

# When it comes to life, exactly what is unsafe?

## MORAL PERSPECTIVES



REV. ROBERT SCHADEN

Magie Johnson is back with the Lakers; condoms are offered along with school lunches; and all is well with the world. Now if we can only elect a president who will make AIDS research a top priority, we will be home free and sex will be safe at last.

Such thinking reminds me of that proverbial swamp land for sale at a great price for those willing to pay cash.

It has been said that there are none so enslaved as those slaves who think that they are free. By the same token, it might be said that there are none so unsafe as

those who think they are safe when, indeed, they are not.

It may be true that condoms make for safer sex. However, safer does not necessarily translate to safe. What is safe sex anyway?

If sexual activity is little more than indoor sport, a means of interpersonal conquest or a quick release of pent up hormones, then perhaps we can define safe sex as any genital activity in which there is no chance for the transfer of disease. If a roll in the hay is little more than an attempt at the illusion of relationship, if the expectation is no more than a very temporary fix for chronic loneliness, then condoms might provide some sort of safety when they work.

If, on the other hand, any of the above leaves you cold, then perhaps we have not come close to addressing the matter of safe sex.

If sexual activity is seen as something more than an exercise of narcissism then latex can wear rather thin in fixing a problem that goes way beyond venereally transmitted diseases.

Granted, that in an effort to deny our animal nature we may go too far in romanticizing sex, even to the point of unreality. However, is it extreme to suggest that truly safe sex has its best chance in a committed relationship that is stable enough to support all the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions that this powerful experience carries with it? Trivialized sex can hardly be safe sex, since trivialized sex trivializes the people who take part in it, and trivializing people is never safe.

There is little doubt that we are an impatient lot. Delayed gratification is not exactly the strong

suit of a society in which instant everything is far more in vogue than delayed anything. We have become used to being able to microwave our food. We expect the photo lab to have our pictures back by yesterday noon. We seek instant fixes for longstanding problems. Working at anything for a period of time is simply not popular.

When it comes to relationships, the program is often the same, the illusion of instant relationship is often more attractive than the

time and the effort it takes to build the kind of relationship that will be growth producing for both persons. Sex can provide that illusion, but when illusions become confused with reality safety is seldom present. All too often the unmet expectations do little more than to make one or the other trusting disabled.

Relationship that is simply about protecting ourselves from one another can hardly be safe in the fully human sense, in that it puts isolation and alienation

ahead of sharing and mutual growth.

If that which threatens life is deemed unsafe, then perhaps only that which contributes to life can truly be said to be safe. Magie doesn't seem to be the only one to have missed the ball on that one.

The Rev. Robert Schaden is with Neuman House on the campus of Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

## Agencies offer toll-free numbers

A number of agencies and government departments offer free information or advice on a wide variety of subjects of interest and service to older adults and their families. Following is a list of toll-free numbers. Operators will be happy to answer your questions or direct you to other proper information sources.

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Alzheimer's & Related Disorders Center 800-621-0379  
American Cancer Society 800-ACS-2345  
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American Parkinson's Disease Association 800-223-2732  
Arthritis Foundation 800-283-7800

Auto Repairs Complaints 800-292-4204  
Cancer Information Center 800-422-6237  
Center for Independent Living 800-482-0222  
Energy Assistance 800-292-5650  
Hospice 800-331-1620  
Housing Discrimination, HUD 800-424-8590  
Lawyer Referral 800-968-0738  
Legal Hotline for Seniors 800-347-LAWS  
Medicaid Information (Social Services) 800-638-6414  
Medicare Appeals 800-365-5899  
Medicare Inquiry (Part B) 800-482-4045  
Medicare Inquiry/Part A (Hospital) 800-872-2566  
Michigan Bell Special Needs Center 800-482-8254  
Nursing Home/Long Term Care 800-292-7852

Physically Impaired Association of Michigan 800-274-7426  
Prescription Drug Credit (form) 800-367-6263  
Social Security 800-234-5772  
Taxpayers Assistance (State) 800-487-7000  
Taxpayers Information (Federal) 800-829-1040  
Utilities (Public Service Commission) 800-292-5555  
Veterans Information and Assistance 800-482-0740

Renee Mahler is a gerontologist and the director of communications and admissions at a Rochester Hills nursing facility. She is a member of the Michigan State Commission on Services to the Aging. Send your questions to her at Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48069.

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