

YOU CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO MARRY

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The average cost of a wedding in 2012 was a whopping \$25,656!

While Will Oramus pointed out in State that the number is misleading and the important number is the mean cost – a mere \$18,086 – it's the bigger number that grabs the headlines leading many couples to lament, "We can't afford to get married." After all, \$25,656 is about the annual take-home pay for a single person grossing \$33,000 a year. A year's pay for a weekend of partying is a lot of money particularly when you have to pay for a sumptuous honeymoon too.

As a result, cohabitation – a poor substitute for marriage – is the logical choice for many. Wealthier college educated Americans still marry and reap all the benefits. Working class Americans think they "can't afford it," cohabitate, and suffer all the consequences.

But it doesn't actually cost \$25,000 to get married. "We can't afford to get married," often means, "We can't afford the lavish wedding which is what we or others expect. We'll do that someday when we have the money."

Since more than half cohabitating couples break up before marriage even if the couple is engaged and money has a way of remaining tight, for most couples "someday" never arrives. By contrast, children have a habit of arriving even if "the big day" doesn't. And, having unmarried parents, those children are more likely to live at a serious disadvantage compared with the children of married couples

The so-called "income-gap" in this country is in large measure a "marriage gap". As Derek Thompson wrote in the Atlantic, "The decline in marriage rates among poorer men and women robs parents of supplemental income, of work-life balance, and of time to prepare a child for school. Single-parenthood and inter-generational poverty feed each other. The marriage gap and the income gap amplify one another."

Married couples, even if those couples are low-income couples, are more likely to enjoy higher incomes, greater net worth, less dependence on government, improved physical and emotional health, lower crime rates, fewer problems with drugs and alcohol, and longer lives. Their children, growing up with their married biological moms and dads, are then more likely to repeat the pattern by staying in school, obtaining college degrees, avoiding problems with the law, illicit drugs, and prison, and waiting until they're married before having children.

And, yes, the differences are that stark as a quick perusal of these Family Facts taken from sociological studies attests. Rather than curse the darkness, National Marriage Week USA in addition to designating Feb. 7-14 as National Marriage Week has begun the Affordable Wedding Project. Because, as their website notes, research links marriage with "financial stability, better health, less troubled kids, greater happiness," there's a need to convince couples that they can't afford not to get married.

In one of the videos about affordable weddings, after describing two very lovely – and very inexpensive – weddings (one of which she organized in one week), National Marriage Week USA's executive director, Sheila Weber notes, "The wedding is about the relationship and not about the money that's spent and the grand party. And so we want to encourage people to think differently than Hollywood is usually telling us and know that there are alternative ways to have beautiful celebrations. And it's really about bringing the people you love together."

Christians do not defend and promote marriage between one man and one woman because we want to impose our morality. We defend and promote marriage for the common good. Life-long marriage between a man and a woman is good news for men, women, and children, for communities, churches, cities, and the nation.

National Marriage Week USA "seeks to mobilize individuals, organizations, and businesses in common purpose to strengthen marriage in communities and convey what the social science clearly tells us: marriage leads to greater wealth, health, longevity and happiness."

Let me encourage you to visit the website and celebrate National Marriage Week in your home and in your church. Along with videos about Affordable Weddings, the site is stocked with easy to access small groups, Sunday school classes, pastors, and congregations.

Marriage in America and in America's churches has fallen on hard times. If Christians don't take the lead in defending, promoting, strengthening, and celebrating marriage, no one else will.

So find some way – even a small way – to celebrate National Marriage Week and share the good news. Maybe you can help plan an affordable wedding. In the final analysis, we can't afford not to.

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"...We should provide the facts about the importance of marriage as a matter of child welfare and economic aspiration. As a society, we have launched highly effective public education campaigns on much less momentous issues, from smoking to recycling... For now, the decline of marriage is our most ignored national crisis..."

Rich Lowry commentary, *TIME Magazine*, 2012

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Let's Strengthen Marriage & National Marriage Week USA

<http://www.nationalmarriageweekusa.org>

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For media interviews

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National Marriage Week USA is part of International Marriage Week, with 16 major countries around the world now mobilizing leaders and events to strengthen marriage in their countries.

<http://www.marriage-weekinternational.com>