

partners promise that no matter what happens they will be there to take care of and support one another. The best advice is: don't live together. It doesn't help – and it could hurt.

Are you a teenager wondering what difference any of this makes to you?

There is a lot you can do right now toward happiness in your adulthood. Be in the habit of sharing your life and concerns

Each generation of a family is challenged to leave the world a more beautiful and beneficial place than it inherited.

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with a caring adult – whether parent or grandparent, friend, pastor, aunt or uncle. Those who do have fewer problems in life... and the fewer problems you have in life, the less baggage you bring into all your relationships, especially your marriage. Most importantly, wait until you are married to have sex. Sexual intercourse is a powerful encounter involving the whole person — body, mind, emotions, and soul. The Church recognizes that this profound gift of self makes exclusive sexual love crucial to sustaining long-lasting happiness and creating healthy families. Failure to do so results in countless serious consequences that risk not only your health and your future ability to have children, but that can jeopardize your life. Every partner exposes you to the diseases of every one of those partners' partners – and it doesn't take long to do the math. Besides, a baby needs and deserves two adult parents. Be smart, and save yourself for someone you want to spend the rest of your life with. You don't need the guilt, regret, fear of pregnancy, low self-esteem or sense of betrayal that accompanies

sexual activity at your age. Premarital sex can fool you into marrying the wrong person – often it is mistaken for love, acceptance and security. Waiting can make your dating relationships better – it will increase your self-respect and gain the respect of others. By waiting, you're being faithful to your spouse even before you meet. By practicing the virtues involved in waiting (faithfulness, self-control, modesty, good judgment, courage) you're developing the kind of character that will make you a good marriage partner and attract the kind of person you'd like to marry. If you have been sexually active, it's never too late to make a fresh start. The advantages of being chaste can still be yours.

Whatever our age or stage of life – as Catholics and as individuals who are concerned about strong, sacramental marriages and healthy families...what can we do?

We can live what we believe, and we can assert our understanding of marriage in the public arena. We can be clear and consistent about our values.

What you do in your family to create a community of love, to help each other to grow, and to serve those in need is critical, not only for your own sanctification but for the strength of society and our Church.

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We can model what it takes to have a great marriage, and affirm and encourage others in their efforts to do the same. "Marriage is communal," explains the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago. "It is in the community that a man and woman choose each other; it is in the community that they live out their purpose as sacrament; and it is in the community, with God's grace, that they are sustained, encouraged, and protected."

Each of us, according to our position in our family, faith and civic community, has a role in fulfilling the meaning and importance of marriage. After all, **what marriage means is really why it matters.**

Resources:

Changes in Teen Attitudes Toward Marriage, Cohabitation and Children 1975-1995 / The Next Generation Series
Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe

"Follow the Way of Love/A Pastoral Message to Families"
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Living Together and Christian Commitment/A Reflection for Engaged Couples Who Are Living Together
James Healy, Ph.D.

Sex, Love and Character: A Message to Young People
Thomas Lickona, Ph.D.

Sex without Strings, Relationships without Rings; National Marriage Project 2000
Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe

Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation before Marriage/A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research; Second Edition 2002
David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Ten Important Research Findings on Marriage and Choosing a Marriage Partner/Helpful Facts for Young Adults; The National Marriage Project 2004
David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Ten Things Teens Should Know about Marriage
David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

"What Marriage Means/Why Marriage Matters"
Christopher News Notes #477

"What You Need to Know About Living Together"
First Things First

When Bad Things Happen To Good Marriages
Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott



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What Marriage Means

...Is Why

Marriage Matters

Diocese of Columbus
Marriage and Family Life Office



Marriage. As a recently published *Christopher News Notes* observes, “This union between a man and a woman has been one of the most talked about, written about, and discussed topics in human history.” “This coming together,” it goes on, “with all its joys and difficulties—means sharing, caring, committing, being loyal, combining strengths, and above all: staying centered on God.”

The benefits of a good marriage, and the positive impact of a happy home on children and society are well known. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes about them in their Pastoral, “Follow the Way of Love”:

A committed, permanent, faithful relationship of husband and wife is the root of a family. It strengthens all the members, provides best for the needs of children, and causes the church of the home to be an effective sign of Christ in the world.

If you’re married, what can you do to live the sacramental ideal of marriage? How do you nurture your relationship so that it thrives and endures, despite the daily difficulties and occasional crises?

Committing to living the love you promised is a great place to start. Taking ownership and claiming responsibility for the relationship is crucial. This means avoiding blame. Consciously making your relationship a priority can result in the closeness you desire. Rather than luck and

An enduring marriage is more than simply endurance. It is a process of growth into an intimate friendship and deepening peace.

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love, the most common reasons couples give for long-term marital success are commitment and companionship. The happiest couples define their marriage as a creation that has taken hard work, dedication and commitment, both to each other and to the institution of marriage.

What if you’re in a marriage that’s struggling? How can you rediscover the love that seems lost?

Many Americans seem to believe that once a marriage falters, it’s over—that the choice is black and white: you either hang on in chronic misery or get out. Yet there are couples that persevere and bounce back – one step at a time they work at it, and get to a very

Your faithful love in a marriage and family is tested by change. It can also be strengthened and brought to maturity through change. The challenge is to remain open to the Lord’s gracious, healing presence and to see change as an opportunity for growth.

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different place in life. Being hopeful is important, too. Having hope involves desiring the kind of marriage you may not yet have and believing that the kind of marriage you want is possible. Seeing problems from your spouse’s perspective also helps – research shows that ability alone can resolve 90% of marital conflicts. Apologize and forgive. “I was wrong – will you forgive me?” are powerful words of reconciliation. (Distinguishing abusive, addictive behaviors from ordinary disagreements is critical). Know that it is normal for certain times in a marriage to be particularly stressful. Job pressure, a child entering school, and relocating are all triggers for strain. Be prepared about what to expect, and educate yourselves in the skills that can help you successfully navigate the unavoidable difficult

times. Empower yourselves: turn to books, classes, professionals, and trusted friends and family members toward competence in sustaining a healthy relationship.

If you’re engaged, what can you do?

Start by taking your marriage preparation seriously. It can help you have a more satisfying marriage as well as indicate how well suited you are for one another – possibly avoiding a big mistake. Perhaps

When a woman and a man vow to be true in good times and in bad they are confirming a decision to love one another.

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you’ve heard that half of all marriages end in divorce. That statistic can be good to know, so that you don’t enter into marriage lightly or think that marriage is easy. However, if you learn healthy relationship skills (such as communication and conflict resolution), and expect to put effort into the creation of a successful relationship, you can dramatically lower your own personal chances for divorce. In fact, the risk of divorce is far below fifty percent for educated people going into their first marriage, and lower still for people who wait at least until their mid-twenties to marry, haven’t lived together before marriage, are strongly religious, and marry someone of their faith.

And what if you’re dating – perhaps one individual exclusively – and hoping to be married one day?

Most importantly, know yourself: your values, your goals, your priorities – what’s negotiable and what is not. Know your partner for a long period of time, and know them well. Be aware that similar backgrounds, personalities, beliefs and goals contribute to the ease and success of a relationship.

Develop the attitudes and skills that

will make you a good mate. Recognize that if you’ve been independent, you will need to learn to trust another as well as adjust to a “WE” mentality. Your “soul mate” may be out there, but they are not going to arrive planning to take full responsibility for your happiness. And disregard the myths about cohabitation being a smart way to test the relationship. Many couples think that it will give them a stronger marriage by having a “head start;” but cohabiting couples who go on to marry actually have a divorce rate 50% higher than those who don’t. Others think that it’s an easy way to “try out” the relationship and avoid the heartbreak of divorce – but that lack of emotional investment can be the very thing that dooms it. Often one partner agrees to cohabitation believing (and perhaps hoping) that marriage will soon follow – yet research shows that 60% of cohabiting couples do not go on to marry. Ending cohabitation can make one more tolerant of divorce – marriage is then often seen as just one more relationship to scrap. It might seem as if it will save you money and reduce financial conflicts, but money problems are actually much more complicated. In addition, cohabitators report lower levels of happiness, and poorer relationships with their parents. They forfeit better connections to a larger community (extended families as well as institutions) that are real sources of social and emotional support, and material benefit, as well. Some say that “marriage is just a piece of paper” – but emotionally, physically, and spiritually marriage is a meaningful, public contract of commitment. A vow of permanence distinguishes marriage from cohabitation: