



Family Matters



The MARRIAGE and FAMILY LIFE OFFICE

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Seven Themes of the Bishops' Pastoral Letter Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan

by H. Richard McCord

In November 2009, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) approved the pastoral letter *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, which is the centerpiece of the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage (see usccb.org/loveandlife). The U.S. Bishops intend this letter to be a theological foundation for understanding the God-given meaning of marriage, for living it faithfully, for promoting and strengthening it, and for protecting and defending it. An easy way to grasp the letter's message is to reflect on its seven themes. Each theme communicates an essential point of Catholic teaching about marriage as a natural institution and as a Christian sacrament.

A NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL GIFT

Marriage comes from the hand of God, who endows it with its proper form and purposes. Marriage is a union that the Creator blessed and called "very good." It is not something that we invented or that we can redefine.

The gift of marriage was not lost by original sin. Instead, it was redeemed by Christ and established as one of the seven sacraments by which his love for us becomes present. In the sacrament of matrimony, the gift of natural marriage is transformed by the action of Christ and his Church. The marital union then becomes a unique relationship in which spouses help each other achieve holiness and give witness to God's love in the world.



THE UNIQUE UNION OF A MAN AND A WOMAN

The creation stories of Genesis show that man and woman are made for each other. The ways that the male and female sexes complement each other are essential to the nature and purposes of marriage. This complementarity is biological, but it also exists in the ways men and women think, act and communicate.

Sexual complementarity enables spouses to form an intimate union that is loving and life-giving. Same-sex relationships cannot do this, and making them equivalent to marriage violates the nature of marriage.

(For more, see marriageuniquenessforareason.org.)

A COMMUNION OF LOVE AND LIFE

Marriage creates a "one-flesh" union, or intimate communion that is meant to be love- and life-giving. The two purposes of marriage, called unitive and procreative, are equal, inseparable and ordered to each other. Contraception is objectively wrong because it deliberately separates the unitive and procreative purposes. Natural methods of family planning, on the other hand, respect God's design for married love.

A SACRAMENT OF CHRIST'S LOVE

The sacrament of matrimony elevates the natural institution of marriage to a sharing of love larger than itself. This is the love of Christ for his bride, the Church. His love is faithful, fruitful, free and forever, and Christian spouses are called to imitate this love.

Since the sacrament makes Christ present in a couple's marriage, they can rely on his grace to help them grow and persevere in love even when it seems impossible.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

The Christian family is an image of the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The love that spouses share and give to their children overflows from the family to nurture the world. This familial love is an indispensable service to society and the Church. Church teaching calls the family a "domestic church," or church of the home, because Christ is present in its members and because the family has a mission to announce and build up the kingdom of God.



A JOURNEY OF HUMAN AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Human growth, which is necessary in every marriage, is intertwined with growth in holiness. Grace builds upon nature.

Worthwhile Websites to Visit



April is Autism Awareness month. For more information about Autism visit www.ncpd.org/ministries-programs/specific/autism

www.TalkingWithKids.org encourages parents to talk to their kids early and often about tough subjects

While the MFLO makes every effort to assure the appropriateness of these web sites, we do not maintain them and are not responsible for their content, accuracy, opinions, or links.

Spiritual growth takes place to the extent that spouses welcome Christ into their lives and strive, through the practice of virtues, to conform their attitudes and actions to his.

All virtues lead to the perfection of love. Marriage is a journey of love that constitutes a true vocation within the Church.

A SCHOOL OF LOVE AND GRATITUDE

If marriage is a gift, then the most appropriate response is gratitude. Gratitude opens the human heart to receive and give love. An open heart, in turn, means openness to children and extends to all those in need.



When couples are nurtured by the Eucharist, they increase their capacity for love and gratitude. They become a blessing and a gift to each other and to the world.

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"Marriage is an act of will that signifies and involves a mutual gift, which unites the spouses and binds them to their eventual souls, with whom they make up a sole family - a domestic church." Pope John Paul II

Important Words

The six most important words...
"I admit I made a mistake."

The five most important words...
"You did a good job."

The four most important words...
"What is your opinion?"

The three most important words...
"If you please."

The two most important words...
"Thank you."

The one most important word...
"We."



Christopher News Notes No. 471 "Say it with Love"

Marriage Prayer

Lord, help us remember when we first met, and the strong Love that grew between us. Help us to work that Love into practical things so nothing can divide us. We ask for words both kind and loving, and for hearts always ready to ask for forgiveness as well as to forgive.

Dear Lord, we put our marriage into your hands. We pray this Marriage Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen

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