



One Man, One Woman, One Union

Questions and Answers on Wisconsin's Constitutional Amendment to Define Marriage

On November 7, Wisconsin voters will be asked to ratify a proposed amendment to the state constitution to define marriage as the union between one man and one woman. If a majority votes "Yes," the amendment will become part of the constitution.

What does the referendum say?

The referendum question reads as follows:

"Shall section 13 of article XIII of the constitution be created to provide that only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state and that a legal status identical or substantially similar to that of marriage of unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized in this state?"

Why are we amending the state constitution? Doesn't state law already address this?

Wisconsin law defines marriage as a union between a husband and wife, which is consistent with the traditional understanding of marriage. However, an amendment to the state constitution establishes a stronger legal recognition of the unique status of traditional marriage in this state. This additional protection is important, given judicial and legislative actions in other states that have altered the legal definition of marriage.

Why is it so important that marriage be preserved as the exclusive union of a man and a woman?

Millennia of human experience and ethical reflection show the family to be the foundation of society. The institution of marriage plays an essential role in the continuation of the human race, the full and proper development of each person and the establishment of a society rooted in personal dignity, social stability and mutual respect. Marriage is the foundation of the family. Thus, while marriage is a personal relationship, it also has public significance. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*, 2003, #5).

Society needs the presence and contribution of males and females. Marriage is the primary pattern for male-female relationships. It has social value insofar as it models the way in which women and men can live interdependently and commit, for the whole of life, to seek the good of each other.

Why should marriage be a part of civil law?

Civil laws provide a structure within which we can live in harmony and peace and support our most cherished values. In a religiously pluralistic society we find common ground for legislation in the created order and in the natural moral law that follows on that reality.

However, the state sometimes has different purposes for its laws. While the Church supports this referendum question, the Catholic concept of marriage involves much more than the gender of the couple or the fact that the state sees it as a contract between a man and a woman. Catholic marriage is based on a personal relationship of life-giving love in which a man and a woman make the love of Christ present to each other and become a sign of that love to those around them. The

most complete way this can happen is for a woman and man to give themselves to each other within the sacrament of marriage.

To propose a new definition of marriage in which people of the same sex are “married,” is to present a completely different understanding of human sexuality and its purpose.

Finally, "the marital union also provides the best conditions for raising children: namely, the stable, loving relationship of a mother and father present only in marriage. The state rightly recognizes this relationship as a public institution in its laws because the relationship makes a unique and essential contribution to the common good" (USCCB, Q&A, #5).

Does denying marriage to homosexual persons demonstrate unjust discrimination or lack of respect for them as persons?

No. Because a marriage and a same-sex union are essentially different realities, it is not unjust to treat them differently. "In fact, justice requires society to do so" (USCCB, Q&A, #6).

"The Catechism of the Catholic Church urges that homosexual persons 'be treated with respect, compassion, and sensitivity' (#2358). It also encourages chaste friendships." (USCCB, Q&A, #6) Such friendships, whether between homosexual or heterosexual persons, are a great benefit to all. (See CCC, #2347)

However, respecting the dignity of homosexual persons does not conflict with upholding God's intent for marriage in which sexual relations have their proper and exclusive place.

The State can justly give married couples benefits and rights it does not extend to others. It would be wrong to redefine marriage as a means of providing benefits to those who cannot rightly claim marriage (USCCB, Q&A, #7).

Does the second part of the constitutional amendment eliminate some of the benefits already extended to “domestic partners” in this state?

No. The terms “civil union” or “domestic partnership” are not in the amendment. All the amendment does is prevent legal recognition of relationships identical to or substantially the same as marriage. Current laws that grant only some benefits to same sex couples won't be affected by the amendment.

For example, state law permits people to name whomever they want as beneficiaries of a will or a life insurance policy. A designee as an agent under a durable power of attorney or as a healthcare agent can be a person who is unmarried, and in fact, unrelated in any way. Businesses can, if they choose, extend employment benefits to individuals unrelated to employees. None of these are seen as identical to marriage.

Besides voting for the amendment, what else can I do?

- **Pray** for married couples that their love serve as witness to the love of Christ, and for our Church that we may proclaim our values with courage, compassion, and civility.
- **Learn** about the Church's teaching on the meaning of marriage and human sexuality.
- **Educate** people in your parish about the Church's teachings.
- **Advocate** by taking part openly in the public conversation on marriage, writing to the editor of your local paper, and encouraging others to vote YES on November 7th.