Marriage and the Common Good

A statement on legislation to redefine marriage

January 2012

Legislation has been introduced in Washington State to change the current law defining marriage. The present law states: "marriage is a civil contract between a male and a female…" This same law also prohibits marriage to close-blood relations, a clear indication that the definition of marriage is related to bringing children into the world and the continuation of the human race. The legislation to redefine marriage, therefore, is not in the public interest.

Marriage is certainly about the public recognition of a relationship between a man and a woman which carries certain rights and responsibilities for the two adults. But, it is much more. Marriage in faith and societal traditions is acknowledged as the foundation of civilization. It has long been recognized that the stability of society depends on the stability of family life in which a man and a woman conceive and nurture new life. In this way, civil recognition of marriage has sought to bestow on countless generations of children the incomparable benefit of a loving mother and father committed to one another in a lifelong union.

Additionally, by defining marriage both in terms of the relationship between a man and a woman and its important role of guaranteeing the succession of generations, the state is recognizing the irreplaceable contribution that married couples make to society. Married couples who bring children into the world make particular sacrifices and take on unique risks and obligations for the good of society. For this reason the state has long understood that it has a compelling interest in recognizing and supporting these mothers and fathers through a distinct category of laws. Were the definition of marriage to change, there would be no special laws to support and recognize the irreplaceable contribution that these married couples make to society and to the common good by bringing to life the next generation.

Upholding the present definition of marriage does not depend on anyone's religious beliefs. Washington State's present law defining marriage as "a civil contract between a male and a female" is grounded not in faith, but in reason and the experience of society. It recognizes the value of marriage as a bond of personal relationships, but also in terms of the unique and irreplaceable potential of a man and woman to conceive and nurture new life, thus contributing to the continuation of the human race. A change in legislation would mean that the state would no longer recognize the unique sacrifices and contributions made by these couples, thereby adding to the forces already undermining family life today.

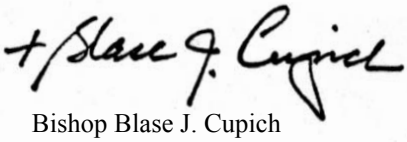
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For these reasons, we the Catholic Bishops of Washington State call on the citizens of this state to maintain the legal definition of marriage. We ask all to join in praying with us for married couples and families and to do everything possible to support them.

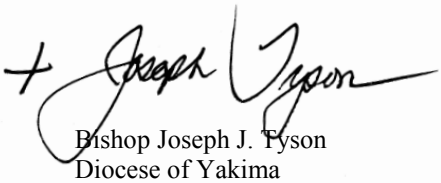
We urge you to contact your own state senator and your two state representatives to request that they defend the current legal definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman.



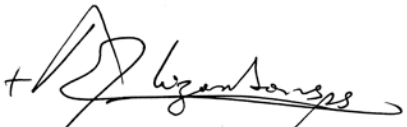
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