



PROMOTE, PRESERVE, PROTECT MARRIAGE

Statement of the Administrative Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Issued on September 9, 2003
Reaffirmed on March 14, 2006

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that marriage is a faithful, exclusive, and lifelong union between one man and one woman, joined as husband and wife in an intimate partnership of life and love. Marriage exists so that the spouses might grow in mutual love and, by the generosity of their love, bring children into the world and serve life fully.

Moreover, we believe the natural institution of marriage has been blessed and elevated by Christ Jesus to the dignity of a sacrament. In this way, the love of husband and wife becomes a living image of the way in which the Lord personally loves his people and is united with them.

God is the author of marriage. It is both a relationship of persons and an institution in society. However, it is not just any relationship or simply another institution. We believe that, in the divine plan, marriage has its proper meaning and achieves its purposes.

Therefore, it is our duty as pastors and teachers – a responsibility we share with the Christian faithful and with all persons of good will – to promote, preserve, and protect marriage as it is willed by God, as generations have understood and lived it, and as it has served the common good of society.

To promote, preserve, and protect marriage today requires, among other things, that we advocate for legislative and public policy initiatives that define and support marriage as a unique, essential relationship and institution. At a time when family life is under significant stress, the principled defense of marriage is an urgent necessity to ensure the flourishing of persons, the wellbeing of children, and the common good of society.

Our defense of marriage must focus primarily on the importance of marriage, not on homosexuality or other matters. The Church's teaching about the dignity of homosexual persons is clear. They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Our respect for them means we condemn all forms of unjust discrimination, harassment or abuse. Equally clear is the Church's teaching about the meaning of sexual relations and their place only within married life.

What are called "homosexual unions," because they do not express full human complementarity and because they are inherently non-procreative, cannot be given the status of marriage.

Recently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a statement emphatically opposing the legalization of homosexual unions. Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, welcomed this statement and further articulated our own conviction that such "equivalence not only weakens the unique meaning of marriage; it also weakens the role of law itself by forcing the law to violate the truth of marriage and family life as the natural foundation of society and culture."

We call on Catholics and other persons of good will to join with us in advancing this positive view of the importance of marriage for children and for society, and to defend these principles and the institution of marriage. This is especially important when popular culture, media, and entertainment often undermine or ignore the essential role of marriage and promote equivalence between marriage and homosexual relationships.

We will do this in our teaching and preaching, but also in our public policy advocacy at the state and national levels and in the important dialogue about how best to protect marriage and the common good in the U.S. Constitution and in our society as a whole. We offer general support for a Federal Marriage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as we continue to work to protect marriage in state legislatures, the courts, the Congress and other appropriate forums.

Thus, we strongly oppose any legislative and judicial attempts, both at state and federal levels, to grant same-sex unions the equivalent status and rights of marriage – by naming them marriage, civil unions or by other means.

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