

A faithful, exclusive, lifelong union between a man and a woman

Marriage is the intimate union and equal partnership of a man and a woman. It comes to us from the hand of God, who created male and female in his image, so that they might become one body and might be fertile and multiply (See Genesis chapters 1 and 2). Though man and woman are equal as God's children, they are created with important differences that allow them to give themselves and to receive the other as a gift.

Marriage is both a natural institution and a sacred union because it is rooted in the divine plan of creation. In addition, the Catholic Church teaches that the valid marriage between two baptized Christians is also a sacrament — a saving reality and a symbol of Christ's love for his Church (See Ephesians 5:25-33). In every marriage the spouses make a contract with each other. In a sacramental marriage the couple also enters into a covenant in which their love is sealed and strengthened by God's love.

The free consent of the spouses makes a marriage. From this consent and from the sexual consummation of marriage a special bond arises between husband and wife. This bond is lifelong and exclusive. The marriage bond has been established by God and so it cannot be dissolved.

In the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, the priest or deacon, the two official witnesses and the congregation all witness the exchange of consent by the couple who themselves are considered to be the ministers of the sacrament. In the Eastern Churches the sacrament is conferred by the priest's blessing after receiving the couple's consent.

Permanency, exclusivity and faithfulness are essential to marriage because they foster and protect the two equal purposes of marriage. These two purposes are growth in mutual love between the spouses (unitive) and the generation and education of children (procreative).

The mutual love of a married couple should always be open to new life. This openness is expressed powerfully in the sexual union of husband and wife. The power to create a child with God is at the heart of what spouses share with each other in sexual intercourse. Mutual love includes the mutual gift of fertility. Couples who are not able to conceive or who are beyond their child-bearing years can still express openness to life. They can share their generative love with grandchildren, other children and families, and the wider community.

As a result of their baptism, all Christians are called to a life of holiness. This divine calling, or vocation, can be lived in marriage, or in the single life, or in the priesthood or consecrated (religious) life. No one vocation is superior to or inferior to another. Each one involves a specific kind of commitment that flows from one's gifts and is further strengthened by God's grace. All vocations make a unique contribution to the life and mission of the Church.

The family arises from marriage. Parents, children, and family members form what is called a domestic church or church of the home. This is the primary unit of the Church — the place where the Church lives in the daily love, care, hospitality, sacrifice, forgiveness, prayer and faith of ordinary families.

Reprinted from "For Your Marriage" —
ForYourMarriage.org — an initiative of the U.S.
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What does the Church teach about Marriage?

Clarity on what the Catholic Church teaches about marriage and its stance regarding the upcoming marriage amendment are particularly important right now in light of inaccuracies and misperceptions about both that are circulating in the media and wider society. This special four-page section explains the Catholic view on marriage and why the church is supporting efforts to pass a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

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Dave Hrbacek / The Catholic Spirit

Catholic marriage: Revealing Christ, building community and reaching out to others

By JoAnn Heaney-Hunter

“Spirituality” is a way to live out one’s religious beliefs. A spirituality of marriage, therefore, is a way to help husbands and wives live out the vocation of marriage in light of faith. Catholic marriage has a distinctive spirituality that is sacramental, communitarian and missionary.

Marriage is sacramental because it is a sign of Christ’s unbreakable love for his people. It is communitarian because it creates and deepens a permanent partnership of life and love. It is missionary because in Catholic marriage couples are called to share with others the good news of their relationship in Christ. A spirituality of marriage helps couples shape their attitude toward life and provides a framework for living one’s marriage in the light of faith.

In the Catholic tradition, a “sacrament” is a concrete expression of Christ in the world. The Eucharist, for example, is a sacrament. Within the eucharistic liturgy, through the priest’s words and actions, the physical signs of bread and wine become Christ really present. Likewise, the Church believes marriage is a sacrament. In marriage, the couple’s life, love and witness can make Christ visible to others. All sacramentally married couples are invited to reveal Christ’s loving presence and generous action in the world.

Just as God is a Trinity of persons — a community — marriage also is communitarian. “Gaudium et Spes,” a Second Vatican Council document, says couples form a permanent, life-giving community. We’ve already described this relationship as sacramental, a sign of Christ’s love in the world. Sacramental couples live as communities that reveal God’s blessings, reach out to heal the brokenness of the family and world, and share their gifts with those around them.

Enriching others

Couples live as communities when they experience the blessings that come from making a total commitment to another person. Making permanent commitments is becoming rare; sacramental couples demonstrate that it is possible. Another blessing of marriage is children. A couple’s willingness to be open to the gift of children, and to demonstrate the generosity and sacrifice necessary to raise them according to Gospel values is a real blessing.

Couples also live as communities when they recognize and heal the brokenness in their individual lives and in their life together. Brokenness is a part of everyone’s life; a spouse is in a unique position to heal the pain that inevitably arises in relationship. Couples create sacramental communities when they build a life of sharing — with each other, with their families, with local communities, with the Church. As couples grow in their love for each other, their communities of life and love enrich the larger communities in their lives.

Finally, sacramental marriages are missionary. Part of the joy of a faith-filled marriage is showing others what it means to be in a loving, Christ-centered relationship, and making known to others the gift of faithful married life and love.

Couples have the potential to show others what it means to embody the life of the Holy Spirit within them. Married couples, while never perfect, are missionary through the witness of their lives and love in the midst of the world. They are characterized by openness to the life of the Spirit within them, by loving service to their neighbors, and by sharing their talents and blessings with and for the local and global communities. As missionaries, married couples can witness Gospel values in their daily lives. A spirituality of marriage shows how couples reveal Christ, build community and reach out to others in love. It is a powerful way to describe how Catholic couples live out their vocation of married life.

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Sex and marriage: An expression of love that is open to new life

The Catholic Church, in its official teaching, has always taken a positive view of sexuality in marriage. Marital intercourse, says the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is “noble and honorable,” established by God so that “spouses should experience pleasure and enjoyment of body and spirit.” (#2362).

The Church’s positive understanding of sexuality is rooted in the teachings of Jesus that were, in part, drawn from the wisdom of the Old Testament. Both the Book of Genesis and the Song of Songs describe the basic goodness of sexual love in marriage. In the New Testament, Jesus began his public ministry with his supportive presence at the wedding feast of Cana, a further indication of the goodness of marriage.

Marital sexuality achieves two purposes.

The Church affirms, first, its role in creating new human life, sometimes called the procreative dimension of sexuality. In giving birth to children and educating them, the couple cooperates with the Creator’s love.

Second, sexual union expresses and deepens the love between husband and wife. This is called the unitive, or relational, aspect of sexuality.

The bond between the procreative and the relational aspects cannot be broken. Each sexual act in a marriage must be open to the possibility of conceiving a child. Contraception is wrong because it separates the act of conception from sexual union. (See “Married Love and the Gift of Life” at USCCB.ORG for more on this topic.)

Recent church teaching has tried to integrate the two purposes of marriage into a single perspective, which sees marital sexual love as essentially procreative. Marital love is by its nature fruitful; it generates new life. The God-created expression of marital love, joined to an openness to new life, contributes to the holiness of the couple. The “call to holiness in marriage is a lifelong process of conversion and growth” (Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 408).

Like all the baptized, married couples are called to chastity. The Church defines chastity as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2337). Married couples practice the conjugal chastity that is proper to their state in life.

Theology of the Body

The late Pope John Paul II wanted to find a new and compelling way to express this positive view of sexuality. He developed a strand of thinking about sexuality and its role in human life called “The Theology of the Body.”

The pope begins with the idea that each human being is willed for his or her own sake. Out of love, God created human beings as male and female, persons of dignity and worthy of respect. Also out of love, God established marriage as the first communion of persons. In marriage, man and woman totally give themselves to each other and, in this self-giving, they discover who they are.

The sin of Adam and Eve ruptured this original unity of body and soul. Sadly, we know the results: Too often women and men have become objects to be used and exploited. The salvation won for us by Jesus Christ began the process of restoring the lost unity of body and soul. This process is partly completed here; full unity will be restored in the next life.

The Church teaches that human sexuality is sacred. Within marriage, it fulfills its purpose as an expression of deep, faithful and exclusive love that is open to new life. Marital sexual relations involve profound openness and receptivity, a complete and mutual self-giving.

Sexuality is an important part of that incredibly rich and mysterious pattern in creation that comes directly from the mind and heart of God.

Reprinted from “For Your Marriage” — FORYOURMARRIAGE.ORG — an initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.



What happens if marriage is REDEFINED?

Most of the following article has been adapted from "Marriage and Religious Liberty: Why the civil definition of marriage should matter to Catholics," Minnesota Catholic Conference.

When a court or legislature adopts a definition of marriage as the union of any two people regardless of gender, legal experts — on both sides of the marriage debate — agree that there will be important consequences for society. Scholars from some of the nation's most respected law schools have written that the issue impacts a host of other issues, ranging from religious liberty, to individual expression of faith, to education and the professions.

For example, these legal scholars (1) predict "a sea change in American law" and foretell an "immense" volume of litigation against individuals, small businesses and religious organizations. Those who do not agree with this new definition of marriage as a genderless institution existing for the benefit of adults — not children — will be treated under the law like bigots and will be punished for their beliefs.

This is already occurring:

■ Religious groups who have refused to make their facilities available for same-sex couples have lost their state tax exemption (2).

■ Religious groups like Catholic Charities in Boston and Washington, D.C., have had to choose between fulfilling their social mission based on their religious beliefs or acquiescing to this new definition of marriage. They have, for example, been forced to close their charitable adoption agencies.

■ Nonprofit groups are faced with abandoning their historic mission principles in order to maintain governmental contracts (for things like low-income housing, health clinics, etc).

■ Whenever schools educate children about marriage, which happens throughout the curriculum, they will have no choice but to teach this new genderless institution. In Massachusetts, students as young as second-graders were taught about gay marriage in class. The courts ruled that parents had no right to prior notice or to opt their children out of such instruction (3).

■ Wedding professionals have been fined for refusing to participate in a same-sex ceremony (4).

■ Doctors, lawyers, accountants and other licensed professionals risk their state licensure if they act on their belief that a same-sex couple cannot really be married. A counselor, for example, could not refuse "marriage therapy" to a same-sex couple because she doesn't believe in gay marriage. She would put her licensure at risk (5).

■ People who believe marriage is between one man and one woman would be the legal equivalent of bigots for acting on their heartfelt beliefs. Refusal to accommodate and recognize "same-sex marriages" would be the equivalent of racial discrimination. Not only will the law penalize traditional marriage supporters, but the power of government will work in concert to promote this belief throughout the culture.

Beyond the U.S.

The impact of same-sex unions is currently being felt beyond U.S. borders.

In Canada, for example, marriage commissioners in the provinces of British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan must perform same-sex marriages or resign, according to an article last May in The Catholic Register in Toronto.

The National Catholic Register recently reported that civil union between three partners has been registered

in Brazil, despite the constitution's definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman. "A Brazilian court earlier allowed homosexuals to marry under a 'stable union' status," the article stated.

The same article also cited a new development in the United States in which the California State Assembly passed legislation in late August allowing judges the ability to declare more than two parents for a child; it applies to men and women, heterosexual and homosexual.

"This confirms everything we've been saying about the consequences of same-sex marriage," Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage, told the newspaper.

Citations

(1) Laycock, Douglas, Anthony R. Picarello, Jr. and Robin Fretwell Wilson. "Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty: Emerging Conflicts." Found at WWW.GOODREADS.COM/AUTHOR/SHOW/5751998.ANTHONY_R_PICARELLO_JR_.

(2) Capuzzo, Jill P. "Group Loses Tax Break Over Gay Union Issue." The New York Times, Sept. 18, 2007, WWW.NYTIMES.COM/2007/09/18/NYREGION/18GROVE.HTML.

(3) Parker v. Hurley, United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, Jan. 31, 2008, cited at WWW.CA1.USCOURTS.GOV/PDF/OPINIONS/07-1528-01A.PDF.

(4) Elane Photography V. Willock, ADF - News Release, n.p., June 4, 2012, WWW.ADFMEDIA.ORG/NEWS/PRDETAIL/5537.

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Q&A

Why do we need a marriage amendment?

Minnesotans will vote Nov. 6 on a state constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The following questions and answers about the effort are an edited version of a Q&A provided by the Minnesota Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota.

Why is this amendment needed?

The amendment is needed to protect the civil institution of marriage, currently codified in Minnesota statutes, from active attempts in the state courts and in the state Legislature to redefine it into a system of domestic partnerships or eliminate it altogether. Unlike a statute, a constitutional provision cannot be changed without the permission of voters.

Why is the Church promoting a constitutional amendment?

All citizens, including Catholics, must care about the government's treatment of marriage because civil authorities are charged with protecting children and promoting the common good, and marriage is indispensable to both purposes.

It is a reality that unites a man and a woman and any children born from their union. That is what marriage is; that is what marriage does. Government supports this social reality; it does not create it.

There are many types of loving, committed relationships in our lives that serve a variety of purposes, but we don't call them marriage. That is because marriage is more. It is about what kids need, not what adults want.

The Minnesota Catholic Conference (MNCC.ORG) makes available many resources on its website to help Catholics and the public understand what the civil institution of marriage is and why it is worth defending.

Is the Church imposing its view of marriage on others?

One need not be religious to see the importance of civil marriage to society, nor is the issue of marriage a purely religious or sectarian question. This is not a debate about sacraments, the "sanctity" of marriage or the private

dimensions of people's romantic relationships, but instead civil marriage's essential public purposes.

In this debate, the Church is merely

offering her insights about what will promote the common good, just as she does on a whole variety of issues: abortion, the economy, migration, education and poverty. She attempts to speak using points of reference accessible to all people: natural law, social science, experience, history and tradition. In doing so, the Church shows she is not defending a mere religious doctrine, but a truth that history shows is universal.

People may disagree with the Church's position, but Catholics are not disqualified from public debates merely because what they know by reason is also supported by what they believe God has revealed. To claim otherwise is a radical assault on free speech and an affront to this nation's cherished tradition of religious participation in important political questions, such as the Civil Rights movement.

Isn't marriage a civil right?

Marriage is a civil right, but like every right it has limitations and responsibilities attached to it.

Every man and every woman has a right to enter into marriage, but marriage as an institution can only be between a man and a

woman. Governments do not have the power to redefine marriage because it is a permanent human institution that does not owe its existence to governments.

Marrying a person of the same sex is not a civil right because same-sex couples cannot fulfill the core public purpose of marriage: bringing men and women into the only kind of union that can naturally make new life and give children mothers and fathers.

Is the Church discriminating against gay people?

Proclaiming the truth about God's clear plan for marriage to be exclusively between one man and one woman is not discrimination. Through nature, we can recognize and understand that a man is male and a woman is female. Neither of these is discrimination; they are simply observations of natural law and the inherent complementarity of the two genders that were clearly made for one another.

The fact is that the marriage amendment does not take away anyone's existing rights or legal protections. We are simply defending marriage from attempts to weaken it or turn it into something else. The debate about the meaning of marriage is not one we have started, and we cannot remain silent as this very important institution is under attack. We recognize that some who oppose a marriage amendment and want to redefine marriage experience same-sex attraction. We do not "hate" them, just like we do not hate those who have divorced or committed adultery or any other sexual sins. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We must make a point to remind ourselves that every person has an inherent dignity. Like all other human beings, our brothers and sisters living with same-sex attraction are beloved children of God. As a result, the Catholic Church affirms that they "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in this regard should be avoided" [Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2358].

People with same-sex attraction, like others in society, are productive citizens,

loving parents, community servants, good friends or our beloved family members. Their fundamental human rights must be defended, and everyone must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression or violence against all persons.

But our love and compassion for our neighbor does not mean we are compelled to modify important public institutions to satisfy desires or validate relationships. People can live as they choose, but no one has the right to redefine marriage for all of society.

Is the Church working with other communities to support the marriage amendment?

Yes. The Church actively supports and collaborates with the Minnesota for Marriage campaign, a broad coalition of religious and secular groups committed to defending the institution of marriage in Minnesota. To learn more about the campaign, visit: [HTTP://WWW.MINNESOTAFORMARRIAGE.COM](http://www.minnesotafor marriage.com).

What can Catholics do to defend and promote marriage?

Catholics can put their faith in action by working with their pastor or parish committees, the activities of which are being supported by the Minnesota Catholic Conference.

Because it takes money to speak in a democracy, Catholics are also encouraged to make a donation to Minnesota for Marriage. Donations can be made through [HTTP://WWW.MINNESOTAFORMARRIAGE.COM](http://www.minnesotafor marriage.com).

Catholics should also pray for the success of the amendment, for those involved, and that our message may fall on receptive ears. Most important, Catholics should witness to the truth of marriage by living their own marriages well and helping others do the same. Ultimately, it is not enough to pass a marriage amendment. We must truly rebuild a culture of marriage and family life.

VOTE YES 

Minnesota Marriage Protection Amendment

Shall the Minnesota constitution be amended to provide that only a union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in Minnesota?

A NON-VOTE IS A NO VOTE



ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN

5 resources to learn more about marriage and the marriage amendment

■ **Catechism of the Catholic Church.** See #1601 to 1666.

■ **"Marriage: Speaking the truth with love,"** by Archbishop John Nienstedt, in *The Catholic Spirit*, Aug. 30, 2012. Online at [HTTP://THE-CATHOLICSPIRIT.COM/THAT-THEY-MAY-ALL-BE-ONE/MARRIAGE-SPEAKING-THE-TRUTH-WITH-LOVE](http://the-catholic-spirit.com/that-they-may-all-be-one/marriage-speaking-the-truth-with-love).

■ **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' marriage page.** [WWW.USCCB.ORG/ISSUES-AND-ACTION/MARRIAGE-AND-FAMILY/MARRIAGE](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage).

■ **Unique for a Reason: Why Marriage Matters** — [HTTP://MARRIAGEMATTERS.MNCC.ORG](http://marriagematters.mncc.org) — a blog exploring the importance of sexuality and marriage sponsored by the Minnesota Catholic Conference.

■ **Marriage Protection Amendment page** of the Minnesota Catholic Conference. [WWW.MNCC.ORG/ADVOCACY-AREAS/MARRIAGE-AND-FAMILY/MARRIAGE-AMENDMENT](http://www.mncc.org/advocacy-areas/marriage-and-family/marriage-amendment).