

## Why is Marriage Good for Men and Women?

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### **Making a Case for Marriage**

*Part of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage*

#### The Situation

- The annual marriage rate fell 50% from 1970-2004. (David Popenoe & Barbara D. Whitehead, *State of Our Unions 2006*, National Marriage Project, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu>, p15)
- Since 1960, the decline of those married among persons age 15 and older has been 14%. This is a result of increases in lifelong singlehood and long-term cohabitation, and a decrease in remarriage for divorced persons. (Ibid.)
- Marriage is being put off until later in life. The average age of marriage in 1960 was 20 for women and 23 for men. Today, the age is 26 and 27 respectively. For those with college degrees, marriage is postponed even longer. (Ibid.)
- Cohabitation is ten times more common than in 1960, a situation that is delaying and replacing marriage. (Popenoe & Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions 2006*, p25)
- Some mistakenly suggest that marriage is good for men but bad for women, citing the effect of marriage on women's careers, the stress of motherhood, and the danger of domestic abuse. (Popenoe & Whitehead, *Top Ten Myths of Marriage*, 2002, citing Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 2000, Ch12)

#### Social science findings

- *Mutual Benefits*
  - Married people have longer life expectancies than unmarried peers. (Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good: 10 Principles*, 2006, p.20, [www.princetonprinciples.org](http://www.princetonprinciples.org))
  - Married couples have more meaningful sexual relationships. They have sex as frequently as cohabiting couples, but also report higher emotional satisfaction in their sexual relationships. (Linda Waite, *Does Marriage Matter?*, 1995, p. 491)
  - Married people are more productive, have higher incomes, and enjoy more family time than the unmarried. This is due in part to the division and specialization of labor, where spouses each take responsibility for specific tasks. (L. Waite & E. Lehrer, *The Benefits from Marriage & Religion in the U.S.: A Comparative Analysis*, *Population & Development Review*, Vol 29, No. 2, June 2003, p. 264)
  - The argument for marriage extends beyond the benefits for children and society and encompasses significant advantages for couples. Men and women equally

benefit from marriage but in gender specific ways (Popenoe and Whitehead, *Top Ten Myths of Marriage*, 2002).

- *Benefits for Men*
  - Marriage encourages better relationships between parents and children, especially father-child interactions. (Brad Wilcox, Institute for American Values, *Why Marriage Matters, 2nd Edition, 26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 2003, [www.americanvalues.org](http://www.americanvalues.org))
  - Married men earn 10-40% more than similar unmarried men (Popenoe & Whitehead, National Marriage Project, *The State of Our Unions 2005*, p16).
  - Married men gain substantial physical health benefits; they are physically fitter and less prone to illness or disability. (Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good...*, p.20)
  - Married men have lower levels of testosterone which is associated with a reduction in aggressive and risky behavior, as well as promiscuity. (Wilcox, *Why Marriage Matters...*, p. 17 & Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good...*, p.20)
  - Married men are less likely to have alcohol and drug addictions, to commit crime, and to be abusive. (L. Waite, *Does Marriage Matter?*, p. 468)
- *Benefits for Women*
  - Compared to unmarried women, married women without children have higher incomes and married mothers are less likely to live in poverty. (Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good...*, p.20)
  - For women, marriage combats depression, provides particularly high psychological benefits, and significantly lowers the risk of suicide. (Wilcox, *Why Marriage Matters...*, p.28 & Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good...*, p.20)
  - Marriage normally decreases the likelihood that a woman will be domestically abused. Only 5% of married women report abuse compared to 14% of cohabiting women. (Waite & Lehrer, *The Benefits from Marriage & Religion...*, p.261)

#### Church teaching and pastoral response

- Vatican Council II affirms that the intimate partnership of married life and love is not only ordered towards the goods of offspring and society, but also for the good of the spouses. (*Gaudium et Spes* #48)
- The Church teaches that marriage "helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1609).
- The Church recognizes the goodness of unity and difference in existence. Just as the persons of the Trinity are different, yet have all that the other has, so also do men and

women in marriage become fully one, but with different resources and ways of relating. (John Paul II, *Letter to Families #8 & Mulieris Dignitatem #10*)

- John Paul II speaks of the capacity for marriage to cure the negative effects of sin with the help of God's grace in the sacraments, and through prayer and forgiveness in the family. (*Letter to Families #14*)
- Speaking about the equal dignity of men and women, the U.S. Bishops address gender difference. They talk about particular physical and psychological gender traits that result in varying skills and perspectives. As noted above, men and women mutually benefit from marriage, but they receive these benefits in different ways. (USCCB, *Follow the Way of Love*, 1993, p.19)

### Conclusion

Marriage is good for children, society, and for the spouses themselves. Social science shows that there are specific benefits for men and women in marriage, which are gifts of a loving relationship between two people who are equal but different. While avoiding any generalizations concerning gender, research does find that marriage helps men to become better fathers, reduces their likeliness to quarrel and fall prey to addiction, and provides many physical health benefits. Women on the other hand, are more likely to gain financially, to be protected from crime and abuse, and to receive psychological benefits. These findings resonate with the teaching of the Church on the complementarity and equality of men and women, as well as on the goods of marriage.