



MARRIAGE

Unique for a Reason

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN, FOR LIFE

Lead Messages on Marriage Redefinition



For more resources, please visit www.marriageuniqueforareason.org

Note: These “lead messages” are concise points that can assist clergy and leaders, and can also be used by all the lay faithful in discussing marriage with family and friends.

The big picture

Marriage is a great gift to men, women, children, and society. The Church *serves and strengthens* marriage by providing pastoral care to engaged couples and marriages at all stages, and in any difficulty. The Church *promotes and defends* marriage by preaching and teaching about marriage’s authentic meaning.

Challenges facing marriage

Marriage needs to be strengthened, not redefined. Cohabitation, divorce, and contraception all erode marriage’s meaning as a public, total, lifelong, and fruitful communion of persons between husband and wife. The latest challenge to marriage, the proposal that sexual difference doesn’t matter, removes the very basis of marriage’s meaning as a one-flesh communion, open to children, making the definition of marriage in law (and thereby culture) open to limitless variation and ultimately meaningless.

The Supreme Court

Two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court raise the question of marriage’s definition in law. The USCCB has joined with many other organizations and individuals in urging the Court to uphold both the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and Proposition 8, which define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Negative rulings could redefine marriage throughout the country, creating a “*Roe v. Wade*” moment for marriage.

The Catholic Church supports marriage

What we stand against is its redefinition. Marriage is and can only be the union of one man and one woman. It is the only institution that unites a man and a woman with each other and with any child who comes from their union.

Sexual difference matters

Sexual difference is essential for marriage. Only through sexual difference can a man and woman “speak” the language of married love in and through their bodies: the complete and total gift of self to the other, a gift that is open to the further gift of the child. *The difference is the difference.*

Marriage is natural

Marriage is a natural institution. It predates both religion and government and is grounded in the nature of the human person. Despite cultural variations, every human society in the entire history of the human race has understood that marriage is a sexual union of man and woman with the purpose of procreating and educating the next generation, and so marriage has with reason been given a unique status in the law. While Jesus elevates Christian marriage to a sacrament, the complementarity of the sexes and the natural meaning of marriage can be known through reason without appealing to scripture.

Equality and Rights

Affirming the true definition of marriage denies no one their basic rights. On the contrary, protecting marriage affirms the basic rights and equal dignity of women and men and safeguards the basic rights and equal protection of children.

Children

Every child is a *gift*. Every child *has* a mother and a father. And every child has a *basic right* to a mother and a father united in marriage. While circumstances may prevent a child being raised by his or her own mother and father, marriage is the way society provides for children's needs in ordinary circumstances.

Mothers and fathers matter

Only a man can be a father; only a woman can be a mother. Both men and women – fathers and mothers – bring irreplaceable gifts to the shared task of child-rearing. A child should not be deliberately deprived of a married mom and dad. Parenting is gender-specific, not gender-neutral.

Single Parents

Those who, through no fault of their own, become single parents often strive heroically and make great sacrifices to raise and provide for their children. They deserve our respect and support. The key point is not to *deliberately or intentionally* deprive children of their mother and father, which would be the necessary consequence of enshrining in the law the claim that a man and a woman are not necessary to make a marriage.

Family

Marriage is about building families, not just about adult relationships. A husband and wife united in marriage are the foundation of a family. And since the union of a man and a woman naturally is ordered to children, marriage is the place where children are welcomed and the family grows.

Adoptive Families

Even when children do not or cannot come forth from a marriage (e.g., due to infertility, the loss of a child in the womb, elderly years), a married man and woman form a total communion of persons, and can give to a child what no other relationship can: a father and a mother united to each other in an exclusively faithful commitment for life. No other relationship is comparable to the union of husband and wife.

Dignity of the Human Person

All persons have inviolable dignity and deserve love and respect. There are many ways to protect the basic human rights of all, but redefining marriage serves no one's rights, least of all those of children.

Same-sex attraction

Everyone deserves love and respect, including those who experience same-sex attraction. The experience of same-sex attraction is a reality that calls for compassion, sensitivity, pastoral care and attention. But no one—especially no child—is served by marriage redefinition. No one is helped by a lie; love tells the truth.

The Church's ministry to persons with same-sex attraction

Support groups, noted for their adherence to Church teaching, for persons who experience same-sex attraction and for their family members, are an important part of Church ministries and are to be encouraged. Examples of such ministries are Courage and Encourage. (See USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination* (2006): p. 22.)

Discrimination

Unjust discrimination is always wrong. Treating different things differently is not unjust discrimination. Protecting marriage is a matter of justice and builds a culture of life: *pro-woman, pro-man, pro-child, pro-family, pro-life*.

Civil unions

Civil unions, domestic partnerships, and the like are non-marital arrangements that mimic aspects of marriage. They erode the institution of marriage and overlook the essential contribution that marriage makes to the common good. They cannot be approved or promoted.

The common good

Marriage and the family are the foundation of society. Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, perform an essential role by teaching family members and society the immense dignity of each human person and what it means to love and be loved. Marriage is a personal relationship with great public significance—not a private affair—that affects all in society.

Law

Advocates for marriage redefinition argue that the law should redefine marriage in order to grant the social status of marriage to persons in same-sex sexual relationships. This ignores not only the purpose of marriage but also the purpose of the law, which is to protect rights and provide for the common good. Redefining marriage undermines the fundamental right of the most vulnerable in our society – children – by denying their right to a father and mother (even if that right cannot be realized in every real-life situation).

Religious liberty

Changing marriage law changes not just one law but hundreds, even thousands, at once. Redefining marriage in the law will make the Church's teaching, as well as any public witness to the natural moral law, *against* the law (civil, human law), and even a form of so-called "bigotry," a claim unfortunately seeing greater frequency today. It will cause innumerable conflicts between the State and religious institutions and individuals. There are, in fact, already numerous examples of this. Marriage and religious liberty are two fundamental goods that stand or fall together.

Ongoing work

The USCCB seeks to strengthen, promote and defend marriage through its initiatives *For Your Marriage* (foryourmarriage.org), *Por Tu Matrimonio* (portumatrimonio.org) and *Marriage: Unique for a Reason* (marriageuniqueforareason.org). Please visit, explore and share these sites.