



## Marriage Fact Sheet 2024

Getting married and cooperating with God to bring children into the world are powerful statements of hope, faith, and love. They are also a response to the deepest longings of the human heart—to be known and rest assured that we belong, to love and be loved, and to make a lasting difference in the world. As Catholics, we believe that we were created in love and for love, by a God who is Love.

The Sacrament of Marriage strengthens and protects marital love with a covenant bond that reflects God’s own commitment to us. Saint John Paul II once said, “for those who are not intent on loving forever, it is hard to imagine that they could truly love for even one day. True love, following the example of Christ, entails a complete gift of self... always seeking the good of the beloved, not one’s own selfish satisfaction.”

Because human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, we still seek a mutual love that lasts a lifetime, and nothing less truly satisfies our longing. Sadly, the world around us has lost sight of God’s plan for family life and human flourishing, instead promoting the false promise of sexual encounters lacking commitment as a substitute for the communion of a lifelong love—without giving a moment’s thought to the children that often arise from such casual unions. Consider that:

- An unprecedented 28% of 40-year-olds in California have never been married
- The number of unmarried couples living together in CA has increased by 21% in the last 10 years
- The intrinsic connection between marriage and raising children has disappeared in the culture
- Public policy actively discourages marriage, especially for low-income families

As marriage goes, so goes the life and vitality of the Church. For example, nationwide, 92% of all priests ordained in 2023 were raised by a married couple living together. Yet in just the last 10 years in CA:

- Average annual marriages have dropped by 6%; Catholic weddings have dropped 31%
- Catholic weddings have gone from 9% to 6% of all marriages
- On average, the number of newborns is down by 13%; infant Baptisms have dropped 36%
- First Communion have declined by 46%—including a 40% drop from 2018 to 2022
- Catholic school enrollment (K-12) has declined by 22%, versus just 7% lower in public schools





Like other Californians, Catholics in our state—especially young adults—are influenced by the social environment and its cultural attitudes. Although the secular trends regarding marriage and family portend major challenges for the state of California in the years ahead, there is a real opportunity for Catholics in this historical moment. Self-identifying Catholics constitute about 32% of the population in California. This means that whatever we do to strengthen the marriage bond through better preparation and lifelong support can have a profound effect on the state as a whole. We are well positioned to radiate God’s love to a world that is still wandering in search of true, everlasting love—like sheep without a shepherd ([Mt 9:36](#)).

For this reason, the Bishops of California have created the **Radiate Love Marriage Initiative** for the 2024-25 pastoral year, to remind our Catholic people that:

- Marriage is good for couples:
  - Confidence, trust, and stability in marriage contribute to [mental health and well-being](#)
  - Studies show that married couples do better [financially](#) and [in overall life satisfaction](#)
  - There are clear physical [health and longevity benefits, especially for men](#)
- Marriage is good for children:
  - On every indicator of well-being, children being raised by both biological parents [do best](#)
  - The children of married biological parents have [fewer behavioral problems and lower rates of delinquency](#)
  - Marriage protects unborn children: about 86% of abortions are [procured by unmarried women](#), especially when the [fathers are not willing to share responsibility](#) for their child
- Countless women today are settling for [fewer children than they would prefer](#) to have, due to the [lack of a committed and supportive husband](#)
- Marriage is good for society:
  - What is good for children—married parents—is also [good for society](#) in the long run
  - Although every family is unique and many single parents raise successful, well-adjusted children, it remains true that communities of predominantly [single-parent households suffer](#) from low median household income, [high crime rates](#), and low upward mobility
  - Married couples—especially those with children—are [economically more productive, responsible, and invested in the future good of society](#), for the benefit of their family
  - Loneliness and the lack of purpose in life—[both of which are counteracted by marriage and family](#)—contribute greatly to the crisis of [mental health and destructive behavior](#)





- The Good News of Jesus Christ is embodied in the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage:
  - The complementarity of man and woman is a gift from God that reflects God's own providence and generativity (CCC, [369-373](#))
  - Marriage can be hard, but it is worth the effort... God can help ([Phil 4:13](#), [1 Cor 10:13](#))
  - The marriage of a man and a woman reflects Jesus' love for the Church ([Eph 5:31-32](#))
  - God and the Church do not abandon the broken-hearted ([Ps 34:19](#)), accompanying couples in need of healing or growing through the annulment process for a new start

By strategically focusing on the topic of marriage and family for one year, we hope to help pastors and parish or school leaders to understand the great importance of this issue for the future of the Church and of the world. We encourage you to work with leaders throughout the diocese to create a strong marriage culture locally, sharing the beautiful gift of marriage and family for all the world to see.

Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding, turning water into fine wine, because he believes marriage is beautiful and worth celebrating. The love of husbands and wives images the love between Jesus and his Church, as both spouses are called to lay down their lives for the other and their children ([John 15:13](#)). In families, husbands, wives, and children teach each other how to love, how to reach their full human potential, and how to live for others—all qualities we desperately need in our world today.

Through the Radiate Love initiative, the bishops of California invite every Catholic to celebrate the beauty and goodness of marriage and family. We invite all families to radiate their love to the world—parents, grandparents, children, spouses, sisters, and brothers. This initiative will include monthly reflections, prayers, videos, and other materials to help families become witnesses of God's love. Find out more at [radiatelove.info](http://radiatelove.info).

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