



April 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you know, our governor recently signed into law a bill that redefines marriage in the State of Washington. A signature drive is currently underway seeking to place this matter before the voters of our state in November. Referendum 74 will ask voters to approve or reject this redefinition of marriage.

In order to qualify for the November ballot, Referendum 74 must receive approximately 120,000 valid signatures of registered Washington voters by June 6. If the Referendum does not qualify for the November ballot because of a lack of signatures, the legal redefinition of marriage will go into effect June 7. We bishops have already made known our strong opposition to the redefinition of marriage, and we will continue to do so.

Because we believe that this issue is critically important, we support Referendum 74 and have approved the gathering of signatures in our parishes over the next few months. Your pastors have received from us information regarding the signature drive, and we requested that they not collect signatures on Palm Sunday or Easter Sunday. After Easter, signatures may be gathered on Referendum 74.

Why do we support Referendum 74 and ask you to do so as well? Briefly, here are the reasons:

1. The Referendum would place this matter before the voters of our state. We believe that the redefinition of marriage is such a far-reaching and radical decision that it should not be left simply to a vote of legislators and the signature of the governor.
2. It has often been said in recent months that the redefinition of marriage as a contract between two persons will give same-sex couples the rights enjoyed by married couples. It is important that you understand that same-sex couples in registered domestic partnerships in our state *already* enjoy the rights and privileges of married couples. These rights were previously enacted into our state law.
3. Marriage between a man and a woman is the foundation of our society. The key to understanding the Church's view of marriage can be found in the two fundamental ends or purposes toward which it is oriented: the good of the spouses and the procreation of children. Man and woman are created as complementary in God's plan, and God established marriage precisely so that man and woman could participate in his love, selflessly give themselves to each other in love, and enjoy the benefits of their love. Married love is also life-giving: according to God's plan, the crowning fruit of marriage is the bearing of children. These two meanings are inseparable.
4. It is important to remember that all Christians are called to chastity, and sexual intercourse is so intimate and significant that it is intended only for a man and woman in marriage. For married couples, chastity involves their faithfulness and respect for one another. For all unmarried persons, chastity means that they refrain from sexual relations. This is the constant teaching of the Church.

5. Some have suggested that the Catholic Church's opposition to the redefinition of marriage amounts to discrimination. That is not the case. Treating *different* things *differently* is not unjust discrimination. Marriage can only be between a man and a woman because of its unique ends, purpose and place in society. The word "marriage" isn't simply a label that can be attached to different types of relationships. Instead, "marriage" reflects a deep reality – the reality of the unique, fruitful, lifelong union that is only possible between a man and a woman. There is nothing else like it, and it can't be defined or made into something that it isn't.
6. Why does the Catholic Church care so much about marriage? Because marriage is a fundamental good in itself and foundational to human existence and flourishing. Following the example of Jesus, the Church cares about the whole person, and all people, and the common good. Marriage affects everyone and is never just a "private" issue; it has public significance and many public consequences.
7. Does the Catholic Church teach that people who experience same-sex attraction have equal dignity? Of course! *Every single human person* has inviolable dignity and worth. In keeping with this conviction, the Church teaches that persons with same-sex attraction must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. We recognize that they have been, and often continue to be, objects of scorn, hatred, and even violence in some sectors of society. An important Vatican document states, "It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs." All persons should be treated with respect, sensitivity, and love. The Church calls everyone to holiness.

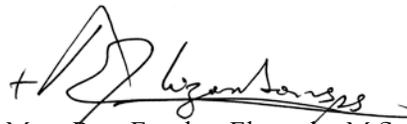
The Church's teaching about marriage and the gift of life is so rich that we cannot fully explain it in this brief letter. To assist you at this time, however, we have provided answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. In the months and years ahead, we will make it a priority in the Archdiocese to share with you the fullness and beauty of our teaching. Catholic teaching cannot be reduced to a sound bite! Because it comes from God, it is for our good, and living according to the Church's teaching brings us life, peace, fulfillment and hope.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. This is an important time for the State of Washington, and we ask you to support the gathering of signatures for Referendum 74 and to do everything you can to uphold the traditional definition of marriage in our state.

Sincerely in Christ,

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Most Rev. J. Peter Sartain
Archbishop of Seattle

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Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle

P.S. For more information, we strongly recommend these very helpful websites:

<http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/> and
<http://foryourmarriage.org/>