

created in God’s image, and God has instilled in us a deep desire to love and to be loved. But love is not about you. It is about the other. And pure love between a man and a woman can be expressed authentically only in the Sacrament of Matrimony, which offers permanence, mutual respect, and openness to children. The Church will tell you to do what God wants you to do.

What are you going to believe?

Preparing for Marriage

Research shows that living together before marriage offers no benefit. If you are in a serious relationship that may lead to marriage and you are not yet living together – don’t.

If you are engaged and have been living together, you should seriously consider living apart and abstaining from sexual relations until the wedding. Living chastely will help you to understand the sacrifices involved in marriage, improve your communication skills, open your eyes to new dimensions of each other, and make your wedding night more special.

One key to ensuring a successful marriage is to take seriously your preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony. If you haven’t been going to Mass regularly, now is the time to start going every weekend. Find out what kinds of marriage formation sessions are offered in your diocese. Set aside time to talk about marriage.

Here are ten questions to begin your discussions:

- 1. Why do you want to be married in the Catholic Church?
- 2. What is your understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 3. Do you understand the concerns the Church has about couples living together?
- 4. Why did you decide to live together?
- 5. How does your commitment to marry differ from your commitment to cohabit?
- 6. How do your families feel about your living together before marriage?

- 7. What have you learned from living together about finances, decision-making, communication, and handling conflict?
- 8. How honest are you with each other? Is there anything that you are unwilling to discuss? Is there anything you are afraid to discuss?
- 9. What are the biggest adjustments you will face as a married couple?
- 10. What role does spirituality play in your relationship?



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If You Disapprove of Cohabitation

If you are unhappy about a cohabiting family member or friend, but don’t know what to say or do, here are some suggestions for dealing with the situation:

- It’s okay to express your concerns about the couple’s relationship. If it’s difficult to discuss your feelings, give them a copy of this pamphlet and suggest that you sit down and talk after they read it.
- Make sure you understand the Catholic teaching on marriage. If you are asked questions that you can’t answer, promise to get the information.
- Know what the current research shows about the risks of cohabiting.
- Don’t break off your relationship with the couple. Continue to love them even if you disapprove of their decision to live together.
- Make it clear that sleeping arrangements in your home will be separate.
- Don’t feel guilty about their decision to live together. It’s not your fault.
- Don’t worry about what other people will say.
- Keep the couple in your prayers.

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WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Cohabitation



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Chances are you know at least one unmarried couple who is living together. Maybe you're living with someone yourself. Or maybe you're thinking about moving in with a "significant other."

Until 1970, cohabitation was illegal in all states. Society considered it scandalous to live together outside the bonds of marriage. But laws and attitudes have changed dramatically over the past five decades. According to readily available recent U.S. Census reports, nearly 9 million unmarried couples (about 18 million people) are living together in the United States. That total has doubled since 2003.

Today, two-thirds of newly married couples have lived together before their wedding. About half of women cohabitating have already lived with a previous partner. The implication is clear: "Everyone's doing it. No problem. Just two people, making a personal choice."

The Catholic Church disagrees.

What the Church Teaches

As Catholics, we believe that marriage is the permanent union of a man and a woman, instituted by God, for the good of both spouses and for bringing new life into the world.

This love between a man and a woman is more than just sexual chemistry. It involves the total giving of each person's physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual being without any reservations. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, marriage can never be considered a temporary or "trial" arrangement.

These are not arbitrary beliefs. They are grounded in the revelation of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Sacrament of Matrimony, the importance of the family, the sacredness of sex, and the dignity of the human person are part of God's divine plan.

If we're honest, we will admit that God's ways are the best ways for human beings. In the case of marriage, researchers can prove it is true. Studies show that married people attain higher levels of personal happiness, emotional fulfillment, sexual satisfaction, mental stabil-

ity, good health, and positive relationships with extended family members.

When couples choose to cohabit, however, there is no spiritual foundation for the union, no lifelong commitment, and no promise of fidelity, which leaves the relationship open to feelings of instability. If couples see their relationship as merely a sexual union that can be terminated when passions cool, if boredom sets in, or someone more interesting comes along, the result can be disastrous.

The Biggest Misconception

Couples often claim living together is a good way to test their compatibility before making a permanent commitment, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Couples who live together before marriage actually face a higher risk of divorce than those who do not – up to 85 percent higher according to several studies. One reason is that many cohabitating couples drift into marriage as the next logical thing to do without any intentional decision to commit themselves to each other for life.

They bring into the marriage attitudes and behaviors that developed when they were two uncommitted individuals living together. They place less emphasis on shared dreams, common values, and mutual understanding. They are less willing to make sacrifices for each other. They tend to speak in terms of "I" rather than "we." Decision-making and handling finances tend to be based on "yours and mine" instead of "ours."

Cohabiting couples do not view their relationship in the same way that married couples do. Women tend to perceive cohabitation as a step before marriage; men are more likely to see cohabitation as a step before making a commitment.



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The Dark Side of Cohabitation

Researchers have shown overwhelmingly that cohabitation as an alternative to marriage produces many negative effects:

- Both men and women who live together are less committed to each other sexually and are more likely to be unfaithful than married people.
- Couples who live together tend to have more conflicts over money than married couples.
- Both men and women who live together have more health problems and are more likely to suffer from depression than married couples.
- Couples who live together are less likely to attend church.
- Men in cohabiting relationships are less likely to help with housework or child-rearing.
- Only half of cohabiting couples actually marry. Up to 30 percent of people who live together never intend to marry.
- Married couples who lived together before marriage have poorer communication skills in discussing problems than married couples who did not live together.
- Living together increases the risk of domestic violence and abuse.
- Within five years of a live-in relationship, about half of cohabiting couples marry, about 40 percent break up, and the rest continue to live together. Only 4 percent of cohabiting couples stay together for ten years.



The Impact on Children

About 40 percent of all cohabiting households include children. In 38 percent of the cases, these are the children of only one partner, and 51 percent are the biological offspring of the couple.

Estimates suggest that over half these children will witness the separation of their parents by the age of nine. When cohabiting couples break up, the fathers are less

likely to support the children financially or maintain contact with them.

Studies show that children of cohabiting couples are at greater risk for behavioral and academic problems. They are also more likely to be sexually or physically abused. The most dangerous family environment for children is when the mother is living with someone other than the child's biological father.

When Older Couples Cohabit

As of 2016, there were 4 million unmarried Americans older than fifty living together, and the numbers are increasing steadily. Older couples forego marriage primarily for financial reasons including:

- Loss of pensions, social security benefits, and health insurance.
 - Fear of incurring responsibility for the other person's debts or medical expenses.
 - Estate issues and the objections of adult children who are concerned about their inheritance.
- In some cases, the primary motivation for seniors living together is companionship.

While this kind of relationship may appear to be against Church teaching, there are situations in which Catholics are permitted to live together, as long as they remain chaste, as in a brother-and-sister relationship. If there is no sexual intimacy, there is no sin.

But the couple must consider the example they are setting and the scandal they are causing for their children and grandchildren by living together outside the bonds of marriage.

What Will You Believe?

The gulf between what is acceptable in the eyes of our increasingly secular society and what is acceptable in the eyes of God grows wider every year.

Secular society tells you there is nothing wrong with living together, that love should not be confined by an institution, even though researchers have proved in study after study that cohabitation has a negative impact on the couple and on society as a whole. Secular society will tell you to do whatever you want to do.

The Church tells us God is love, human beings are