

# Marriage and Referendum 74



## WHAT EVERY CATHOLIC NEEDS TO KNOW BEFORE VOTING September 2012

### **Q. How does the new state law redefine marriage?**

**A.** State law has always defined marriage as a “civil contract between a male and a female.” If voters do not reject Referendum 74, marriage would be redefined as “a civil contract between two persons” in order to allow persons of the same sex to marry.

### **Q. How will Referendum 74 appear on the ballot?**

**A.** The exact language of the measure will state: “The legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6239 concerning marriage for same-sex couples, modified domestic-partnership law and religious freedom, and voters have filed a sufficient referendum petition on this bill.

*“This bill would allow same-sex couples to marry, preserve domestic partnerships only for seniors, and preserve the right of clergy or religious organizations to refuse to perform, recognize or accommodate any marriage ceremony.”*

**Should this bill be:  Approved  Rejected**

### **Q. What is the Catholic Church’s position on Referendum 74?**

**A.** The consistent teaching of the Catholic Church is that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, and therefore the law redefining marriage should be rejected.

### **Q. Why is the Catholic Church involved in the public policy debate over Referendum 74?**

**A.** The Church recognizes the union of a man and woman in matrimony as a fundamental good and foundational to human existence and flourishing. Marriage is of paramount importance to families and society. It is never just a private issue; it has public significance and public consequences. The Catholic Church speaks out on such public policy matters because it has an obligation to teach moral values that shape the character of society.

### **Q. Don’t people with same-sex attractions need the state to redefine marriage in order to have the legal benefits of marriage?**

**A.** No. Registered domestic partners in Washington State already have legal equality with married couples, and they possess all the legal rights and benefits of marriage. Although some proponents contend redefining marriage is required for domestic partners to access these legal rights and benefits, it is not necessary, as all of the rights and benefits were granted by law in 2009. Redefining marriage in state law cannot and will not grant any federal benefits.

### **Q. What does the Catholic Church teach about the dignity of persons with same-sex attractions?**

**A.** The Church teaches that people with same-sex attractions must be treated with respect, compassion and sensitivity, free from all unjust discrimination. The Church recognizes the challenges associated with human sexuality, irrespective of whether a person’s attractions are to the same sex or the opposite sex, and it teaches that the human family is wounded when any of its members are rejected or disrespected.

### **Q. What about parents whose children have same-sex partners? Shouldn’t these children have the right to marry just like their brothers and sisters?**

**A.** It’s understandable that parents whose children have same-sex partners love their children and want them to be happy. But pursuing happiness does not grant a right to redefine marriage. Sexual difference is a basic defining element for marriage and relationships between two persons of the same sex are not and can never be marriages.

Same-sex couples are not denied the right to marry any more than heterosexual couples who do not meet the defining criteria. Certain conditions have always been placed on marriage: couples must be a certain age, they cannot be married to someone else, they cannot be closely related by blood, and they must be of the opposite sex. These elements, which constitute the legal definition of marriage, are in the best interest of children, adults and society.

**Q. Isn't the prohibition against two men or two women marrying the same as laws that banned interracial marriage?**

**A.** The essence of marriage is the union of a man and a woman. Laws banning interracial marriage in this country were enacted with the misguided intention of maintaining so-called racial purity, but they did not change the legal definition of marriage as an institution uniting a man and a woman and any children born from their union. The essential legal definition of marriage remained unchanged even where interracial marriages were banned.

**Q. What's the difference between a husband and wife who can't have children, and two persons of the same sex, who also can't have children?**

**A.** The ultimate purpose of marriage is the happiness of the couple and the procreation of children. Only the marital union of a man and woman can fully achieve this purpose. Even when a husband and wife cannot conceive because of infertility or age, their union coincides with the purpose to which the marriage act is directed. In contrast, even if persons of the same sex are healthy and of child-bearing age, their sexual union cannot result in procreation, and therefore cannot achieve the ultimate purpose to which the marriage act is directed.

**Q. How would the legal redefinition of marriage affect children and their parents?**

**A.** Legalizing marriage between persons of the same sex is a radical change in law and society. Since Massachusetts redefined marriage to be a genderless institution, children as young as second grade have been taught that marriage between a man and a woman is no different than the marriage of two persons of the same sex. The court has ruled that parents have no right to opt their children out of such instruction.

**Q. Isn't it unjust discrimination to oppose marriage between two men and two women?**

**A.** No. Recognizing differences is not unjust discrimination. Redefining marriage as a genderless institution, on the other hand, would be truly unjust because schools and other institutions would be prevented from teaching that gender difference matters and that mothers and fathers have distinct and irreplaceable roles in the lives of their children.

**Q. Why would redefining marriage be harmful?**

**A.** Changing the legal definition of marriage to create a new entitlement for adults would subordinate children's right to be united with their mother and father. Shifting the focus of marriage from children and families to adults will have profound, long-term consequences. Every child without exception has a mother and a father and both parents contribute in distinct ways to the formation of children, helping them to understand their identity as male or female. Our laws and social institutions should support the fundamental right of children to be united with their mothers and fathers, and marriage defined as the union between a man and a woman is the only institution that establishes and protects that right.

**Q. What difference does redefining marriage make to my marriage?**

**A.** If the state redefines marriage there may be no direct harm to existing marriages, but it would change the way marriage is perceived in society and taught in schools. Law is a teacher, and such a law would teach that marriage is the public recognition of adult relationships and has nothing to do with legally connecting mothers and fathers with their children. It also would teach that mothers and fathers are interchangeable and that gender is inconsequential to children and society. Children will be taught that marriage between a man and woman is just one relationship among many and the resulting change in attitudes will affect decisions they make with respect to relationships and the raising of their children.