

FLOURISH

Introduction and Vision

The *Flourish* programme for use in Catholic primary schools on the island of Ireland came about in response to the need, identified by the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference, for a series of lessons that would view the subject of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) through a Catholic lens. In the words of Archbishop Eamon Martin, Catholic schools 'should help educate young people in taking responsibility and making well-informed decisions regarding their choices, including being aware of their own values and those of others who may differ from them'.¹ Though he was addressing the secondary school sector here, this formational process begins much earlier.

In the belief that there is no ethos-free way to teach RSE, *Flourish* aims to assist the teacher to guide children through carefully thought-out lessons with consistent parental involvement, thereby enabling the child to develop a strong moral compass, knowing what they, their family and the Church believe and stand for. They will learn to respect themselves and others because of the inherent dignity in each human being and because we are all made in the image and likeness of God. They will come to appreciate not just the science behind sexual relationships and new life, but the miracle of life – how we are co-creators with God and how human life needs to be nurtured and protected.

The emphasis in *Flourish*, which consists of four lessons per class per year, is on forming positive

¹ Keynote address by Archbishop Eamon Martin to JMB/AMCSS 31st Annual Conference, Galway, 2018.

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relationships and integrity. It is a reflective process in which parental involvement is a key component. Through the use of newsletters, letters to parents and ongoing home-school activities, *Flourish* encourages parents to have frank and honest discussions with their child on their moral viewpoint so the child is not left floundering, looking to social media, the internet and TV programmes for information and moral guidance. Children are also taught to listen to and respect other viewpoints while being able to freely express their own.

Flourish reflects Catholic values on sexual morality in a non-judgemental way. The innocence and stage of development of children in the primary school is respected and taken into account. The Catholic school is an inclusive environment and *Flourish* aims to reinforce the message that God loves each and every one of us and that love is the most important thing in relationships and families. While sensitive issues may emerge, the teacher will respond in a caring, non-judgemental way and will always refer children to their parents for guidance and support.

The *Flourish* programme is not a complete Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme in itself, being only four lessons per year. It is designed to be used in tandem with whichever Department of Education programme is already in use in the school. The information videos used in the programme are the Busy Bodies videos, which are designed by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and are completely age appropriate.² These videos, as well as the *Flourish* programme itself, can be viewed by parents at home in order to accompany their child on their educational journey.³

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum* (CPPREC) includes a



section on RSE at every curricular level.⁴ The *Flourish* programme is true to the curriculum strand of Christian Morality therein and the strand units of Human Dignity, Human Freedom and Responsibility, God's Graceful Presence and Assistance, Social Teaching of the Church, and RSE in a Christian Context. The programme strands – *Myself and Myself and Others* – are also in keeping with the Department of Education SPHE curriculum.⁵

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis acknowledges that 'it is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialised and impoverished. It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving.'⁶ *Flourish* emphasises the values of love and commitment as the basis for sexual relationships. The gift of love – God's love for us and the love we can gift to each other – is the central theme. In John 13:34 Jesus said, 'Now I give you a new commandment: Love one another! Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.'⁶ *Flourish* promotes the value of loving ourselves first, the love we celebrate within a family and the joy of loving others in a respectful, Christian way.

² <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-parents/resources/busy-bodies-adolescent-development-resources.html>.

³ <https://www.cpsma.ie/rse-primary-programme-flourish>.

⁴ <https://www.veritasbooksonline.com/RECurriculum/fileseng/Primary%20RE%20Curriculum%202015-for%20ebook.pdf>.

⁵ <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education>.

⁶ *Amoris Laetitia*, 280.