



## THE PUBLIC INTEREST IN DEFINING MARRIAGE

### INTRODUCTION

The question as to how society defines marriage will be debated again in this legislative session in the form of a proposal to amend the Wisconsin constitution. The proposed amendment will affirm that marriage is a union between one man and one woman. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference supports this proposed amendment. This support is grounded in the teachings of the church and secular considerations regarding life in the community.

### CATHOLIC TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

In their 2003 statement, “Between a Man and a Woman: Questions and Answers about Marriage and Same Sex Unions,” the US bishops teach that:

Marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of life and love. They commit themselves completely to each other and to the wondrous responsibility of bringing children into the world and caring for them. The call to marriage is woven deeply into the human spirit. Man and woman are equal. However, as created, they are different from but made for each other. This complementarity, including sexual difference, draws them together in a mutually loving union that should be always open to the procreation of children (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], nos. 1602-1605).

For Catholics, marriage is both a sacrament—a visible sign of the love of Christ—and a part of the natural order. For a number of reasons, societies across time and cultures have placed special value and recognition on the union of a man and a woman.

### MARRIAGE IS IMPORTANT AND UNIQUE

**Laws governing marriage address a social good.** Though it is a personal commitment between two people, marriage has public consequences. Both religious traditions and secular societies hold that marriage represents not just a personal preference, but also a social good. It creates stability, protects the next generation and strengthens commitments between spouses and extended families. This is why marriage enjoys special significance in the law.

Not all marriages will be life long, not all marriages will bear children and not all children will be born within the context of a marriage, but the exceptions do not redefine the rule. The law can serve as teacher by upholding what society values.

**Marriage connects children to parents and parents to children.** No child enters the world absent a union between irreplaceable parts of a father and a mother. When the father and the mother give of themselves to conceive a child, and accept that child for its own sake, they affirm that life and all people are sacred in their own right. When both are present to a child, when both give daily witness of their commitment, of their need for each other as man and woman, they model for their children a commitment and mutuality that other relationships cannot replicate.

**Marriage attests to the complementarity of men and women.** The union of one man to one woman gives a singularly powerful witness to the interdependence between generations and to the complementarity of the sexes. This witness is is not and cannot be duplicated in other relationships. No other commitment signifies so powerfully

this mutual reliance of men and women in private and public life. This mutuality warrants the special recognition our laws confer upon it.

This is why many religions teach—and why social policies encourage—that procreation must occur in the context of a marriage relationship. In the words of one editorial, “marriage at its best, tutors us as no other experience can in the given nature of human life and the acceptance of responsibilities we have not willed or chosen.”

**Respecting the human dignity of homosexual persons.** The Catechism acknowledges that we do not fully understand the genesis of homosexuality, but that those with a homosexual orientation, like all human persons, have inherent dignity. They have been made in the image of their Creator and no society, government or individual is warranted in attacking that dignity, whether through bigotry, discrimination or violence.

Society may fashion laws to protect the rights of individuals with a homosexual orientation in matters of common interest and their personal goods. These may include access to employment, housing and other basic needs. For example, all individuals should be free to designate health care agents and those with hospital visitation rights. But redefining marriage as it has never been defined before is not the means to achieve these goals.

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

The WCC urges legislators to support amending the Constitution to affirm the current definition of marriage.

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