

# Questions & Answers - Sex Education in Sunday School

Fr. John Matusiak

## Question

Could you please inform me of the Orthodox Church's position on the subject matter of sex education being taught to children by laity?

I'd like to know if the Church believes this is a "family matter" to be taught by the parents- their responsibly?

Is it a subject that should be discussed in Church school?

## Answer

### QUESTION 1:

Could you please inform me of the Orthodox Church's position on the subject matter of sex education being taught to children by laity?

### RESPONSE:

While the Church has no official position on this, Saint John Chrysostom is quite firm that the primary responsibility of Christian parents is to see to the evangelization of their children. By "the evangelization of children" he means the overall spiritual, religious, and moral formation of their children for the purpose of leading them to salvation.

From his venerable statement we can deduce 1. that parents are the primary instructors and examples in the moral and faith formation of their children.

2. that, as such, Sunday School—something relatively new to Orthodox Christianity, having been introduced in imitation of non-Orthodox traditions in America in the 1930s and 1940s—while indeed important, is quite secondary to that which parents alone must and should impart in terms of knowing, living, and applying the Gospel of Christ to their lives.

3. that the imparting of Christian morality—which is the broader context in which "sex education" must be placed by Christian parents and the Church—is primarily the responsibility of the parents, demanding that they themselves live a moral life and that they provide an appropriate role model for their children.

4. that "sex ed" as commonly understood in our culture—and the school system is really wishy washy on what this means, to be frank—is first and foremost the responsibility of parents, not public schools [which unfortunately cannot impart morality, much less Gospel-based faith formation], nor be expected to express the Orthodox Christian view] or even private schools. [I know of "Christian schools" that teach "situational sexuality," reflecting non-Orthodox traditions that have shunned Scriptural values with regard to sexuality.] 5. that parents who insist that imparting morality is the "job" of the Church, Sunday School, or public school are in effect displaying irresponsible behavior, violating the clear maxim of Saint John Chrysostom, to whom "Sunday School" would have been a very foreign concept.

Finally, "sex education" apart from Gospel-based moral formation is nothing but biology/health/science, as evidenced in most public schools, precisely because it is primarily interested in describing how/how to/what. It is well known that much of what passes for "sex

education” indeed “educates” individuals in the “mechanics” of having sex. Without first implanting a moral conscience and attitude into a child—and this **MUST** be done well before a child is four or five years old, as even secular education professionals acknowledge—broaching the subject of human sexuality apart from Gospel-based morality is a futile task indeed.

Further, many sex ed programs offered in schools, while claiming to be “objective” and “non-judgmental” in terms of morality, in fact impart a morality that is utterly foreign to Orthodox Christianity. Claiming that a curriculum is “objective” while teaching that “Susie has two daddies” is a contradiction in terms, to be kind!

### **QUESTION 2:**

I’d like to know if the Church believes this is a “family matter” to be taught by the parents- their responsibly?

### **RESPONSE 2:**

I would have to say “yes.”

### **QUESTION 3:**

Is it a subject that should be discussed in Church school?

### **RESPONSE 3:**

My personal opinion—and the practice I’ve followed in my parish during my 32 years of priesthood—is that sexuality within the broader context of Christian morality should be discussed, but that it is better discussed within the context of a focused retreat, rather than in the brief, weekly, 45-minute Sunday School session. Better still, parishes should offer workshops for parents on this subject, not only instructing them in how to approach these matters with their children, but also reminding them that they are the ones who are primarily responsible for the religious, spiritual, and moral formation of their children, and that they should not dump their kids off at Sunday School to that “the Church can make them good Christians,” especially if the parents do not attempt to live Christian moral lives themselves—which, sadly, is often the case.

I would also say that all too often the only concern of parents is that their kids don’t get pregnant, or impregnate others, or acquire an STD.

Sadly, I’ve heard otherwise intelligent parents say blatantly stupid things like, “Well, little Nikita, you should NEVER engage in sex, but IF you choose to do so, please make sure you use ‘protection.’” This is no different than saying, “Well, little Nikita, you should NEVER drive 100 miles an hour, but IF you choose to do so, please make sure you have your seat belt buckled,” or “Well, little Nikita, you should NEVER do methamphetamines, but IF you choose to do so, please make sure that you don’t overdose.” Not acceptable, and hardly expressions of good parenting.

As one very astute and honest parishioner told me many years ago, “If we spend the week at home living like pagans, we can’t expect the Sunday School to transform the kids into model Christians.” Much wisdom in this.

Source: <http://oca.org/questions/contempmoral/sex-education-in-sunday-school>