

## Challenging Our Teens

By Bishop Victor Galeone

"Free to love! Dear young people, who does not want to love and be loved? But to experience sincere love, you must open the door of your heart to Jesus and take the way He marked out with His own life: the way of self-giving. This is the secret to the success of any real call to love, particularly of that call born in a surprising way in an adolescent's heart which leads to marriage, the priesthood or the consecrated life." - *Witness to Christ Among Your Peers* by Pope John Paul, II, 1997.

I recall the day, years ago, that I was answering questions that the Confirmation candidates had anonymously submitted prior to class. The third card I picked out of the box asked: "Is it OK to French-kiss your girl?" I answered that such behavior outside of marriage wasn't permitted for a believing Christian; it was seriously wrong. "Well I don't see why," a male voice blurted out from the back of class. "Everybody's doing it!" Rather than take the defensive, I thought I'd put the ball in his court. "Joel, let's say that 10 years from now you're happily married. One day you return from work early to find your wife locked in a passionate embrace with your best friend. Would you have any objections?" "You better believe I would!" "But why?" "Because she's not his wife!"

You're right - she's not his wife. And neither is your girlfriend your wife now. So you just proved my point. God wants us to save intimate expressions of love for marriage."

"But I love my girl. And that makes it different."

"Really? Let's say that 10 years from now your best friend defends himself by saying that he loves your wife, too. Would that make it any different?" Joel looked down at his desk without a comment.

I don't fault Joel and those who think like him. They have rarely been challenged with the truth. Most of their morality has been absorbed from *MTV* and television shows that target youth like *Dawson's Creek*. But that's about to change.

On Saturday, Nov. 16, three diocesan ministries are hosting a daylong gathering of parents, educators and teenagers called *Project W.A.I.T.* at Bishop Kenny High School in Jacksonville. There is no charge for the day. It's my solid hope that many of our teenagers will attend along with their parents. There will be some first-rate presenters on hand, raising our vision to what the Lord expects of us regarding chastity.

Chastity! The word flies in the face of today's politically correct atmosphere. But some crucial facts are glossed over in the process:

25% of sexually active teens have a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

In 1950 there were only two STDs identified by the Center for Disease Control. Today there are nearly 30

STD's identified!

23% of sexually active Americans has herpes, a virus with no known cure.

40 million Americans are infected with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which causes three genital cancers.

There are more than 10 million sexually explicit pornographic sites on the Internet.

These facts prove the importance of our hosting a workshop that promotes chastity Nov. 16. I pray that

it will be a huge success. I pray, too, that the participants will feel just like the young lady who took part in a similar workshop as a teen: The person I spend the rest of my life with, must be someone who has proven his ability to be committed. After all, my marriage will be a lifelong commitment! His abstinence from sex is one way to prove his ability to be true to me. I would be oh-so honored to find out that the man I marry has respected me enough - without even knowing me - to have kept himself only for me until our wedding night.”