

IN COMMUNION

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Women and men want happy, healthy, life-long relationships built on trust, honesty, and intimacy. But most of all, we want our relationships to be built on real love. In today's society, understanding real love can be difficult. As Catholics, we believe Christ shows us the most perfect image of love: his total gift on the Cross. We find the true meaning of our lives when we imitate this total gift of self and draw our strength from it.

Women and men profoundly and uniquely imitate this love in marriage. They vow to give themselves to each other, completely. Because of their sexual difference, husband and wife can truly become "one flesh." Through the language of their bodies, their sexual union recalls their vows: giving themselves to one another in love that is total, faithful, and life-giving. Their sexual love is meant to be an intimate communion with the other—mind, body, and soul—the *whole* person.

When a couple deliberately contracepts or sterilizes their sexual union, they change the meaning of their love and their relationship to God. In our hearts, we know we are made for an incredible, an amazing, and a natural love to be shared in communion with our spouse. Contraception impedes and even breaks that communion.

The impact of a contraceptive mentality is not isolated to individual couples. The widespread use of contraception impacts the entire culture, forming societies to be self-seeking, not welcoming to new life.

Forty years ago the Church through Pope Paul VI predicted that if contraception became widely available, there would be a general lowering of moral standards, that men's respect for women would decline, there would be an increase in infidelity and the breakdown of the family, and finally, governments would sanction or mandate contraception in social policy. The most intimate relationship of the couple would be manipulated by public authorities.

Looking around the world today, it is difficult to ignore the growing disregard for women and children, the breakdown of marriage and family life, and the increased threat of government coercion.

But the good news is that the Father raised his Son, Jesus Christ, who, through the Holy Spirit, is always inviting us to encounter him, and to accept his invitation to be in full communion with him and with each other. That's why he gave us the Church, whose task it is to guide every person toward a true and fully loving relationship with God and with one another.

There has been much news lately about the Church's teaching on contraception and sterilization. As Catholics, we may be asking thoughtful questions or struggling to understand this teaching.



To learn more, or to see questions others have asked, visit www.usccb.org/love-and-sexuality.