

Michigan Catholic Conference: Traditional marriage unites children with a mother, a father

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“It is one of the great social tragedies of our time that marriage is flourishing among the most advantaged and self-actualized groups in our society and waning among those who could most benefit from its economic and child-rearing partnership.”

So stated the 2010 State of Our Unions Report on the status of marriage, produced by the Institute for American Values and the University of Virginia’s National Marriage project, describing the consequences of the precipitous decline of marriage spreading into middle America.

Today, more than half the births to women younger than 30 are outside of marriage. Sociologists, both liberal and conservative, are ringing the alarm bells as more children are living in poverty as a result and the devastating consequences of fatherlessness are better understood. The fact that 85% of children that show behavioral problems are from fatherless homes headed by single mothers, and that fatherless children in single-parent households are three times more likely to land in jail by age 30, are just two examples of this human tragedy.

When society should be focusing on how to promote men and women marrying before having children, marriage and a decision reached by the voters of Michigan are about to go on trial in federal district court in Detroit. Did voters have a rational reason for preserving marriage between a man and a woman in the state constitution in order “to secure and preserve the benefits of marriage for our society and for future generations of children,” as the Michigan Constitution now reads? Or was the vote an act of bigotry against same-sex couples, as some federal courts have found and those who purport to promote tolerance claim?

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When society and the state recognize marriage between a man and a woman, an institution specifically geared to unite children with both their mom and their dad is established. By disconnecting marriage from the interests of children, marriage laws become vehicles to achieve objectives never connected with marriage, such as public recognition of committed relationships, or broader access to tax benefits.

In the upcoming trial, two women claim that marriage should be redefined to allow them to cross adopt each other’s adopted children. Essentially, the case seeks to redefine an institution known by nature, reason and experience, and pursues a solution that our Holy Father Pope Francis has referred to as “anthropological regression.”

If marriage is redefined by the court to disconnect it from the foundation of the family of common ancestry, it will make laws related to marriage essentially a vehicle to serve adult interests. Serious consequences will result. How can young people be taught the importance of a child’s father and mother being united in marriage without appearing discriminatory, when the law sanctions marriage as a vehicle for creating motherless or fatherless families, as in the case of same-sex couples?

Perhaps the central question about the trial over Michigan's marriage amendment should be: Is it constitutional to have a privileged civil institution that is specifically geared to unite children with their moms and dads, and to promote the norm of men and women marrying before having children?

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