

# Amen: Love and sex in a poisonous culture

Father Matthew Buening cringed when he opened his copy of *The Towerlight* on Valentine's Day.

The "sex edition" of the student newspaper of Towson University featured student articles including a defense of "polyamory" (having multiple sex partners), several personal accounts of "embarrassing, fun or funny" sexual exploits and an exploration of the effectiveness of aphrodisiacs.

Scattered throughout the publication were posed photographs of student editors frolicking with condoms in what *The Towerlight* called a celebration of "safe sex."

"It celebrated all the things that are wrong with the culture's view of sex and love," said Father Buening, Catholic chaplain of the university. "That was followed up on campus by a corruption of the vision of sexuality - everything from handing out condoms like crazy to giving just bad advice about sexual activities."

What do you do when the tide of popular culture is crashing down on traditional morality, marginalizing those who hold on to quaint ideas such as saving sex for marriage or entering into relationships for love and not just physical pleasure?

Wisely, Father Buening didn't wag his finger. Instead, the priest extended an invitation to see sex as something more meaningful.

In a letter to the editor published by *The Towerlight*, the priest said he dared to believe that sex is "an amazing gift from God" and "the most intimate and sacred way we can express to someone how much we love them with our very bodies."

He offered encouragement to those students who have been left feeling wounded, confused and hurting after treating sex as what he called a "leisure activity with people you don't truly love."

"Don't think that you have to fall in line and conform to the way everyone else

around you is thinking about love,” he wrote in his letter to the editor. “Be daring and think differently.”

Father Buening, one of the most joyful priests you will ever meet, has been heartened by the response to his outreach. Students at the Newman Center, where the Catholic chaplaincy is based at Towson, were supportive, and the priest unexpectedly received several emails of encouragement from members of the faculty.

The chaplain doesn’t want to condemn other people’s views, he said. Instead, he hopes to use students’ own desires to be different and radical, inspiring them to a higher calling.

A “poisonous” culture that promotes a shallow view of love and makes pornography available at every turn debases society, Father Buening said. It also breaks down people.

“A lot of our job is going to be picking up the pieces from our broken culture,” Father Buening said. “I wish we could reach them sooner, but at least we can minister to them when their hearts have been broken by a relationship that was just used for physical pleasure or (to help) people who feel their self-worth is only found in their exterior beauty.”

While it isn’t easy to broach sensitive topics such as sexual morality, Father Buening said, he is reminded of St. John Paul II’s challenge to “put out into the deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

“People really want to be challenged to be better than even they think they can be,” he said.

Real love is loving people where they are, Father Buening acknowledged, but not allowing them to stay there.

*To listen to a radio interview with Father Buening about love and sex, see below:*

*Email George Matysek at [gmatysek@CatholicReview.org](mailto:gmatysek@CatholicReview.org).*