



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## Premarital Sex: What's the Big Deal?



It is becoming increasingly common for unmarried couples – youth and adults – to engage in premarital sex. The commonly cited reasons by those who see no harm in having premarital sex include: “This is our way of expressing our love.”

“We are going to get married anyway, so what's the big deal?”

“I have to have sex with my partner to know if we are sexually compatible.”

Those who maintain that premarital sex is wrong because sex is an act of union reserved for those who have professed their commitment to each other through wedding vows, can be labelled “old-fashioned” and “traditional”.

Here, we examine the differences in these perspectives. What are people really saying when they ask: “What's the big deal?”

### Separating body from soul

Those who do not see premarital sex as wrong often view the body as a separate entity from the soul. There are therefore no significant implications (apart from the biological aspects) to use one's body or another's body. Following this reasoning, if the other's body is not “compatible”, “useful”, or “pleasurable”, it can be reasonable not to commit oneself to that person in marriage.

There are also times when a person may feel coerced to have sex with a partner to prove their love and commitment to each other, or out of fear of losing the partner. Here, the body is viewed as an object, a tool: giving one's body in sex as a way to hold on to a relationship. But in doing so, the gift of sex means no more than a bouquet of flowers, or an item of jewellery.

Yet, what marriage counsellors will explain is that the emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects of sex are undeniably present when the physical act takes place. That is why spouses feel deeply hurt by the sexual infidelity of their partners. It is because the body is as much a part of a person that one can feel betrayed when that body is given to someone else. It is not just the body that has been shared, but an integral part of the person himself. So the body should not be regarded as a separate entity and should not be used as leverage in a relationship.

### Sexual compatibility

Compatibility can be important or not in a relationship depending on which aspect of compatibility is being discussed. There are many couples who appear incompatible in their personalities, hobbies or interests, but enjoy happy marriages.



*In this continuing series on Values by Catholic Medical Guild and Caritas Singapore, we look at premarital sex and explain the underlying attitudes behind those who engage in it.*

What is infinitely important in a marriage is compatibility of values. Our values guide our decisions and behaviour. Alignment of values will mean that the couple will be aligned on the critical decisions in their life journey together.

Is sexual compatibility an important value to a couple? It is a question for every couple to answer.

For those who say “yes, and that is why we need to determine this before marriage”, the question is: would that not be tantamount to treating sexual compatibility as a pre-condition for continuing a relationship? And what happens if your body is no longer “sexually compatible” with your partner's at some point in the future (for example, if because of a medical condition, you are unable to have sex)? Would it then be acceptable for the partner to seek another compatible body?

**“We're going to get married anyway”**

Inherent in this statement is the idea that it does not matter whether sex is shared before or only during marriage.

It discounts the significance of marriage if one does not need to get married before having sex (even if one intends to get married eventually).

Instead, marriage should be the only state in which two persons unite themselves meaningfully in sex after they have promised to give themselves totally to each other “for better or for worse, till death do us part”.

In the act of giving oneself to another, the need for commitment through all adversity becomes paramount. By understanding and keeping the promise of being faithful to one another, then can a loving relationship flourish and function. Integrity takes discipline and effort. In striving together to stay true to these promises, sex then becomes the ultimate consummation and renewal of marriage vows to be shared by two individuals fully committed to each other.

Perhaps that is why divorces have been found to be higher among those who have had sex before marriage, as compared to those who waited till marriage before having sex.

What is your yardstick for measuring love?

### Premarital Sex in a Nutshell

#### What It Is

Premarital sex is sexual intercourse engaged by persons who are not married. It is also called fornication. Premarital sex is often used in the context of two persons who are engaging in sexual activity prior to marriage.

#### The Current Landscape

- While mainstream religions generally regard premarital sex as morally wrong, societal reality indicates many people are practising it.
- A 2006 study indicated that 95 per cent of Americans reported they had premarital sex and 93 per cent said they did so by age 30.
- A 2007 survey of youths by Singapore Polytechnic indicated that 46 per cent think it is okay to have sex before marriage.
- A few countries have strict religious laws against fornication, with punishment ranging from imprisonment to stoning. Singapore and many other countries do not have such laws against sex outside marriage, unless one of the partners is a minor. The definition of “minor” varies. In Singapore, it is 16 years old, with the offence being classified as “statutory rape” if the victim is below 14 years of age.

#### Arguments For Premarital Sex

- Free choice.** As long as sex is between two consenting adults and causes no harm to others, it is their business.
- Expression of love.** Sex is just one of the ways a couple expresses their love for each other. Why should they not be allowed to express their love? And if the couple is intending to get married anyway, why can they not engage in it earlier?
- Trial of sexual compatibility.** Couples should have premarital sex to check if they are sexually compatible. It would be terrible if they found out they were not only after marriage.

#### Arguments Against Premarital Sex

- Love is not just a physical act.** In engaging in premarital sex, couples focus more on the physical aspects of the relationship, and less on others. Studies have shown that couples who engaged in premarital sex reported less satisfaction with their communication, relationship and sex life after marriage, compared to those who waited till they got married before engaging in sexual intercourse.
- The result, not the means, of happy marriages.** Great sex is not the means to a happy lasting marriage. Rather, great sex is the result of a happy marriage, which is based on good communications and relationship between the couple.
- Conditional love.** To have sex with a person before marriage to check if that person is compatible or not puts a condition on the partner. And conditions to love are not compatible with marriage, where love should be unconditional.

### What The Church Teaches

- Sex is beautiful as an integral part of the love between a man and woman totally committed to each other.** “In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion... Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2360-61)
- The sexual act must only take place exclusively within marriage.** Premarital sex is “contrary to the moral law. The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2390)
- A trial marriage is not true love.** “Carnal union is morally legitimate only when a definitive community of life between a man and woman has been established. Human love does not tolerate ‘trial marriages’. It demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2391)