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## Protecting Marriage

As teachers of the faith, we, the Catholic Bishops in Illinois, offer this statement about a growing debate today over the definition of marriage. Citizens of Illinois will soon be asked to sign a petition for an advisory referendum to the Illinois constitution that asks the following,

**‘To secure and preserve the benefits of marriage for our society and for future generations of children, a marriage between a man and a woman is the only legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State’?**

We support efforts to define marriage between a man and a woman, as husband and wife, as the only marital union that is legally valid or recognized. While it seems redundant to define in civil law what already exists in nature, it is necessary to do so in the face of efforts to reduce marriage to a question of individual civil rights.

Seeking the truth about this issue requires thinking about the meaning of marriage, its purposes, and its value to individuals, families, and society. This kind of reflection, using reason and faith, will lead us to the appropriate starting point: the fact that the institution of marriage is based on human nature. In other words, neither the state nor the Church invented marriage, and neither has the right to change its nature.

### The Nature of Marriage

In the Catholic faith, marriage is a sacrament, an action by Christ himself who unites a man and a woman for life as husband and wife; but it is first of all a basic human and social institution. Though it is regulated by civil laws and church laws, it did not originate from either the church or state but from God as creator of the human race.

In a manner unlike any other relationship, marriage makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the common good of society, especially through the procreation and education of children. The union of husband and wife becomes, over a lifetime, a great good for themselves, their family, communities, and society. Marriage is a gift to be cherished and protected.

The natural structure of human sexuality makes man and woman complementary partners for the transmission of human life. Only a union of male and female can express the sexual complementarity willed by God for marriage. The permanent and exclusive commitment of marriage is the necessary context for the expression of sexual love intended by God both to serve the transmission of human life and to build up the bond between husband and wife (see [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), nos. 1639-1640).

In marriage, husband and wife give themselves totally to each other in their masculinity and femininity (see [CCC](#), no. 1643). They are equal as human beings but different as man and woman, fulfilling each other in marriage through this natural difference. This unique complementarity makes possible the conjugal bond that is the core of marriage.

Across times, cultures, and very different religious beliefs, marriage has remained the foundation of the family. The family, in turn, is the basic unit of society. Thus, marriage is a personal relationship with public significance. The marital union also provides the best conditions for raising children: the stable, loving relationship of a mother and father present only in marriage. The state rightly protects this marital relationship as a public institution in its laws, because the relationship makes a unique and essential contribution to the common good.

For various reasons, a same-sex union contradicts the nature of marriage: it is not based on the natural union of male and female; it cannot cooperate with God to create new life; and the natural purpose of sexual union cannot be achieved by a same-sex union. Persons in same-sex relationships cannot enter into a true conjugal union. Therefore, it is wrong to equate their relationship to a marriage.

Laws play an educational role insofar as they shape patterns of thought and behavior, particularly about what is socially permissible and acceptable. When marriage is redefined so as to make other relationships equivalent to it, the institution of marriage is devalued and weakened. The weakening of this basic institution has already exacted too high a social cost. (Additional information can be found in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops document, "Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers about Marriage and Same-Sex Unions," which is available on the Internet at [www.usccb.org/laity/manandwoman.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/laity/manandwoman.shtml).)

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### **The Citizens' Initiative on Marriage**

Efforts are now underway to gather 285,000 valid signatures across Illinois to place this advisory referendum on the November 2006 ballot. Illinois law allows for referendums to be only advisory, so if the necessary signatures are collected and the question receives a majority vote in November 2006, the General Assembly is still not under legal obligation to act. However, if the necessary signatures are collected and the question passes, our state will have taken a significant step to affirm that marriage is the union between one man and one woman.

There are no legal restrictions to collecting signatures for such a referendum on Church grounds, yet such activity may present issues for some in the Catholic community. Churches, parish offices and other Church property are primarily for worship, and those seeking signatures on Church grounds should seek permission from the Pastor prior to collecting signatures on Church property itself. For additional information about the referendum, please call the Catholic Conference of Illinois at (312) 368-1066.

11/05

Signed by:

His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., Archbishop of Chicago

Most Reverend Joseph L. Imesch, Bishop of Joliet

Most Reverend Thomas G. Doran, Bishop of Rockford

Most Reverend George J. Lucas, Bishop of Springfield-in-Illinois

Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C., Bishop of Peoria

Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Belleville