



CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

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Couples at Church of the Resurrection, both those who are married and those preparing for marriage, frequently bring questions to clergy and pastoral staff about the Church's position on various moral issues related to procreation and contraception. The clergy of Church of the Resurrection have carefully and prayerfully considered these issues and arrived at a theological understanding that provides a basis for responding to such questions in a manner that is faithful to the understanding of Christians through the ages, fully consistent with the freedom of the Gospel, and adapted to the unique circumstances of our own day. This paper describes that understanding.

An individual Christian's moral choices ultimately must be determined by the individual's conscience. All the same, Christians have a serious obligation before God to develop a well-formed conscience. They do so by placing themselves under the absolute authority of the Word of God and by prayerfully considering the guidance of the Church. It is our earnest desire that this paper will help Christians who are striving to develop a well-formed conscience to do just that, and so enter into the fullness of God's plan for their life.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

For most of human history, marriage and procreation have been all but inseparable. In the past century, however, developments in reproductive technology have made it possible for married couples to exercise near total control over their fertility. This possibility raises ethical questions for married Christians. *What is God's plan for marriage, and how does procreation fit into that plan?* Should Christian couples take advantage of these recent developments in reproductive technology? If so, are there any limitations on how they do so?

Origin of Marriage

It is now common to view marriage as a “social construct” – something that we as a society created and, therefore, something that we as a society can change. Indeed, many now argue that the distinction between male and female itself should be viewed in much the same way. In contrast, Scripture presents the institution of marriage and our sexual identity in a profoundly different light.

Scripture teaches being male and female is not a mere “accident of nature,” but rather a fundamental component of who we are as human beings created in the image and likeness of God: Genesis 1:27



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Scripture explains that this difference between male and female was intended by God for the purpose of marriage: Genesis 2:24

During his public ministry, Jesus clearly taught that the essential character of marriage was established at creation and cannot be changed: Matthew 19:8

Thus, the opening lines of the marriage liturgy of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) remind us that “Almighty God established the bond and covenant of marriage in creation...”

Purposes of Marriage

Why did God establish marriage? One reason, drawn directly from the difference between male and female, is procreation: Genesis 1:27-28

Marriage is an invitation for a man and a woman to become partners with God in the creation of new life. Pious Jews are careful to note that the command to “be fruitful and multiply” is the very first of the 613 commandments of the Torah.

A second reason for marriage, according to Scripture, is to create a unique bond between the spouses: Genesis 2:24

This bond of exclusive love and mutual support provides the foundation for the family, the cornerstone and model of authentic community.

The ACNA marriage liturgy summarizes these twin purposes of marriage as follows:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind was ordained by God; for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love the Lord; for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity.

The fruits of marriage abound beyond the spouses and their children. In the Book of Genesis, God places Adam in the garden “to work it and take care of it,” with “a helper suitable for him.” So too, a man and woman joined together in marriage receive a common call from God to make their own shared contribution to the world. Thus, the ACNA’s marriage liturgy invites those witnessing a marriage to pray that God will give the newly married couple “such fulfillment in their marriage that they may reach out in love and concern for others.”



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Sacramental Aspect of Marriage

Anglicans use the term “sacrament” to describe an “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” (ACNA Catechism 102). That is, a sacrament offers us a visible image of what God is doing invisibly.

The traditional *outward and visible sign* of marriage is the exchange of solemn vows by a man and a woman in the presence of witnesses. The *inward and spiritual grace* of marriage is the fact that God Himself creates a bond between those who marry that is both permanent and of such closeness that the spouses are “no longer two, but one”: Matthew 19:3-6

So deep and lasting is this bond of marriage that the Apostle Paul teaches that God intended marriage, in part, as the visible image or “sacrament” of Christ’s love for his Church: Ephesians 5:32

Fruitfulness and Responsibility

Not every marriage will be blessed by children. However, consistent with the purposes of marriage, *a truly Christian marriage must be open to that gift*. That is not to say, however, that Christian couples must remain indifferent to the number and timing of the births of their children. Serious, unselfish considerations, such as health concerns and challenges to the proper catechesis of children, may lead a Christian couple to prayerfully undertake a plan to limit the number of their children and to regulate the timing of their births.

Many couples that feel a need to limit the number of their children or space their birth choose Natural Family Planning (NFP), which takes advantage of our knowledge of the cycle of human fertility to control the number of births and their timing, while preserving the symbolic openness to life inherent in the natural union of male and female.

The ACNA marriage liturgy notes that an additional purpose of marriage is “to maintain purity.” Jesus solemnly warns his disciples of the dangers of lust in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27-30). The sin of lust encompasses any sexual attitude or behavior that focuses on self-gratification rather than on self-giving. Understood in this sense, lust poses a danger, not just to individuals who are not married to each other, but also to partners within a marriage. The very rhythms of the wife’s body that allow for seasons of fertility and non-fertility create an opportunity for conversation and self-denial between the spouses that can help to ward off this



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danger. The clergy of Church of the Resurrection encourages married couples to strongly consider NFP.

In recent years, certain issues have come to the fore that were not envisioned or specifically addressed in the past. Some modern contraceptive methods, for example, are designed to destroy a fertilized egg, or prevent its implantation. Similarly, vasectomies, tubal ligations, and other forms of sterilization have increasingly come to be used as an alternative form of birth control. For issues such as these, the clergy of Church of the Resurrection offers guidance to its members based on traditional Christian moral theology.

Human life begins at conception (fertilization); therefore, we believe that any method of contraception that either destroys a fertilized egg, or prevents its implantation, is morally unacceptable in all circumstances, because it violates God's commandment against the taking of innocent human life.

Most methods of birth control seek to avoid or prevent conception without *permanently* eliminating a man or a woman's reproductive capacity. Conversely, sterilization is expressly designed to eliminate a man or a woman's reproductive capacity altogether. The ability to share with God in the creation of new life is a sacred and priceless gift that is not to be rejected or discarded lightly. Therefore, the clergy of Church of the Resurrection strongly discourages the use of sterilization as a form of birth control.

This teaching in no way is offered as a judgment or condemnation of past choices, but rather as a word of counsel and encouragement for future decisions.

Summary

Scripture teaches that our sexual identity and marriage are not mere human conventions, but part of God's eternal plan for us. God established marriage both for the creation of new life and for the creation of a permanent bond of mutual love and support between spouses, thereby setting the foundation and model for authentic community.

Not every marriage will be blessed by children, but every marriage should be open to the gift of new life. Nonetheless, for serious and unselfish reasons, a Christian couple may legitimately seek to limit the number of their children and space the timing of their births. Abortion, or the use of abortifacient drugs that either destroy a fertilized egg or prevent its implantation are never



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morally acceptable. Likewise, sterilization is strongly discouraged as a form of birth control, because it destroys fertility rather than regulating it.

The question is not one of past decisions, but of future choices. Therefore:

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths. (Isaiah 2:3)

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