

judgment of this woman as much as he was lovingly trying to help her embrace some of the realities of her sinful choices – choices that had a marked negative effect on the quality of her life, as well as her ability to discern and accept Christ's life sustaining, healing, transformative message.

A Few Final Thoughts If this article has unsettled you, forgive me. This was not my intention. My intention was to provide some information that you may not have heard. My other intention was to begin to help you understand why the church takes the position it does with regard to sexual relations outside of marriage and in particular, cohabitation.

While some may unfairly criticize the Church's position regarding cohabitation, suggesting that it is inherently out of touch and out of step, the Church does not take the position it does because it refuses to change or is unsympathetic to our needs. On the contrary, skewed and hostile interpretations of the Church's position with regard to cohabitation generally emerge from an ignorance of Holy Tradition and are not based in an understanding of Church teachings.

A more accurate interpretation of the Church's teachings regarding cohabitation begins from an understanding of the wisdom contained in the following quote from Saint Paul. "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think of these things" (Phil. 4:8).

These God given "things," are the morals, values, holy principles, teachings, dogmas that

undergird our faith tradition and draw us close to God and one another. So, choose wisely with God's help. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE

www.Interfaith.goarch.org

Center for Family Care

www.family.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE

www.Outreach.goarch.org

PUBLICATIONS

By Charles Joanides Ph.D., LMFT

When You Intermarry

Ministering to Intermarried Couples

Attending to Your Marriage



Marriage and Family

Some Practical Steps

Department of Marriage and Family



Produced by the Department of
Marriage and Family
Greek Orthodox Archdioceses of America

Should We or Shouldn't We Live Together?

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In the sixties, my generation called it "shacking up." Today it's called "living together," and academics call it "cohabitation." In this article I'll be using the latter two terms to describe why more and more couples are choosing to live together before marriage. I'll also talk about some of the myths and risks attached to this choice. Finally, I'll provide some reasons why our Church counsels its faithful to avoid this temptation before marriage. But first, I'd like to share the following few statistics.

Facts and Stats

Cohabitation rates have spiked dramatically since the sixties. In 1960 an estimated 450,000 couples lived together, by 2006 that number increased to around 5.4 million. That's a twelvefold increase in just 46 years. As a result, over 50% of all couples who get married today

choose to live together before marriage. So, why the dramatic increase?

Reasons why People Choose to Live Together

These are some reasons why people choose to live together.

- Everyone's doing it, so why not us?
- It decreases the divorce rate by helping potentially incompatible couples avoid a fatally flawed marriage and an ugly divorce.
- Living together is like a trial marriage.
- It will help us save money before we get married.

But the question remains are these reasons based on fact or fiction? Let's take a closer look at what research has found.

Everyone's Doing It

While it's true that over 50% of couples do cohabit before marriage, it's also true that nearly 50% don't live together before marriage. So, in actuality while the cohabitation rates are very high, not everyone "is doing it."

It Decreases the Divorce Rate

It's also not true that cohabitation helps couples avoid divorce. Research clearly indicates that couples who live together before marriage are nearly twice as likely to divorce when compared to couples who do not cohabit before marriage. So, from an evidence-based perspective, if couples want to increase their chances of staying together after marriage they should avoid living together before marriage.

It's like a Trial Marriage

Living together is *not* like a trial marriage. That's because cohabitation is qualitatively different

from marriage in many important ways. Here are some examples of how these lifestyles differ.

- Couples who live together tend to be less committed to one another when compared to married couples.
- Cohabiting arrangements are significantly less permanent when compared to marriages. Cohabiting couples are four times more likely to break-up when compared to married couples.
- Cohabiting partners are less likely to value fidelity and are more likely to engage in sex outside of the relationship when compared to married couples.
- Couples who cohabit are also more likely to separate their earnings. Married couples are more likely to pool their money.

What these differences suggest is that, on average, there is less permanence and less commitment among cohabiting couples. These differences also mean that couples who view cohabitation like a trial marriage may be doing themselves a great disservice because the two lifestyles are not comparable.

It Will Help Us Save Money

It's true. Some cohabiting couples do save on rent money, utilities and other related living expenses before marriage. Yet, it's debatable how cost effective these savings are when compared to the habits and patterns that these couples form before marriage. For example, consider the topic of finances. Couples who live together are more likely to separate their earnings and are less likely to pool their money both before and after marriage. That's because the habits and patterns that couples adopt while cohabiting are hard to break after marriage.

Moreover, such habits and patterns can and often do have a toxic effect on a couple's efforts to cultivate financial oneness and togetherness after marriage.

What the Church Teaches

The Church teaches that human sexuality is a gift from God. It also teaches that sexual relations should exclusively be reserved for the marriage bond. As a result, when we choose to misuse this gift outside of the marriage bond, we engage in behavior that displeases God and creates distance between us and God – which incidentally is not the same as saying that God will punish and condemn us to hell if we choose to live together.

On the contrary, we do not worship a punitive God who seeks a pound of flesh each time we stray from his teachings. We worship a loving, forgiving, merciful God who "desires that all people should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) – His truth. It's for this reason, among other similar reasons, that God counsels us through writings like Saint Paul's to "flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), since he cares and loves us and desires a relationship with us.

So, when we make choices that stand in opposition to God's revealed truths and counsel, we are distancing ourselves from God and His life sustaining, healing, transformative grace. That is precisely the reason why our Lord offered the following gentle, constructive admonition to the Samaritan woman who was living with someone out of wedlock: "...for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband" (Jn. 4:18). In making this observation Jesus was not standing in