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Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan

Annotated Version

Glossary

Chastity

The [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches that “all the baptized are called to chastity. . . . to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life” (CCC, #2348).

[Learn more about Catholic teaching on the virtue of chastity](#)

Children

The Church teaches that “children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents” (Second Vatican Council, [*Gaudium et Spes*](#), #50).

[Learn more about Catholic teaching that children are a gift](#)

Cohabitation

Cohabitation as a prelude to marriage or a substitute for marriage has become a widespread social practice. In 2008 more than 6 million Americans were cohabitating, compared to 500,000 in 1970. Sixty percent of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation.

[Why Isn't It Good to Live Together Before Marriage](#)

Because many couples who approach the Catholic Church for marriage are already living together, the issue has become a major one in marriage preparation. See the resource paper, [Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples](#), prepared by the USCCB Committee on Marriage and Family Life.

Other Church documents:

- Pontifical Council for the Family, [*Family, Marriage, and “De Facto” Unions*](#)
- The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania, [*Living Together*](#)
- For Your Marriage, [*Cohabitation*](#)
- The Catholic Bishops of Kansas, pastoral letter [*A Better Way*](#)

Communion of Persons

“At last, this one is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. ...That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.”

(*Genesis 2:23*)

Sacred Scripture provides significant insight into the reality of marriage. Over the centuries, the Church, led by the Holy Spirit, has reflected on these words and found many insights to describe what God has designed for His people. A fundamental insight is that God willed marriage to be a *Communion of Persons* – a “one flesh” union of husband and wife.

The marital communion of persons is the intimate union of a man and a woman, made in God’s image and therefore, made in love for love, to share love. Married love is caught up in God’s love. Indeed, the Church speaks of marriage as a reflection of how God loves—a union of the outpouring of the Father to the Son and Spirit. Husband and wife are entrusted with this love that is faithful, permanent, and life-giving!

See also:

- [Excerpts from the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*.](#)
- [*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1605 and #1614.](#)
- Excerpts [from various Church documents on the topic of conjugal love which is linked to the communion of persons.](#)

Complementarity

The sexual difference between men and women has both a human and a theological significance. It cannot be reduced merely to a biological fact. Rather, it is based in a wholistic, biblical view of the human person who is created in God’s image to give and receive love. An extensive treatment of sexual complementarity is offered in a [Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World](#) that was issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2004.

See also: “[Made for Each Other](#),” part of the USCCB initiative *Marriage: Unique for a Reason*

Contraception

Procreation is a sacred gift from God. Over the centuries, Catholic teaching has consistently condemned the use of contraception. This teaching is linked to how God made men and women and what He willed for the marital relationship. In their document *Married Love and the Gift of Life*, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote:

“By using contraception, couples may think that they are avoiding problems or easing tensions But the gift of being able to help create another person, a new human being with his or her own life, involves profound relationships. It affects our relationship with God, who created us complete with this powerful gift. It involves whether spouses will truly love and accept each other as they are, including their gift of fertility. Finally, it involves the way spouses will spontaneously accept their child as a gift from God and the fruit of their mutual love. Like all important relationships with other persons, it is not subject solely to our individual control. In the end, this gift is far richer and more rewarding than that.” (*Married Love and the Gift of Life*, p. 17)

To learn about why contraception is wrong, see the [full text of *Married Love and the Gift of Life*](#) and [excerpts from Church teaching](#).

Declaration of Nullity (Annulment)

Annulments and the annulment process are frequently misunderstood. Often, the issue arises when a divorced Catholic wants to remarry in the Church, or when a Catholic wishes to marry a divorced person. In these situations, the pastor, or his designee, can discuss with the individual whether an annulment is needed and, if so, how to begin the process.

More information about the annulment process and how it works in a particular diocese is often available on the diocesan web site. Go to the [For Your Marriage website](#) and click on the map at the bottom: “Find Catholic Marriage Support.”

For general information about annulments and resources see [For Your Marriage/Annulments](#).

Divorce

The Catholic Church believes that God established marriage as the permanent and unbreakable union of a man and woman. The Church does not recognize civil divorce because the state cannot dissolve with is indissoluble. For more information and resources see:

- John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#), #83-84
- Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, [Divorce and the Catholic Church \(Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference\)](#)

- [For Your Marriage/Divorce](#)

Domestic Church

Drawing upon language and imagery that dates back to the early days of Christianity, the Second Vatican Council re-introduced the teaching that the Christian family is a domestic church or church of the home in its [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church](#) (Lumen Gentium), no. 11. This teaching was explained and significantly expanded by Pope John Paul II in his [Apostolic Exhortation on the Family](#) (Familiaris Consortio), nos. 49-63.

In 1994 the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote a message to families entitled [Follow the Way of Love](#). This message has a section called “You Are the Church in Your Home”, in which the bishops describe in simple, concrete language how families can respond to the call to be a domestic church.

Domestic Violence

In 1992 the Catholic Bishops of the United States approved the statement, “When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women.” This was the first time the bishops as a body had spoken out against domestic abuse. Ten years later the bishops [updated the statement](#), but the core message remained the same: Violence against women is never justified.

The bishops’ statement has encouraged many dioceses, parishes and Catholic organizations to try to raise awareness about the prevalence of domestic violence and to respond effectively to the needs of survivors. Examples include:

- “Women Healing the Wounds” by the [National Council of Catholic Women](#) (available for purchase on the NCCW website)
- Bishop Ricardo Ramirez’s [statement on DV](#), “Speaking the Unspeakable”

For more information about domestic violence and additional resources see [For Your Marriage/Domestic Violence](#).

Growth in Marriage (Stages of Marriage)

It has been said that over the course of a marriage spouses form several marriages – all with the same person. All healthy marriages experience change and transitions, some of which are predictable. Each stage challenges the couple to confront specific developmental tasks. For an overview of the stages of marriage see [For Your Marriage: “Stages of Marriage”](#). See also [“The Lifecycle Stages of a Marriage”](#) by Sr. Barbara Markey.

Infertility and Reproductive Technologies

The Church has compassion for couples suffering from infertility and wants to be of real help to them. At the same time, some “reproductive technologies” are not morally legitimate ways to solve those problems. The following information will help Catholic couples struggling with the evaluation and treatment of infertility.

- [Guidelines for Catholic Couples who are in need of evaluation and treatment of infertility.](#)
- For a pastoral discussion on Church teaching and reproductive technologies, see [Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology](#), U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2009)
- For theological discussion on Church teaching and reproductive technologies, see:
 - [Dignitas personae \(On Certain Bioethical Questions\)](#), Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2008)
 - [Donum vitae \(Instruction on Respect for Human Life\)](#), Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1987)
 - [Quotes from Church teaching on reproductive technologies](#)

Internet Pornography

Addiction to pornography has grown to epidemic proportions in the Internet age. For information about the scope of this addiction, its effects on the marital relationship, and how to strengthen a marriage after a porn addiction, see

For Your Marriage: [“Overcoming Obstacles: Pornography”](#).

See also the pastoral letter by Bishop Paul Loverde, [“Bought with a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God”](#).

Marital Covenant

In the Bible there are many references to the covenant or relationship that God established between himself and his people. Church teaching also presents marriage as a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves an intimate partnership of their whole lives.

See [a short explanation of how the Church understands marriage as a covenant.](#)

Marriages with Persons of Other Religions (Interreligious Marriages)

Marriages between Christians and non-baptized persons are called interreligious or interfaith marriages. They are not considered sacramental.

See John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#) #78 and For Your Marriage, [“Interfaith Marriages.”](#)

Mixed Marriage

A marriage between two baptized Christians of different faith traditions (e.g., Catholic-Presbyterian, Baptist-Lutheran) is called a mixed marriage. The Catholic Church considers such marriages to be sacramental.

See John Paul II, [Familiaris Consortio](#) #78 for a discussion of the special needs of spouses in a mixed marriage; and For Your Marriage, “[Interfaith Marriages](#),” which also addresses the situation of Catholics marrying non-Catholic Christians.

Mutual Subjection

Ephesians 5:22 (“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord”) is sometimes misinterpreted to mean a one-sided subjection of wife to husband. In fact, St. Paul calls husbands and wives to mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ. See John Paul II, [Mulieris Dignitatem](#), especially # 24; and USCCB, [Follow the Way of Love](#), especially the section on “Growing in Mutuality.”

National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage

The U.S. Catholic Bishops began a project known as the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage (NPIM) in 2004, and it continued until 2008 when its goals were integrated into the USCCB-wide priority on strengthening marriage and the family. The purposes of the NPIM were to communicate a message about the meaning and value of married life and to increase the Church’s ability to minister both to those preparing for and living the vocation of married life.

The NPIM brought together Catholic teaching and pastoral practice, social science research, and the experience of married couples. It offered guidance and resources, including the 2009 pastoral letter [Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan](#), to promote and strengthen marriage as a human institution and a Christian sacrament.

In 2008 and again in 2013, the U.S. Catholic Bishops identified strengthening marriage and family life as one of their four national pastoral priorities.

See the [activities of the NPIM](#).

NFP

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a general term for certain methods that are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. NFP methods are used to both achieve as well as avoid pregnancy.

See the [USCCB NFP webpage](#) for a variety of information on the methods of Natural Family Planning as well as Church teaching which support its use in marriage. For basic information on the science and methodology of NFP see [Basic Information on NFP](#) and [An Introduction to NFP](#).

[Quotes from Church teaching in support of NFP](#)

Sacrament of Matrimony

Marriage is one of the Catholic Church's seven sacraments. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of sacraments as "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions" (n. 1131).

See [a short explanation of the meaning of marriage as a sacrament](#).

Same-Sex "Unions"

So-called same-sex "marriage" has become a major social issue in the past decade. During that time the Catholic Church has expressed its position on this issue many times and at various levels of its teaching authority.

See especially:

- A statement of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognitions to Unions Between Homosexual Persons](#)
- A statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, [Between Men and Women: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions](#)
- [Frequently asked questions](#) on the USCCB website *Marriage: Unique for a Reason*
- [USCCB promotion and defense of marriage webpage](#), including relevant teaching documents and other statements from the Vatican, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, State Catholic Conferences, and individual diocesan bishops along with other helpful background

Stages of Marriage Preparation

Many people connect "marriage preparation" with the months immediately before the wedding; however, the Church emphasizes that a person is formed for marriage beginning in childhood. This formation takes place in the home, school, and in the faith community, which instill the values and virtues necessary for a successful marriage. For a discussion of the remote, proximate and immediate stages of marriage preparation, see the Pontifical Council for the Family's [Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage](#).

Theology of the Body

Over the course of five years (1979-1984) Pope John Paul II delivered 129 short catechetical talks at his weekly public audience at St. Peter's in Rome. These addresses were an extended reflection of the meaning of sexuality and marital love. The Holy Father referred to this collection of talks as a "theology of the body."

See [articles explaining the scope and importance of the Pope's teaching](#).

See [a complete collection of the Pope's "theology of the body" texts](#).

Vocation

Marriage is a vocation, or call from God. It is a specific way to live out the universal call to holiness which is given to all Christians in the sacrament of Baptism. As a vocation, marriage has a public dimension, as spouses are called to service in their families, parishes, and communities.

For a brief overview see the For Your Marriage article, "[The Vocation of Marriage](#)."

See also [Gaudium et Spes](#) #48.