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ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Holy Synod/Official Statements & Speeches/The Holy Synod of Bishops

Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life

These affirmations on marriage, family, sexuality, and the sanctity of life are issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops on the occasion of the Tenth All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America.

Miami, Florida, July, 1992

The Procreation of Children

The procreation of children in marriage is the “heritage” and “reward” of the Lord; a blessing of God (cf. Psalm 127:3). It is the natural result of the act of sexual intercourse in marriage, which is a sacred union through which God Himself joins the two together into “one flesh” (Genesis 1-2, Matthew 19, Mark 10, Ephesians 5, et. al.).

The procreation of children is not in itself the sole purpose of marriage, but a marriage without the desire for children, and the prayer to God to bear and nurture them, is contrary to the “sacrament of love” (Orthodox Marriage Service; St. John Chrysostom, On Ephesians, Homily 20).

Married couples are encouraged to abstain from sexual union at times for the sake of devotion to prayer (as, for example, on the eves of the Eucharist, and during Lenten seasons). They are to do so, however, only “for a season by agreement” since their bodies are not their own but belong to each other; and they are to “come together again lest Satan tempt” them (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2-7).

God himself “knits together” the child conceived in the mother’s womb, beholding its “unformed substance” as it is being intricately wrought before his all-knowing eyes (Psalm 139:13-18). The Lord Jesus himself was first acknowledged on earth by John the Baptist when both the Lord and His Forerunner were still embryos within their mothers’ wombs (Luke 1:39-45).

Orthodox Christians have always viewed the willful abortion of unborn children as a heinous act of evil. The Church’s canonical tradition identifies any action intended to destroy a fetus as the crime of murder (Ancyra, Canon 21; Trullo, Canon 91; St. Basil, Canon 2).

Convinced of these God-revealed truths, we offer the following affirmations and admonitions for the guidance of the faithful:

The procreation of children is to take place in the context of marital union where the father and mother accept the care of the children whom they conceive.

Married couples may express their love in sexual union without always intending the conception of a child, but only those means of controlling conception within marriage are acceptable which do not harm a fetus already conceived.

Married couples may use medical means to enhance conception of their common children, but the use of semen or ova other than that of the married couple who both take responsibility for their offspring is forbidden.