

COMMUNION OF LIFE AND LOVE

Notes on Marriage and Family Life

Marriage In the Lord

Excerpts from *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions* (Issued by USCCB, November 12, 2003)

What is marriage?

Marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of life and love. They commit themselves completely to each other and to the wondrous responsibility of bringing children into the world and caring for them. The call to marriage is woven deeply into the human spirit. Man and woman are equal. However, as created, they are different from but made for each other. This complementarity, including sexual difference, draws them together in a mutually loving union that should be always open to the procreation of children (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], nos. 1602-1605).

Why is it so important to society that marriage be preserved as the exclusive union of a man and a woman?

When marriage is redefined so as to make other relationships equivalent to it, the institution of marriage is devalued and further weakened. The weakening of this basic institution at all levels and by various forces has already exacted too high a social cost.

In light of the Church's teaching about the truth and beauty of marriage, what should Catholics do?

There is to be no separation between one's faith and life in either public or private realms. All Catholics should act on their beliefs with a well-formed conscience based on Sacred Scripture and Tradition. They should be a community of conscience within society. By their voice and their vote, they should contribute to society's welfare and test its public life by the standards of right reason and Gospel truth. Responsible citizenship is a virtue. Participation in the political process is a moral obligation. This is particularly urgent in light of the need to defend marriage and to oppose the legalization of same-sex unions as marriages.

Life in the Domestic Church

Sharing Meals in the Domestic Church

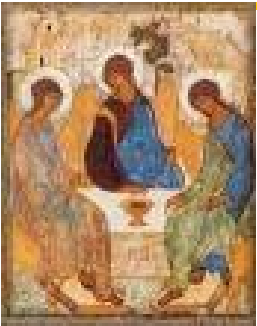
What is the significance of the family meal? Of course, the food we consume sustains us and strengthens our bodies, but what does it do for our souls? From the physical perspective, we are strengthened and nourished by the food itself, but from the eternal, or spiritual, perspective we are also fed by our unity, our communion, as a family. This is reflected in the Mass. We go to Mass every Sunday to be fed by the Word and the Eucharist, and when we receive our Lord in the Eucharist we are in communion with those around us and the universal Church as well.

The home is the "domestic church." It is from the Holy Table in the Mass that all of our other "tables" take their meaning. Meal time is when the family comes together to thank God for His goodness, to be physically nourished, and to celebrate and live the unity of the domestic church. In the Catholic Church, the celebration of the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (CCC, n. 1324). In the home, meal time should be the source and summit of the domestic life, for it incorporates the essential aspects of life: prayer, nourishment, and communion.

In today's busy world, it is more important than ever to make a point of having regular meals together. Regular meals together (whether once a day or once a week) build family unity, help children and adolescents learn important social skills and manners, and foster joyful memories for years to come. Some tips:

- Pause to say grace before the meal: "Bless us O Lord...", and include prayer intentions from family members.
- Give everyone a chance to contribute to the conversation during the meal. Invite kids to contribute only positive opinions.
- Turn off the T.V. and don't answer the phone during the meal. Make it a true "together time" and be fully present.

Sexuality...reaches the deep structures of the human being, and the nuptial encounter, far from being reduced to the satisfaction of a blind instinct, becomes a language through which the deep union of the two persons, male and female, is expressed. They give themselves to one another and in this intimacy, precisely to express the total and definitive communion of their persons, they make themselves at the same time the responsible co-workers of God in the gift of life. ~ Pope John Paul II



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Notes for Clergy on Marriage and Family Life

Natural Family Planning Awareness Week

A Way of Life, A Way of Love

July 22-28, 2007

Natural Family Planning Awareness Week is an excellent time to take a first (or second) look at NFP. Many Catholics do not know what NFP is—or what they *think* they know is all wrong, or only half true. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) promotes learning and discussion of the several methods of NFP during the week of July 22-28 as the Church marks the anniversary of Pope Paul VI's landmark encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (July 25), and the feast of SS Anna and Joachim, (July 26) parents of the Mother of God. NFP is a celebration of the goodness of life and of married love—not a way of restricting freedom or imposing rules. NFP promotes both communication and closeness with God, as husband and wife prayerfully discern God's will for their family. Natural Family Planning Awareness Week provides pastors with an opportunity to educate parishioners on the goodness of God's plan for marriage and family, and to let them know what classes and information are available in the Archdiocese. The website for the USCCB has many resources for use during NFP Week—and all year round—at www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfpweek. There you'll find ideas for homilies, petitions for prayers of the faithful, couples' stories of their experiences with NFP, and more. You can also check out the Family Life page on the Archdiocesan website—www.archdiocese-phl.org/evangelization—for a schedule of NFP classes, our NFP brochure, and a handy FAQ to give to engaged or married couples. Enclosed in this month's priest mailing is a bulletin insert from the USCCB, based on the Bishops' 2006 document "**Married Love and the Gift of Life.**" This 2-page summary of the document is a great explanation of Church teaching about married love and human sexuality, and Natural Family Planning at the service of marriage and family. The US Bishops encourage study of this document by both the clergy and the faithful, and the full document is available on their website.

For more information about NFP and how to spread the word among your parishioners, contact the Family Life Office at 215.587.5639, or famlife@adphila.org.

Marriage Preparation is a Journey of Faith

Marriage Preparation Programs offered by the Family Life Office approach engaged couples from the perspective of a process of evangelization. In this process there are three moments: **Encounter, Communion, and Mission.** Over the next editions of *Communion of Life and Love* the ethos of each of these moments will be described, and how they relate to the preparation of engaged couples for "*Marriage in the Lord.*"

Recently when Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated the ecclesial congress of the diocese of Rome (*Jesus is Lord: Educating in the Faith, in Discipleship and in Witness*) he stated that **in Jesus Christ** "*we discover the true face of God, that which we truly need in order to live...Educating in the faith, in discipleship and in witness means helping our fellow man, or rather it means helping one another, to enter into a living relationship with Christ and with the Father... A decisive contribution to Christian education and formation comes...from prayer and our personal friendship with Jesus. Only those who know and love Jesus Christ can introduce their brothers and sisters to a living relationship with Him.*"

What can we draw from this regarding the process of Christian education and formation for marriage preparation? That what is most essential for those who assist engaged couples prepare for the Sacrament of Marriage is that *they* must themselves have encountered the Lord Jesus Christ, and give witness to their love for Him. This provides the "tone and meaning" of marriage preparation, for "**only those who know and love Jesus Christ can introduce their brothers and sisters to a living relationship with Him.**" This is the heart of Marriage Preparation which is a Journey of Faith with and in the Lord.