

# THE DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE AND THE RIGHT OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: REAFFIRMING A SHARED WITNESS

*An Open Letter from Religious Leaders to All in Positions of Public Service*

Released April 23, 2015

Dear Friends:

At this significant time in our nation's history with the institution of marriage before the United States Supreme Court, we reaffirm our commitment to promote and defend marriage—the union of one man and one woman. As religious leaders from various faith communities, we acknowledge that marriage is the foundation of the family where children are raised by a mother and a father together. Our commitment to marriage has been expressed on previous occasions, including the Letter of Shared Commitment and Letter on Marriage and Religious Liberty. This commitment is inseparable from affirming the equal dignity of all people and the necessity of protecting their basic rights.

The state has a compelling interest in maintaining marriage as it has been understood across faiths and cultures for millennia because it has a compelling interest in the well-being of children. Every child has a mother and a father, and every child deserves the opportunity, whenever possible, to be raised by his or her own married mother and father in a stable, loving home. Marriage as the union of a man and a woman is the only institution that encourages and safeguards the connection between children and their mother and father. Although this connection cannot always be realized and sustained—and many single parents, for example, are heroic in their efforts to raise their children—it is in the best interests of the state to encourage and uphold the family founded on marriage and to afford the union of husband and wife unique legal protection and reinforcement.

The redefinition of legal marriage to include any other type of relationship has serious consequences, especially for religious freedom. It changes every law involving marital status, requiring that other such relationships be treated as if they were the same as the marital relationship of a man and a woman. No person or community, including religious organizations and individuals of faith, should be forced to accept this redefinition. For many people, accepting a redefinition of marriage would be to act against their conscience and to deny their religious beliefs and moral convictions. Government should protect the rights of those with differing views of marriage to express their beliefs and convictions without fear of intimidation, marginalization or unwarranted charges that their values imply hostility, animosity, or hatred of others.

In this and in all that we do, we are motivated by our duty to love God and neighbor. This love extends to all those who disagree with us on this issue. The well-being of men, women, and the children they conceive compels us to stand for marriage as the union of one man and one woman. We call for the preservation of the unique meaning of marriage in the law, and for renewed respect for religious freedom and for the conscience rights of all in accord with the common good.

Sincerely Yours:

*The Rev. Dr. Leith Anderson*  
President  
National Association of Evangelicals

*The Most Rev. Dr. Foley Beach*  
Archbishop and Primate  
Anglican Church in North America

*Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.*  
Presiding Bishop  
International Pentecostal Holiness Church

*The Rev. John F. Bradosky*  
Bishop  
North American Lutheran Church

*Rev. Mark Chavez*  
General Secretary  
North American Lutheran Church

*Clint Cook*  
Executive Director  
General Association of General Baptists

*Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone*  
Archbishop of San Francisco  
Chairman  
USCCB Subcommittee for the Promotion  
and Defense of Marriage

*His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios*  
Archbishop of America  
President of the Holy Eparchial Synod  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

*The Most Rev. Robert Duncan*  
Archbishop Emeritus  
Anglican Church in North America  
Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh

*Rev. Dr. Ron Hamilton*  
Conference Minister  
Conservative Congregational Christian  
Conference

*Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison*  
President  
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

*Rev. Bruce D. Hill*  
Bishop  
Evangelical Congregational Church

*John Hopler*  
Director  
Great Commission Churches

*Steven R. Jones*  
President  
Missionary Church, Inc.

*Imam Faizul Kfian*  
Islamic Society of Washington Area

*Most Rev. Joseph E. Kurtz*  
Archbishop of Louisville  
President  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*Most Rev. William E. Lori*  
Archbishop of Baltimore  
Chairman  
USCCB Ad Hoc Committee for  
Religious Liberty

*Dr. Jo Anne Lyon*  
General Superintendent  
The Wesleyan Church

*Most Rev. Richard J. Malone*  
Bishop of Buffalo  
Chairman  
USCCB Committee on Laity, Marriage,  
Family Life and Youth

*Dr. Russell Moore*  
President  
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty  
Commission

*Dr. Gus Reyes*  
Director  
Christian Life Commission, Texas Baptists

*Rev. Eugene F. Rivers, III*  
Founder and President  
Seymour Institute for Black Church and  
Policy Studies

*Jacqueline C. Rivers*  
Executive Director  
Seymour Institute for Black Church and  
Policy Studies

*Larry Roberts*  
Chief Operating Officer  
The Free Methodist Church – USA

*Rocky Rocholl*  
President  
Fellowship of Evangelical Churches

*Rev. Samuel Rodriguez*  
President  
National Hispanic Christian Leadership  
Conference / Hispanic Evangelical  
Association

*Bishop Gary E. Stevenson*  
Presiding Bishop  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day  
Saints

*Dr. L. Roy Taylor*  
Stated Clerk  
Presbyterian Church in America

*His Beatitude, The Most  
Blessed Tikhon*  
Archbishop of Washington and Metropolitan  
of All America and Canada  
Orthodox Church in America

*Dr. Joseph Tkach*  
President  
Grace Communion International

*Rev. Dr. David Wendel*  
Assistant to the Bishop for  
Ministry and Ecumenism  
North American Lutheran Church

*Rev. Phillip Whipple*  
Bishop  
United Brethren in Christ Church, USA

*David P. Wilson*  
General Secretary  
Church of the Nazarene

*Rev. Paul Winter*  
Elder  
Bruderhof Communities

*Dr. George O. Wood*  
General Superintendent  
Assemblies of God