

## Easter Resurrection Lesson: All Human Life Has Value

### Can Public High School Students Talk About Their Faith?

Can they pray before an athletic event, or read the Bible during free period, or write a paper on Jesus? According to U.S. Department of Education regulations, religious ideas expressed in a non-threatening way are fully permitted. Barbara Samuells, founder of Catholics for Freedom of Religion, promotes talks to public school children about this very topic. Her group's pamphlet, "Free to Speak," explains that:

"Religious freedom in America protects **your right to live your faith among your school friends** in many appropriate school situations each day. The faith and religious practices you learn are not confined to home or church but are protected in your public school as well."

Unfortunately, some school administrators & teachers deny religious rights out of either **prejudice or extreme caution**. Most of these denials are never challenged, but should be, even for teachers who want to express their faith in school. Legal groups like the First Liberty Institute and Alliance Defending Freedom represent students free of charge in fighting such unconstitutional denials. [[www.catholicsforfreedomofreligion.org](http://www.catholicsforfreedomofreligion.org)]

"Religious liberty belongs to us. It wasn't provided to us by government; it was given to us by God. No government agency has any right to restrict it much less take it from us. And when we respectfully tell our government that we will not agree to confine our religious convictions and keep them out of public view, we are acting in the very best traditions of both our Christian faith and our shared American history." Bishop John O. Barres, Fifth Bishop of Rockville Centre, NY, 2013.

### Actor and Activist to Speak at Banquet

Kevin Sorbo, leading actor in the film "God's Not Dead" & internationally acclaimed for the TV show "Hercules" as well as author of *True Strength* will be one of the two featured speakers at the 2017 NJRTL Banquet Dinner on Friday, April 28. Also, activist Star Parker, founder & President, of The Center for Urban Renewal and Education (CURE), will speak. She is a former welfare mother, and now businesswoman, national celebrity, and international author. To register, visit <http://njrtl.org/>.



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### Justice Alito: Expect Battles Over Religious Freedom

The U.S. is entering a period "in which our dedication to religious liberty is going to be tested, and therefore all of us are going to be tested," warned U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito in a speech sponsored by a New Jersey Catholic Lawyers Association in March.

In 2007, Alito experienced anti-Catholic bias personally, after he and other Catholic justices of the Supreme Court voted to uphold the ban on the horrible procedure known as partial-birth abortion. Newspaper cartoons and comments perpetuated "the old slander that **Catholics could not be trusted** or could not exercise independent judgment," said the associate justice.

According to Bishop John O. Barres, Fifth Bishop of Rockville Centre, NY: "Threats to religious liberty, zealous efforts to hermetically seal off the witness of Christians in the public square, radical atheism at fever pitch, hedonism and a pornographic culture, the dictatorship of relativism and the continuing scandal of abortion – it can all be quite daunting and jarring."

We are likely to see "pitched **battles for religious freedom** in courts and Congress, in state legislatures and town halls," said Justice Alito. "It is vital to our country that we evangelize our fellow Americans about the importance of religious freedom, because if we don't, we won't keep the flame of religious liberty alive in this country. The United States will not be the place that it has been – the country that we love so much." [*The Beacon*, Diocese of Paterson, NJ, 3/23/2017, and Catholics for Freedom of Religion.]

### Porn a Growing Public Health Crisis

Three states have proposed resolutions affirming the **harm of pornography** including the 'hypersexualization' of teens & pre-teens, normalization of violence in sexual relations, objectification of women leading to sex trafficking and prostitution, addiction, impaired marital and family life.

Each bill recognizes the need for "education, prevention, research and policy change at the community and societal level" to address the pornography "epidemic."

The numbers of people who view pornography are staggeringly high. For example, 55% of men aged 18-30 said they first encountered pornography before the age of 12, while 25% of women did. And industry revenues for internet porn are now over \$13 billion.

Habitual viewing has serious effects. **Fight the New Drug**, an anti-pornography group, (continued on page 2)

## Pornography (continued from page 1)

has gathered research on increased aggression in regular viewers of porn, dissatisfaction with romantic relationships and addiction through dopamine dependency.

This dehumanizing addiction is troubling for Catholic parents who seek to instill virtues into their children, especially when considering the availability of **devices on which to view lewd content**.

"You can call addiction a compulsion, or a psychological term for a bad habit, but it's a behavior that eventually takes over your life," said Angela Fernandes, a psychotherapist in Seattle. The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers in a 2003 survey found that **in 56% of divorces, one spouse had an obsessive interest in online pornography**. "It's destroying relationships, and that's what our society, our culture, our communities are based on," Fernandes said.

While appropriate public policy is not clear, James O'Day, executive director of **Integrity Restored**, a ministry to those who have been affected by pornography, said that families should educate themselves about the extent of porn, protect their computers and smart phones through filtering and accountability software and talk to each other.

Fr. Scott Hastings of the Omaha, Nebraska, Archdiocese hopes that, in the future, talking about pornography and assisting people with this addiction "would be just as open as talking about Alcoholics Anonymous." Many, he explained, are suffering tremendous damage because they feel they cannot talk about their struggles with porn which is "everywhere, and yet we pretend that it's something we can't talk about. We need to help people get honest and be open about it." [N. W. Smith, *Our Sunday Visitor*, 3/19/2017]

### **NEW BOOK: Matt Fradd, *The Porn Myth*, Ignatius Press.**

This is a non-religious response to the commonly held belief that pornography is a harmless pastime. Fradd draws on current research to demonstrate porn's destructiveness, and explains the neurological reasons porn is addictive. The book helps individuals **learn how to be free of porn**, and offers real help to the parents and spouses of porn users..

## Life Runners

Established in 2008, the mission of Life Runners is to pray, raise funds, and run & walk as a team to end abortion. There are some 5,000 team members and 99 chapters nationwide and overseas, in 29 nations.

Many local parishes sign up young adults and teens to participate in one or more legs of the annual run. "Life Runners is a club at my high school - nothing is better than defending the unborn!"--Kendal Hagenhoff (student) "Our team runs/walks as a prayer, All In Christ for Pro-Life!"--Dr. Pat Castle (coach & founder) "Everyone can do this - runners, walkers, cheerers!"--a mom [www.liferunners.org]

## Confusion over "Gender Identity"

In March, the Supreme Court sent back the case of a Virginia teen with the biology of a girl who wants to be considered male & to use the boys' bathroom at school. But other transgender cases are moving to the Supreme Court.

"Such matters are best handled with care & compassion at the local level, respecting the privacy and safety concerns of all students," said Philadelphia Arch-bishop Charles J. Chaput, and Youngstown Bishop George V. Murry.

These cases reflect the controversial ideology called **gender theory**, which contends that sexual identity is not biological but a social construct shaped by custom and individual preference. Critics of the theory include Pope Francis who calls it a "great enemy" of the family. His document on marriage and family, *Amoris Laetitia*, says that "biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated."

Gender theory was sharply criticized by Dr. Paul R. McHugh (Johns Hopkins medical school), Dr. Paul W. Hruz (Washington U. medical school), and Dr. Lawrence S. Mayer (Arizona State U.). The psychiatrists distinguished between male & female sex, a biological fact determined at conception by chromosomal makeup, and gender, a product of social convention & personal choice; they also recognized **gender dysphoria** as "a distressing & persisting incongruity between their sex" and their self-identity "as male or female."

Children who experience this condition usually grow out of it, they said. The use of hormones and even surgery to effect so-called sex change can have "catastrophic outcomes. No matter how disturbing this condition may be, nothing about it affects the objective reality that those suffering from it remain the male or female persons that they were at conception, at birth, and thereafter."

The doctors said gender theory is a "**scientifically unwarranted**, dangerous experiment upon our nation's children" which doesn't account for its "far-reaching implications." They cited a position statement of the American College of Pediatricians that strongly opposes tinkering with biological sex. A child treated this way is at risk of eventually being left "psycho-socially isolated and alone." [Russell Shaw, *Our Sunday Visitor*, 3/26/2017]

"The vast majority of children (80% to 95%) with gender dysphoria will realign their gender identity to match their sex," Dr. Hruz said. In a BBC documentary, *Transgender Kids: Who Knows Best?*, Canadian Dr. Kenneth Zucker encouraged patients to realign their gender with their biological sex & only approved medical help when the initial therapy failed. But under mounting criticism from 'LGBT' activists, in 2015 he was fired from his post after 30 years. [Joan F. Desmond, *National Catholic Register*, 3/5/2017]