

What Does the Church Say About Abortion?

All persons, not just Catholics, can know from the scientific and medical evidence that what grows in a mother's womb is a new, distinct human being. All persons can understand that each human being -- without discrimination -- merits respect. At the very least, respecting human life excludes the deliberate and direct destruction of life -- and that is exactly what abortion is.

Among important issues involving the dignity of human life with which the Church is concerned, abortion necessarily plays a central role. Abortion, the direct killing of an innocent human being, is *always* gravely immoral (*The Gospel of Life*, no. 57); its victims are the most vulnerable and defenseless members of the human family. It is imperative that those who are called to serve the least among us give urgent attention and priority to this issue of justice.

Since its beginnings, Christianity has maintained a firm and clear teaching on the sacredness of human life. Jesus Christ emphasized this in his teaching and ministry. Abortion was rejected in the earliest known Christian manual of discipline, the *Didache*, a compendium of Church teachings, written in the first century.

The first right of the human person is their life. Humans have other goods and some are more precious, but this one is fundamental - the condition of all the others. Hence it must be protected above all others. It does not belong to society, nor does it belong to public authority in any form to recognize this right for some and not for others: all discrimination is evil, whether it be founded on race, sex, color or religion. It is not recognition by another that constitutes this right. This right is antecedent to its recognition; it demands recognition and it is strictly unjust to refuse it.

It is true that the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, insofar as the decision to rid herself of the fruit of conception is not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless, these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.

Laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* (1995)

Taken from USCCB statement: "**The Catholic Church is a Pro Life Church**" and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Procured Abortion (1974), no. 11 and *Evangelium Vitae*

What Does the Church Say About Suicide?

The Church teaches that the provision of water and food, even by artificial means, to a patient diagnosed as being in a "vegetative" state is "morally obligatory, insofar as and until it is seen to have attained its proper finality, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering."

The Church insists that each and every human being has inherent dignity. Even the patient in the so-called "vegetative" state, who cannot visibly respond to us, is no "vegetable" but a human person loved by God; and "the value of a man's life cannot be made subordinate to any judgment of its quality expressed by other men." That patient, and his or her family, deserve the love and support of the entire community so they will not face their burdens alone.

Food and water should "in principle" is to be considered an "ordinary and proportionate" means for sustaining these patients' lives. Such feeding, even if it requires some medical assistance, is "morally obligatory" as long as it serves its proper goals – effectively providing nourishment and alleviating suffering. This was no rigid and mechanical edict, but a recognition that food and water are basic sustenance, without which all of us would die. They should be provided when they serve patients' basic needs, the first of which is life itself.

The Church cites the latest medical findings about the "vegetative" state, recounted by leading experts at the four-day-long conference preceding his speech. Increasingly, physicians don't know whether they can reliably diagnose such a state, predict its outcome, or estimate how much sensation and consciousness remains in these patients. Science is joining with morality to urge us not to make easy assumptions about these patients, the assumption that they cannot feel the suffering of a death by dehydration.

This is no radical change in Church policy. Since 1992, for example, the U.S. Bishops' Committee has urged a strong presumption in favor of assisted feeding for these patients. Even as medical science increasingly urges us not to dismiss these helpless patients, medical "ethics" has tragically moved in the opposite direction.

Taken from USCCB March 2005 statement: "**Bishops' Official Thanks Congress And The President For Giving Terri Schiavo A Chance To Live**" and USCCB article, Apr 9, 2004, "**Pope's Speech is About Human Dignity**"

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Capital Punishment?

The U.S. Catholic bishops have been calling for an end to the use of the death penalty for over 25 years. Our nation should forego the use of the death penalty because: The sanction of death, when it is not necessary to protect society, violates respect for human life and dignity. State-sanctioned killing in our names diminishes all of us. Its application is deeply flawed and can be irreversibly wrong, is prone to errors, and is biased by such factors as race, the quality of legal representation, and where the crime was committed. We have other ways to punish criminals and protect society.

The USCCB states that the United States cannot “teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill”. The use of the death penalty contributes to a cycle of violence in our society that must be broken, according to a *Culture of Life*. The sanction of death undermines respect for human life and dignity. The death penalty is a continuing sign of a *culture of death* in U.S. society. It is time for our nation to abandon the illusion that we can protect life by taking life. When the state, in our names and with our taxes, ends a human life despite having non-lethal alternatives, it suggests that society can overcome violence with violence. The use of the death penalty ought to be abandoned not only for what it does to those who are executed, but what it does to all society.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states further: "Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against an unjust aggressor. If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in conformity with the dignity of the human person. Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm—without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself—the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity "are very rare, if not practically nonexistent." (no. 2267)

Taken from: the USCCB Press release November 2005 and the document “**A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death**” December, 2005 and from “**The Catechism of the Catholic Church, first revision**”.

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Contraception?

In the Catholic Rite of Marriage a man and woman are asked if they will love one another faithfully and totally—in short, if they will love as God loves. “Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?” asks the bishop, priest, or deacon. “Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives? Will you children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” These are different ways of asking the same basic question: Are you ready to accept person, and all that may come from your union, completely and forever?

What does this have to do with contraception? A husband and wife express their committed love not only with words, but with the language of their bodies. That “body language”—what a husband and wife say to one another through the intimacy of sexual relations—speaks of total commitment and openness to a future together. So the question about contraception is this: Does sexual intercourse using contraception faithfully affirm this committed love? Or does it introduce a false note into this conversation?

Married love differs from any other love in the world. By its nature, the love of husband and wife is so complete, so ordered to a lifetime of communion with God and each other, that it is open to creating a new human being they will love and care for together. Part of God’s gift to husband and wife is this ability in and through their love to cooperate with God’s creative power. Therefore, the mutual gift of fertility is an integral part of the bonding power of marital intercourse. That power to create a new life with God is at the heart of what spouses share with each other.

When married couples deliberately act to suppress fertility, however, sexual intercourse is no longer fully marital intercourse. It is something less powerful and intimate, something more “casual.” Suppressing fertility by using contraception denies part of the inherent meaning of married sexuality and does harm to the couple’s unity. The total giving of oneself, body and soul, to one’s beloved is no time to say: “I give you everything I am—except. . . .” The Church’s teaching is not only about observing a rule, but about preserving that total, mutual gift of two persons in its integrity.

This may seem a hard saying. Certainly it is a teaching that many couples today, through no fault of their own, have not heard (or not heard in a way they could appreciate and understand). But as many couples who have turned away from contraception tell us, living this teaching can contribute to the honesty, openness, and intimacy of marriage and help make couples truly fulfilled.

Why does saying “yes” to children at the altar mean never using contraception to close the act of intercourse to new life? Some argue that if a husband and wife remain open to children throughout their marriage, they need not worry about using contraception occasionally. But practicing what is good most of the time does not justify doing what is wrong some of the time.

Even if I see myself as a truthful person “on the whole,” any occasional lie I tell is still a lie, and so is immoral. By such acts, I begin to make myself into the kind of person who lies. This is no less true when we falsify the “language of the body,” speaking total love and acceptance of the other person while denying an essential part of that message.

A couple need not desire or seek to have a child in each and every act of intercourse. And it is not wrong for couples to have intercourse even when they know the wife is naturally infertile. But they should never act to suppress or curtail the life-giving power given by God that is an integral part of what they pledged to each other in their marriage vows. This is what the Church means by saying that every act of intercourse must remain open to life and that contraception is objectively immoral.

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Euthanasia?

Current efforts to legalize euthanasia place our society at a critical juncture. These efforts have received growing public attention, due to new publications giving advice on methods of suicide and some highly publicized instances in which family members or physicians killed terminally ill persons or helped them kill themselves.

As Catholic leaders and moral teachers, we believe that life is the most basic gift of a loving God--a gift over which we have stewardship but not absolute dominion. Our tradition, declaring a moral obligation to care for our own life and health and to seek such care from others, recognizes that we are not morally obligated to use all available medical procedures in every set of circumstances. But that tradition clearly and strongly affirms that as a responsible steward of life one must never directly intend to cause one's own death, or the death of an innocent victim, by action or omission. As the Second Vatican Council declared, "euthanasia and willful suicide" are "offenses against life itself" which "poison civilization"; they "debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n.27).

As the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has said, "nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying." Moreover, we have no right "to ask for this act of killing" for ourselves or for those entrusted to our care; "nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such an action." We are dealing here with "a violation of the divine law, an offense against the dignity of the human person, a crime against life, and an attack on humanity" (Declaration on Euthanasia, 1980).

Taken from: Administrative Committee National Conference of Catholic Bishops September 12, 1991

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Human Cloning?

As the Second Vatican Council affirms, moral judgments about procreation must be based on "the nature of the human person and his acts" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51). To understand the nature of the act of human procreation is to realize why cloning does not respect this nature.

Human cloning is the final step down the path of depersonalized procreation. It involves no meeting of male and female at all — in fact, a child produced this way has no "mother" or "father" in the ordinary sense, but only a template or model. Instead of openness to life, it involves domination over life — for a technician manufactures the new embryo in a laboratory, and even controls his or her genetic makeup to be identical to that of someone else. This act has the nature of a manufacturing process, suited to a commodity rather than a human being. It dehumanizes in the act of creating.

When we manufacture offspring according to preset specifications, then, we are violating a fundamental aspect of human procreation. We are treating our children as inferior beings, as our "creatures". The other abuses of human cloning — the selfish fixation on producing a child "just like me"; the willingness to subject cloned humans to high risk of death and disability; even scientists' willingness to clone embryos solely to exploit and destroy them — flow from this first fundamental error.

Human cloning would create a human being who deserves to be treated as our equal, but would do so in a way that undermines this equal dignity. It is not a worthy way for humans to bring other humans into the world.

Taken from: the USCCB document "**Human Cloning vs. Human Dignity**" By: *Richard Doerflinger*, deputy director of the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities

What Does the Catholic Church Say About In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)?

In 1987 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document known as *Donum Vitae* ("The Gift of Life"), which addressed the morality of many modern fertility procedures. *Donum Vitae* teaches that if a given medical intervention helps or assists the marriage act to achieve pregnancy, it may be considered moral; if the intervention replaces the marriage act in order to engender life, it is not moral.

One reproductive technology which the Church has clearly and unequivocally judged to be immoral is in vitro fertilization or IVF. In vitro fertilization brings about new life in a petri dish. Children engendered through IVF are sometimes known as "test tube babies." Several eggs are aspirated from the woman's ovary after she has taken a fertility drug which causes a number of eggs to mature at the same time. Semen is collected from the man, usually through masturbation. The egg and sperm are ultimately joined in a glass dish, where conception takes place and the new life is allowed to develop for several days. In the simplest case, embryos are then transferred to the mother's womb in the hope that one will survive to term.

In IVF, children are engendered through a technical process, subjected to "quality control," and eliminated if found "defective." In their very coming into being, these children are thoroughly subjected to the arbitrary choices of those bringing them into being. In the words of *Donum Vitae*: "The connection between in vitro fertilization and the voluntary destruction of human embryos occurs too often. This is significant: through these procedures, with apparently contrary purposes, life and death are subjected to the decision of man, who thus sets himself up as the giver of life and death by decree." The document speaks of "the right of every person to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage." To be within and from marriage, conception should occur from the marriage act which by its nature is ordered toward loving openness to life, not from the manipulations of technicians.

The dehumanizing aspects of some of these procedures are evident in the very language associated with them. There is the "reproductive technology industry." Children are called the "products" of conception. Inherent in IVF is the treatment of children, in their very coming into being, as less than human beings.

Taken from USCCB Document: "**Begotten Not Made: A Catholic View of Reproductive Technology**"
by **John M. Haas, Ph.D., S.T.L.**

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Natural Family Planning?

Natural family Planning is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy.

Natural Family Planning reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, and recognizes the value of the child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife.

As we reflect on the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, we recognize the advances in natural family planning [NFP] and the efforts of scientists, pastors, and married couples committed to "instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way" (*Familiaris consortio*, #35). With proper instruction, married couples can readily understand the cycle of fertility and they are able to plan and space births in a way that is both consistent with God's law and supportive of their own intimacy and unity. Natural family planning, "involves accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control" (*Familiaris consortio*, #32). And as noted in *Humanae Vitae*, its benefits to married couples are many:

It demands continual effort, yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, being enriched with spiritual values. Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace, and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favors attention for one's partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepens their sense of responsibility. By its means, parents acquire the capacity of having a deeper and more efficacious influence in the education of their offspring (*Humanae Vitae* 21).

Natural family planning gives couples a richer appreciation of human sexuality and of their own marital relationship, and it strengthens their openness to childbearing.

Helping couples to deepen conjugal love and achieve responsible parenthood is part of the Church's total pastoral ministry to catholic spouses. Fulfillment of this ministry includes both education and pastoral care.

From: "**Human Sexuality from God's Perspective *Humanae Vitae* 25 Years Later**", A Statement by the USCCB Committee for Pro-Life Activities and Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry, p 23, USCCB, Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Partial-Birth Abortion?

Resting on the Supreme Court's widely criticized *Stenberg v. Carhart* decision, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit declared the federal Partial-Birth Abortion Act of 2003 unconstitutional. The court cited the law's lack of a "health" exception (defined in *Doe v. Bolton* as including all factors relating to a woman's "well-being.") But it makes no sense to say one must kill a child who is more than half born to advance the mother's health instead of simply completing a live delivery.

The American Medical Association has said that partial-birth abortion is never medically necessary. To claim it as a constitutional right makes a mockery of the U.S. Constitution.

There is no place in a civilized society for this cruel and dangerous practice, and we look forward to the decision being overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Taken from July 8, 2005 USCCB statement by: Gail Quinn, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

What Does the Catholic Church Say About "Plan B", Emergency Contraception (EC) and the Morning After Pill?

A woman who uses EC after unprotected sex clearly intends to prevent pregnancy. However, she may be quite unaware of "where" she is in her cycle (i.e., whether or not she has ovulated). Although she may not intend to abort, the drug's action of altering the endometrium to interfere with implantation may in fact abort the developing embryo.

Preven and other EC pills are FDA-approved as "contraception," however, medical and advocacy groups admit that the pills work in a variety of ways. While these pills may sometimes have a contraceptive mode of action because they prevent or delay ovulation or fertilization, they are designed to prevent implantation as well.

The question must be asked: "How is this contraception?" Women are being falsely led to believe that these pills are contraceptive in nature. But one of their common and intended modes of action is to prevent the development of the embryo, resulting in his or her death. Brown University associate professor of medicine, Ralph Miech, M.D., Ph.D., agrees. "This type of pill causes an abortion," he wrote in the *Providence Journal* on August 3, 1998. "From a pharmacologic perspective, this type of pill should be called an 'abortion-after pill'."

Taken from the USCCB Document: **"Emergency "Contraception" and Early Abortion"**

What Does the Catholic Church Say About RU 486?

The FDA has about 400 reports of RU-486 related “adverse events.” A dozen or more describe “failed” or incomplete abortions requiring hospitalization and “intervention to prevent permanent impairment/damage.” One 15-year-old patient experienced adult respiratory distress syndrome, lung infiltration, abdominal and pelvic pain, purulence, and septic thrombophlebitis.

Responsible medical associations have warned the FDA for nearly a decade about the dangers inherent in the RU-486/misoprostol combination. Citizens Petitions were filed with the FDA both during and after its dubious fast-tracked approval in the waning months of the Clinton presidency.

There are three main ways that RU-486 is potentially lethal to women: bleeding to death, infection, and ruptured ectopic pregnancy. Why? Because the pills always cause bleeding and pain, which in turn can mask potentially fatal problems.

These are not isolated events. A World Health Organization (WHO) study documented the infection risk associated with RU-486: 30% of women who had incomplete RU-486 abortions developed pelvic/genital tract infections. The RU-486 drug combination seems to suppress the immune system. WHO recommends a 6-week course of antibiotics after every RU-486 abortion.

The RU-486/Cytotec drug regimen is not safe in the hands of teens, or in the hands of clinic staff who leave it up to frightened girls to determine if a life-threatening complication is developing. And because the mode of action and side-effects of RU-486/Cytotec mask the very symptoms that would alert doctors to life-threatening complications like ectopic pregnancy, incomplete abortion, and uncontrolled bleeding (which nearly cost an Iowa woman her life during U.S. drug trials), RU-486 abortions are unsafe even if FDA protocols were followed.

Taken from the USCCB Document: “**RU-486:No Magic Pill**” by Susan E. Wills

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Stem Cell Research?

Sometimes it is wrongly said that the Catholic Church opposes stem cell research. In fact, the Church supports ethically responsible stem cell research, while opposing any research that exploits or destroys human embryos. The Catholic Church strongly supports stem cell research that uses *somatic stem cell* sources, often referred to as adult stem cells.

Embryonic stem cell research as performed to date results in the death of the embryo from which the stem cells are derived. Because the Church opposes deliberately destroying innocent human life at any stage, for research or any other purpose, it opposes embryonic stem cell research as currently conducted. As a practical matter (in addition to, but less important than the moral objections to embryonic stem cell research) to date (2007) embryonic stem cell research has produced no beneficial therapeutic results in humans. The research is plagued with instances of teratomas in laboratory animals, which are tumors that grow from the stem cells in brains or other organs that develop into foreign types of tissues such as teeth and hair. Embryonic stem cells are taken from new human embryos at about five days after *in vitro fertilization*, at a time when these stem cells have not yet naturally developed to the point where they have differentiated to become a specific type of human tissue.

The Catholic Church has long supported research using somatic stem cells from adult (non embryonic) tissue, which poses no moral problem. Adult stem cells are taken from such varied sources as bone marrow, blood, amniotic fluid, placental tissue and umbilical cord blood and recent research has found it to be far more flexible than was previously thought possible. There are 72 reported treatments or cures in humans using adult stems cells, as reported in peer-reviewed scientific journals. There are more than 600 ongoing FDA-approved clinical trials using adult stem cells for such things as diabetes, Parkinson's Disease, spinal cord injury and sickle cell anemia, among others. Such research and treatment does not require the destruction of human life.

The Church's position, supported by reason and science, is clear: the human embryo is a subject identical to the human being which will be born at the term of its development. Consequently whatever violates the integrity and the dignity of the embryo is ethically inadmissible. Similarly, any form of scientific research which treats the embryo merely as a laboratory specimen is unworthy of man. Scientific research in the field of genetics needs to be encouraged and promoted, but, like every other human activity, it can never be exempt from moral imperatives; research using adult stem cells, moreover, offers the promise of considerable success.

Clearly, the Church favors ethically acceptable stem cell research. It opposes destroying some human lives now, on the pretext that this may possibly help other lives in the future. We must respect life at all times, especially when our goal is to save lives.

Taken from: USCCB Pro-Life Secretariat article titled: "**Catholic Support for Ethically Acceptable Stem Cell Research**" and (scientific facts) from Carol Marie Siedenburg presentation: "**Stem Cell Research, Why the Fuss?**" (reviewed and approved by Father Tad Pacholczyk) and from Statement of Pope John Paul II on the New Year, January, 2005

What Does the Catholic Church Say About War?

2308 All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war.

However, "as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed."

2309 The strict conditions for *legitimate defense by military force* require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the "just war" doctrine.

The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.

2314 Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation." A danger of modern warfare is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern scientific weapons especially atomic, biological, or chemical weapons - to commit such crimes.

Taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Marriage?

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN, FOR LIFE

Lead Messages on Marriage Redefinition

For more resources, please visit www.marriageuniqueforareason.org

Note: These “lead messages” are concise points that can assist clergy and leaders, and can also be used by all the lay faithful in discussing marriage with family and friends.

The big picture:

Marriage is a great gift to men, women, children, and society. The Church *serves and strengthens* marriage by providing pastoral care to engaged couples and marriages at all stages, and in any difficulty. The Church *promotes and defends* marriage by preaching and teaching about marriage’s authentic meaning.

Challenges facing marriage: Marriage needs to be strengthened, not redefined. Cohabitation, divorce, and contraception all erode marriage’s meaning as a public, total, lifelong, and fruitful communion of persons between husband and wife. The latest challenge to marriage, the proposal that sexual difference doesn’t matter, removes the very basis of marriage’s meaning as a one-flesh communion, open to children, making the definition of marriage in law (and thereby culture) open to limitless variation and ultimately meaningless.

The Catholic Church supports marriage:

What we stand against is its redefinition. Marriage is and can only be the union of one man and one woman. It is the only institution that unites a man and a woman with each other and with any child who comes from their union.

Sexual difference matters:

Sexual difference is essential for marriage. Only through sexual difference can a man and woman “speak” the language of married love in and through their bodies: the complete and total gift of self to the other, a gift that is open to the further gift of the child. *The difference is the difference.*

Marriage is natural:

Marriage is a natural institution. It predates both religion and government and is grounded in the nature of the human person. Despite cultural variations, every human society in the entire history of the human race has understood that marriage is a sexual union of man and woman with the purpose of procreating and educating the next generation, and so marriage has with reason been given a unique status in the law. While Jesus elevates Christian marriage to a sacrament, the complementarity of the sexes and the natural meaning of marriage can be known through reason without appealing to scripture.

Equality and Rights:

Affirming the true definition of marriage denies no one their basic rights. On the contrary, protecting marriage affirms the basic rights and equal dignity of women and men and safeguards the basic rights and equal protection of children.

Children:

Every child is a *gift*. Every child *has* a mother and a father. And every child has a *basic right* to a mother and a father united in marriage. While circumstances may prevent a child being raised by his or her own mother and father, marriage is the way society provides for children’s needs in ordinary circumstances.

Mothers and fathers matter: Only a man can be a father; only a woman can be a mother. Both men and women – fathers and mothers – bring irreplaceable gifts to the shared task of child-rearing. A child should not be deliberately deprived of a married mom and dad. Parenting is gender-specific, not gender-neutral.

Single Parents:

Those who, often through no fault of their own, become single parents strive heroically and make great sacrifices to raise and provide for their children need and deserve our respect and support. The key point is not to *deliberately or intentionally* deprive children of their mother and

father, which would be the necessary consequence of enshrining in the law the claim that a man and a woman are not necessary to make a marriage.

Family:

Marriage is about building families, not just about adult relationships. A husband and wife united in marriage are the foundation of a family. And since the union of a man and a woman naturally is ordered to children, marriage is the place where children are welcomed and the family grows.

Adoptive Families:

Even when children do not or cannot come forth from a marriage (e.g., due to infertility, the loss of a child in the womb, elderly years), a married man and woman form a total communion of persons, and can give to a child what no other relationship can: a father and a mother united to each other in an exclusively faithful commitment for life. No other relationship is comparable to the union of husband and wife.

Dignity of the Human Person:

All persons have inviolable dignity and deserve love and respect. There are many ways to protect the basic human rights of all, but redefining marriage serves no one's rights, least of all those of children.

Same-sex attraction:

Everyone deserves love and respect, including those who experience same-sex attraction. The experience of same-sex attraction is a reality that calls for compassion, sensitivity, pastoral care and attention. But no one—especially no child—is served by marriage redefinition. No one is helped by a lie; love tells the truth.

The Church's ministry to persons with same-sex attraction: Support groups, noted for their adherence to Church teaching, for persons who experience same-sex attraction and for their family members, are an important part of Church ministries and are to be encouraged.

Examples of such ministries are Courage and Encourage. (See USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination* [2006]: p. 22.)

Discrimination:

Unjust discrimination is always wrong. Treating different things differently is not unjust discrimination. Protecting marriage is a matter of justice and builds a culture of life: *pro-woman, pro-man, pro-child, pro-family, pro-life*.

Civil unions: Civil unions, domestic partnerships, and the like are non-marital arrangements that mimic aspects of marriage. They erode the institution of marriage and overlook the essential contribution that marriage makes to the common good. They cannot be approved or promoted.

The common good: Marriage and the family are the foundation of society. Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, perform an essential role by teaching family members and society the immense dignity of each human person and what it means to love and be loved. Marriage is a personal relationship with great public significance—not a private affair—that affects all in society.

Law:

Advocates for marriage redefinition argue that the law should redefine marriage in order to grant the social status of marriage to persons in same-sex sexual relationships. This ignores not only the purpose of marriage but also the purpose of the law, which is to protect rights and provide for the common good. Redefining marriage undermines the fundamental right of the most vulnerable in our society – children – by denying their right to a father and mother (even if that right cannot be realized in every real-life situation).

Religious liberty: Changing marriage law changes not just one law but hundreds, even thousands, at once. Redefining marriage in the law will make the Church's teaching, as well as any public witness to the natural moral law, *against* the law (civil, human law), and even a form of so-called "bigotry," a claim unfortunately seeing greater frequency today. It will cause innumerable conflicts between the State and religious institutions and individuals. There are, in

fact, already numerous examples of this. Marriage and religious liberty are two fundamental goods that stand or fall together.

Ongoing work: The USCCB seeks to strengthen, promote and defend marriage through its initiatives *For Your Marriage* (foryourmarriage.org), *Por Tu Matrimonio* (portumatrimonio.org) and *Marriage: Unique for a Reason* (marriageuniqueforareason.org). Please visit, explore and share these sites. You can also visit the USCCB *Love and Life in the Divine Plan* website for more insight <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/upload/pastoral-letter-marriage-love-and-life-in-the-divine-plan.pdf>

"We [bishops] understand the pain of those for whom divorce seemed the only recourse.

"We urge them to make frequent use of the sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation..."

"We encourage divorced persons who wish to marry in the Catholic Church to seek counsel about the options that exist to remedy their situation, including the suitability of a declaration of nullity when there is no longer any hope of reconciliation of the spouses."

How does the Church view divorce?

The Church believes that God, the author of marriage, established it as a permanent union. When two people marry, they form an unbreakable bond. Jesus himself taught that marriage is permanent (Matthew 19:3-6), and St. Paul reinforced this teaching (see 1 Cor 7:10-11 and Eph 5:31-32). The Church does not recognize a civil divorce because the State cannot dissolve what is indissoluble. See [Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2382-2386](#).

Are divorced people excommunicated from the Catholic Church?

No. Divorced people are full members of the Church and are encouraged to participate in its activities.

May a divorced Catholic receive Holy Communion?

Yes. Divorced Catholics in good standing with the Church, who have not remarried or who have remarried following an annulment, may receive the sacraments.

What support does the Church offer to divorced persons?

The Church understands the pain of those caught in this situation. When divorce is the only possible recourse, the Church offers her support to those involved and encourages them to remain close to the Lord through frequent reception of the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 287). Many dioceses offer programs and support groups for divorced and separated persons. [Catholic Divorce Ministry](#), [The Beginning Experience](#), and [Journey of Hope](#) are helpful resources.

I am a divorced Catholic who would like to remarry in the Catholic Church. What do I need to do?

Unless your former spouse has died, you will need to obtain an annulment.

I am divorced. I am not a Catholic but I plan to marry a Catholic. We have been told that I need to obtain an annulment before we can marry in the Catholic Church. I do not understand this since I was not married in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church respects all marriages and presumes that they are valid. Thus, for example, it considers the marriages of two Protestant, Jewish, or even nonbelieving persons to be binding. Any question of dissolution must come before a Church court (tribunal). This teaching may be difficult to understand, especially if you come from a faith tradition that accepts divorce and remarriage. Some couples in a situation similar to yours have found it helpful to talk with a priest or deacon. To go through the annulment process can be a sign of great love for your intended spouse.

Information from USCCB - <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/divorce/index.cfm>

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Annulments?

An annulment is a declaration by a Church tribunal (a Catholic church court) that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding union.

The annulment process is frequently misunderstood.

What is an annulment?

“Annulment” is an unfortunate word that is sometimes used to refer to a Catholic “declaration of nullity.” Actually, nothing is made null through the process. Rather, a Church tribunal (a Catholic church court) declares that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding union.

A valid Catholic marriage results from five elements: (1) the spouses are free to marry; (2) they freely exchange their consent; (3) in consenting to marry, they have the intention to marry for life, to be faithful to one another and be open to children; (4) they intend the good of each other; and (5) their consent is given in the presence of two witnesses and before a properly authorized Church minister. Exceptions to the last requirement must be approved by church authority.

Why does the Church require a divorced Catholic to obtain a declaration of nullity before re-marrying in the Church?

The Church presumes that marriages are valid and lifelong; therefore, unless the ex-spouse has died, the Church requires the divorced Catholic to obtain a declaration of nullity before re-marrying. The tribunal process seeks to determine if something essential was missing from the couple’s relationship from the moment of consent, that is, the time of the wedding. If so, then the Church can declare that a valid marriage was never actually brought about on the wedding day.

What does the tribunal process involve?

Several steps are involved. The person who is asking for the declaration of nullity – the petitioner – submits written testimony about the marriage and a list of persons who are familiar with the marriage. These people must be willing to answer questions about the spouses and the marriage. The tribunal will contact the ex-spouse – the respondent – who has a right to be involved. The respondent’s cooperation is welcome but not essential. In some cases the respondent does not wish to become involved; the case can still move forward.

Both the petitioner and the respondent can read the testimony submitted, except that protected by civil law (for example, counseling records). Each party may appoint a Church advocate who could represent the person before the tribunal. A representative for the Church, called the defender of the bond, argues for the validity of the marriage. After the tribunal has reached a decision, it is reviewed by a second tribunal. Both parties can participate in this second review as well.

How long does the process take?

It can vary from diocese to diocese, often taking 12 to 18 months or longer in some cases. The diocesan tribunal may be able to give you a more exact estimate.

How can a couple married for many years present a case?

The tribunal process examines the events leading up to, and at the time of, the wedding ceremony, in an effort to determine whether what was required for a valid marriage was ever brought about. The length of common life is not proof of validity but a long marriage does provide evidence that a couple had some capacity for a life-long commitment. It does not prove or disprove the existence of a valid marriage bond.

If a marriage is declared null, does it mean that the marriage never existed?

No. It means it was not valid according to Church law. A declaration of nullity does not deny that a relationship existed. It simply states that the relationship was missing something that the Church requires for marriage.

If a marriage is annulled, are the children considered illegitimate?

No. A declaration of nullity has no effect on the legitimacy of children, since the child's mother and father were presumed to be married at the time that the child was born. Legitimacy depends on civil law.

I do not plan to re-marry. Why should I present a marriage case?

Some people find that simply writing out their testimony helps them to understand what went wrong and why. They gain insights into themselves. Others say that the process allowed them to tell their whole story for the first time to someone who was willing to listen. Many find that the process helped them to let go of their former relationship, heal their hurts, and move on with their lives. A person cannot know today if they might want to marry in the future when crucial witnesses may be deceased or their own memories may have dimmed.

Why does the Catholic Church require an intended spouse, who is divorced but not Catholic, to obtain an annulment before marrying in the Catholic Church?

The Catholic Church respects all marriages and presumes that they are valid. Thus, for example, it considers the marriages of two Protestant, Jewish, or even nonbelieving persons to be binding for life. The Church requires a declaration of nullity to establish that an essential element was missing in that previous union preventing it from being a valid marriage.

This is often a difficult and emotional issue. If the intended spouse comes from a faith tradition that accepts divorce and remarriage, it may be hard for them to understand why they must go through the Catholic tribunal process. Couples in this situation may find it helpful to talk with a priest or deacon. To go through the process can be a sign of great love of the non-Catholic for their intended spouse.

My fiance and I want to marry in the Catholic Church. He has been married before and has applied for an annulment. When can we set a date for our wedding?

You should not set a date until the annulment has been finalized. First, his petition may not be granted. Second, even if the petition is eventually granted, there may be unexpected delays in the process. Many pastors will not allow the couple to set a date until the petition is officially approved.

How much does it cost?

Fees associated with the process vary within the U.S. Most tribunals charge between \$200 and \$1,000 for a formal case depending on how much the diocese subsidizes the work of the tribunal. Fees are typically payable over time, and may be reduced or even waived in cases of financial difficulty. Other expenses may be incurred when consultation with medical, psychological, or other experts is needed.

How do I start the process?

Your parish can provide the information and forms that you need to get started.

What Does the Catholic Church Say About Cohabitation?

Today almost half the couples who come for marriage preparation in the Catholic Church are in a cohabiting relationship. Cohabitation, in a commonly understood sense, means living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Living together in this way involves varying degrees of physical and emotional interaction. Such a relationship is a false sign. It contradicts the meaning of a sexual relationship in marriage as the total gift of oneself in fidelity, exclusivity, and permanency.

Over the past twenty-five years cohabitation has become a major social phenomenon affecting the institution of marriage and family life. It is also an extremely perplexing issue for priests, deacons, and lay pastoral ministers who help couples prepare for marriage in the Church.

Reasons for cohabitation:

- Fear of or disbelief in long-term commitment
- Desire to avoid divorce
- Desire for economic security
- Stage of personal development, escape from home, "rite of passage"
- Desire for stability for raising of children
- Pressure to conform to current mores that having cohabiting partner is measure of social success, personal desirability, adult transition
- Desire to test the relationship
- Rejection of the institution of marriage and desire for an alternative to marriage

What social science says about cohabitation

On average, marriage preceded by cohabitation is 46% more likely to end in divorce. Social scientists have tried to determine whether some of the risk is due to the selection effect, i.e., that people who cohabit are already those who are more likely to divorce. While research shows the selection influence, most social scientists emphasize the causal effect, that is, cohabitation itself increases the chance of future marital problems and divorce. Cohabitors as a group are *less committed* to the institution of marriage and more accepting of divorce. As problems and issues arise to challenge the marriage, they are more likely to seek divorce as the solution.

Cohabitation usually favors one partner over the other. Studies find that cohabitators are unequally committed. Often, the more committed partner is willing to put up with poor communication, unequal treatment, insecurity and abuse. Typically, women are more vulnerable, since they tend to be more committed. Cohabitors are demonstrated to have *inappropriately high expectations of marriage* that can lead them to be disillusioned with the ordinary problems or challenges of marriage. Cohabitors generally report lower satisfaction with marriage after they marry than do noncohabitators. There is danger that they think they have "worked out everything" and that any further challenges are the fault of the institution of marriage.

Cohabitation puts children at risk. Forty percent of cohabiting households include children. After five years, one-half of these couples will have broken up, compared to 15% of married parents.

Church teaching/pastoral response

Church teaching on cohabitation reflects its belief about the dignity of marriage. Marital love is an image of God's love for humanity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1604) and Christian

marriage is a sign of Christ's union with the Church (*Catechism* #1617). This union can never be temporary or a "trial"; it is permanently faithful.

Every act of sexual intercourse is intended by God to express love, commitment and openness to life in the total, unreserved gift of the spouses to each other. Premarital sexual intercourse is sinful because it violates the dignity of persons and the nuptial meaning and purpose of sexuality (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 406). It cannot express what God intended. Rather, it says something false--a total commitment that the couple does not yet have. This total commitment is possible only in marriage.

This mutual self-giving enables the couple to become co-creators with God to bring new life into the world. The gift of sexual intercourse has two purposes: to express and strengthen marital love (unitive) and to share that love with children (procreative). Only in marriage can this total self-giving take place, and only in marriage can children be raised with the secure, committed love of a mother and father.

Couples can enter into cohabitation ("free unions") for various reasons. Pastorally the church community should become familiar with these situations on a case-by-case basis. "They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation" (*Familiaris Consortio* #81). Above all, when cohabiting couples approach the church for marriage we encourage pastoral ministers to recognize this as a teachable moment. Here is a unique opportunity to help couples understand the Catholic vision of marriage. Here, too, is an opportunity for evangelization. By supporting the couple's plans for the future rather than chastising them for the past, the pastoral minister can draw a couple more deeply into the church community and the practice of their faith. Treated with sensitivity and respect, couples can be helped to understand and live the vocation of Christian marriage.

Following *Familiaris Consortio*, diocesan marriage policies that address cohabitation mostly favor an approach that integrates correction with understanding and compassion. This is an opportunity for evangelization and a teachable moment. "While couples need to be welcomed with the gospel values of love, understanding, and acceptance, they also need to be challenged by the gospel message of commitment and faithfulness." (*Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples*, a report by the Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family Life, [/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml](#)).

Conclusion

Many young people are searching for a soulmate in a marriage partner. They want an intimate and enduring relationship where they can share their deepest dreams and desires. In a misguided effort to achieve this intimacy, they often enter into a cohabiting relationship. In so doing, they undermine their chances of attaining the very thing they most want. The Catholic Church understands this quest for intimacy, which God himself has placed within the human heart. Sexual expression is a means of achieving marital intimacy, where the spouses are committed to each other and to the marital relationship. The Catholic Church has consistently taught this truth, and social science research now confirms it.