

Backgrounder

Questions and Answers about “The Protection of Marriage: A Shared Commitment” (open letter, released Dec. 6, 2010)

What is “The Protection of Marriage: A Shared Commitment”?

“The Protection of Marriage: A Shared Commitment” is an open letter signed by religious leaders of different communities throughout the United States that expresses a shared commitment to protecting marriage in our society as the union of one man and one woman.

How did the letter come about?

The letter is the result of discussions among leaders from a wide variety of religions represented in our nation. Against the backdrop of judicial and legislative attempts to redefine marriage in ways that are contrary to reason and religious conviction, these leaders decided that it would be important and helpful to publicize their shared commitment to defending marriage as an institution that is fundamental to the health of our society.

How will the letter be used?

The letter may be used in different ways, both at the national and local levels. For example, the USCCB is sending the letter to Catholic dioceses and parishes throughout the country and is encouraging the insertion of the letter in parish bulletins. PDFs of the letter are available at www.usccb.org/defenseofmarriage/shared-commitment.

Is this letter for a limited audience?

As an open letter, this letter is addressed to all people and particularly those in this country. As a letter from various religious leaders, the letter shows that protecting marriage “is not about imposing the religion of anyone, but about protecting the common good of everyone” (see Archbishop Dolan’s remarks in news release). In this way, the letter speaks to marriage as a universal good and to its protection as the concern of all.

Does the letter mark the beginning of a new initiative of the USCCB?

No. This letter represents one piece of the bishops’ ongoing pastoral priority to strengthen and protect marriage. The USCCB’s work in this area spans a number of years and has included ecumenical and interreligious outreach and collaboration in different ways. While this letter marks an important and unique step of collaboration, it is one aspect of the USCCB’s ongoing attention to marriage and continued recognition of the significant value of collaboration with other communities.

Why is the letter being released now?

Marriage, as the union of one man and one woman, is a unique and irreplaceable institution, essential for the common good of all and the good of this nation. In the current day, when marriage’s unique meaning is legally challenged or forgotten by some, this letter serves as an invitation and encouragement to promote and protect the true definition of marriage.

Isn't redefining marriage to include two persons of the same sex a question of rights?

Every human life has inviolable dignity and is a gift. This is a bedrock principle. The dignity of the human person is at the basis of the protection of human rights. The protection of human rights presupposes the protection of those human realities central to the meaning and enhancement of the dignity of each and every human person. Marriage is the most immediate and central reality in the protection and enhancement of human dignity, for marriage is meant to be the central context in which a child comes to be and is loved, nurtured, and formed. The question of rights, then, begs the prior question of marriage. Proposals to legally redefine marriage to include two persons of the same sex bypass the very meaning of marriage. The right to marry takes place in a very specific context, that is, within the proper conditions and definition of marriage. No one has the right to change and redefine the nature of marriage. The truth of marriage is a reality to be recognized and protected by the state, not deconstructed and redefined.

What are some reasons why marriage should be protected as the union of one man and one woman?

There is a clear, rational basis for the legal protection of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Here are a few reasons: First, marriage can only be between one man and one woman. Sexual difference, man to woman and woman to man, is essential to marriage. Only a man and a woman are able to enter into the total, body-person union that marriage is. This two-in-one-flesh union is absolutely unique, a good in itself, and serves an irreplaceable function in society. Second, children have the right to be known, loved and raised by their own mother and father. Marriage connects mothers and fathers to each other and to their children, and healthy marriages provide the optimal environment for a child's formation and well-being. The heroic act of the adoption of a child is in fact derived from, based upon, and presupposes the essence of the family, founded on the irrevocable marriage bond between one man and one woman. Third, marriage and the family serve the common good of all. The family, founded upon marriage as the union of one man and one woman, is the fundamental building block of society. Protecting marriage is protecting the good of all. Marriage should be strengthened, not redefined. For more information on why marriage can only be between one man and one woman, see www.marriageuniqueforareason.org and www.usccb.org/defenseofmarriage.