

## Experiencing a healthy and happy celibate priesthood.

Two critical keys to living a healthy and happy celibate priesthood are self-care and appropriate boundaries. This discussion highlights the importance of maintaining physical, spiritual and psychological health and wellbeing. This includes healthy sexual development and integration. Let's start with the basics: *I am human, and my first job in life is to be human.*

### **What does it mean to be human?**

We are bodily creatures.

We are sacred, made in the image and likeness of God.

We are relational.

We are incomplete and broken.

We are the adopted sons and daughters of God.

We will be resurrected with a glorified body and soul.

### **How do we live out our humanness?**

Maintaining healthy mind, body, and spirit is a necessary priority for those who wish to be the healthy and happy human person God created them to be.

Physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing are intricately bound together. The integration and development of one's mind, body, and spirit is necessary for one's overall health. If one area of these domains is diminished, the other areas of wellbeing will be diminished commensurately. For example, physical pain can diminish our emotional and spiritual health. Conversely, a healthy spiritual life can positively affect our physical and emotional wellbeing.

It is by embracing and not avoiding our humanness that we become the person God has called us to be.

### **Human Sexuality**

An important component of who we are in mind, body and spirit is the gift of sexuality. In his book *The Holy Longing*, Fr. Ronald Rolheiser writes: *Sexuality is a beautiful, good, extremely powerful sacred energy given to us by God and experienced in every cell of our being as an irrepressible urge to overcome our incompleteness, to move toward unity and consummation with that which is*

*beyond us. He goes on to say: The energy culminates in our desire to be co-creators with God for the planet.*

Sexuality is much more than just the sexual act. It shapes emotions and influences the ability to form relationships and experience intimacy.

As found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 2332: *Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his 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.*

### **The God Given Purpose of Sexuality**

Arguably, the greatest desire in life is to be loved and to love. Thus, the ability and capability to love and be loved in a healthy, life-giving way is dependent on physical, psychological and spiritual health, as well as successful sexual development and integration.

As described by the Catechism and Fr. Ron Rolheiser, sexuality is the internal drive for affection, love, family, friendship, community, communion, and wholeness. It moves people towards self-transcendence and generativity that is being creative, gracious and life giving.

This generativity is not dependent on sex. One can have a lot of sex and not be transcendent, gracious or life giving while one can be celibate and be these in abundance.

### **Healthy and Happy Celibacy**

In conclusion, maintaining physical, psychological and spiritual health along with healthy sexual integration are critical in living a healthy and happy celibate priesthood. Deficits in any of these areas will negatively affect one's ability to minister to others in a healthy and impactful manner.

### **Self-care and Boundaries**

Two of the most important aspects in maintaining a healthy life is making a firm commitment to self-care and appropriate boundaries.

Self-care is the practice of taking action to preserve one's personal health. Actions that benefit self-care include: keeping a regular prayer life and spiritual

direction; exercise; healthy diet; counseling on a regular basis; participating in a priest support group; healthy relationships with other priests and friendships; and having a confidant who is healthy in mind, body and spirit. A healthy lifestyle also includes developing a stress management plan, appropriate use of smart phones and the internet, weight management, and appropriate alcohol use. Seeking help when experiencing difficulties in any of these areas is most critical.

The importance of establishing and keeping appropriate boundaries cannot be overstated. Boundaries are the key to defining a relationship between people. It is incumbent on professional ministers to maintain priestly boundaries and ensure clarity about the limits of this relationship to whom they minister.

Please reach out to your diocese or community for assistance in maintaining a healthy life style and boundaries. In addition, helpful information and materials are accessible at Saint John Vianney Center at [SJVCenter.org](http://SJVCenter.org)