



THE MARRIAGE PROTECTION AMENDMENT, STATE ISSUE 1: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS & THE POSITION OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS

1. WHAT DOES THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, ISSUE 1, PROPOSE?

The ballot language reads as follows: “Only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this state and its political subdivisions. This state and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance or effect of marriage.” This amendment will be considered at the November 2nd election. A simple majority vote will decide the outcome of this question about marriage.

2. WHY IS THIS AMENDMENT BEING PROPOSED AT THIS TIME?

An initiative petition drive collected over 500 thousand signatures throughout Ohio to place this issue before voters. The intent is to protect traditional marriage between a man and a woman. Demands are surfacing for recognition of same-sex marriages. The state of Massachusetts has issued marriage licenses to same-sex unions based on a decision by a court in that state.

3. OHIO HAS A LAW DECLARING MARRIAGE IS ONLY BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN. WHY DO WE NEED A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT?

In May 2004, Ohio’s Defense of Marriage Act went into effect affirming the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman only and declaring a strong public policy against same-sex marriages or unions. A court can declare this state statute unconstitutional. That is what happened in Massachusetts and the state of Washington. The state’s Supreme Judicial Court ignored state law similar to Ohio’s Defense of Marriage Act and found a right to same-sex marriage in the state constitution. Having the Ohio constitution specifically address this issue will help to defend legal challenges against the traditional definition of marriage. Without the protection offered by a constitutional amendment marriage could be redefined with damaging consequences for traditional marriage.

4. HOW DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH UNDERSTAND MARRIAGE?

Marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of love and life.¹ The Catholic Church strongly believes that marriage is a basic human institution and that, though it is regulated by civil laws and church laws, it did not originate from either the church or the state, but from God. Accordingly, we believe that neither church nor the state ought to alter the nature and structure of marriage. Marriage is an interpersonal relationship with public significance. It makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the common good when it fulfills its natural, God-given purposes, namely to bring children into the world and care for them and to provide a way for a man and a woman to seek each other’s welfare in a committed, lifetime relationship.²

¹ Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions, USCCB, November 2003.

² Letter to Congress, Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory, President USCCB, July 2004.

5. WOULD DEFINING MARRIAGE AS ONLY BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN IMPOSE RELIGIOUS VALUES ON OTHERS?

No. Our civil laws avoid religious references, but they retain the wisdom of reserving marriage for relations between one man and one woman. This has been the understanding of marriage for many centuries in many different cultures. It is part of the natural moral law available to those who sincerely seek the truth.

6. THE MEDIA CALLS THIS AMENDMENT THE “GAY MARRIAGE BAN.” IS THAT ACCURATE?

No. The amendment simply affirms the centuries old understanding of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. All non-marital relationships are excluded – not just same-sex unions but polygamous ones as well.

7. RECOGNIZING SAME-SEX MARRIAGES WON’T HURT MY MARRIAGE. WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Marriage cannot be all things to all people and still stand for important values like monogamy and the family. For example, if same sex-marriages were recognized, marriage would no longer be the foundation of the family. If polygamous marriages were recognized, then marriage would no longer promote monogamy. Over time people would come to view marriage as simply a menu of choices. People could switch from one form of marriage to another. Personal whim would replace personal commitment. Marriage would no longer be the firm foundation of the family.

8. SOME SUPPORT CIVIL UNIONS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARRIAGE FOR SAME-SEX UNIONS. WOULD THIS HARM MARRIAGE?

Yes. Civil unions are simply another name for marriages. The term itself – “civil union” – borrows terminology traditionally associated with marriage. Anyone who supports reserving marriage for relationships between one man and one woman should also oppose civil unions. Most of our laws already allow partnerships between adults for inheritance, health and other purposes.

9. WHERE DO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF OHIO STAND ON THIS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT?

On October 5, 2004 the Catholic Bishops of Ohio voted unanimously to support passage of Issue 1. Since the institution of marriage did not originate from either the Church or state, but from God, neither the Church nor state ought to alter the nature and structure of marriage. Therefore, as Catholic Bishops we ask all Catholics and others of good will to vote for the approval of Issue 1 on November 2.

10. HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ON THIS ISSUE?

Contact the Catholic Conference of Ohio, 9 E Long St., Columbus, Ohio 43215, 614-224-7147, www.ohiocathconf.org; or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family Life, 3211 4th St, N.E., Washington, DC 20017, 1-202-541-3000. www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/samesexunions.htm.