

# CONSENT IS A PROCESS

## The Process of Consent

We tend to think that a decision is made in a moment. A man says, “Will you marry me?” The woman answers yes, and then everything is settled. After all the Writings teach, “Consent is the essential of marriage; everything else is just the formalities.” (*Married Love* 21.4) In actual fact our decisions are generally much more gradual than they appear. There are many steps leading up to a proposal. Before you choose whom you will marry, you make many choices about what kind of a person you will be and what kind of relationships you will have with other people. You make choices about how you will relate to people of the opposite sex, and you make choices about what kind of personal limits or boundaries you will keep. Finally, you choose to spend enough time with a person that you can come to love that person’s qualities.

The process of consent continues after you decide to get married. There are still many choices to make: when and where will you be married, and by whom? What kind of marriage will it be? Will it endure? Will it be a spiritual marriage? What level of commitment will there be? Will there be children? How will they be raised? How will the work be divided?

Through this gradual process, your consent, and therefore your marriage, can grow stronger and happier. Actually, many couples who have enduring marriages continue to strengthen their commitment by choosing to be married again and again. Some couples renew their wedding vows after ten or twenty years. Some make their anniversary a time to make a new commitment. Some say to each other daily, “I choose to be married to you.”

## Talking to Others Who Care about You

We tend to think of marriage as a private agreement between two individuals. In fact, as the Writings point out, it is a public institution, a legal contract protected by society (*Married Love* 307), overseen by parents (298), established in the presence of witnesses (307), confirmed and consecrated by a minister (308) and celebrated by friends and relatives (309). Society is founded on the institution of marriage, and the destruction of that institution would result in the ruination of society (*Married Love* 276, *Divine Providence* 77).

It is essential that the couple themselves have complete freedom in their consent to be married. Both partners must be in a state in which they are free to deliberate (*Arcana Coelestia* 3158). Consent can never be forced. (*Married Love* 299) The purpose of involving so many other people in your marriage is to ensure that your consent is freely given, and to provide you with the knowledge and experience that can help you avoid a blind or hasty decision. So make the decision for yourselves, but allow people who care about you to support you in the process.

*This is excerpted from a pamphlet Getting Ready for Marriage which is being prepared by Rev. John Odhner and should soon be available from the General Church.*