

Declaration on Marriage

We, each from our respective theologies and traditions, understand marriage to be in its essence the union of a woman and a man. Each religion has, in its distinctive way, understood marriage to have religious significance. Yet the unitive understanding of the structure of marriage is not exclusively religious. It is shared by societies and cultures throughout the world and throughout time. The following is a public statement on the nature and structure of marriage which reflects this common understanding of marriage.

We the undersigned abide in our affirmation of the institution of marriage: the public covenanting together of a man and a woman in a loving, enduring and exclusive relationship through which our society may be enriched. Marriage bridges and celebrates sexual difference and is the primary relationship within which children are begotten and nurtured.

The institution of marriage ensures children their birthright to know and be nurtured by a mother and a father in the most stable type of relationship. As Supreme Court Justice La Forest wrote as part of the majority decision in *Egan v. Canada*: the definition of marriage is “firmly anchored in the biological and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and that they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship. In this sense, marriage is by nature heterosexual.”

Although the reality of marriage in Canada sometimes falls far short of the ideal, this is not grounds for the diversion of marriage from its purpose. Marriage as a life-long covenant between a man and a woman is older than our oldest democratic and parliamentary arrangements, older than our court systems, and is more universally accepted than any code of law ever promulgated. Marriage is society’s real and symbolic affirmation of and commitment to a child’s right to know and experience a mother and a father, as recognized in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada. Though not every marriage brings new children into the world, it is the context in which most children are born. Thus it is the state in which a woman and a man become responsible co-parents together, embodying the differences and complementarity of the sexes, and labouring in love to entrust the best that they are and have to their offspring.

As a social institution, marriage is primarily concerned with the common good and not individual rights. The marriage of a woman and a man therefore merits deferential government protection and social recognition. The interest of the state in the institution of marriage has always been, and should continue to be, the union of one man and one woman, for the good of society. The recognition of this distinctive relationship in law and public policy is vitally important for the stability and security of our country and its children. As the recent report commissioned by France’s National Assembly has acknowledged: “The best interests of the child must prevail over adults’ exercise of their liberty.”

Changing the definition of marriage involves a repudiation of millennia of history and experience. Redefining marriage as being “between two persons” eclipses the essence and full purpose of marriage; the inner connection between marriage, the complementarity of the sexes, procreation and the raising of children is lost. When severed from its nature and purpose, marriage becomes simply a euphemism for a committed relationship between two consenting adults. Such an understanding diminishes both the sacred and civil dimensions of marriage and fails to promote the common good of society.

Faith communities need language to express their principles and beliefs along with freedom to promote and foster ways of living that have stood the test of time. Yet, how can they promote an institution when the identifying language has been stripped of its real meaning, has been legally redefined, and means different things to different people? With what language can they encourage a distinctive and necessary relationship? As their understanding becomes viewed as narrow and intolerant, will they be afforded the public space to present their beliefs and the freedom to abide by them? The freedom of conscience of marriage officials and service providers is already being violated.

To ensure that future generations do not lose the distinctive and fundamental institution of marriage, we appeal to the members of the Parliament of Canada and to all Canadians to reconsider the decision to redefine marriage and to work together to re-establish in law and public policy the historic and universal definition of marriage which reflects its unique and essential nature.

Signed on November 9, 2006 by:

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Anglican Coalition in Canada, Rev. Paul Carter, Network Leader
Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada Inc., Rev. Wesley E. Mills
Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, Canadian Diocese, His Grace Bishop Bagrat Galastanian, Primate
Associated Gospel Churches, Rev. Bud Penner
Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Bellous, Executive Minister
Baptist General Conference of Canada, Rev. Jamey McDonald
Baptist Union of Western Canada, The Rev. Jeremy Bell
Brethren in Christ Church in Canada, Brian Bell
British Methodist Episcopal Church, The Right Rev. Maurice Hicks, General Superintendent
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, +Andre Gaumond, Archbishop of Sherbrooke, President
Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, David Wiebe, Executive Director
Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists, Rev. Gerald Taillon, National Ministry Leader
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Community Christian Fellowship of Canada, Rev. Len Goddard, President
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Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada, Jeff Anderson, President
Evangelical Free Church of Canada, Dr. Ron Unruh, President
Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Mr. Len Barkman

Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, Rev. Allen Kehler
Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada, Rev. Phil Delsaut
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North American Baptist Conference, J. Gordon Harris, Interim Executive Director
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Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Rev. William D. Morrow
Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland & Labrador, Rev. Paul Foster
Reformed Church in America, Regional Synod of Canada, The Rev. Siebrand Wilts, Clerk
Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, Pastor Daniel Jackson, President
The B.C. Muslim Association, Daud Ismail, President, Imam Dr. Zijad Delic and Maulana Shadat Husain, Chief Preacher
The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, Dr. Franklin Pyles
The Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada, The Rev. Father Ammonius Guirguis
The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Bruce J. Clemenger, President
The Fellowship of Christian Assemblies of Canada, Rev. Glen Forsberg, Chair, Corporate Committee
The Free Methodist Church in Canada, Bishop Keith Elford
The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, His Eminence John, Primate
The Wesleyan Church of Canada, Rev. Donald Hodgins
United Brethren Church in Canada, Bishop Brian Magnus
Vision Ministries Canada, Pastor Gord Martin
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