



Referendum 74

Frequently Asked Questions

March 29, 2012

In 1998 the Legislature of the State of Washington passed the Defense of Marriage Act defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. This legislation reflects the time-honored understanding of marriage by both Church and society. This year, the state legislature changed the legal definition of marriage from a *“civil contract between a male and a female”* to *“a civil contract between two persons.”*

Marriage has both spiritual and civil dimensions. The Catholic Church, like all major religions, defines marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman ordered by its nature toward the good of the spouses, procreation and the education of children. The bond between a man and woman in a loving marriage also serves as the foundation for civil society because it is the cornerstone for family life. In the context of its civil dimension, marriage has played an essential role in the growth and development of human civilization.

The Catholic Church recognizes and teaches the dignity and worth of every human being. That is the basis of our formation, our teaching and our charitable outreach. Marriage is the most basic and universal of social institutions and its fundamental definition is upheld not only by Church teaching but by a broad and longstanding public consensus. Since Washington State law already grants all of the benefits and privileges of marriage to couples in domestic partnerships, no compelling public interest exists for altering the legal definition of marriage.

In recent years the bond of marriage has been weakened and undermined by a multitude of cultural forces that create an unfavorable environment for children, who often become the unintended victims of family disintegration. In response to this reality the Catholic Church commits itself to preparing couples for lifelong marriage, strengthening existing unions and finding ways to assist marriages in crisis. Because the new law redefining marriage undermines the basic understanding of marriage, the bishops of Washington State support Referendum 74 as a means to reaffirm marriage as the union between a man and a woman, while opposing all unjust discrimination against any individual.

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Q. Why is the Catholic Church involving itself in the public policy debate over Referendum 74?

A. Marriage is of paramount importance to families and society and the Catholic Church recognizes the union of a man and woman in matrimony as a fundamental good in itself and foundational to human existence and flourishing. The Church cares about the whole person, and all people. Marriage is never

just a “private” issue; it has public significance and public consequences. Marriage (and the disintegration of marriage) affects everyone. Today, people all over the world are suffering because of the breakdown of the family, and the Church speaks out on public policy matters affecting marriage as an expression of its charity and concern for the **common good**.

Q. Wouldn't the Church help promote the common good by supporting legal marriage for same-sex couples?

A. Recognizing other relationships as equal to marriage in quality and value to society would have far reaching consequences. Redefining marriage in civil law would make it discriminatory to promote the importance of men and women marrying before having children. Schools would be required to teach that marriage is just one alternative among many with no intrinsic connection to children and family. To quote Pope Benedict XVI, the common good is “the good of ‘all of us,’” the good of every member of society, including children who have a right to both a mother and a father. The best way to promote that basic right is to support lifelong, committed marriages between men and women.

Q. Why does the Church say that the change in the law redefines marriage?

A. It is a redefinition of marriage. Prior to 2012, State law defined marriage as a “*civil contract between a male and a female*.” The bill as passed by the legislature and signed by the governor redefined marriage as “*a civil contract between two persons*.” This law redefined civil marriage in Washington State.

Q. The Church says it opposes unjust discrimination, but doesn't its opposition to marriage between two men or two women discriminate against people with same-sex attractions?

A. No. To recognize differences is not discrimination. The debate has centered on adults, but marriage is not ordered solely for the benefit of adults. Marriage also promotes the best interests of children. The Church and civil society have always recognized the incomparable benefit children receive from a loving mother and father committed to one another in a lifelong union. While some argue for the “right” to marriage, a more fundamental human right is that of a child to be cared for by his or her mother and father. Our laws and social institutions should be ordered to support that fundamental right, and marriage defined as the union between a man and a woman is the most effective institution for promoting that interest.

Q. Why is the civil definition of marriage as the union between a man and a woman so important to children?

A. Every child without exception has a mother and a father. Sexual difference between a husband and wife is necessary to conceive a child, but its importance does not end there. Men and women bring unique gifts to parenting. Only a woman can be a mother. Only a man can be a father. Each contributes in a distinct and unique way to the formation of children, helping them to understand their identity as male or female. Respecting a child's dignity means affirming his or her need for — and right to — a mother and a father. Marriage — defined as the legal union between a man and a woman — is one of the ways society protects the dignity and basic human rights of children.

Q. Doesn't this presume that single parents cannot be “good” parents?

A. Not at all. There are times when the ideal of a mother and father raising their child together cannot be realized. The Church acknowledges the difficulties faced by single parents and seeks to support them in their often heroic response to meet the needs of their children. However, dealing with the unintended reality of single parenthood and approving the formation of “alternative families” that deprive a child of a father or a mother (such as arrangements headed by two men or two women) are very different propositions. Undesired single parenthood can still witness to the importance of sexual

difference. In contrast, arrangements of two men or two women are incapable of such witness and present motherhood and fatherhood as disposable. Children deserve to have their need for a father and a mother respected, affirmed and protected in law.

Q. Don't studies show that children do fine with two "moms" or two "dads"?

A. Actually, the conclusions of studies that look at children raised by two men or two women are mixed, at best. Some of the studies suffer from small sample sizes or view traits such as "flexible gender identity" as positive. It also is important to remember that social science does not capture the whole of reality. The truths of human nature should be illumined by good science (and the Church enthusiastically encourages this), but such truths do not stand or fall on the findings of social science. No study should ignore the dignity of the child and their right to a mother and a father.

Q. The Church honors marriages between infertile couples and even sanctifies the marriages of elderly persons. Isn't denying people with same-sex attractions the right to marry a double standard?

A. It is true that not all married men and women have children, but every child has a mother and father, and marriage is the only institution that unites them into a communion of persons: a family. That is the primary public interest for civil marriage and the reason every culture, every society and every religion has recognized the uniqueness of the marriage bond. Families are the most basic building block of society and marriage is the foundation of the family. To a significant extent, the laws and institutions of civil society may be evaluated on the basis of their support for marriage and the family.

Q. What harm is there to married men and women if the definition of marriage is changed to allow two men or two women to marry?

A. There is no direct harm to existing marriages if the state redefines marriage, but it will change the way marriage is perceived in society and taught in schools. The status of marriage will be diminished because it will be discriminatory to suggest that it is the foundation of the family. Children will be taught that marriage between a man and a woman is just one relationship among many, and the resulting change in attitudes will affect decisions they make with respect to relationships and the raising of children.

Q. Isn't the Catholic Church trying to impose its beliefs about marriage on the rest of society?

A. The first principle of Catholic teaching is the dignity of every person. Imposing any belief on others would violate that principle. The Church, however, has a right and obligation to teach and advocate for the common good. Within the Catholic faith tradition, the marriage covenant between baptized people is raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament, but people of all faith traditions and no religious faith at all have recognized the importance of marriage throughout history and across time. That is why we join our voices with all — regardless of their faith — to support marriage as the unique institution that forms the foundation of society by uniting a man and a woman with each other and any children born from their union.

Q. Isn't marriage between two men or two women simply another step in social progress similar to laws that eliminated prohibitions against interracial marriage?

A. There is no connection between legal bans on interracial marriage from previous eras and opposition to changing the legal definition of marriage. The essence of marriage is the union of a man and a woman. Laws banning interracial marriage in this country were enacted with the misguided intention of maintaining so-called racial purity, but they did not change the legal definition of marriage as an institution uniting a man and a woman and establishing in law the relationship of the married couple to

children born from their union. The essence of marriage remained unchanged both before and after these unjust prohibitions were lifted.

Q. What does the Catholic Church teach regarding people with same-sex attractions?

A. The Church teaches the inviolable dignity of each and every person and that every person must be treated with respect and dignity, free from all unjust discrimination. The Church recognizes the challenges associated with human sexuality, irrespective of whether a person's attractions are to the same sex or the opposite sex. Although the Catholic understanding of human sexuality teaches that sexual attraction between a man and a woman is ordered by God's loving plan of creation, it also teaches that the human family is wounded whenever any of its members are rejected or disrespected.

Q. But doesn't the Catechism teach that people with same-sex attractions are disordered?

A. No. This teaching has been the subject of misunderstanding and, as a result, is a source of pain for many. The Catechism of the Catholic Church does teach that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered, not persons. Use of the term "disorder" in common parlance has many meanings and connotations, but in the Catechism it is a term with a precise philosophical definition. In its reference to homosexual acts the Catechism of the Catholic Church denotes that these acts do not coincide with the order of nature for propagating life.

Q. Doesn't Catholic Church teaching reject the love between people with same-sex attractions, denying them the right to love whom they choose?

A. Blessed John Paul II stated that without love individuals are incomprehensible to themselves. All human persons are made for love, but not everyone is made for marriage. The misunderstanding of Church teaching on love and marriage results from equating sexual relations with love. While sexual relations can sometimes provide the illusion of intimacy, they also can reduce persons to mere objects of use, even in marriage. Love always seeks the good of the other and it is a vocation open to every person.

Q. Don't we need to legalize marriage between people with same-sex attractions in order that they may enjoy all the rights and privileges associated with civil marriage?

A. No. Through a series of incremental law changes in 2007, 2008 and 2009 Washington State already guarantees same-sex couples all the rights and privileges associated with civil marriage.

Q. Where can I learn more about Catholic teaching on marriage?

A. The United States bishops (USCCB) have more information available. Visit www.marriageuniqueforareason.org for videos and companion guides on the promotion and protection of marriage. For a list of relevant Church documents on marriage, [click here](#) for the USCCB website. For more information on strengthening marriage, visit foryourmarriage.org.

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