

*Cultivating Marital Commitment to Reduce Poverty:
Bringing the Gospel of Marriage to the Poor*

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This paper will explore the link between economic health and marriage trends in the U.S. Poor and working-class men and women without college degrees are more likely to avoid or delay marriage, to cohabit and have children out of wedlock, to engage in marital infidelity, and to divorce than are the college-educated. Intercorrelations among these indices, in addition to their respective associations with lower net worth and economic mobility, increased poverty, and dependence on state-provided welfare will be examined. Current research on the cycle of poverty, infidelity, divorce, and extramarital relationships and births will be reviewed. Finally, the role of the Catholic Church in addressing these social pathologies will be presented in the context of an innovative hypothesis for further study: abandoned spouses who are still committed to their marriages can provide models for reviving the institution of marriage and thereby help weaken the cycle of poverty and marital instability.