

# MARRIAGE PREPARATION DOCUMENT

A Clergy Guide to  
Addressing Significant Topics

# CONTENTS

Introduction

The Marriage Sacrament

Theology of the Body

Cohabitation

Contraceptives

Abortion

Pornography

Post Marriage

## Marriage Preparation Document for Deacons

### Touching on the sensitive topics

Marriage in the Catholic Church is a sacred and lifelong covenant between a man and a woman.

As expressed in the Questions of Intent in the Rite of Matrimony, this requires:

- Freedom: "have you come here freely?"
- Total commitment: "... and without reservation"
- Self-giving love: "...to give yourselves to each other"
- Faithfulness: "will you love and honor each other as man and wife?"
- Permanence: "...for the rest of your lives"
- Fruitfulness: "will you accept children lovingly from God"

Unfortunately, our secular society ("the world") often does not support these principals, and engaged couples are exposed to very different messages as they prepare for, and then live out, their married lives. This document seeks to help the deacon to address these issues within the context of marriage preparation, through several brief papers, each with additional resources.

- More than likely during the course of your marriage preparation in the parish, you will encounter a woman or man who has taken part in an abortion. We must encourage dialogue between the couple where this situation exists, showing mercy and tenderness. In this way, the couple will have the **freedom** to give full consent with nothing hidden or blocking the total sharing of self, past, present and future. This is addressed in the section on Abortion.
- The majority of engaged couples are already living together before marriage, falsely believing this will help them prepare for a strong marriage. But this conditional relationship is contradictory to the **total commitment** they are preparing to make. This is addressed in the section on Cohabitation.
- We must introduce the couple to God's Plan for marriage as a reflection of the **self-giving love** of the Trinity, the opposite of self-seeking love, or lust, so widely promoted by our hedonistic culture. This is addressed in the section on the Theology of the Body, "God's Plan for Marriage and Sexuality".
- **Faithfulness** is challenged by many factors, especially the lure of pornography, which many consider "harmless" or "victimless". But within a marriage, the use of pornography leads the spouses to treat each other as just objects to be used for sexual pleasure--destroying the love of the Covenant between the spouses and God. This is addressed in the section on Pornography.

- Many couples who come to the Church to be married don't really understand what they are asking from the Church. The deacon must present the Sacrament in a way that helps the engaged couple comprehend the **permanence** and grace of the state in the life that they are about to enter. This is addressed in the section on The Marriage Sacrament.
- The openness to children is a fundamental purpose of marriage and stems from the free, total, faithful giving of one spouse to another. If, indeed, the couple approaches marriage with confidence and trust in their spouse, the **fruitfulness** of children will be the natural result of the marital union. This is addressed in the section on Artificial Contraception.
- Finally, the need for **ongoing support** of the Catholic Community for young married couples is addressed in the section on Retaining Contact with Newly-Married Couples.

We hope that you will find these resources helpful, and we welcome your questions and feedback.

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# THE MARRIAGE SACRAMENT

## The Marriage Sacrament

Many couples that come to the Church to be married don't understand what they are asking from the Church. They have a concept of the Church's teachings; but, often those perceptions are tainted with a secular slant that is misleading and unhealthy. This document is meant to help the deacon discuss the Sacrament in a way that assists the engaged couple to comprehend the gravity and grace that they are about to enter.

### The World View on Marriage

The world looks on marriage as a convenience more than a lifelong commitment. Examples of this are found in same-sex relationships and pre-nuptial agreements. The world has been convinced that Marriage is not driven by the hand and law of God; rather, by the changing definitions created in civil law.

- **The Commitment of the Relationship**— In a secular marriage, a couple is not required to make a lifelong commitment. One or the other can terminate the contract by going back to the state and getting a civil divorce. There is little to no effort within state agencies to try and heal or reconcile the disagreement between the two parties. *This is particularly painful for children that are left without a paternal or maternal relationship.*
- **The State**—The State license must be signed even by those who choose to have a Sacramental wedding. This license to enter a marriage is not enforced other than post-marriage obligations levied on the parties should they decide to separate.
- **The Wedding Party**—The wedding party members, if any, are often friends and relatives of the family but have no obligation to support the couple after their wedding. Sometimes a witness can even be a stranger or a drinking buddy.
- **Justice of the Peace**—If the government witness of marriages was responsible for the success of the marriages they witnessed, there would probably be fewer civil marriages in the country. They are simply a witness on behalf of the state and authorize the marriage civilly.
- **The Contract**—A wedding by the State is simply a contract; no different than procuring an item or service to be purchased—only the terms of the agreement are different. The couple is free to set the terms (e.g. prenuptial agreement) and to honor the contract or break it.
- **Imitation of** —The State has a poor history of providing good role models for successful marriage for a couple to imitate. This is especially true when many marriages are by "common law" or can be witnessed by anyone. Indeed, with the authorization of same-sex marriages, the State has set the precedent for all sorts of other contractually established relationships under the title of marriage.
- **Consummation of the Contract**—The signing of the wedding license is all that is required to make the wedding "official", and its purpose is to document in state records the names of the married parties.

## **The Catholic Church View on Marriage**

- **The Grace of the Sacrament**—The Church understands that the grace of the Sacrament does not just begin and end at the wedding. It is a life time of abundance that is poured out freely to each of them. This grace is entrusted to each of them to be given away to the other totally and completely. As they empty their self to the other; God provides more.
- **The Church**—The congregation is made up of those specifically invited to the wedding because of their relationship to the couple, to represent the Church and to witness the most important obligation the wedding couple makes--each to the other. This "Church witness" should take on the responsibility of helping the newlywed couple fulfill the vows they made to God and His Bride, the Church. The building itself, identifies the Church structurally and allows the couple to contemplate how the great Sacrament of Marriage belongs to the whole Church of which they are a part.
- **The Wedding Party**—The wedding party members have a special place in the wedding as particular witnesses to the Sacramental event. They are called and designated to be special friends to the couple—no longer to one of the individuals, but to the couple and their relationship with God. It is their responsibility to help keep the marriage healthy and strong, to the best of their ability. Thus, it is important to educate the wedding party on their obligations prior to the ceremony so they have time to replace or back out if they so desire. (A Rite of Commitment for the Wedding Party is provided in the Appendix.)
- **Jesus Christ, Present**—The couple should be fully aware of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Tabernacle, and in the lifelong covenantal vows they undertake in the ceremony. This also is a reminder to call upon God in each important decision they make regarding their future. Therefore, prayer is an important aspect of their relationship throughout their lives.
- **The Covenant**— Sacramental Marriage is a tripartite covenant which gives the couple an opportunity for an intimate relationship with God, who does not break his promises, as the third party to the Marriage. This is in contrast to a bi-lateral human contract between two people that is often broken.
- **Imitation of Christ and His Bride**—A good point of catechesis is to explain the relationship of Christ and His Church. It also helps to explain that Jesus desires unity with His Bride which is best explained in the Exsultet when the Deacon sings, that heaven is "wedded" to earth. Also, Ephesians 5 offers up an important opportunity to help the couple understands how they should respond and relate to one another as God relates to His Church.
- **Consummation of the Sacrament**—The purpose of the Sacrament is about unity of the couple and the procreation and education of children in the faith. Unity might be best experienced by encouraging them to pray together on their wedding night as the "two become one flesh" in consummating their vows to each other and God. The prayer of Tobit and his wife, Sarah is a good example to use. (Tob 8:5-8)

# THEOLOGY OF THE BODY



# God's Plan for Marriage and Sexuality

## The World's Perception of Marriage and Sexuality

We have all witnessed the rapidly declining perception of the sacredness of marriage and sexuality in our culture, as "public opinion" and ensuing legislation continue to undermine the understanding of marriage as a sacred relationship between a man and a woman that reflects the nature of Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. Likewise, the world's view of sexuality and sexual intimacy promotes the notion that neither gender nor commitment are important, but sex is a merely human pleasure that should be available to all, without restriction or consequence. As a result, infidelity, pornography, divorce, cohabitation, same-sex unions, contraception, and abortion of unwanted children are accepted as "normal", and as "rights" for all.

Couples who have made the commitment to marry in the church have a need and a right to learn a much different understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage and human sexuality as a wonderful gift that invites them into a taste of the divine love that God shares with us.

In our experience over decades of preparing couples for marriage, we have witnessed a clear decline in their understanding of the sacredness of sexuality, as they have been more and more influenced by the rapid decline of our society's understanding and appreciation of the meaning of sexuality. Several factors are obvious in the population of engaged couples: they are, on the average, approaching marriage at a later age; a great majority are cohabiting<sup>1</sup>; and it is apparent that very few are marrying their first sexual partner<sup>2</sup>. Given that many, perhaps most, have already experienced sexual intimacy outside of the context of marriage, our challenge is to help these couples grow into a richer and more complete appreciation of what a couple's sexual intimacy can be in marriage.

In the initial meeting with engaged couples, our fundamental role is to introduce them to a new way of understanding their sexuality so that they are at least curious, if not yet fully open, to what they will hear in the course of their marriage preparation, from the *Theology of the Body*. It is not the intent, at this point, to "teach" them the *Theology of the Body*. It is to invite them into an openness to learn something surprisingly positive and exciting about married love. Once they are open to understanding the amazing state of life God has called them to, and are willing to accept that the world's plan is counterfeit, and God's plan is beautiful, they will learn through *Theology of the Body*, why their sexual relationship is holy, positive, and life-giving. Then, in turn, they can discover why lust, in all its forms (infidelity, pornography, contraception, etc.) are deceptions of the enemy to cheat them of the grace, and destroy the sacredness, of their marriage.

<sup>1</sup>. <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/factsfigures/>; <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/upload/Marriage-and-Family-in-the-US.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>. <http://waitingtillmarriage.org/4-cool-statistics-about-abstinence-in-the-usa/>

# God's Plan for Marriage and Sexuality

## Presenting God's Plan to the Engaged

This is no small task, but a tremendously important one if we are to renew the world through the church, through the family, through authentically married couples and authentically celibate persons. Pope Saint John Paul II's work, the *Theology of the Body* presents a definitive and life-giving explanation of authentic humanity, which is most clearly defined in our sexuality...the masculinity and femininity with which God created us in His own image.

If we, as marriage preparation ministers, are to effectively transmit this life-giving message to those who are about to enter Matrimony, we must first understand and embrace this teaching ourselves. *Theology of the Body* (a compilation of 129 brief audiences Pope John Paul II gave from 1979 to 1984, expressing work he had written before he became pope) is a deep and profound teaching, not readily digested in one reading. So, before attempting to "introduce" this theology, we must first become familiar with it, and live it ourselves. (List of suggested resources is attached.)

**Fundamental truths in *Theology of the Body* which are important to introduce to the engaged from the beginning.**

- First is the very positive attitude that the church holds toward sex and sexuality ("correcting" the too common misperceptions that sex is bad, dirty, or primarily for procreation.) John Paul II demonstrates, that, "from the beginning," God intended to reveal his own nature through creating us as sexual persons, ordered toward relationship and self-giving.
- Unlike animals, who use their bodies instinctively to reproduce sexually, humans are uniquely created with body and spirit, and infused with a deep desire for community, as Adam discovered when he was first alone.
- God asks us to love one another as "persons", rather than use one another as "objects", particularly in the intimate love of marriage. Husbands and wives are to be in awe of each other, recognizing that they have been called by God to love this unique person they have chosen to marry.
- God is not limited to a physical body, but chose to enter into flesh to "meet us where we are," in the body. Christ's embrace of the flesh, and His clear call to return to "the beginning", before sin, to understand our human sexuality, and in that, understand more deeply God's nature and love, invites us into a deeper experience of it with Him.
- their own marriage, as a sacrament, is a vocation to be a model of Christ's love for his church...pointing to the ultimate relationship of total love we will experience in heaven.

# COHABITATION

## **The Issue of Cohabitation:**

### **The World's View of Co-habitation before Marriage**

Cohabitation before marriage and the growing indifference to ever being married are widely accepted and ever-growing realities in American culture. Characteristics of those approaching the church for marriage include low levels of religious participation, those whose own parent's marriages ended in divorce, and lower levels of earning power where money becomes a burden on the relationship. The growing secularization and individualization of our culture, an aversion to long term commitments, economic feasibility and the conviction that a "trial marriage" is the social norm and improves the chances of a good marriage are reasons frequently given for making this choice.

### **Predisposing Attitudes and Characteristics Taken into a Marriage**

#### ***The Church's View on Co-habitation before Marriage***

- Cohabitors as a group are *less committed* to the institution of marriage and more accepting of divorce. Those who cohabit before marriage are 50% more likely to divorce than those who do not cohabit.
- "*Sexual exclusivity*" --After marriage, a woman who cohabited before marriage is 3.3 times more likely to be sexually unfaithful.
- Cohabitors identify themselves or the relationship as *poor risk for long-term happiness*, and so feel the need to test the relationship through cohabitation.
- Cohabitors may decide to marry because of various *pressures*. While family and friends are often right to encourage marriage for a cohabiting couple, a marriage made under such pressure is problematic unless the couple chooses it for more substantial reasons.
- Cohabitors report lower satisfaction with marriage after they marry than do noncohabiters. There is danger that they think they have "worked out everything" and that any further challenges are the fault of the institution of marriage.

#### ***Experiences from Cohabitation Itself (versus those who marry without cohabiting)***

- The experience of cohabitation *changes the attitudes about commitment and permanence* and makes couples more open to divorce.
- Cohabitors have *more conflict over money*; have set patterns of autonomy or competition about it.
- Domestic violence is a more common problem, less of a need to protect the relationship, and can lead to dysfunctional patterns of problem-solving. Children and stress over the permanency of the relationship are common causes of conflict and sometimes violence.
- Cohabitors who marry are *less effective at conflict resolution* due to a fear of upsetting an uncommitted relationship or the lack of need to protect it.

- Using sex as a controlling factor can be a negative pattern which cohabiting couples can bring to their marriage. *Reinforcement of negative family of origin patterns* can also have occurred in the cohabiting relationship and be carried over to marriage. Both of these patterns are common issues that dating couples carry into marriage, but they can be exaggerated by the cohabitation experience.

### **Reaching the Cohabiting, Engaged Couple:**

It is important to help the couple to identify the attitudes, issues and patterns that led them to make the decision to cohabit. These often become the predisposing factors to put them at high risk for divorce when they do choose to move from cohabitation to marriage. The cohabitation experience itself creates risk factors, bad habits that can sabotage the subsequent marriage. These attitudes and patterns can be identified and brought to the couple preparing for marriage for examination, decision-making, skill-building, change. Without creating "self-fulfilling prophecies," those preparing cohabiting couples for marriage can help them identify and work with issues around commitment, fidelity, individualism, pressure, appropriate expectations.

### **The Goals in Addressing the Issue of Cohabitation**

- The primary goal in counseling a cohabiting couple is to enthusiastically encourage each person that the total and unrestricted gift of oneself to the other in the image of Christ, the bridegroom of his bride, the Church, is not only achievable but the way to each person's true fulfillment and joy in this life and in the life to come.
- Encourage and, if necessary, support a free decision on the part of the cohabiting couple to live separately in their preparation for marriage.
- Discuss the positive benefits of renewing their relationship by this separation, to live chastely, and to draw closer to the Lord and the effects of his grace, for Catholics, with a warm invitation from clergy, by availing themselves of the sacrament of Reconciliation and regular participation at Mass and for both, a renewal of prayers for each other and for their future together.
- Facilitators of the FOCCUS inventory should be advised to pay particular attention to the couple's communication and problem solving practices and recommend special counseling/training to be educated in recognizing and overcoming negative behaviors prior to the wedding. Address the issue of pressures that have surfaced in their relationship since they began to live together, especially when they have children together. Encourage them to participate in programs that help them with financial decisions, with parenting and ways to confidently work together to move forward.

# CONTRACEPTIVES

## **The Issue of Contraception**

During the wedding ceremony, the couple will be asked "Will you accept children lovingly from God?" The openness to children is a fundamental purpose of marriage and stems from the free, total, faithful giving of one spouse to another. If, indeed, the couple approaches marriage with confidence and trust in their spouse, the fruitfulness of children will be the natural result of the marital union.

### **The World's view of sex and fertility**

Modern society has relegated the marital act to, primarily, gratification. It has also downgraded the life-giving component marital love to a secondary status. Current thought equates children as a burden, as something that will interfere with the couple achieving their goals in life. News items are often quoted about the time and cost burdens associated with raising a family, denigrating child bearing below financial and career success. The implication is that the time needed for children will interfere with one's job and lead to fewer promotions and less self-satisfaction in employment; and money would be better spent on a bigger house, new cars, or more exotic vacations, than on one or more children. The overall message is that the burden of children will, somehow, limit one's potential to have a full and productive life.

**Contraception (artificial birth control)** Because secular society views children as something to be avoided or limited, modern science has developed methods to prevent pregnancy during sex. Most of the impetus is on the female; allowing her to be available to the male without the familial obligations.

**Effectiveness of artificial birth control.** None of the birth control methods are 100% effective. The table in the appendix summarizes the failure rate of common birth control methods, which should be alarming. Commonly, the failure rate for contraceptives is 8% to 30%. Continued use over time increases the chance of an unwanted pregnancy to 60% to 90%.

**Health risks of artificial birth control.** Several artificial birth control methods carry significant health risks. They are touted as a means to free the couple from unwanted pregnancy; ignoring the medical dangers. Many oral contraceptives have been classified as "Group 1 carcinogens", leading to a risk of cancer in the breast, liver, and cervix<sup>1</sup>; as well as heart disease, stroke, venous thromboembolism, blood clots and heart attack.

### **The Church's view of sex and fertility**

"God created man in his own image... male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). The Church views human sexuality as something natural, wholesome, and in keeping with God's plan for humanity. Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In contrast to the self-centeredness promoted by secular society, the Church views physical intimacy as a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. "In the marital act, the spouses achieve the twofold end of marriage, the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These meanings cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family" (CCC2363).



**Contraception (artificial birth control).** The primary objection of the Church to these methods is that, with artificial birth control, the couple separates sexuality from fertility. This interferes with the natural process that links the marital act with the procreation of children. In addition, some methods do not just prevent conception, but also act to make it impossible for a fertilized egg to implant or continue to develop (abortion.) Couples using contraception are withholding from each other their own fertility, contradicting the "total self-giving" of marriage.

**Natural Family Planning (NFP).** The Church teaches that, for just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. One of the steps for preparing a couple for marriage is instruction on morally acceptable methods for family planning. The Church teaches that artificial methods of birth control are morally unacceptable because they interfere with the natural process of human reproduction. NFP is morally acceptable and has little to no increased risks of health concerns.

**Effectiveness of NFP.** The failure rate of NFP is 1.8%<sup>4</sup>. The risk of unintended pregnancy with NFP is about 25% over 10 years with perfect use<sup>4</sup>. There are distinct times of fertility and infertility that occur in a regular cycle, which are readily observable once trained in the method, and can be used to abstain from sex when the woman is fertile.

**Health risks of NFP.** As Natural Family Planning is completely natural, introducing no chemicals, hormones, or devices into either partner's body, there are no health risks associated with its use. In fact, the knowledge of the fertility cycles of the woman provided with NFP helps couples struggling with infertility to become pregnant by identifying the most fertile times for intercourse.

**Summary.** Secular society views sex as something for the pleasure of the individual, separated from the life-giving aspects of sexual union. Towards that end, methods have been developed to prevent any pregnancy that would naturally occur with the completion of the sexual act. In contrast, the Church views sex as a communion between husband and wife for their mutual benefit. Openness to children is assumed within a Christian marriage, and a pregnancy that occurs within the confines of marriage should be accepted with great joy. One of the greatest differences between the secular world's acceptance of artificial birth control methods and the Church's acceptance of NFP is the attitude of the couple toward children. For couples using artificial birth control, pregnancy is often considered a burden, and may lead to abortion of the fetus. For couples using NFP, pregnancy is usually considered a blessing, a gift from God, consistent with their marriage vows.

Information on Natural Family Planning is available at the Archdiocese website:

<http://archden.org/eflm/nfp/>



# ABORTION

## **Prior Experience with Abortion**

Abortion may seem a difficult subject to talk about with young couples, but it is essential that persons who have experienced abortion in this, or a prior relationship, be able to share openly and honestly with their future spouse, since if these experiences remain hidden, they can tragically affect the freedom to love each other completely.

### **The World's View on Abortion**

- Our society has declared that a mother has the legal right to abort her unborn child, for any reason, and those who oppose that right are hateful of women, and seek to "impose their morality on others."
- The world would argue that an unborn child is not a person, and therefore abortion does not end a relationship, just a mass of cells.
- Abortion provides an easy option for the father to avoid his responsibilities, both to the child, and to his relationship with the woman, teaching him he has the "freedom" to escape difficult situations.
- Unintended pregnancies are seen an impediment to personal, economic and career goals. Pregnancy is treated as a disease, with a simple medical solution, with no further consequence.
- The "right" to terminate inconvenient pregnancies is seen as a "freedom" to enter multiple sexual relationships.

### **The Church's View on Abortion's Effect on Marriage**

- The Church has courageously defended the moral law and understands the deep emotional and physical scars that result from an abortion, particularly for the woman (i.e.: depression, inability to be open to an intimate relationship and potential for future problematic infertility). She also understands the important role of the father in a relationship and his obligations and duties; not only to the mother but also to the child.
- The Catholic Church has never minimized the grave sin, which is abortion. She understands that sin is a form of bondage and does not allow for freedom. Yet, St John Paul II says in *Evangelium Vitae*, "Do not give in to discouragement, and do not lose hope."
- *If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you His forgiveness and His peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation...You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord.*

## **Can an Abortion be Forgotten?**

The burden still rests on the mother to undergo and deal with the pain of killing her child and its physical and emotional repercussions, often alone. Yet, fathers and mothers of aborted children often develop mental pictures of their daughters and/or sons, have named them, and some have even watched them grow through the years in their imaginations. This is especially true when they have another child and special events take place that trigger the memory of what might have been. These memories have a deep and personal effect on future relationships; especially when hidden from a prospective spouse.

## **Can an Abortion be Forgiven?**

People often feel guilt and shame over a past abortion and some believe that it is an unforgivable sin. But, this is not true. Often times, simply going to confession can absolve a person from the bondage of their sin, giving them the freedom to share that part of themselves with their fiancé. Until they are free of this bondage, they may keep up a charade of participating in their faith and parish activities for fear of giving scandal or being rejected by loved ones. They find themselves sinking deeper and deeper into despair because of the guilt and shame they take on, known only to themselves.

## **How to Address Abortion with an Engaged Couple**

This issue needs to be broached with every couple so that if they have participated in an abortion it will be something for them to address privately. For most couples this probably will not be an issue, but how devastating an impact that unconfessed sin can have on a marriage!

Suggest the couple discuss this issue in the following way, if applicable:

- First, pray about the situation and what God desires from you.
- Second, make an appointment with a parish priest, one whom you feel will listen carefully to your concerns and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that you know that you have been forgiven.
- Third, with the counsel of your pastor, discuss this issue with your future spouse.
- Fourth, it is likely the person or couple will need to seek counsel (i.e. Rachel's Vineyard);

If their future spouse cannot accept this revelation of their past, they are setting conditions on the relationship and aren't able to love the reality of who the person is today. If, on the other hand, the one who has experienced abortion chooses to withhold this from their fiancé, they, too, would not be entering marriage "freely, and without reservation."

In any case, they need to be treated with great sensitivity and compassion.

# PORNOGRAPHY

# **The Issue of Pornography in Marriage**

## **The World's View of Pornography**

Pornography is a victimless issue that purports to put on display the beauty of sexual encounters. Pornography is harmless and is not hurting anyone.

Sexually arousing photography and film-making is an "art form." There is nothing wrong with expressing the act of sexual intimacy between persons by means of photography and videography.

Pornography is objective. It's not a person. It's just a two dimensional image of a person or of persons; whereby a man or a woman (or a greater number of people) can derive pleasure and personal satisfaction.

Pornography has an immediate accessibility that allows a person to quickly find sexual satisfaction without affecting anybody and which can be enjoyed in complete privacy.

Sexual pleasure is good for its own sake. It lowers our level of anxiety and gives us relief when pressure around us and/or sexual desires builds up.

Pornography enhances the sexual experience within a relationship.

Pornography satisfies our natural craving for pleasure. There is nothing wrong with allowing us to follow our "animal instincts".

People opposed to pornography are prudes and uptight about sex.

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Pornography is a multi-billion dollar business worldwide. It is very profitable. It is good for the economy. Women, in particular, are able to make good money in the industry.

"Porn is always available, never too busy, and always inviting. It doesn't criticize, doesn't require foreplay or patience, isn't dependent on "feeling close," and never has a headache"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Impact of Pornography on Marital Sex By Juli Slattery

## **The Truth About Pornography as Expressed by the Wisdom of the Church**

The human body is not merely an object. We are a *person*, made beautifully and lovingly in the image and likeness of God. We are multi-dimensional souls that find true meaning in the collective beauty of our mind, our body and our spirit.

We most perfectly express our true self when we interact with other persons for the sake of the other person, and not for self-serving passions.

It is by Holy Matrimony that we are ordered to the other person in the most intimate and selfless bond of sexual intercourse, for the greater good of the spouse and for the effect of being fruitful for God's kingdom. Our ultimate cause, *as a man and as a woman*, is that new life should spring forth from our union.

Pornography fractures the Sacramental bond of Matrimony and is cheating on your spouse. We are unfaithful to our spouse and to God if we participate in any sexual activity outside of our marital bond.

Pornography is an addictive evil that is never satisfied. It leads to more inordinate passions and more dangerous curiosities as we are incessantly deceived by the evil one. We are encouraged and lifted up by Jesus and His Bride, to seek healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to seek sobriety from the grave matter of this sin.

Pornography promotes a subordinate and degrading behavior with women as they are treated in a degrading and dehumanizing manner. This often leads to other maligned behaviors within the marriage; such as a decrease in intimacy with your spouse, infidelity outside the Marriage Bond, illicit sexual behavior within the marriage, and alienation to one's spouse, to name a few.

In addition to being damaging to the individuals, using pornography directly contributes to abuse of those involved in the industry. The pornographic industry leads to such things as the exploitation of children and adults, human trafficking, prostitution and rape. Even young children are exposed to the widespread distribution of pornography.

God and the Church want married couples to express the deepest level of marital intimacy; however, using pornography dilutes the experience of the marital act by distracting one from the presence of their spouse to some other object. In essence, this is an act of infidelity to the sacredness of the marital relationship.

There are various Catholic support groups and counseling services readily available to help us and/or our spouse, so we can journey back to Holiness along with Sacramental Reconciliation. (See appendix for referral sources.)

# POST MARRIAGE

## **Sustaining and Strengthening Marriages**

The Sacrament of Matrimony is a challenging and demanding vocation. But often, once the wedding ceremony is complete, we have little contact with the newly married (perhaps until they seek baptism for their children.) The feeling of "independence" once they have "left father and mother" can sometimes lead to isolation from the church community, and the gifts it can provide. For this reason, we as clergy need to participate in ways of assisting married couples, from the newly married to the well-seasoned, to strengthen in their relationship and vocation. The purpose of this paper is to encourage and offer suggestions on ways in which this may be accomplished.

- **Retain contact with newly married couples**

St. John Paul II exhorted pastoral ministers to help (married) couples "to discover and live their new vocation" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #69). This help can only be possible if parishes establish a means through which continued contact with couples can be maintained for the purpose of fostering stronger marital relationships. Deacons are uniquely qualified for this responsibility as many of them are engaged in the Marriage Sacrament themselves.

- **Encourage participation in the faith community**

The way Marriages are portrayed through media and popular culture can cloud one's expectations of Marriage. Developing strong relationships within a faith community can have a positive impact on marital relationships and foster true friendships with the help of God.

- **Provide programs offering newlyweds the opportunity to interact with veteran married couples, re-emphasizing the covenantal Marriage aspects and building practical skills**

**Communication:** Canon Law requires pastors and faith communities to provide assistance to all married people so that "the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection" (c. 1063).

**Financial:** Money is a sensitive topic and a couple's attitudes towards household finances need to be aligned. If couples don't define their core values, money may end up being spent carelessly and irresponsibly leading to couples blaming each other for financial woes.

**Parenting:** Parenting is hard work, but with a focus on virtue and love for God combined with practical advice on ways to raise children parent's can be assured that their children will be happy, healthy and independent.

- **Contact the parish for couples visiting the parish to get married**

If the couple is moving to another location or is getting married away from their parish, the Deacon should contact the parish and let a clergyman know about the wedding. The Deacon should also let the couple know that he will be contacting them and that they should set an appointment up to meet with the Priest or Deacon.



## **Suggestions for the Deacon to Help Strengthen Married Couple Relationships**

When the Deacon witnesses a Marriage, he invokes a special responsibility to the couple and their relationship with God which should not end on the wedding day. Indeed, there are many things the Deacon can do to help keep couples involved in the faith community, such as:

- Call couple 6 months to a year after wedding to visit with them
- Offer to conduct a house blessing for the family, inviting others for the celebration
- Select a mentor couple to help newlyweds build community
- Bless their first child when they announce they are expectant parents
- Provide a Special Mass for celebrating parishioner milestone anniversaries
- Invite the couple to participate individually or as a couple in a parish ministry
- Develop a study group for young married couples to build relationships with each other and to learn the faith as it applies to their state in life
- Take young married couples on retreat
- Ask Pastor to recognize anniversaries during Sunday Mass
- Take couple to dinner or coffee to update you on their married life
- Call them on their anniversary; offer special prayers
- Ask them to visit you for a special blessing during 1<sup>st</sup> and subsequent years
- Make a pilgrimage to local areas with focus on married life
- Encourage them to pray to their patron saints; guardian angels and to the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph for intercession in their relationship
- If the couple moves out of the parish, contact the local priest or deacon to let them know of the couple's location and ask the clergyman to look for them. Provide the couple with contact information for their new parish.
- Begin a novena with newlywed couples
- Bring in special speakers on Marriage and family life; personally call your couples
- Have a Daily Mass said for their Marriage and invite them to be there