

DIVORCE

133. Most people recognise the human need for close, personal and enduring relationships. Nevertheless, divorce has become increasingly common. This is frequently a source of great pain. The divorce proceedings may also add to distress already caused on both sides and the effects on the children may remain through life. The contemporary expectation seems to be that someone who gets divorced should remarry and second marriages are commonly viewed as a positive sign that someone has 'moved on'. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, seeks to follow the teaching of Jesus that marriage is indissoluble: 'What God has united, man must not divide' (*Mark 10:9*).

134. The general claim that divorce is a better option, for the sake of the children, than continuous strife between the parents seems to underestimate the harm that the process of divorce itself involves. Nevertheless, the Church accepts the legitimacy of seeking legal separation in sufficiently serious circumstances. A civil divorce may be needed to give legal and social protection to one or other of the partners that cannot be obtained simply by living separately. Those who divorce normally need help and support and should not be subject to stigma or discrimination. Yet, as civil divorce does not truly dissolve the marriage, the divorced person is not free before God or the Church to marry someone else.

135. Sometimes, after long investigation, the Church will declare that what appeared to be a valid marriage lacked an essential element such that it was not, in fact, a marriage. This is different from a divorce and is called an 'annulment'. If a marriage has broken down irretrievably, a person has the right to have the Church investigate to see if there are grounds for it to be declared null. However, the alleged grounds for nullity may not have been present from the beginning and problems may only have developed later on. In this case an annulment is not possible since the marriage was entered into at the beginning and marriage is indissoluble.

136. The Catholic Church continues to bear witness to the indissolubility of marriage by its sacramental discipline. The Catholic Church in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland sought to acknowledge the pain caused by this discipline in *One Bread, One Body* (1998). It is important to emphasise that seeking or receiving a divorce, where there are serious and objective reasons for it, is not in itself a barrier to receiving communion. While those who have entered a second relationship after divorce are not permitted to participate fully in the Sacraments, the Church warmly invites and encourages them to become involved in the life and prayer of the local Church community as much as possible.

QUESTIONS

Is a divorce too easy to procure in our society? Discuss

Would more people have opted for divorce two or three generations ago if women had been less dependent on their husbands for financial security? Discuss

It's a proven statistic that people who 'live together' before marriage are far more likely to divorce than those who don't? Discuss

With a big percentage of marriages breaking down should the church be emphasising the virtue of perseverance bearing in mind what Jesus said: 'he who perseveres to the end will be saved? Discuss

*What is the difference in the group's view between annulment and divorce? Discuss
Is the church unreal in its requirement that those Catholics who divorce and remarry without an annulment are not allowed to receive Holy Communion? Discuss*

Do 'broken homes' fuel childhood worries? Discuss