



## ON MARRIAGE AND DISCRIMINATION

A STATEMENT BY THE BISHOPS OF WASHINGTON STATE

We the bishops of Washington are mindful that Catholics need clarity on Church teaching to fulfill their obligations as faithful citizens. We are particularly concerned in 2006 about two public policy issues confronting our state that have the potential to confuse and divide Catholic people.

With the Washington State Supreme Court deciding the definition of marriage, we consider it an urgent priority to reaffirm our support for marriage as a sacred union between a man and a woman. Church teaching unequivocally supports this understanding of marriage based on its deep religious, historical and cultural roots. We therefore oppose attempts to overturn the state's Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

In June it is likely that Congress will take up a constitutional amendment stating that marriage in the United States shall consist of the union of a man and a woman. The Knights of Columbus have initiated a national campaign and will distribute postcards to parishes at no cost. We know many parishes will participate in this campaign.

The second policy matter relates to the signature-gathering campaign to place Referendum 65 on the November ballot. This measure seeks to repeal legislation approved in 2006 (HB 2661) that adds "sexual orientation" to the state's law against discrimination in employment, housing, credit, insurance and certain contracts.

Although we support protections like those proposed in HB 2661 for all people, we opposed this legislation prior to its passage by the Legislature. The reasons for our opposition were twofold. First, the measure contained an overly broad definition of "sexual orientation" that went beyond orientation to include various types of sexual behavior. Furthermore, similar laws were used by courts in at least two other states as factors in overturning their laws defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Despite our opposition to HB 2661, however, we are concerned that the signature-gathering campaign for Referendum 65 may have the effect of encouraging unjust discrimination against homosexual persons. As Pope Benedict XVI made clear in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas est* (God is Love), we are all loved equally by God and called to love every other person. Discrimination, intolerance or other mistreatment is contrary to Church teaching regardless of a person's sexual orientation. In addition, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* instructs us that it is not sufficient only to avoid unjust discrimination. Homosexual persons "must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity." (CCC, 2358) Therefore, it would be a grave error to suggest that any aspect of our teaching on human sexuality and marriage detracts from the dignity of any human person.

In summary, our respect for all human persons does not imply acceptance of a broader activist homosexual agenda. As a result we will continue to oppose legal definitions of sexual orientation that degrade the meaning and dignity of human sexuality and any efforts, direct or indirect, to alter the legal definition of marriage. Therefore, just as we affirm our understanding of marriage, we also assert the Church's opposition to unjust discrimination in all its forms.

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Alex J. Brunett  
Archbishop of Seattle

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William S. Skylstad  
Bishop of Spokane

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Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J.  
Bishop of Yakima