

Project entitled

***"Growing in Virtue:  
A Booklet Handout Resource for the Confessional"***

History of the project:

- Because of the significant number of sexual sins discussed these days in Confessions, a priest from the Archdiocese asked Dr. Ken to create a pocket-sized booklet resource for priests to distribute when appropriate.
- Dr. Ken developed the content, and then shared draft versions with several other Catholic mental health professionals, several Catholic recovering sex addicts, and with several priests. Adjustments to content were made based on their feedback.
- One recommendation was for the booklet to contain a QR code link to the Gratia Plena website where more resources on the topic could be accessed. This allowed the booklet to have fewer pages so as to save on printing costs and to reduce the use of paper. It also allows for content on the website to be easily updated as new resources on this topic become available.
- The Scanlan Foundation offered to fund the finished design and printing of the first batch of about 1000 booklets. We are very thankful for their generosity.
- Mr. Bubba Arnim of Remedy Graphics in Katy printed the first batch of booklets.
- These booklets were bundled in 30 packs of 30.
- 30 parishes were identified for distribution of the initial set of booklets.

If more booklets are desired in the future,  
they can be ordered directly from the printer:

**Bubba Arnim  
Remedy Graphics  
(281) 391-8555 Office  
(281) 391-8556 Fax**

*(Gratia Plena makes no money or royalties from the printing of these booklets)*

The price of the printing naturally drops for orders of larger quantities,  
and so, several nearby parishes could order together to get a price break.

Do not forget to provide the printer with your parish's non-profit tax-exempt form/number.

Dear Priests, God bless you for your compassionate ministry in the confessional!

St. John Vianney...pray for us!



growing in virtue

## **Growing in Virtue**

*Dr. Ken Buckle, Catholic Psychologist*

You have taken a great, positive step in receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament offers God's grace that forgives, that is, erases and destroys sin. The sin that has been confessed and forgiven does not exist anymore. This sacrament provides also healing, grace, and strength for your journey toward heaven, where you are meant to be one day with your Creator. Jesus does not want you or the community to be divided by the effects sin. He longs for you to be whole again and desires that nothing would separate you from his love and mercy, and that no sin would separate us from each other.

This booklet provides a good next step: working with the help of God and others to further develop virtue, which leads you to embody the person God created, living in peace and freedom in harmony. By escaping the bonds of sin, you will live life more fully, leave guilt and shame behind, and love others as Jesus taught us all to love.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us about virtue: CCC736 "By this power of the Spirit, God's children can bear much fruit. He who has grafted us onto the true vine will make us bear 'the fruit of the Spirit ...' We live by the Spirit: the more we renounce ourselves, the more we 'walk by the Spirit.'" CCC1832 "The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity."

*This booklet focuses on growth in the virtue of chastity.*

It has been given to you out of the passionate love of God and the compassion of his priests who care for you.

We hope that you will invoke the Holy Spirit's aid and silently read and reflect on the booklet's contents. It serves as a starting point, to help you move into taking new action on this important virtue. God makes all things new (Revelation 21:5). Do not despair! Take courage! He is calling you!

## **INTRODUCTION**

Your sexuality is one part of how you were created as a human by God; therefore, your body is a gift from the Father. Making corrections or changes in sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may not be easy. There is a complex mixture of physical, emotional, relational, and cultural factors involved in your sexual thoughts, attractions, and behaviors. Sometimes old wounds have contributed to your current sexual issues. They can be overcome with help. Simple will power may not work.

You do not have to struggle with trying to make these difficult changes on your own. You can seek the grace of God and the assistance of others for your healing, and in the process draw closer to Him. Jesus is indeed the great Physician! He is here for you and every one of us, the sick and hurting. You may battle with your pride that tells you that you can manage on your own, to keep your struggle hidden, that you have things under control, but that is often a lie to God, yourself, and sometimes others. God wants you to thrive free of harmful things you are attached to in unhealthy ways. Jesus wants you to be close to Him and His protection. Do not give up hope! Keep trying!

## **IF THERE IS DANGER OF DIVORCE**

Family law attorneys have been reporting that pornography and extramarital affairs are the cause of most divorces in today's culture. A spouse may have any number of reactions to discovering sexual infidelity: shock, anger, hurt, betrayal, sadness, frustration, disappointment, or despair. Sometimes this revelation reaches the level of spousal trauma, which manifests in myriad ways, including demanding a separation of bedrooms or from the home. More seriously, there may be a call for divorce. This is a grave concern due to the sanctity of Holy Matrimony. We should try our best to save our marriages and reach for help together.

It is important for us to understand the pain we have caused to our spouses and to respect his or her reactions. We should make humble and genuine apologies -- without excuses or blame. We need to feel and show remorse. We should not be angry or defensive with our spouses. We need to ask for forgiveness while understanding that our spouse may not be ready to forgive us. It may take time, but things can change. God's power to heal is limitless.

Many marriages can be saved! Sometimes, it is best that an undiscovered infidelity be disclosed or discussed a counselor first. Marriage counseling with a professional and licensed Catholic counselor may be a good approach if the hurt spouse is willing. We need to be patient and understanding if he or she is hesitant or reluctant.

### **IF YOU HAVE BEEN ARRESTED**

Pornography, masturbation, promiscuity, affairs, and other immoral sexual activities may begin in a mild form, perhaps infrequently and seeming at first to be “harmless” because nobody knows what we’re doing. We have observed that it is common for these behaviors to escalate over time because repeating the same behavior may not produce the same old desired effect. As our thoughts, attractions, and behaviors become more risky and serious, we may find them to border on or become illegal, such as the use of child pornography, prostitutes, or other dangerous, illegal, and illicit activities. We know that serious legal problems are a natural and expected consequence that may happen if we are unwilling to seek, enter, and persist in treatment or recovery. If you have been arrested, consult with your attorney about how you should approach treatment options. Do not give up hope. God can help us find a way through any crisis, even when we cannot see the road ahead. Jesus said we are never alone, and that He is with us always. Nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37).

### **OTHER UNPLEASANT CONSEQUENCES**

There are so many difficulties that can arise from our lack of chastity. Any and all of these can create a motivation in us to take urgent action. We should not procrastinate, minimize, or delay finding our way to increased purity and health with God’s grace, the help of others, and our determined efforts. What follows are ideas for you to consider. Try to keep an open mind and heart as you review what follows.

## **SPIRITUAL RESOURCES**

It is natural when facing difficulties for a person to seek spiritual remedies. Grace provides us with a supernatural ability to do what we otherwise might not be able to do. If we ask for what we need in a specific way with a sincere and humble heart, the Holy Spirit can provide us with wisdom, insight, and healing. Our Guardian Angel and also the saints can be invoked for protection and direction and assistance.

There are many good opportunities to encounter grace and the Spirit in the sacraments: regular Sunday and weekday Masses, regular Confession, the Anointing of the Sick, and special Healing Masses. The Rosary has been a helpful and powerful weapon for many. Others have found consolation and strength in St. Louis de Montfort's "Way of Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary."

Spiritual Direction using a trained, certified, and experienced Catholic guide or mentor, may also prove helpful. This is an ancient but very positive and effective Catholic tradition. When a spiritual director is a priest, Confession might be integrated into the meetings. A spiritual director may be found at a local parish, a religious order house, a local retreat center, or through the Spiritual Directors International website. The place where they are may accept donations.

Be very careful about taking spiritual shortcuts. Seeking a cure outside the safety of the Church from a psychic, a so-called spiritual healer, potions, from Internet gurus, and New Age practices may open up an opportunity for the Evil One to trick and attack us. Don't look for an easier way.



## **OUR BLESSED MOTHER**

In seeking relief and healing in the growth of the virtue of chastity, we should turn to Our Blessed Mother Mary for inspiration to ask her intercession for us with her Son Jesus who is the chief Exorcist. She accompanies us to Christ.

Dying on the cross, Jesus gave us to his mother, Mary. She is a beautiful gift and great support. She wants us to win! The Archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:28) described the young Virgin Mary as being “full of grace,” having been recognized by the Father for her goodness and pure heart. She was told about this amazing and surprising plan to bear the Son of God who would become human to die for our sins. This plan at the beginning of time proved to be a stumbling block for Lucifer who turned against God and Mary (and all of us). Satan and his minions (demons) are real and active, and their goal is to separate us from God in any variety of ways possible, including sexual sins. If we stay close to God, we do not need to fear evil temptation, because Jesus has power over darkness. His Mother also has power to “strike at the serpent’s head” (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 12:1,5,9).

We are not suggesting by saying these things that we are not responsible for our immoral sexual behavior because demons are to blame. We are indeed reminding you that we are in the midst of a spiritual war, and one battlefield is for our chastity. Our fight should use spiritual remedies such as the Eucharist and Confession, prayer, and the invocation of the communion of saints. We may also need psychological services. There is no shame in this. We do what’s needed.

## **MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES**

A licensed and experienced therapist may help examine contributing factors to our sexual issues: depression, ADHD, anxiety, loneliness, insomnia, substance use, old traumas (such as sexual abuse), marriage conflict, family problems, burnout and boredom, work or vocational issues, and so on. Therapy or counseling is not a quick fix. It also requires openness, hard work, and motivation of the person seeking to change. Healthcare insurance sometimes covers the expense of counseling. Some therapists or organizations may be willing to adjust their fees to help you afford services. Check around for recommendations from friends or parishes to find good therapists. Be persistent in your search for help.

Counseling is a healthcare service, and so by law it is private and confidential. You can discuss this issue with your counselor in the first meeting. You can feel safe there.

Many therapists today are experienced in working on sexual issues, but Catholics would do well to locate a faithful Catholic counselor for a better match on values and view of the human person. To locate a Catholic counselor near you try the Catholic Psychotherapy Association website (look under "members") or also try searching on the [catholictherapists.com](http://catholictherapists.com) website. Don't give up the quest.

Medication and/or counselling may be very helpful in your work on chastity. Today, nearly any physician may prescribe psychiatric medications; however, it may be better to receive these medications from a psychiatrist or other specialist who is well-trained in managing psychiatric medications.

## **12-STEP PEER SUPPORT GROUPS**

These are free programs that assist in recovery through the non-professional support of peers. These are run by people who have successfully made changes and who assist others out of a sense of having had a spiritual experience and gratitude for recovery. They really do work for many people. The 12-Step program offers meetings, mentors (sponsors) and a proven method of character transformation to find freedom from the slavery of compulsive behaviors. They offer a pathway for mending relationships.

The 12-Step approach is a deeply spiritual program. Although it is non-religious so as to be accessible to all people, it offers nothing that is contrary to Catholic teachings. In fact, those individuals who began Alcoholics Anonymous, the original 12-Step group, had close connections to clergy and religious in the Catholic Church.

A spiritual approach to healing seems fitting because our compulsive behaviors often have left us embarrassed, full of guilt and shame, and have created spiritual distress. We recommend Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) for Catholics, but SAA (Sex Addicts Anonymous) may also be helpful with the guidance of a faithful Catholic sponsor. Check their website for more information and literature resources.

## **HOSPITAL AND RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS**

If things really deteriorate, severe sexual addictions may require intensive treatment in programs away from home, away from distractions, and away from temptations.

### **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR MEN OR WOMEN**

Because the secular culture promotes such different and unhealthy values with immoral temptations, surrounding ourselves with like-minded faithful Catholic adults may help us find the right path to holiness. Many parishes offer groups or ministries for men or women, such as Bible Studies or other fellowships and opportunities to engage in volunteer service. Some examples are ACTS retreats for men or women, the “That Man is You” program, Catholic Daughters, St. Anne Society, and so on. We may need to change our friends and activities in order to find stronger support, encouragement, and healing through grace. Get out, get involved, and don’t hold back.

### **ADDITIONAL INTERNET RESOURCES**

Use the QR code below with your smart phone camera or QR Reader to follow the link to our website where you will find lists of more books, articles, and other web links for issues that have to do with the virtue of chastity. Devote serious time to your study for the sake of your psychological, emotional, moral, relational, and spiritual growth. You may learn new information, and you may discover that some of what you might have believed was actually not true or accurate. What you discover may benefit not only yourself but others around you, such as your children and family.



## **SECURE YOUR TECHNOLOGY**

Today's technology has provided amazing benefits that make life easier and more interesting, but it has also opened many pathways to temptation. You may need to take certain action steps in this regard to make progress in growing in chastity. Here are some recommendations:

1. Based on your history, identify the tech media that are problematic (cell phone, TV, social media apps, websites, etc.). Be honest with yourself.
2. Address each issue, shutting the door on them one by one (for example, deleting troublesome social media apps from smart phone, cancelling cable TV, etc.). Set your pride aside for your goal of chastity.
3. Install or set up filters for adult content on hardware (modems, computers, etc.). Some operating systems and devices have "parental controls" which can help people of all ages avoid temptation.
4. Install accountability and filtering software on devices. You may need to identify an accountability partner (should not be your spouse).
5. Set web browser search engines to "safe search" mode, if available.
6. Become willing to allow trusted others to view your phone, search/browser history, email, etc. and track our location at any time so that nothing is hidden. We are only as sick as our secrets. Again, seek to overcome pride and fear.
7. Learn and practice setting healthy boundaries and showing respect for the dignity of every person you encounter, whether in real life or through technology connections, including respect for your own self.

### **IN SUMMARY**

“Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:18).”

Yes, love covers a multitude of sins. Being a prude is the opposite extreme to being in lust, and chastity is the healthy and proper middle ground. Living in chastity means that we have an increased freedom to love. Therefore, get involved in activities that encourage you to love even in the little dimensions and short moments of daily life, such as with your family members and coworkers, all the way to helping the poor and distressed. The activity of love and the time that it occupies are a participation in divine activity which pushes out sin from your life. God is life-giving love.

As we reflect openly and honestly about our past, we should not trap ourselves in shame. Jesus wants to free us. We must avoid despair and discouragement. Do research using the information in this booklet and elsewhere. Seek options for attacking issues so that you grow in the virtue of chastity. Make a plan. Don't get stuck in contemplation too long. Take action, doing whatever it takes, and don't be afraid. Find what works for you. Multiple resources mentioned in this booklet can work together in a good recovery plan. The challenge of recovery is a work also in developing the virtue of humility. Never give up. There is hope!

For information about  
individual, marital, family, or group counseling or  
spiritual direction at Gratia Plena,  
please call (832) 532-0129  
or check our website:  
*[www.gratiaplenacounseling.org](http://www.gratiaplenacounseling.org)*

The King David's Men group meets weekly at some of  
our office locations, and is led by professional  
counselors to address these issues of chastity. KDM  
group members and several priests provided input on  
this booklet. We are thankful for their wisdom.

*This booklet and the King David's Men group  
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