



# The Problem of Out of Wedlock Births

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan, *People of God*, April 2012

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The decline of marriage in our American society is our most ignored national crisis. Recent studies have shown that more than half of births to mothers under age 30 now occur out of wedlock. It seems as though we are casting aside the institution of marriage and with it the notion that children should be raised in stable two-parent families. This is a social catastrophe. (from *Time Magazine*, March 5, 2012, article by Rich Lowry, page 13)

Out of wedlock births account for 73% among African Americans, 53% among Latinos and 29% among Anglo-Saxons. Almost 70% out of wedlock births are attributed to high school dropouts and 51% to high school graduates. But those who have gone to college have only an 8% experience of out of wedlock births.

We know that the breakdown of the family is very tough on children. Children in two-parent families are more likely to graduate from high school and college, get a decent job and enjoy a stable family life themselves. Children born into or raised in single parent households have real challenges. They are often raised by extended family members such as grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles, which can strain the mother-child or father-child relationship. The single parent struggles to juggle the strains of parenthood, education and employment. The Church must encourage them and assure them that God loves them.

The Catholic Church, in accord with the Bible, has always taught that sexual activity belongs in the relationship of marriage between a man and a woman. The further we get away from the teachings of Christ in the Church the more problems come into people's lives. The trend toward out of wedlock births is an extremely serious problem.

We need to do a better job of educating our teenagers and young adults in the truth of our Catholic teaching. We need to encourage marriage and family as the only source of true happiness for the children and for the couples themselves. I ask our priests, deacons and religious educators to teach about this important subject and to keep reminding our young people of the moral teachings and the need to have some self discipline and, if needed, a spirit of sacrifice and prayer to remain chaste. And to look forward to marriage as the proper place for the intimacy that results in the birth of a child.