

“Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, can not fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #24

body language: Speaking the Truth with Our Bodies

In the novel *The End of the Affair* by Graham Greene, a woman named Sarah has made a vow to live chastely. Frustrated by the difficulty involved, she impulsively wishes that she didn't have a body. But then she contemplates a scar on the body of Maurice, the man she loves. He got the scar protecting a man from a falling wall, and she realizes that she wants that scar to exist forever. "Then I began to want my body that I hated, but only because it could love that scar," she thinks. **"We can love with our minds, but can we love only with our minds?"**¹

Sarah came to the same realization that guided Pope John Paul II in presenting what is called the "theology of the body." While people often think that Christianity denigrates the body, the truth is the exact opposite: Christianity celebrates the body, because the human body is God's gift to help us love.

Love is invisible. Despite what cartoons present, hearts and cupids don't pop up around someone who loves. So how do we show another person that we love them? Sarah hit on the answer: with our bodies. **Our bodies make self-giving love visible.** Human love expresses itself

through smiles, handshakes, hugs—and through thousands of other bodily actions.

Think of the love of parents for their children. One mother shared an experience of feeling overwhelmed



by the repetitive work that holds a household together. As she was putting away laundry, she contemplated a shirt that she had washed numerous times for a succession of children.

"All of a sudden I felt snagged on a point of self-pity—the futility of it all. I cried out, 'God help me! How many times am I going to wash this shirt? What is the point of all this repetitive work?' Almost immediately, the Lord brought to mind a simple but marvelous thought: "Think how many children you have been able to love, week after week, through this one little shirt."²

The body is like that small laundered shirt: it speaks a language of love.

The Special Love of Marriage

Most love (like the love of parents) is non-sexual. The body, as we have seen, has a special role to play in expressing all love, but it is specifically fitted to express the love of husband and wife. Our maleness and femaleness are designed so that we can give of ourselves to someone of the opposite sex in a face-to-face marital embrace. Every human body, in its sexual differentiation as male or female, reveals that we are all made for fruitful, self-giving love.

Some of us are called to loving self-gift in the supernaturally intense way of consecrated religious

sisters or brothers, or as priests—in other words, as celibates. They sacrifice family life in order to become spiritual mothers and fathers. Others live out their fruitfulness in the chastity of single lay life. Those of us called to marriage fulfill the possibility of sexual self-gift in married love that is total, lifelong, exclusive, and open to life.

In other words, **husbands and wives express their special kind of love—the lifelong, life-giving love of marriage—with a special kind of body language: the language of sex, the conjugal act.**

Sexual love is a specific kind of love, in which the body expresses the desire to be with the other person forever. The conjugal act can communicate this true love because it is inseparable from the possibility of new life. As the fruit of marital love, children embody the love of their parents!

Giving Ourselves in Sex

The intrinsic connection between sex, new life, and self-giving love has been forgotten in our culture. Sex is too often made to be only about pleasure. Of course, sexual pleasure is a good thing; after all, God invented it! But it is *because* sex is necessary for the survival of humankind and is meant to serve self-giving love that God made it pleasurable. If sex is reduced to pleasure, it becomes a kind of lie. The body says, “I’ll love you forever and have children with you,” even while the mind says, “I’m doing this for pleasure.”

In true and loving sex, the whole person gives his or her whole self, without reserve. If we hold back part of ourselves (like our fertility or our commitment), we are not really giving ourselves totally. When we don’t give ourselves totally, we aren’t lov-

“We should say what we mean and mean what we say with sex. And sex says marriage. Sexual intercourse is the body language which accompanies and expresses, again and again, the wedding vows.”

Australian Bishops Conference, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2006

ing the way God has made us to love. And that makes us unhappy and, indeed, unfree.

Free Enough to Love Completely

We sometimes think that freedom means the right to choose whatever we want, as long as no one seems to get hurt. But if we choose to go against God’s loving plan for our happiness, then we end up hurting ourselves and others. Freedom is first and foremost directed to something; it is the **freedom to love**.

The freedom to love enables man to “fully find himself ... through a sincere gift of himself,” as the Second Vatican Council says.³ **Chastity** is the name of the virtue that makes this freedom to love possible: it is the intelligent integration of our sexual desires in the light of the truth writ-

ten into our bodies. Chastity makes us free enough to give ourselves away. And only then can we flourish as human beings.

Of course, God doesn’t ask us to become this way on our own. We are able to master our selfishness only through God’s grace. He will make us free enough to love. He does this first and foremost through the **sacraments** (such as the Eucharist, Reconciliation or Confession, and Matrimony or marriage).

Then we are made able to live as He wants us to live: free, holy, happy. Then we can truly love and honestly express love with our bodies. And only then can sex really say what it was created to say: “I love you so much that I want to be with you forever and have children with you.” That is speaking the truth with our bodies, the truth that sets us free.⁴

³Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1951), p. 110. ⁴Kimberly Hahn, “The World after the Wedding,” from *Catholic for a Reason*, vol. IV: *Scripture and the Mystery of Marriage and Family Life*, ed. Scott Hahn and Regis J. Flaherty (Steubenville, Oh.: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2007), p. 21. ³*Gaudium et Spes*, #24, www.vatican.va. ⁴There are many great resources on the theology of the body. See, for example, Christopher West’s work at www.ChristopherWest.com.

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE .ORG

“Christian faith and ethics are not meant to stifle love, but to make it healthier, stronger and more truly free.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Fifth Meeting of Families, Valencia, Spain, 7/8/2006

marriage: God's Loving Plan for Sex

The Jeweler's Shop

In a play entitled *The Jeweler's Shop*, Anna, an unhappily married woman, goes to a jeweler and tries to sell her wedding ring. The jeweler places the ring on his scales. But nothing happens. “This ring does not weigh anything,” he tells her. Without her husband's ring, her own ring had no weight or meaning.

These days it's common to hear that marriage doesn't have a special place among other types of adult relationships. But *The Jeweler's Shop* points out that marriage does indeed have a unique weight and power.

The rings exchanged in a wedding ceremony are not just pretty ornaments. They symbolize something very real. They symbolize the commitment that the husband makes to his wife and the wife makes to her husband. With God's grace, that commitment has the power to change each spouse and to transform the world.

Why? Because it is only in giving ourselves away generously and totally that we find fulfillment. Most people are used to thinking of the Church's teaching on sex and marriage as a list of rules. But here's a great secret: **God's plan for sex is to make you happy.** All of the “rules” are meant only to protect sex from



selfishness. When sex is about generous **self-giving**, then it has the power to make us happy.

Self-Giving Love

Of course, our culture is full of temptations to live otherwise. We are told that sex outside of marriage, including living together in a sexual relationship while unmarried (cohabitation), is a way for adults to become fulfilled personally. Actually, the sociological evidence tells a different story: married couples are far happier and healthier than unmarried and cohabiting couples. (You can read about some of this evidence at www.MassCatholicMarriage.org.)

The reason is simple: **marriage is the only place where sex can ex-**

press self-giving love, and it is only in giving ourselves away that we can find ourselves.

Self-giving love in marriage has the power to make us happy here on earth. But ultimately Jesus wants even more for us: He wants us to be unspeakably happy with Him in a life beyond death. We can't fathom what that joy must be like. But we can begin to taste that joy here and now by pursuing **holiness** (doing the Father's loving will in all our actions) within the sacramental life of the Church. By grace, Christ's total self-giving love heals and perfects our loving, leading us to a happiness without end.

God has made everything about us to reflect this truth about holi-

ness and self-gift. **In fact, the truth of sex and self-gift is written in our bodies.** Have you ever thought about the fact that the sexual differences between men and women don't make much sense on their own? Clearly, man and woman are fitted physically for each other. Our bodies allow us to give ourselves to a person of the opposite sex in a face-to-face embrace.

God's Love Creates

Our bodies reveal still more. They show us that sex is oriented toward **new life.** Self-giving in marriage is meant to be fruitful, the way God's love is always fruitful. God's love creates. It brings new life! And human married love is meant to serve the creation of a new human being. Everyone, even non-Christians, can understand that marriage should be lifelong and life-giving.

So, if everything about us—even the human body—is made for self-gift, why is it sometimes so hard to be married? Why did Anna want to sell her wedding ring?

The **cross** at the front of the church may help to answer this question. Our Lord died on the cross to save us from sin and bring us into the embrace of God's eternal love. Each one of us is called to be a saint, but most of us are not there yet. Sin of-

“Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”

Pope John Paul, II, *Redemptor Hominis*, #10

ten makes our relationships difficult. Fortunately, God doesn't expect us to fix things on our own! That's why He gives us his grace through the Church.

In particular, He gives us grace in the **sacraments**, which make God's grace present. Marriage between baptized Christians is a sacrament, a very special one that injects God's own love into the deepest rhythms of the world.

Sacramental marriage expresses the self-giving love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the bodies of the husband and wife. In *The Jeweler's Shop*, when Anna catches a glimpse of Jesus, He has her husband's face.

Your Vocation

Is marriage your **vocation**? Is it how God wants you to become holy and happy? Only you can perform your particular God-given mission. No one else can do it for you.

Are you ready to transform the world? Some have already embraced their unique world-transforming mission by giving themselves away totally in the priesthood or religious life. Most of us will transform the world as married persons. Pope John Paul II pointed out, *“The future of humanity passes by way of the family.”*

All of us—married or single, clergy or religious or lay—can support the family in our society. We can evangelize about God's plan for marriage. We can support family-friendly laws. Most importantly, we can strive to live a life of self-giving love, whatever our vocation.

The Jeweler's Shop presents an engaged couple who fears for the future, but each reassures the other by saying, “The future depends on love.” Years later, *The Jeweler's Shop's* author—Pope John Paul II—would exclaim, “Be not afraid! Do not be afraid to love!”

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE.ORG

Want to Learn More? Watch for *The Future Depends on Love* television series on Catholic TV and on www.CatholicTV.com.

“It is only the rock of total, irrevocable love between a man and a woman that can serve as the foundation on which to build a society that will become a home for all mankind.”

Pope Benedict XVI, 5/11/2006

marriage: At the Heart of Social Justice

What matters more than children? The French poet Charles Péguy gets at this truth, describing a father's thoughts concerning his sons (though this clearly applies in similar ways to mothers and daughters as well):

It's never the child who goes to the field, who tills and who sows, and who reaps and who harvests the grapes and who trims the vine and who fells the trees and who cuts the wood.

For winter.

To warm the house in winter. But would the father have the heart to work if he didn't have his children. If it weren't for the sake of his children.

His children will do better than he, of course. And the world will go better. Later. He's not jealous of it.

On the contrary.

Nor for having come to the world, as he did, in an ungrateful time.

And to have no doubt prepared for his sons a time that is perhaps less ungrateful.

What madman would be jealous of his sons and of the sons of his sons.

Doesn't he work solely for his children.¹

The future depends on love because 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.

The struggle for the common good is more urgent than ever: the inno-

cence of our children is threatened by the hook-up culture, which is reinforced by Planned Parenthood-style sex ed. Abortion and embryo-destructive research are destroying the most powerless human lives, whom Blessed Mother Teresa called “the poorest of the poor.”

We are made for love, so we must seek social justice, which is to have the common good as the horizon of all our actions. And social justice requires above all that we safeguard and strengthen marriage and family life.

Promote Peace by Promoting the Family

When 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” indi-



viduals: “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.*”² 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 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

“Peace and war begin at home.

If we truly want peace in the world,
let us begin by loving one another in our own families.”

Mother Teresa⁴

common good of all. The weakest among us—the elderly, the disabled, the unborn—are cared for in stable and loving families. Mother Teresa said, “The greatest destroyer of peace is abortion,” because it injects violence into the most intimate human relationships, that between parents and children. 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

In our individualistic culture of consumerism, with its focus on the economic calculation of private advantage, it is very difficult for us to act always with the common good of society as our horizon—to treat family values as more basic than economic values. It is very countercultural indeed to point out that sex is not a private matter.

Even economically speaking, how-

ever, 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.”**³

We are the ones that must communicate this social sensibility to our children, pointing out, for example, why cohabitation not only causes broken hearts but also damages the common good. 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. ☉

¹Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. David Louis Schindler, Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 12, 18. ²Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2008, www.vatican.va. ³B. Wilcox, *The Facts of Life & Marriage*, Touchstone, Jan/Feb 2005, cited at <http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/societyeng.shtml>. ⁴Mother Teresa, *In My Own Words*, ed. Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1997), p. 47.

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE .ORG

Want to Learn More? Watch for *The Future Depends on Love* television series on Catholic TV and on www.MassCatholicMarriage.org.

“The Church teaches that the sexual union of husband and wife is meant to express the full meaning of love, its power to bind a couple together and its openness to new life.”

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Married Love and the Gift of Life*

the benefits for marriage of Cherishing Fertility

Do you want to avoid divorce? To be true to their public vows to love for as long as the beloved lives, married couples have to be vigilant and have constant recourse to the graces of the sacraments. A healthy marriage requires attention: conscious efforts to communicate better, and certainly a growing prayer life together.

One practice ties all these together and seems almost magical in its ability to strengthen marriages. In fact, less than 1% of couples who practice it suffer divorce. That activity is **natural family planning (NFP)**.¹

Not Your Grandmother's Rhythm Method

“Oh, that,” maybe you are thinking. “Isn't that the old, unreliable 'rhythm' method?”

Not so fast. It's true that the rhythm method failed when a woman's cycle wasn't uniform.² But NFP isn't rhythm. Natural family planning uses specific signs of the woman's natural rhythms of fertility to plan sexual activity for the purpose of either avoiding or achieving pregnancy. Modern methods of NFP have a **99% success rate in avoiding pregnancy**.³

NFP methods, especially NaPro technology, also have success rates ranging from 38% to 82% in achieving pregnancy, depending on the problem causing the infertility. (In contrast, the morally objectionable *in vitro* fertilization method has a success rate ranging from 21% to 27%.)⁴



Most people have never heard of natural family planning, and those who have are often skeptical. One woman, Sharon, relates how she felt during her Pre-Cana introduction to NFP: “I sat in the class with my arms folded and an *almost* closed mind and heart. But, it was there I started to realize (although I didn't yet want to admit it to anybody) that my thoughts about NFP came strictly from a place of ignorance.”⁵

Her fiancé, Michael, liked the idea of protecting Sharon from using potentially dangerous contraceptive chemicals by using NFP. But he faced other problems. He was hampered by old habits, such as viewing pornography, that made it difficult for him not to objectify women. How could he value his wife as a whole person?

How could NFP help Michael and

Sharon's marriage, as it has helped so many other marriages?

Sex = Babies + Bonding

The answer lies not so much in what NFP is but in **what sex is**. Sex has two meanings: babies and bonding.⁶ God wants sex to be life-giving: to give life to the relationship of a husband and a wife (bonding) through giving life to a new person (a baby).

Like Mike and Sharon, many of us wonder, “Can't I just have the bonding, without the openness to babies?” The problem with this idea is that the two meanings of sex are inseparable. Being closed to new life makes us closed to our spouse. After all, a wife's fertility is part of *her*; female fertility is a *personal* reality not to be chemically suppressed or destroyed. The same is true of a husband's fertility. Do we treat our

spouse's body and fertility with reverence or with fear?

Sadly, our whole culture seems to fear fertility. Society's message is often that the worst possible consequence of sex is a baby. But, as Dr. Janet Smith puts it, "... **if a pregnancy results from an act of sexual intercourse, this means that something has gone right with an act of sexual intercourse, not that something has gone wrong.**"⁷ Fertility is not a disease: it's a sign of health.

What would you think about someone who said, "The worst possible consequence of a job is a paycheck!" It would be a little odd, wouldn't it? There are many reasons to have a job, but its primary purpose remains to support oneself and one's family financially. Likewise, sex has many wonderful effects, but its primary purpose remains enabling the gift of a new life. (This is one of the most secure findings of evolutionary biology.) And babies are indeed gifts, one of the great rewards of marriage.

Because NFP respects the fact that the conjugal act is ordered to new life, NFP is not "Catholic birth control." There is a fundamental difference between *having contraceptively sterilized sex* and *abstaining from sex* during a fertile period.

“The total giving of oneself, body and soul, to one's beloved is no time to say: 'I give you everything I am—except . . .'”

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
Married Love and the Gift of Life

Really Good Things for Marriage

In fact, married couples abstain from sexual activity all the time, for all kinds of reasons. (You're probably abstaining right now!)⁸ Couples who use NFP tend to have as much intercourse as other couples.⁹ **All kinds of benefits come from NFP:** more communication, more discernment about God's will, more respect for one another, not to mention preserving the woman from all the toxic side-effects of contraceptive drugs.

These effects include blood clots, hypertension, migraines, and depression. In addition, it should be considered that the Pill may occasionally operate not through preventing pregnancy but as an abortifacient (causing an abortion).¹⁰ Also, it must be noted that the main mechanism of the intrauterine device (IUD) is most certainly abortifacient. Women and girls are not often adequately informed of these

significant issues—a grave violation of their dignity and their right to informed consent. Couples using NFP avoid these problems.

But the biggest benefit of NFP comes from letting God into the bedroom. Sex is too wonderful to close it off to God. (It should be noted that there are couples who give their marriage to God by opening themselves in an absolute way to new life. This generosity and NFP are mutually complementary ways of life.)

Mike and Sharon were so impressed with what NFP did for their marriage that they began to teach it to other couples. Reflecting on this experience, Mike said, "[In] teaching NFP for seven years and talking to couples about these issues, Sharon and I have *never, not once*, met a husband or wife who says about [NFP], 'It's the dumbest thing I ever did.' We consistently see a mixture of surprise, joy and peace. And **surprise, joy and peace are really good things for a marriage.**"¹¹ 

FIND OUT MORE

Family Life Offices in Massachusetts

Boston: www.familylifeboston.com,
(617) 746-5800

Fall River: www.familyfallriver.org,
(508) 999-6420

Springfield: www.diospringfield.org
(click on Departments/Ministries and Family Life),
(413) 452-0614

Worcester: www.worcesterdiocese.org
(click on Departments and Marriage and Family),
(508) 929-4311

Information on NFP
Couple to Couple League International,
www.ccli.org

Fertility Care Centers of America,
www.fertilitycare.org

One More Soul, www.omsoul.org
NFP Outreach, www.nfpoutreach.org

¹Mercedes Arzú Wilson, "The Practice of Natural Family Planning Versus the Use of Artificial Birth Control: Family, Sexual and Moral Issue," *Catholic Social Science Review*, vol. 7 (Nov 2002), p. 1. ²The method's failure rate is 9% (R.A. Hatcher, et al, *Contraceptive Technology*, 18th Edition [New York: Ardent Media, 2000].) Summarized at <http://www.fertilitycare.org/crms/effectiveness.htm> and <http://ccli.org/nfp/basics/effectiveness-p02.php>. ³Summarized at <http://www.fertilitycare.org/napro/infertility.htm>. ⁴Sharon and Mike Phelan, "Escape from Fuddledom," <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/nfpweek/art-phelan.pdf>. ⁵Janet Smith, Ph.D., "Contraception: Why Not," audio CD. ⁶Janet Smith, Ph.D., *Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love* (New Hope, Ken.: New Hope Publications, n.d.), p. 10. ⁷As Christopher West likes to say. See www.christopherwest.com. ⁸Study confirms that couples using natural family planning have intercourse just as frequently as couples using other methods," 10/11/2005, <http://www.news-medical.net/?id=13701>. ⁹Walter L. Larimore and Joseph B. Stanford, "Postfertilization Effects of Oral Contraceptives and Their Relationship to Informed Consent," *Archives of Family Medicine*, vol. 9 (Nov. 2000), pp. 126-133. ¹⁰Phelan and Phelan, "Escape from Fuddledom."

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE.ORG

Want to Learn More? Watch for *The Future Depends on Love* television series on Catholic TV and on www.MassCatholicMarriage.org.

“Having a [spouse] who is committed for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, makes people happier and healthier.”

Gallagher and Waite, *The Case For Marriage*, p. 77

What the Church teaches, social science confirms...

Marriage Is Good for Husbands, for Wives and for Their Children

God is both Creator and Redeemer. So God knows all about our bodies, our hearts, and our relationships. After all, He made them! God invented sex and marriage.

It shouldn't be a surprise, therefore, that His way for marriage is the way that makes us truly fulfilled and happy. But does science back up the Church's teaching?

Yes! **The sociological evidence is clear: lifelong, life-giving marriage is good for husbands and wives. It is also the ideal environment for raising children.**

Marriage Is Good for Husbands and Wives

“For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health”—the marriage vows bind a man and woman together publicly. In an uncertain world, these vows create a rock-solid reality. The husband and wife can set out on the adventure of building a shared life together because of the security of their publicly sworn love.



More Security. The marriage bond is invisible, but it exists! In fact, sociology shows that its effects are powerful: marriage makes people healthier and wealthier. In contrast, cohabiting couples (who live together in a sexual relationship outside of marriage) do not have the security of a publicly sworn love.

More Money. Spouses make more money, pool resources, and reduce expenses to a much greater degree than cohabiting couples do.¹

Better Health. And marriage improves a person's physical health. A wife is significantly healthier, and a husband benefits even more. “Married adults have longer lives, less illness, greater happiness, and lower levels of depression and substance abuse than cohabiting and single adults.”²

The difference that marriage makes is only common sense, when you think about it. For example, men are likely to benefit from their wives’

looking after their behavior and diet. (Some sociologists call this phenomenon “the virtue of nagging”!) Single men are much more likely to engage in risky behaviors—to drink and smoke too much, for instance—than married men. Marriage inserts them into the wide world of family networks and social responsibility.

Increased Sense of Meaning

Marriage and parenthood give a person a **sense of meaning**. We aren’t just living for ourselves. We have other people to think about. That sense of meaning helps our mental health as well.

Increased Happiness. Do you want to be happy? Marriage is one of the best predictors of **happiness**. 40% of married people rate their lives “very happy,” compared to less than 25% of cohabitators.³

Better (and More) Sex. In fact, married sex is much more physically and emotionally satisfying than sex among unmarried people. And husbands and wives have more of it than unmarried people.⁴

Again, this is just common sense. **Sexual intimacy** is much more satisfying when it is experienced in the context of marital love, with its public commitment. Marriage promises a spouse who will be there forever, for better and for worse, in sickness and in health. Who doesn’t want that?

Life-Giving Marriage

Children want that permanence too. “The spouses’ union achieves the twofold end of marriage: **the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life.**”⁵ Married love, which is sexual love, creates new life. And children flourish under marriage as God has created it.

“Few propositions have more empirical support in the social sciences than this one: Compared to all other family forms, families headed by married, biological parents are best for children.”

David Popenoe, Rutgers University, February 2006⁹

Children living in low-conflict families with their married biological mother and father are more likely to attend school and graduate, less likely to be depressed and abuse drugs and alcohol, less likely to be physically and sexually abused, and less likely to be sexually active and undergo teen pregnancy.⁶

In addition, children flourish when they have **both their mother and father**. “Studies suggest that men and women bring different strengths to the parenting enterprise, and that the biological relatedness of parents to their children

has important consequences for the young, especially girls.”⁷ In fact, exposure to a biological father’s pheromones (chemical signals) seems to delay sexual development and thus sexual activity in daughters!⁸

Of course, many single parents do a terrific job raising their kids, and they need to be supported in their heroic efforts. Still, having both a mother and father is optimal.

Sociology confirms what the Church has always taught: following God’s plan for sexuality and marriage leads to human fulfillment and happiness! ☺

¹The Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good: Ten Principles* (Princeton: The Witherspoon Institute, 2006), p. 22. ²Witherspoon, *Marriage*, p. 22. ³Maggie Gallagher and Linda Waite, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), p. 67. ⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 78-96. ⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2363. ⁶Witherspoon, *Marriage*, pp. 18-21. ⁷*Ibid.*, p. 20. ⁸*Ibid.*, p. 21. ⁹“The Scholarly Consensus on Marriage,” Center for Marriage and Families Fact Sheet no. 2 (New York: Institute for American Values, 2006).

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE.ORG

“The Holy Spirit is with you: He dwells within you
by virtue of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage!
He will sustain you in the fulfillment of your mission!”
Pope John Paul II, 2/7/1998

more than a wedding: Why Get Married in the Church?

When Joel and Marie decided to get married, they were graduate students making little money. They had a choice: a “church wedding,” with all the expenses that the wedding industry in all those wedding magazines says are necessary, or just a simple civil ceremony before a justice of the peace?

Sometimes we are given the impression that the reason to get married in the Church is primarily aesthetic: we can find a beautiful church and have the picture-perfect wedding. Opposing this idea, for many people, are often significant financial constraints. It is reasonable not to want to drain the savings account just for nice pictures and memories.

But **the wedding isn’t the real reason to get married in the Church. The real reason is the marriage.** A Christian marriage is a **sacrament** that makes God’s grace present. And nothing about the sacrament requires emptying the bank account.

Inviting Jesus

Think of all the difficulties that marriages face these days. God wants to empower us to have a happy and holy marriage. He wants us to be delivered from the evils of divorce, to raise our children well, and to flourish



as a family. God gives us his grace to do all these things in the sacrament of Matrimony (marriage). **By grace, God transforms us so that we are able to love as He loves.**

In fact, in the sacrament of Matrimony a groom starts off marriage by ministering God’s grace to his bride, as she ministers to him. That is because “the spouses as ministers of Christ’s grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church.”¹ The priest is the witness; the spouses are the ministers of the sacrament.

That moment is the beginning of

a flood of grace that Jesus wants to pour out upon the spouses. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* spells out these graces: “Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens, to ‘be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’ (Eph 5:21), and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love.”²

By having a “church wedding,” Catholics have more than a beautiful wedding. They have God’s sacramental power for a beautiful marriage!

Marriage: Natural and Supernatural

Not every wedding held in a church is a sacrament, however. In order to receive sacramental grace, a person has to be baptized. Baptism initiates a person into the Christian life and prepares him or her to receive other sacraments. If one or both of the spouses is unbaptized, then the marriage is not a sacrament. It is, however, a real marriage, what the Church calls a “good and natural marriage.” As Jesus said, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’” (Mt 19:4-5).

Marriage has been designed by the Creator “from the beginning” to be the place where lifelong and life-giving love forms a family. Marriages involving non-Christians have this natural value, and thus they are valid (“good and natural”) marriages. The sacrament of Matrimony bathes this naturally good thing in God’s grace and blesses it even more.

What if a Catholic marries a non-Catholic? If the non-Catholic spouse is a baptized Christian (a “mixed marriage”), then both husband and wife receive the sacrament of Matrimony, as long as the Catholic gets permission from the diocese to marry and follows the requirements for a Catholic wedding.

What if a Catholic marries a non-Christian (someone not baptized)? Then more caution is required, which is expressed in the dispensation needed in these cases (called “disparity of cult”). The marriage will not be sacramental but a “good and

“In the joys of their love and family life, Christ gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1642

natural” marriage.

Why does the Church care what faith someone has? Because she has a realistic understanding of the possible difficulties entailed in mixed marriages and marriages with disparity of cult. They can lead to tension in the marriage and to indifference to religion. And, above all, the fate of the children to be born is at stake. God wants them to have all the graces of His goodness—which can only be found in their fullness in the Catholic Church. But the Church affirms that different religions do not constitute “an insurmountable obstacle for marriage” when both spouses are open to God’s grace working in their lives.³

Putting the Mass First

When Joel and Marie were contemplating marriage, they did not have any hesitations: they would be married in the Church. “For us, the wedding wasn’t about the reception, the dress, or the honeymoon,” says Marie. “It was about the sacrament,

which would unite us as one flesh in God’s eyes.”

But how could they afford a “church wedding”? “Easy,” says Joel. “We kept the focus on the Mass.” The reception was held in the parish hall, and it was catered by a bunch of friends who volunteered. The decorations were simple, and Marie’s mother did the wedding cake. A friend took pictures. The honeymoon lasted a few days.

Joel and Marie’s student days are behind them, and they celebrate their tenth anniversary this year. Do they have any regrets about having such a simple wedding?

“No, none!” says Marie. “Why start off married life buried in debt from a lavish wedding?” Joel confirms, “We loved our wedding, and we have great memories from it. But we have more than memories—we have a great marriage that draws us closer to God, which is what the sacrament is all about. **Christ was at the center of our wedding then, and He is at the center of our marriage today.**”

¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1623.* ²*ibid., #1642.* ³*ibid., #1634.*

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE.ORG

“Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.”

Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #11

God will not leave us: How Lifelong Married Love Shows God to the World

Don’t we all long for someone to love us without reserve? To be there always? We know by faith that God loves us with that kind of faithful love. But that is too much to expect from another human being.¹

Isn’t it?

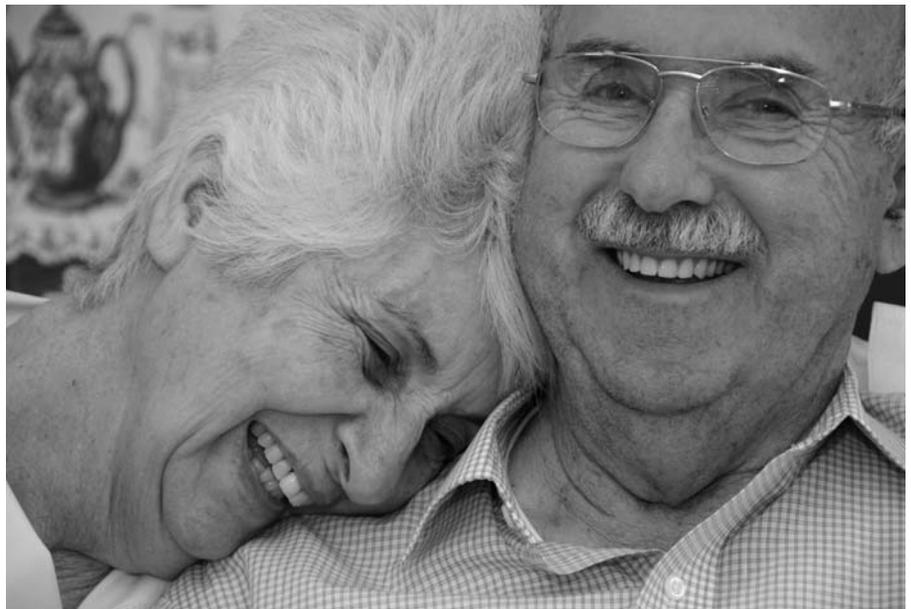
God knows how hard faithful love can be for us. The Church understands, too. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* acknowledges, “It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being.”¹

The good news is that marriage between a baptized man and woman involves more than human love; it is also a sacrament (it communicates God’s grace). God wants to give us the grace to live faithful love.

The Good News

The *Catechism* continues, “This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that **married couples share in this love**, that it supports and sustains them, and that **by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God’s faithful love.**”

What a miracle! The sacrament of marriage means that the husband



and wife are given the grace to love one another for life, not simply with their own love but **with God’s own love!**

In fact, St. Paul tells us, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).

What is St. Paul talking about? Good news: on the Cross, the Church comes forth from the wounded side of Christ, like Eve came from the side of Adam in the Garden. The Church

is Christ’s Body, because Christ and the Church are one flesh. Christ has married the Church by loving all of humanity faithfully until death on the Cross. This is the great love story of history: God so loves the world that he gave his only Son (John 3:16).

If Christ and the Church are married, what does this tell us about Christian marriage?

Well, St. Paul gives us a hint: “So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather

nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the Church” (Ephesians 5:28-29).

In other words, **husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the Church.** Christ will not leave his Church! God will not leave his people. Only in the sacrament of marriage can we human beings show such love. But with the “yes” of marriage, we enter into the faithfulness of Christ—who gives himself away completely, in total self-giving love, on the Cross and in the Eucharist.

Even the self-giving love of a non-sacramental marriage causes humans to flourish. For example, social science provides evidence that children thrive in this setting. The presence of a child’s biological father and mother in a low-conflict marriage leads to optimal outcomes for children on many different measures.

Troubled Marriages

But what about troubled marriages? Does the Church have no sympathy for couples in those situations?

The United States Catholic bishops have repeatedly emphasized that **the Church is for your marriage.** In fact, they initiated a website, www.foryourmarriage.org, to provide resources and information. There are many programs available to help improve marriages, such as Worldwide Marriage Encounter (www.wwme.org). WWME has many evening and day-long programs, in addition to their weekend retreats; visit www.MassCatholicMarriage.org for more

“God, who is love and who created man and woman for love, has called them to love. By creating man and woman he called them to an intimate communion of life and love in Marriage. “So they are no longer two but one flesh.””

(Mt 19:6). *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 337

information. In addition, **Retrouvaille** helps couples in troubled marriages (www.retrouvaille.org).

In fact, there is good cause for hope: 64% of adults who said they were unhappy in their marriage, but remained in it, reported five years later that they were happy.²

What happens if the marriage ends in **divorce**? People in this situation need the Church’s pastoral care and are gently invited to come to her. Sometimes it is necessary for spouses to separate, and many spouses are abandoned through no-fault divorce. But choosing divorce is contrary to the reality of marriage. “The Church does not recognize a civil divorce because the State cannot dissolve what is indissoluble” (www.foryourmarriage.org). But it is important to know that “divorced Catholics in **good standing with the Church**, who have not remarried or who have remarried following an annulment,

may receive the sacraments,” including Holy Communion.

“Oh, **annulment**,” you may be thinking. “That’s just another name for a ‘Catholic divorce.’” This is a misunderstanding. What a divorce tries to do is to take two married people and make them unmarried (which is in fact impossible). A marriage either occurs at a wedding, or it doesn’t (for various reasons). An annulment is the judgment that the marriage didn’t exist in the first place.

A final thing may be noted about the indissolubility of marriage: even the grave betrayal of adultery does not dissolve the marital bond. Marriage images God’s love for humanity: no matter how many times we have betrayed Him through sin, He seeks us out to forgive us—so that God and humanity can be joined at the wedding feast of the Lamb for a love that never ends. This is the truth of every marriage. ☉

¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1648. ²<http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/divorce.shtml>, citing Linda J. Waite, et al, *Does Divorce Make People Happy? Findings from a Study of Unhappy Marriages* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2002).

More questions about divorce and annulment?

Visit www.MassCatholicMarriage.org and click on “Learn” and “Fact Sheets.” Also visit www.foryourmarriage.org.

Do you need to experience the Lord’s healing following divorce? The Church is holding out her hand to you. Begin by talking to your pastor and contacting your diocesan family-life office.

Boston: www.familylifeboston.org, (617) 746-5800

Fall River: www.familyfallriver.org, (508) 999-6420

Springfield: www.diospringfield.org, (413) 452-0614

Worcester: www.worcesterdiocese.org, (508) 929-4311

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE.ORG

Want to Learn More? Watch for *The Future Depends on Love* television series on Catholic TV and on www.MassCatholicMarriage.org.

“By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. ... Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice.’”
Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1646

marriage vs. cohabitation: Is There a Difference?

Can a relationship be like a test-drive? That is what writer and economist Jennifer Roback Morse wonders in a reflection on cohabitation (living in a sexual relationship with someone not your spouse). Many people argue that it is only sensible to “try out” living with someone before committing to marrying them. You wouldn’t buy a car without taking it for a test-drive, right?

But Dr. Morse points out the obvious: “Here’s the problem with the car analogy: the car doesn’t have hurt feelings if the driver dumps it back at the used car lot and decides not to buy it. The analogy works great if you picture yourself as the driver. It stinks if you picture yourself as the car.”¹

Dr. Morse knows what she is talking about. She and her husband lived together before marriage. While their relationship survived, **most cohabitators are not so lucky: fewer than half will marry, statistics indicate.**² And if they do marry, they are **nearly 50% more likely to divorce.**³

Cohabitators seem to be setting themselves up for unhappiness. The sad thing is that many people cohabit because they have experienced the tragedy of divorce and are trying to avoid it. But cohabiting doesn’t protect anyone from heartbreak.



The chances of being dumped are far higher among cohabiting couples than among married couples.⁴ The test-drive analogy already indicates the tenuousness of the relationship. What the “driver” is saying to the “car” is, “You act like you’re married; I’ll act like I’m shopping.”⁵

The Cohabitation Risk

In fact, not only does cohabiting increase your chances of break-up, it also decreases your odds of experiencing the personal benefits that come with marriage. Married couples are happier, healthier, wealthier, and have more and better sex than the unmarried.⁶

Both **women and children are**

more likely to be abused in cohabiting environments than in marriage. “In general, the evidence suggests that the most unsafe of all family environments for children is that in which the mother is living with someone other than the child’s biological father. This is the environment for the majority of children in cohabiting couple households.”⁷

And about 40% of cohabiting households have children. Even when it is the biological parents who are cohabiting with children, the situation is not likely to be stable; 75% of children in cohabiting households experience the trauma of parental separation, compared to around 33% of children in married households.⁸

Cohabiting = A Habit of Not Trusting

The fact is, marriage isn't just a piece of paper. It is a reality that changes those who enter into it whole-heartedly. **What is it that makes marriage so different? The answer is easy: commitment.**

When a husband and a wife have a lifelong commitment to one another and to the children that God wishes to send them, then they are living a *different relationship* than the cohabiting couple is living. A married couple is living a *committed* relationship. And it turns out that commitment to another makes us happy and fulfilled. We are made for self-giving love.

In reflecting on her own story, Dr. Morse ruefully reports that cohabiting is no way to teach yourself to be generous in love. "No one can simulate self-giving. Half a commitment is no commitment. **Cohabiting couples have one foot out the door, throughout the relationship. They rehearse not trusting.**"⁹ Any habit, especially a habit of the heart, is hard to break. It is unrealistic to expect to stop on a dime and suddenly be able to commit to a life-time of love when the "right person" comes around.

God's Love Energizes Our Love

Fortunately, God understands us better than we understand ourselves. While we are not able to change ourselves, *He* can change us. He has given us the sacraments to inject His strength and love into our lives.

In the sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), God forgives our sins and gives us grace to persevere in loving well. The sacrament of the Eucharist feeds us with Jesus's own Body and Blood, so that we can be true members of His body, the

“Human freedom finds its deepest realization in the marriage covenant. The world tells us that freedom means avoiding all commitment but the truth is the opposite! True freedom is the ability to unite your whole being in choosing what is good, without any constraint.”

Mary Healy, *Men and Women Are From Eden*¹¹

Church, and embody His love in the world. And the sacrament of Matrimony provides us with the grace to live out the commitments made in the wedding vows.

“Perfect Love Casts Out Fear”

In his first epistle, St. John writes, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18). Ultimately, most people cohabit out of a fear of the future. What if this relationship does not work out? Living together instead of marrying seems to be the easier way.

But in relationships, as in so many other things, victory goes to the

brave, not the timid. Real love trusts the beloved person and places all hope in the grace of God working through the sacraments.

The bishops of Australia have commented on the fundamental link between sex and trust: “If one or both persons are not yet ready to say ‘I give all that I am, including my body’ and ‘I accept from you the gift of all that you are, including your body,’ then they are not ready for sex. **If a couple do not fear becoming a real gift to each other, they should not fear marriage.**”¹⁰

Becoming a real gift to another person—sounds a lot better than being the used car returned to the lot. ☉

¹Jennifer Roback Morse, “Why Not Take Her For a Test Drive?” http://www.jennifer-roback-morse.com/articles/cohab_fast_facts.html ²David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage, A Comprehensive Review of Recent Literature*, 2nd ed., 2002, p.6, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/publicat.htm> ³Ibid., p. 4, citing Alfred DeMaris & K. Vaninadha Rao, 1999, “Premarital Cohabitation & Subsequent Marital Stability in the U.S.: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54. ⁴After 5 to 7 years, 39% of all cohabiting couples have broken their relationship, 40% have married (although the marriage might not have lasted), and only 21% are still cohabiting” (Popenoe and Whitehead, *Should We Live Together?*, pp. 6-7). ⁵See Morse, “Why Not Take Her For a Test Drive?” ⁶Maggie Gallagher and Linda Waite, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000). ⁷Popenoe and Whitehead, *Should We Live Together?*, p. 8. ⁸Ibid. ⁹Morse, “Why Not Take Her For a Test Drive?” ¹⁰Australian Bishops Conference, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2006, p. 8, <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/documents/20061024972.pdf> ¹¹Mary Healy, *Men and Women Are From Eden* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2005), pp. 25-26

THE FUTURE
DEPENDS ON
LOVE.
Marriage
LIFE LONG. LIFE GIVING.

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE, 150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 5
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02114-2511
PHONE: 617.367.6060 ~ FAX: 617.367.2767
WEB: MASSCATHOLICMARRIAGE.ORG