

Sacrament of Marriage – 2019 Outline for High School Curriculum on Catholic Marriage

*These names are used interchangeably: Marriage, Christian Marriage, Sacrament of Matrimony

A. Origin of Christian Marriage.

(YOUCAT no. 260; Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) nos. 1601-1605; 1613-1616; *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) paragraphs #9-13).

1. God made man and woman for each other – equal partners (Adam and Eve in Genesis; “No longer two but one flesh” – Mt. 19:6).
2. God is the author of marriage, which Jesus raised to a sacrament (AL no. 71).

B. Unique Aspects of Catholic Marriage.

1. Catholic marriage is a sacrament that signifies and actually makes Christ’s love present in the world (a true sign of Christ’s love for his bride, the Church) (CCC no. 1617; AL no.121).
2. Marriage is a sacrament of service – a vocational calling to serve each other, their children, their families, their faith and town communities, and the world (CCC no. 1534; AL nos. 58, 93, 94, 101, 134, 183, 186).
3. Marriage is a saving reality – a part of God’s plan for salvation and part of God’s eternal covenant of love (CCC nos. 1602, 1639; AL no.72).
4. Catholic marriage is a sign and image of the Trinity – God exists as a communion of three persons in an eternal, loving, trinitarian relationship - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Love overflows from this eternal relationship as creation. Though each created human person is made in the image and likeness of God, humans image God more perfectly in relationship to one another. The love between married couples, specifically the fruitful one-flesh union of married couples, is a profound sign of the Trinity, thus the family – father, mother and children – helps reveal the mystery of the Trinity (CCC nos. 1604, 2205; AL nos.11, 12).

C. Defining Catholic Marriage.

1. How the Sacrament of Matrimony comes about (YOUCAT no. 261; CCC nos. 1625-1631).

A promise is made by a baptized man and woman before God and the Church and consummated by the bodily union (one-flesh union) of the couple.

2. What is necessary for a valid (true) Catholic marriage? (YOUCAT no. 262; CCC nos. 1644-1654, 1664).
 - a. True (valid) marriage for a Catholic (to another Catholic, baptized Christian or unbaptized person) requires the free consent (free choice) of both parties declared publicly; the capacity for lifelong love and commitment (no impediments); celebrated according to the proper form (in a Catholic Church, witnessed by an authorized priest or deacon and two legal witnesses according to the Order for Celebrating Matrimony).

(*Convalidation* is the process that enables Catholics who marry outside the Church to make their marriage valid and true, also known as “having their marriage blessed.”)

3. When Catholics marry non-Catholic Christians [Mixed or Interdenominational marriages] (YOUCAT no. 267; CCC nos.1633-1637; AL no.247).
 - a. Special permission (a dispensation) is needed to marry a non-Catholic Christian. If the marriage is celebrated in the church of the non-Catholic party, special permission is also needed.
 - b. Interdenominational marriages have additional challenges in terms of practice of the faith and raising children, and need special assistance from the Church.
4. When Catholics marry non-Christians [unbaptized] (YOUCAT no. 268; CCC nos. 1633-1637; AL no. 248).
 - a. Because the marital relationship implies unity in all things, couples who don't share a belief in Jesus Christ can have many difficulties in their relationship, in the practice of faith and raising children, so the Church established an impediment of disparity of religion.
 - b. A dispensation from this impediment must be obtained by the Catholic person to marry in the Church but the marriage is not a sacrament (a sacrament requires two baptized persons).

D. The Essential Elements of Christian Marriage: Unity, Indissolubility, Openness to Children, Commitment to the Spouse's Welfare (YOUCAT no. 416; CCC nos. 1645-1654).

1. *Unity*: Marriage is a covenant that by its nature brings about bodily, intellectual and spiritual union between a man and woman (CCC nos. 1644-1645).
 - a. Significance of the sexual encounter within marriage (YOUCAT no. 417; CCC nos. 2362, 2367; AL no. 150-152).
 - b. According to God's will, husband and wife should encounter each other in bodily union (one flesh union) so as to be united ever more deeply with one another in love and to allow children to proceed from their love (AL no. 74).
 - c. In Christianity, the body, pleasure and erotic joy enjoy a high status. The sexual relationship is seen as sacred body language, a way to express the deep, unconditional, indissoluble love of married persons. Sex outside of marriage contradicts and devalues the true meaning of the sexual act, and goes against the dignity of the human person.
2. *Indissolubility*: Marriage lasts “until death do us part.” (AL no. 62).
 - a. The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony (CCC nos. 1638-1642).
 - 1) Definition of grace: the free and undeserved help that God gives us; a participation in the life of God. The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and sanctify us (CCC nos. 1996-97; 1999).
 - 2) One of the effects of sacramental marriage is grace. Grace is like the glue that keeps the marriage bond strong, the supernatural

power that enables couples to work through difficulties, forgive each other, and love unconditionally “in good times and in bad.”

- 3) Married couples are given grace to love each other and their children unselfishly. By this grace they “help one another attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating children.” (CCC no. 1641).
 - 4) Christ is the source of (marital) grace...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 each other’s burdens...to love one another with supernatural, tender, fruitful love (CCC no. 1642).
 - 5) Couples receive more grace throughout marriage through the sacraments, namely the Eucharist.
3. *Openness to children*: Every Catholic marriage must be open to children.
- a. Significance of children in marriage (YOUCAT nos. 418-423; CCC nos. 2368-2378; 2398-2399).
 - 1) A child is a creature and a gift of God, which comes to earth through the love of his parents.
 - 2) Children are not the sum total of paternal and maternal genes; they are completely new and unique creatures of God equipped with a soul. Parents are co-creators but their children belong to God.
 - b. Responsible parenthood (AL nos. 80-82).
 - 1) A Christian married couple has as many children as God gives them and as they can take responsibility for, given the health of each spouse and their economic and social situation.
 - 2) Christian married couples should be responsible in using the gift and privilege of transmitting life.
 - 3) Criteria for regulating birth – avoiding conception for good, not selfish, reasons, without external coercion, using means that are morally acceptable in the Church.
 - 4) Natural Family Planning (NFP) – fertility appreciation and self-observation, keeping with the dignity of man and woman and respecting the innate laws of the female body; demands mutual affection and consideration.
 - 5) NFP is ecological, holistic, healthy and an exercise in partnership; on the other hand, artificial means of contraception (e. g IUD’s , the pill, condoms and surgical sterilization) block the total self-giving of husband and wife, can lead to using each other and devaluing the sexual act in marriage, and some methods can endanger the woman’s health.

c. Infertility

- 1) Married couples who suffer from infertility can accept medical assistance that does not contradict the dignity of the human person, the rights of the child conceived, and the holiness of the sacrament of Matrimony.
- 2) There is no absolute right to have a child; every child is a gift from God
- 3) Married couples who've exhausted all permissible medical means of assistance can adopt, become foster parents, or give life to their communities in other ways.
- 4) All assistance in conceiving a child through research and medicine must stop when the common bond of parenthood is loosened or destroyed by the intrusion of a third person or when conception becomes a technological act outside the sexual union in marriage (e.g. in vitro fertilization or surrogate motherhood).

4. *Commitment to the spouse's welfare* (CCC nos. 2360-2361; 2397-2398).

E. Living the Sacrament of Marriage.

1. The family is a "Church in miniature" – a domestic church (YOUCAT no. 271; CCC nos. 1655-1657; AL no. 87)

a. Every family is an image of God's love in human fellowship; every marriage is perfected in openness to others, to the children that God sends, in mutual acceptance and being for others.

b. Families image the Church by praying together, sharing stories, sharing meals, celebrating family events and milestones, forgiving each other, sacrificing for each other and in their love for one another (AL nos. 29, 30).

c. Catholic families are called to a mission, to create new disciples and to help build God's Kingdom on earth.

d. Marriage preparation begins in the family [Remote, Proximate and Immediate Preparation] (CCC no. 1632).

1) *Remote* preparation begins when a child is born into a family and officially at Baptism. The parents and family have the primary role in remote preparation for marriage.

2) *Proximate* preparation takes place from the teen years to early adulthood. Social and interpersonal skills are fine-tuned during this period of professional, spiritual and domestic development. Parents are crucial in proximate preparation.

3) *Immediate* Preparation begins when a couple is engaged and decides to marry in the Church. It is the official preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. It involves married couple witness (including parents), catechetical and life-skills instruction, and support from the family and parish community.

2. On-going marriage enrichment and support (CCC nos. 1632, 1648).

3. Reflective prayer on married life as witness to Christ's love (CCC no. 1661).

4. Assistance from parishes in times of difficulty (AL no. 229).

5. Problems encountered in marriage and family life (YOUCAT no. 264; CCC nos. 2331-2359; AL nos. 33, 34, 41-57).

- a. Many marriages are endangered by a lack of communication and consideration, economic and societal problems, and the reality of sin: envy, lust, infidelity, selfishness. Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential for every marriage.
- b. Individualism, secularism, materialism and instant gratification negatively impact marriage.
 - 1) Abortion, sterilization and a contraceptive mentality.
 - 2) Cohabitation as devaluation of the sacred character and true meaning of marriage.
 - 3) Children seen as either a burden or means of self-affirmation rather than a gift from God.
- c. “Gender” ideology that denies difference and reciprocity (complementarity) in the nature of man and woman, and the importance to society of the natural connection of marriage with children and families.

F. When Catholic Marriages End in Divorce (YOUCAT no. 269; CCC nos. 1629, 1649; AL nos. 242, 243).

1. When couples struggle in marriage, the Church encourages them to seek assistance through prayer, professional counseling, or programs designed to assist troubled marriages. In cases when marriage becomes unbearable, couples who civilly divorce are still considered to be married in the Church and full members of the Church.

2. Couples who wish to remarry may seek a *declaration of nullity* from the Church – a determination that one of the essential elements of sacramental marriage was not present at the start.

3. Catholics who divorce and remarry without a declaration of nullity [annulment] (YOUCAT no. 270; CCC nos. 1665, 2384; AL nos. 243, 244; 291-312).

a. Such persons are accepted lovingly through Jesus’ mercy. However, their new marital union contradicts Jesus’ demand for indissolubility, which is contrary to the Eucharist, the ultimate symbol of Jesus’ unity with the Church and his irrevocable covenant of love. Someone who lives in this contradictory situation, though still a member of Christ’s Church, is not admitted to Holy Communion.

b. Couples are encouraged to regularize their situation (through convalidation) by speaking with their pastor. The Church will always open her doors widely to those who seek her mercy and love.

Resources:

Catechism of the Catholic Church

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm>

YOUCAT – Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church, Ignatius Press, 2010

<http://www.stmonica.cc/cms/lib04/WA02001513/Centricity/Domain/34/YOUCAT-Full-Version.pdf>

Theology of the Body for Beginners, Christopher West

The Joy of Love, Amoris Laetitia (AL), Pope Francis Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2016