

## What is marriage?

Marriage, as instituted by God and supported by the needs of human nature, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of one man and one woman joined in an intimate communion of life and love. The call to marriage is woven deeply into the human spirit. Man and woman are different from, yet created for, each other in all aspects of their being. This complementarity, including sexual difference and spousal configuration, draws them together in a mutually loving union that is always open to the procreation of children.

## Why can marriage exist only between a man and a woman?

Only the union of a male and female can express the full sexual complementarity willed by God for marriage. In knowing what God has created, we know His will. Man and woman are to give to each other their entire being in their masculinity and femininity. "They are equal as human beings but different as man and woman, fulfilling each other through this difference."\* This makes possible the conjugal bond, which is the core of marriage.

## Why is it so important that marriage be preserved?

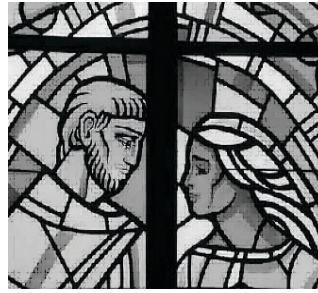
After millennia of human experience and ethical reflection, history has shown the family to be the foundation of society. The institution of marriage plays an essential role in the continuation of the human race, the full and proper development of each person and the establishment of a society rooted in personal dignity, social stability and mutual respect. Marriage is the foundation of the family. In turn the family is the basic unit of society. Thus while marriage is a personal relationship it also has public significance.\*

Society needs the presence and contribution of males and females. Marriage is the primary pattern for male-female relationships. It has social value insofar as it models the way in which women and men can live interdependently and commit, for the whole of life, to seek the good of each other.

"The marital union also provides conditions for raising children: namely, the stable, loving relationship of a mother and father present only in marriage. The state rightly recognizes this relationship as a public institution in its laws because the relationship makes a unique and essential contribution to the common good."\*

## Why should marriage even be a part of civil law?

The civil government has power to enact legislation because there is a human need for order as we live together with others. The ordering of our society must reflect our deepest and most abiding values.



# Marriage and Society

Civil laws are intended not only to provide a structure within which we can live in harmony and peace, but also to support our most cherished values. In a religiously pluralistic society we find common ground for legislation in the created order and in the natural moral law that follows on that reality.

It is within the context of God's natural created order, human sexuality and marriage, that we can evaluate some of the current challenges to these values today. To propose a new definition of marriage is to present a completely different understanding of human sexuality and its purpose. Thus we see increasingly proposals made for same-sex "marriage" - the desire to legitimize a union of people of the same sex as if it were a relationship equal to marriage.

**T**he Church's vision of family life includes the personal commitment of the spouses to each other. It also embraces the openness to the generation of new life if it is God's plan for the marriage - the joyful acceptance of the responsibility and privilege of raising children and helping them to grow in wisdom, age and grace.

In God's plan, marriage is a graced response to the love of God reflected in the love of the spouses for one another. God's grace elevated married life to the level of sacramental participation in Christ's own redeeming action, ordinarily allowing parents to participate in the building up of the body of Christ by bringing new life into the world and into the Church.

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.

From the Pennsylvania Catholic Bishops' Statement  
*Human Sexuality, Marriage and Same-sex Unions*  
Questions & Answers

[www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org)

\* *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*,

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003