

The future depends on children

Without children, cultures die, nations die, the human species dies. Nothing is more fundamental to the common good than children. And nothing matters more for the well-being of children than the health of marriage and family life. Social justice requires above all that we safeguard and strengthen marriage and family life.

Promote Peace by Promoting the Family

When Blessed Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she was asked what people can do to promote world peace. Her answer was profoundly countercultural: “Go home and love your families.” Justice can only arise from the human heart, and habits of the heart are first learned in the family.

Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly pointed to the same truth. His Message for the World Day of Peace 2008 emphasizes the irreplaceable role of the family in “humanizing” individuals: “Indeed, in healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness, or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, *the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace.*” Who can replace a mother’s care in teaching her child to be unselfish? Or a father’s concern to see his children treat one another fairly? Without healthy family life, selfishness and injustice will corrode society.

As a result, the pope has strong words for those who would undermine the family: **“everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace.”**

Sex and the Common Good

In marriage, love and life transform the world. The nobility of the vocation to true love must be communicated in a compelling way to our children, who are being drawn away by the dehumanizing hook-up way of life. “Friendship with benefits” destroys the happiness of everyone involved, but our young girls are especially victimized. With innocence destroyed, our children are finding it harder and harder to grow up to love with that openness of heart necessary to welcome the future in lifelong and life-giving marriage.

Intimate relationships between adults can also be unjust, even when the people involved consent to being treated badly. Pope John Paul II never tired of reminding us



Marriage and Children

that sexuality is meant to express lifelong and life-giving love. Anything less is lying with our bodies. We owe it to other people to respect their dignity, which is inseparable from how we treat their bodies. We must not exploit them for our own pleasure. And we are owed the same respect.

Conversely, when sexuality is an intimate expression of lifelong, life-giving married love, it serves the common good of all. The loving commitment of marriage opens the spouses to the children that result from their union. Just and loving relationships flow outward from the family into the larger community and serve the common good.

Love and Money

Economically speaking marriage must be recognized as crucial. Marriage is a wealth-building institution. If we want to raise the economic status of the disadvantaged, we need to promote marriage. Minorities have suffered from the breakdown of marriage and the family disproportionately. The lifelong commitment of a husband and a wife is one of the most significant factors in the economic health of the individuals involved, especially women and children. As one sociologist puts it, the sociological data indicate that **“the preferential option for the poor begins in the home.”**²²

We must communicate this social sensibility to our children. It all begins in the home: in marriage and family life. Whatever attacks the integrity of love in the home undermines society and social justice at its root. The future depends on the lifelong and life-giving love of marriage.

A Great Truth

The Church’s vision of human sexuality in marriage is a great truth entrusted to us by God as reflected in the way he created us. Jesus Christ also revealed to us what God’s plan is for our sexuality and for marriage. We not only cherish this great truth but we must also speak up in its defense because we hold marriage to be a sacred reality.

Learn more about marriage & family issues from the
PA Catholic Conference Institute for Public Policy
www.pacatholic.org

Adapted with permission from the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, masscatholicmarriage.org.
NOTES: 1 Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2008, www.vatican.va. 2 B. Wilcox, *The Facts of Life & Marriage*, Touchstone, Jan/Feb 2005, cited at <http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/societyeng.shtml>