing a lesser sin. (See below.)

If a husband violates his marital vows and sleeps with other women, he must make sure that he does not transmit the virus to his wife, else he would be violating the principle of justice. This is where the principle of ‘lesser evil’ comes in.

— JESUIT THEOLOGIAN,
FR. JAMES KEENAN,
ADDRESSING A MEDIA
FORUM IN THE
PHILIPPINES, 2001

Can Catholics use condoms?

SOME CHURCH LEADERS may tell you that using condoms is morally wrong. But if you or your partner has other sexual partners, or if one of you is infected already with HIV, then it can be a morally good decision to use a condom. Sometimes, Catholic teaching uses the “lesser of two evils” approach to making moral decisions. This approach looks at the complexi-

ties of our lives and the decisions we face, and recognizes that it is often necessary to choose between the lesser of two evils in difficult situations. While some modern theologians reserve the term “evil” for only the most extreme violations of human rights, such as genocide, murder, and torture, certainly the use of a condom must be a “lesser evil” than risking someone’s life to a deadly disease.

Regardless of your approach to moral decision making, the Catholic church teaches that God gave each of us a conscience and no one should be forced to act against his or her conscience. If you carefully and prayerfully examine your conscience and decide that to use condoms is the most moral way to act, you are not committing a sin. To save a life is not a sin.

ABCs of prevention: Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms

MANY GOVERNMENTS, civil society organizations and religious leaders have adopted a three-prong strategy to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS by promoting abstinence, faithfulness between partners and condom use for those who are sexually active and at risk (the “ABCs”). This integrated approach to prevention is critical to global and national efforts to fight the epidemic. Uganda is recognized as exemplary in using the ABC strategy to curb the spread of HIV. Uganda has maintained political support for strategies that stress interpersonal communication among family members and friends resulting in increased condom use, a significant decrease in the number of sexual partners and a reduction in the proportion of sexually active males among those aged 15–19.

Condoms are key to preventing the spread of HIV/ AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, together with sexual abstinence, postponement of sexual debut and mutual fidelity.

— UNAIDS, *REPORT ON THE GLOBAL HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC, 2002*

(Population Action International, *Condoms Count: Meeting the Need in the Era of HIV/AIDS*, 2002)

Although the success of the ABCs approach is a result of an integrated strategy, some conservative policy makers have promoted the ABCs inaccurately as a hierarchical approach to prevention, abstinence being the best choice, then fidelity and lastly condom use. This hierarchical framework has negatively impacted those infected with HIV for several reasons. First, it reinforces a false stereotype that AIDS is a disease of those who are promiscuous. Such a stereotype perpetuates the stigmatization of and discrimination against those infected with HIV. Second, it does not take into account the reality of women who cannot refuse sex, even with their husbands. And finally, it reinforces negative attitudes towards sex and sexuality since abstinence is placed above having sex.

Furthermore, there is a danger that too much emphasis on the ABCs can undermine the critical role of integrated strategies of prevention that incorporate empowerment of women and girls and other gender-sensitive initiatives, voluntary counseling, testing and referral; treatment, care and prevention; antipoverty initiatives, and comprehensive sexuality education. AIDS is a complex disease and needs complex responses.

Conclusion

THE LARGELY NEGATIVE response among Catholic bishops about sex and condom use exposes the need to maintain sexual honesty during the AIDS era. Governments, civil society organizations and religious leaders must make greater strides not only to provide comprehensive prevention programs as described

above, but also to speak positively and honestly about sex, violence against women and girls, and HIV/AIDS prevention so that every person can strive for a mature and responsible sex life free from fear, anxiety and violence.



Here are some specific steps that you can take:

- Talk about what it means to engage in mature and responsible sex that is mutually consensual, empowering and respectful of human dignity.
- Condemn violence against women and girls; all cases of violence against women and children should be reported to civil authorities and perpetrators should be punished.
- Recognize and affirm men's rights and responsibilities and their commitment to safe and mature sexual relationships.
- Promote dialogue between men and women to change gender roles and attitudes that perpetuate male dominance over women. Men and boys who are victims of sexual violence should be assisted and supported by their communities.
- Engage in behavior that respects individual human rights; demand that others respect your human rights.
- Be informed:
 - Know the facts about transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
 - Know what sexual acts have no risk of transmitting HIV, which ones have a low risk and which ones have a high risk of spreading HIV.
 - Know how to prevent sexual transmission of diseases, as well as unintended pregnancy.
 - Know the facts about condoms, where to access them and how to use them correctly.

- Know how to access treatment, care and support if you or a loved one is infected.
 - Know your choices.
- Think and talk positively about sex and condoms: Condoms can enable those with HIV/AIDS to continue living their sexual lives fully, with satisfaction.

The Condoms4Life Campaign

Condoms4Life is an unprecedented worldwide public education effort to raise public awareness about the devastating effect of the bishops' ban on condoms. The campaign was launched on World AIDS Day 2001 with the display of billboards and ads in subways and newspapers saying, "Banning Condoms Kills."

The advertising campaign in the US, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, Kenya, Chile and Zimbabwe, was the first phase of an effort to change the Vatican's policy and challenge its aggressive lobbying against avail-

ability and access to condoms in areas of the world most at risk. The ads point out that many of the 4,000 plus bishops lobby governments and the United Nations to restrict access to condoms claiming that condoms cause AIDS, not prevent it.

For World AIDS Day 2002, the campaign emphasized positive progress in the church, and Bishop Kevin Dowling received hundreds of postcards from Condoms4Life supporters thanking him for his courage in opposing the church's ban on condoms.

In 2003, in response

to the inaccurate and irresponsible claims by a Vatican official that condoms do not prevent HIV transmission, the campaign urged Catholics, especially young people, to use condoms as part of a mature, responsible sexuality.

The campaign is sponsored by Catholics for a Free Choice, its partners in Europe and Latin America and colleagues in Africa and Asia.

The Condoms4Life Web site contains facts on HIV/AIDS and on Catholic hierarchy's opposition to condoms around the world.

www.Condoms4Life.org

Catholics for a Free Choice

Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) is a nongovernmental organization with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. CFFC shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being, and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education and advocacy, CFFC works in the United States and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis and Catholic social thinking and teaching.

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