



A Letter to the Catholic Faithful of California From Your Shepherds

[“The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church,”](#) proclaims Pope Francis.

Thus, in celebration of the love found in marriage and family, we, the Catholic bishops of California, are overjoyed to introduce ‘[Radiate Love](#)’ – a new initiative to encourage and inspire marriage. We are embarking on this journey over the next year to celebrate and support marriage and family life among the flock God has entrusted to us.

The institution of marriage is held dear by God. A marriage between a woman and a man is simultaneously a unique expression of the natural human longing for unfailing love, the source of new life and social health, and a key means by which God provides vital information about Himself and human nature. This is because marriage offers a penetrating glimpse into God’s identity as a communion of Persons and a model for how He loves us and how we are to love Him and every neighbor.

Today, however, many despair of marriage. Marriage rates are declining. It is increasingly [seen as an unattainable luxury by poorer and marginalized Americans](#). And the ties between marriage and children are breaking, with unfortunate consequences.

Observing these losses and offering to help is not a work of nostalgia or an attempt of religion to lecture politics and society. Nor is it an opinion that everyone should marry. Instead, it is a proposal to advance [human happiness and freedom](#), especially among vulnerable groups. It is also a proposal that harmonizes faith and natural reason, and it arises from the same charitable impulses by which Catholic schools educate children, our social services care for the poor, and our healthcare ministries nurse the sick.

Virtually every culture in every age has greatly supported stable relations between men and women and the children they bear. That is marriage. And today, we have overwhelming empirical evidence across the ideological spectrum justifying this preoccupation. Marriage undergirds [human happiness, stability, and prosperity](#). It is the ideal setting to [nurture children to a healthy adulthood](#). [Family instability and absent or uninvolved parents – especially absentee fathers – are linked to poverty, crime, inadequate education and employment](#), and a whole host of other social ills. [The decline of marriage is a leading factor in adult loneliness and the growing income and opportunity gaps between racial and socioeconomic groups](#).

In short, contemporary evidence soundly rejects decades of baseless claims that marriage constrains freedom and happiness, or that decoupling sex, marriage, and childbearing boosts romantic happiness. Most troubling, the uncritical acceptance of these claims often leads to [unforeseen disastrous consequences for children](#).



Scripture strengthens the evidence from natural reason. In the beginning, the Creator pronounces that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gn 2:18). Jesus reaffirms the importance of lifelong marital unity (Mt 19:6). Saint Paul teaches that marriage offers a privileged entry into the mystery of God’s love for His people (Eph 5:32). The Gospel reports Jesus’ admonition that God’s way of loving – faithfully, sacrificially, fruitfully – must also be the measure of human love of neighbor (John 13:34 and 15:8-17).

Saint John Paul II called the family a “[school of love](#).” It is where a man and a woman learn to give and receive the complementary gifts with which they are endowed. It is where family members first learn to love those very near “neighbors” strewn on their path – Good Samaritan-style – patiently, enduringly, mercifully, and even in the face of vast differences. It is how we are enabled to share this love with those outside the family and society.

In the words of Pope Francis, the complementarity in marriage and family life is “[a great treasure... a thing of beauty](#).” It answers human longing for enduring love, is a boon to vulnerable children, the bedrock of a healthy society, a driver of freedom and social equality, and one of God’s most precious gifts to the human race.

With all of this in mind, the Catholic Church in California pledges to redouble its efforts to encourage, celebrate, and accompany dating and married couples through our [Radiate Love](#) initiative. We invite Catholic couples in all seasons of their lives to engage in their parishes and visit the website frequently in the year ahead. There you will find resources and suggestions to help bring the joy of the Lord’s grace into your relationship and family life, just as Jesus brought fine wine at the Wedding of Cana. Please accept this initiative as our gift of hope for marriage and family life.

May almighty God bless you and keep you always,
The Catholic Bishops of California



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