

The Marriage Movement

A Statement of Principles

Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education

Institute for American Values

Religion, Culture, and Family Project, University of Chicago Divinity School

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Readers who would like to become signatories to this Statement can do so by visiting its web site at www.marriagemovement.org.

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On page 35: To Jacques Prévert (1979) by Jean-Michel Folon. ©2000, Artists Rights' Society (ARS), New York, NY

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The Marriage Movement

A Statement of Principles

Why We Come Together

WE COME TOGETHER AS SUPPORTERS OF SOMETHING NEW: a grass-roots movement to strengthen marriage. We come together to give public voice and direction to this new movement—to explain our intentions, specify our goals, and seek the support of our fellow citizens.

We are teachers and scholars, marriage counselors and marriage educators. We are judges, divorce lawyers, and legal reformers. We are clinicians, service providers, policy analysts, social workers, women’s leaders, religious leaders, and advocates for responsible fatherhood. We are people of faith, asking God’s blessing in the great task before us. We are agnostics and humanists, committed to moral and spiritual progress. We are women and men, liberals and conservatives, of different races and ethnic groups. We come together to pursue a common goal. We come together for a marriage movement.

We come together because the divorce revolution has failed. Contrary to the hopes of many Americans in the 1970s, high divorce rates have proved no panacea for family dysfunction. Divorced parents can fight, too, and sometimes even abandon their children altogether. Children of divorce must cope with new emotional and logistical difficulties at the same time that parents are often overwhelmed by new emotional, time, and financial problems. Even in the best of circumstances, children miss their fathers when living with mothers, and their mothers when living with fathers.

Nostalgia for the high hopes of the 1970s should not blind us to the hard truths discovered over the past thirty years: When marriages fail, children suffer. For many, the suffering continues for years. For some, it never ends. Children suffer when marriages between parents do not take place, when parents divorce, and when spouses fail to create a “good-enough” family bond. We recognize that there are abusive marriages that should end in separation or divorce. We firmly believe that every family raising children deserves respect and support. Yet at the same time, we cannot forget that not every family form is equally likely to protect children’s well-being.

Nor has the divorce revolution reliably delivered on its promise to adults of greater personal happiness. Instead, research has shown that remarriages are no happier, on average, than first marriages, and are even more divorce-prone. Even when parents remarry, their children do no better, on average, than children raised by single parents, and both do worse on all measures than children raised by their own two married parents.¹

We come together because the unwed-childbearing revolution has failed. More births to unmarried mothers has not led to greater freedom, equality, and justice for women. Instead, because few single men become nurturing, dependable fathers, few unwed mothers enjoy the benefits of an equal parenting partnership. In practice, our embrace of unmarried childbearing has led not to greater equality for women, but to the feminization of both parenting and poverty.

We come together because we value freedom and cherish our free society. We recognize that the decline of marriage weakens civil society and spreads social inequality. Americans of all social classes and ethnic groups value marriage. Yet, as society retreats from supporting marriage publicly, those who succeed in achieving this aspi-

ration are increasingly likely to be the already highly advantaged: better educated, more affluent, and white.²

As M. Belinda Tucker has noted, “African Americans marry later, are about twice as likely to divorce, and are less likely to marry ever, yet Blacks’ views of the importance of marriage are similar to those held by members of other ethnic groups.”³ By age 30, 80 percent of white women, but only 45 percent of black women, have married.⁴ Meanwhile in 1995, 32 percent of the marriages of wives who are high school graduates had ended by the ten-year mark, compared to 18 percent of college-educated wives.⁵ The result of trends like these is that many fewer less advantaged children enjoy the economic and emotional benefits of living with married parents. In the early 1990s, 80 percent of white (non-Hispanic) children lived with a married couple, compared to just 16 percent of African American children and 67 percent of Hispanic children.⁶

We recognize that the decline of marriage is an American problem, not an ethnic problem, touching in one way or another every community. But we also recognize a special responsibility to our most vulnerable children. If America allows the norms, attitudes, values, information, skills, and economic support needed to sustain marriage to be privatized, we should not be surprised to find that marriage will become the private property of the privileged. Marriage, a rich generator of social and human capital, must not become the private hoard of the upper-middle class, creating a new, disturbing marital divide between the haves and have-nots in America.

We come together to affirm that marriage is not a special interest. Whether an individual ever personally marries or not, a healthy marriage culture benefits every citizen in the United States: rich or poor, churching or unchurching, gay or straight, liberal or conservative, parent or childless, African American, Hispanic, Anglo, Asian, or Native American. Marriage is not a conservative or liberal idea, not a plaything of passing political ideologies. Marriage is a universal human institution, the way in which every known society conspires to obtain for each child the love, attention, and resources of a mother and a father.

A large body of research has shown that current rates of divorce, family conflict, and unwed childbearing are not good for children, for adults, or for society.⁷ New research from pioneering marriage educators and therapists are laying out exciting new paths to marital success.⁸ Innovative leaders—in state and local government, civic organizations, faith communities, academia, education, child welfare, psychology, marriage education, and therapy—are beginning to focus on the vital new question: What can we do to strengthen marriage?

Support for marriage, we emphasize, does not require turning back the clock on desirable social change, promoting male tyranny, or tolerating domestic violence. We seek to bring not condemnation and shame to the already distressed, but hope and support to the nine out of ten Americans who at some point in their lives choose marriage as the vessel for their dreams of a lasting, loving family bond.

We come together to enlarge and energize this emerging effort to renew the marriage vow and the marriage vision. We come together to help more men and women achieve a caring, collaborative, and committed bond, rooted in equal regard between spouses. We come together to pledge that in this decade we will turn the tide on marriage and reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing, so that each year more children will grow up protected by their own two happily married parents, so that each year and more adults’ marriage dreams will come true.

Where Do We Stand Today? The Contemporary Marriage Crisis

OVER THE LAST TWO GENERATIONS, marriage as a social institution has weakened. Since 1960, the crude divorce rate has doubled, while the number of divorces has almost tripled, from 393,000 in 1960 to almost 1.2 million in 1994.⁹ Meanwhile, just since 1980, the proportion of children born outside of marriage has almost doubled, from 18.4 percent to almost one-third. Each year in America at least 1.2 million babies are born to unmarried parents.¹⁰

Weaker marriage ties have not translated into happier marriages or families. Between 1973 and 1993, the percent of persons who were in intact and happy first marriages “has declined substantially in recent years, the proportion after ten years now being about one third,” reports University of Texas Scholar Norval Glenn. Despite high rates of divorce, the proportion of children living with unhappily married parents has not declined.¹¹

Why has marriage weakened? Scholars point to a variety of important cultural, legal, and economic changes: increases in intimacy expectations, greater social approval of alternatives to marriage, the greater economic independence of women, “no-fault” divorce reform, the rise in social insurance programs that make individuals less dependent on families, the expansion of market and consumer mores into family life, and lesser social supports and pressures to get and stay married from family, friends, professionals, churches, business, and government. Moreover, divorce in one generation increases divorce in the next. One large recent study found that children whose parents divorced were 76 percent more likely to divorce themselves, even after controlling for family characteristics and the parents’ predi-
vorce marital quality.¹²

Has this decline happened because Americans no longer care about marriage? No. Marriage remains a widely shared aspiration. In a 1996 survey, just one percent of Americans said marital success was “not very important” to them. Only eight percent of Americans call marriage an “outdated institution,” a proportion that has not changed over the last generation. About half of Americans say that “divorce in this country should be more difficult to obtain,”¹³ and public support for this point of view is rising.¹⁴ The paradox is, as Norval Glenn has written: “[M]arriage remains very important to adult Americans—probably as important as it has ever been—while the proportion of Americans married has declined and the proportion successfully married has declined even more.”¹⁵

The younger generation is equally enthusiastic about marriage. Eight out of ten high school girls say that having a good marriage and family life are “extremely important.”¹⁶ More than two out of three younger Americans agree that “when parents divorce, children develop permanent emotional problems.” Three-fourths believe that divorce laws are too lax.¹⁷

At the same time, young people today view cohabitation more favorably, are less likely than in the recent past firmly to connect marriage with childbearing, and appear to be translating these attitudes into action. Between 1976-1980 and 1991-1995, the proportion of high school senior girls who said that having a child while unmarried is either “a worthwhile lifestyle” or “not affecting anyone else” jumped from 33 percent to 53 percent.¹⁸ By the early 1990s, about 40 percent of women under the age of 30 who became first-time mothers were not married.¹⁹ Between 1975 and 1995, the proportion of high school girls who agreed that “It is usually a

good idea for couples to live together before getting married” skyrocketed from 32 percent to 55 percent.²⁰

Between 1975 and 1995, the proportion of all couples who were cohabiting rather than married more than tripled, and 64 percent of women born between 1963 and 1974 made their first union a cohabitation rather than a marriage.²¹ By the early 1990s, cohabitation was replacing marriage among young parents as well: The proportion of all out-of-wedlock births occurring to cohabiting couples leaped from 29 percent in the early 1980s to 39 percent in the early 1990s.²²

In each of these cases, the untutored strategies of the young make it *less* likely, not more, that they will achieve their goal of a successful marriage. Children born to cohabiting parents are more likely than those born to married couples to experience their parents’ breakup.²³ An out-of-wedlock child makes it less likely that a woman who wants to marry will find a mate.²⁴ Cohabitation does not decrease—and may increase—the risk of divorce.²⁵ The longer and more often men and women cohabit, and the more tolerant of divorce they become, the fewer children they

want, and the less positive attitudes toward marriage they develop.²⁶ More tolerant attitudes about divorce, research suggests, may make good marriages less likely. “Ironically,” two researchers recently concluded, “by adopting attitudes that provide greater freedom to leave unsatisfying marriages, people may be increasing the likelihood that their marriages will become unsatisfying in the long run.”²⁷

*Has marriage weakened because
Americans no longer care?
No. Just one percent says
a good marriage is
“Not very important.”*

Is Change Possible? The Case against Despair

IS RENEWING A MARRIAGE CULTURE A REASONABLE GOAL? WE THINK SO.

When Americans organized in the 1990s to combat teen pregnancy, teen pregnancy declined.²⁸ The recent decline in teen sexual activity,²⁹ a significant decline in divorce rates since 1979,³⁰ a drop in the illegitimacy rate, and the levelling off of the proportion of births out of wedlock in the late 1990s,³¹ are all indicators that social change is not a one-way street. The apparent success of new strategies (such as community marriage policies³² and marriage education³³) in preventing divorce gives us powerful additional reasons to hope.

We know that not all of our fellow citizens agree. There are at least three concerns that stand in the way of a renewed public commitment to marriage.³⁴

The Argument from Despair

The first stumbling block to rebuilding a marriage culture is “the argument from despair.” High rates of divorce and unwed childbearing, some distinguished voices tell us, are irreversible trends. As one scholar said in 1988: “[T]he changes in the structure of the family are probably the result of some sizable and largely unstoppable changes in social and economic patterns.”³⁵ Said another respected scholar more recently: “[L]iving together is not going away. We have to realize this is the world we live in.”³⁶

We respectfully, but firmly, disagree. The history of American progress is the history of confronting entrenched social problems once considered inevitable. Slavery, racism, poverty, pollution, drunk driving, domestic violence, sexism, tobacco use—in each case, Americans proved that when a social practice, big or small, is wrong or destructive, the correct response is not fatalistic acceptance, but action. Few social problems are ever perfectly resolved. Certainly we recognize that there will always be children born without committed fathers; there will always be abusive marriages that should not survive.

But the decline of marriage is not inevitable. Social recovery is possible, as the recent encouraging turnaround in the divorce rate affirms. The goal of our movement is not perfection, but progress; not to eliminate divorce or unwed childbearing, but to reduce it further; not to make every marriage last, but to help more marriages succeed.

The Fear of Hurting Single Parents

The second argument against a marriage movement stems not from despair but fear: Will a great public effort to strengthen marriage require denigrating single mothers and their children? We don't think so.

Supporting marriage does not require punishing single parents or their children. The Marriage Movement is a movement for a better marriage culture, not a movement of the smug marrieds for the smug marrieds. Many of us in the marriage movement are single parents or the children of single parents. We know firsthand how children suffer and parents struggle when marriages fail. We know, too, how false the common stereotype is that single parents don't care about marriage. Few parents, single or married, dream of the day their daughters will become single mothers, or their sons turn into absent fathers.

Children of single parents, like all American children, need and deserve help in making better marriages than their parents may have had. They need a marriage culture that affirms their deepest aspirations and does not merely confirm their deepest fears; a culture that tells them that married love is a possible, reasonable, normal, achievable goal. Fatherless boys, in particular, need help in affirming the value of responsible, nurturing fatherhood. They do not need false reassurances that their own fathers' abandonment was no big deal, or that if they in turn become part-time or absent fathers, their own children will not suffer. If boys without fathers are to grow up to be loving, committed fathers to their own children, they cannot live in a culture that tells them that full-time fathers are not important.

The Privatization of Marriage

Marriage is not just a private relationship. It is also a social institution. "The belief that marriage is a social good and therefore a legitimate concern of the state," points out Don Browning, "lies behind the 1998 green paper on family and marriage issued by the Labor government in England, the interest in marriage education in Australia, and the moves into marriage preparation in Florida, Louisiana, and Arizona. The mass of legal codes governing marriage and family in the 50 states is also a sign of the long-standing belief that marriage deals with profound goods that must be monitored and ordered for the public good."³⁷

After 30 years of a divorce culture, many Americans see marriage as too personal to be a proper matter for public concern or intervention. Even family members, clergy, and children are often not seen as legitimate stakeholders in the success of a marriage. For if marriage is just a word for two adults who have managed (or not managed) to create an emotionally satisfying personal relationship, how can any outsider legitimately second-guess their decision to divorce?

We do not share this limited conception of marriage. A good marriage is not just a good private relationship, and married couples are not in a sealed bubble, immune from the influences of others. Though marriage is intimate and personal, marriage also has an inherently public side. Marriage is what lovers do when they want to bring their relationship out of the private realm of personal emotions and make it a social fact, visible to and recognized not only by the couple, but also by friends, family, church, government, and the rest of society. Good marriages are made, not born, and they are most likely to be made in a society that understands and values marriage as a shared aspiration and key social institution, not just a private affair of the heart.

*Marriage is not
a conservative or liberal idea,
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What Is Marriage? Six Dimensions

MARRIAGE HAS AT LEAST SIX IMPORTANT DIMENSIONS:

- *Marriage is a legal contract.* Marriage creates formal and legal obligations and rights between spouses. Public recognition of, and protection for, this marriage contract, whether in tax or divorce law, helps married couples succeed in creating a permanent bond.

- *Marriage is a financial partnership.* In marriage, “my money” typically becomes “our money,” and this sharing of property creates its own kind of intimacy and mutuality that is difficult to achieve outside a legal marriage. Only lovers who make this legal vow typically acquire the confidence that allows them to share their bank accounts as well as their bed.

- *Marriage is a sacred promise.* Even people who are not part of any organized religion usually see marriage as a sacred union, with profound spiritual implications. “Whether it is the deep metaphors of covenant as in Judaism, Islam and Reformed Protestantism; sacrament as in Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy; the yin and yang of Confucianism; the quasi-sacramentalism of Hinduism; or the mysticism often associated with allegedly modern romantic love,” Don Browning writes, “humans tend to find values in marriage that call them beyond the mundane and everyday.”³⁸ Religious faith helps to deepen the meaning of marriage and provides a unique fountainhead of inspiration and support when troubles arise.

- *Marriage is a sexual union.* Marriage elevates sexual desire into a permanent sign of love, turning two lovers into “one flesh.” Marriage indicates not only a private but a public understanding that two people have withdrawn themselves from the sexual marketplace. This public vow of fidelity also makes men and women

more likely to be faithful. Research shows, for example, that cohabiting men are four times more likely to cheat than husbands, and cohabiting women are eight times more likely to cheat than spouses.³⁹

• *Marriage is a personal bond.* Marriage is the ultimate avowal of caring, committed, and collaborative love. Marriage incorporates our desire to know and be known by another human being; it represents our dearest hopes that love is not a temporary condition, that we are not condemned to drift in and out of shifting relationships forever.

• *Marriage is a family-making bond.* Marriage takes two biological strangers and turns them into each other's next-of-kin. As a procreative bond, marriage also includes a commitment to care for any children produced by the married couple. It reinforces fathers' (and fathers' kin's) obligations to acknowledge children as part of the family system.

In all these ways, marriage is a productive institution, not a consumer good. Marriage does not simply certify existing loving relationships, but rather transforms the ways in which couples act toward one another, toward their children, and toward the future. Marriage also changes the way in which other individuals, groups, and institutions think about and act toward the couple.⁴⁰ The public, legal side of marriage increases couples' confidence that their partnerships will last. Conversely, the more marriage is redefined as simply a private relationship, the less effective marriage becomes in helping couples achieve their goal of a lasting bond.

Marriage as the Incubator of Fathers

Consider just one example of how the various dimensions of marriage reinforce healthy and productive behavior: the incubation of fatherhood. The empirical evidence is quite clear: Marriage is our best hope of fostering involved, effective, nurturing fathers.

As a matter of mere biology, men can sire a virtually unlimited number of children, but a man can provide daily care, protection, love, and financial support to only a few children. Marriage closes this gap between a man's sexual and fathering capacities. It makes a sexual union with one woman a matter of public record. It obligates not just the man, but also his kin, to protect the children of this sexual union as family.⁴¹

When fathers do not live with their children, research shows, the relationship between father and child typically dissipates. Ten years after the divorce, only one in ten children saw their father as often as once a week; two-thirds had not seen him in the past year.⁴² One study of unwed fathers found that while 57 percent visited their infants weekly, just 22 percent saw their elementary school-aged children this frequently. In another sample of urban, African American families, just one out of five young single mothers said that their child's father took "a lot" of responsibility for their three-year old child, compared to 88 percent of married and cohabiting mothers.⁴³ Why? One reason is that when fathers are not married to the mother of their children, they develop difficult, competing obligations to new partners and new children. Time, energy, and money are limited resources. When a father doesn't live with his children's mother, his fathering must be spread out over at least two households, and often more. Outside of marriage, the difficulties of fathering multiply, and the number of successful fathers dwindles.

Is Marriage a Private Matter? The Public Costs of Divorce

IS STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE A LEGITIMATE PUBLIC GOAL?

We believe that the answer is yes, for at least four reasons:

- Marriage protects the well-being of children;
- Divorce and unwed parenting generate large taxpayer costs;
- Marriage is a unique generator of social and human capital, as important as education in building the wealth of individuals and communities; and
- Only marriage creates a reasonable hope of permanence.

Marriage is what lovers do when they want to bring their relationship out of the private realm of personal emotions and make it a social fact, visible to and recognized by society.

The Well-Being of Children

Children do better, on average, when they are raised by their own two married parents. What are the risks of non-intact families for children? As Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher sum up: “On average, children of married parents are physically and mentally healthier, better educated and later in life more likely to enjoy more career success than other children.” On the other hand, “Children raised in single-parent households are,

on average, more likely to be poor, to have health problems and psychological disorders, to commit crimes and exhibit other conduct disorders, have somewhat poorer relationships with both family and peers, and as adults eventually get fewer years of education and enjoy less stable marriages and lower occupational status on average than children whose parents got and stayed married. This ‘marriage gap’ in children’s well-being remains true even after researchers control for important family characteristics, including parents’ race, income and socioeconomic status.”⁴⁴

What does marriage do for children? With marriage, children gain direct access to the financial, emotional, educational, and spiritual resources of both parents. Outside of marriage, the economic and emotional interests of parents and children diverge. Children experience new loyalty conflicts and so do adults. A man who is living separately from his children experiences a contradiction between providing for his children and maintaining his own household’s standard of living; he also experiences a new tug-of-war between time and money for his kids and retaining enough time and money to attract a new mate. Outside of lifelong marriage, men risk being torn into fractional dads, pulled in too many directions by children spread out over too many different households.

Similarly, a single mother must assume new breadwinning and parenting duties, while also attempting to find time and energy to create a social life for herself. The introduction of non-related males into the household significantly increases the risks of child abuse.⁴⁵ In more ordinary cases, it tends to create difficult emotional and loyalty balancing acts, as children and new partners compete with both parents for time, attention, money, and emotional priority. Outside of marriage, the tasks of parenting remain the same, but both parents must meet them with reduced time, emotional energy, and financial resources.

Outside of marriage, the parent-child bond itself typically weakens, not only with absent fathers, but with overworked mothers as well. As two researchers who

studied 2,000 married families over a 15-year period report: “[R]elations with parents appear to suffer, on average, more when parents divorce than when unhappily married parents stay together.”⁴⁶ Many single parents are unsung heroes, overcoming these difficulties to create warm, loving homes for their children. But few of these heroes and heroines would deny the difficulties of parenting outside of marriage. Few Americans of any marital status view single parenting as an ideal.

The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce

Divorce and unwed childbearing create substantial public costs, paid by taxpayers. Higher rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence, and poverty among both adults and children bring with them higher taxpayer costs in diverse forms: more welfare expenditure; increased remedial and special education expenses; higher day-care subsidies; additional child-support collection costs; a range of increased direct court administration costs incurred in regulating post-divorce or unwed families; higher foster care and child protection services; increased Medicaid and Medicare costs; increasingly expensive and harsh crime-control measures to compensate for formerly private regulation of adolescent and young-adult behaviors; and many other similar costs.

While no study has yet attempted precisely to measure these sweeping and diverse taxpayer costs stemming from the decline of marriage, current research suggests that these costs are likely to be quite extensive. For example:

- Boys raised outside of intact marriages are two to three times more likely to commit a crime leading to incarceration by the time they are in their early thirties, even after controlling for race, family background, neighborhood quality, and cognitive ability.⁴⁷ Because divorce lowers family income and (often) neighborhood quality, and because divorce in one generation leads to higher rates of unwed parenting in the next, the long-term consequences of marital breakdown on the crime rate are likely to be even higher.

- Changes in family structure explain 97 percent of black and 99 percent of white families’ poverty spells—not only unwed childbearing but also divorce.⁴⁸ Forty-four percent of women experience poverty following divorce.⁴⁹ Absent remarriage, the typical divorced woman can expect a standard of living near the poverty level, and this drop cannot be explained by selection effects into divorce.⁵⁰ About one-fifth of women who apply for welfare benefits for the first time do so because of divorce or separation; about one in four mothers who were first propelled onto welfare by divorce are still welfare-dependent five years later.⁵¹ The long-term effects of divorce on welfare expenditures are even higher, as daughters of divorce are three times more likely to become unwed teen mothers, and are also more likely later to be divorced.⁵²

- Unmarried hospital patients are two-and-a-half times as likely to require nursing home care, even after taking into account the severity of illness, the diagnosis, age, gender, and race.⁵³ Elderly married men and women are also less likely than unmarried senior citizens to enter a nursing home.⁵⁴

- Following divorce, children are 50 percent more likely to develop health problems,⁵⁵ generating higher Medicaid costs for mothers in poverty. Children in female-headed households are more likely to be hospitalized, and to have chronic health conditions, than children in two-parent families, even after taking into account the lower average education and income of single-mother families.⁵⁶

- One quarter of children in both mother-only and remarried families repeat a grade in school, compared to 14 percent of those in married families. About a quarter of children in mother-only families (and 18 percent in stepfamilies) have been suspended or expelled, compared to less than 10 percent in mother-father families.⁵⁷

- Teenagers and young women whose parents are divorced are more than three times as likely to have an out-of-wedlock child as young women whose parents stayed married.⁵⁸ About one out of ten teens under 15 who are living with both of their parents have ever had sex, compared to 20 percent of those living in a blended family, 23 percent of those living with a single mother, and 27 percent of those living with a single father.⁵⁹

Divorce creates substantial taxpayer cost in diverse areas, including welfare, Medicaid, crime-control, foster care, and special education.

A Unique Generator of Social and Human Capital

Married adults live longer, healthier, happier, and more affluent lives than adults who don't marry or don't stay married. This phenomenon is not simply an artifact of selection; marriage itself makes adults better off, by offering them greater emotional and financial support, wider and more integrated social networks, important

economies of scale, and productive boosts in earnings, parenting capacity, and life management.⁶⁰

Marriage also helps to conserve wealth and expand social capital. At any given level of income, married adults are less likely to experience financial hardship. The longer people stay married, the more wealth they accumulate, whereas length of cohabitation has no relationship to wealth accumulation. Informal partners—who are not held by the wider society to be financially responsible to one another—do not reap the same benefits as the legally married.⁶¹

When it comes to helping Americans to live a long, healthy life, marriage offers profound advantages as well. As one review of the literature put it: “Compared to married people, the non-married . . . have higher rates of mortality⁶² than the married: about 50 percent higher among women and 250 percent higher among men.” Marriage lowers the incidence of depression, suicide, and substance abuse (including alcoholism). One longitudinal study following a nationally representative sample of 13,000 men and women over five years found that, after controlling for initial mental health status, the mental health of all singles (never married, separated, divorced, and widowed) declined compared to those who remained married over the entire period.⁶³

Thus adults as well as children suffer long-lasting disadvantages when they live in communities where healthy marriage is not the norm.

The Only Realistic Promise of Permanence

Although many cohabiting couples eventually marry, long-term cohabitation is rare: Just one out of ten cohabiting couples are still cohabiting after five years.⁶⁴ By contrast, 80 percent of couples who marry for the first time are still married five years later,⁶⁵ and if current divorce rates remain constant, for about six out of ten younger women marrying for the first time, the act of marriage will indeed create a *lifelong* bond.⁶⁶

Marriage is not just a “piece of paper,” and alternatives to marriages are not “just as good,” in the sense of being equally likely to produce lasting, loving ties. One British study finds that biological parents who marry are three times more likely to be together two years later than biological parents who cohabit, even after controlling for maternal age, education, economic hardship, previous relationship history, depression, and relationship quality.⁶⁷

Individuals choose freely whether or not to marry. But before individuals can have that choice to make a lifelong bond, the special status of marriage must first be created and sustained by families, faith, law, and society.

Does the Public Care? Evidence of a Growing Marriage Movement

A MARRIAGE MOVEMENT IS VISIBLY EMERGING; a diverse and growing group of leaders are organizing new initiatives to strengthen marriage. These include:

The Marriage Education Movement

- The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education’s annual Smart Marriages conference, which brings together leaders in all areas of the marriage movement, including the secular, religious, scholarly, and public policy sectors, has grown from 600 attendees in 1997 to 1,200 in 1999. The Coalition serves as an information clearinghouse for the media, legislators, scholars, and community organizers. Its e-newsletter goes to several thousand marriage educators; lay ministers and clergy; counselors; therapists; journalists; legislators; family lawyers; and other leaders in the marriage movement. Its directory of programs (www.smartmarriages.com) has increased from 15 in 1997 to 140 in 2000. The Smart Marriages conference trains approximately 400 marriage educators each year in intensive pre- and post-conference training institutes.

- In Minnesota and Utah, new community marriage initiatives have hosted (or are planning to host) marriage education conferences to train therapists, educators, and clergy in the latest marriage preparation techniques. The goals of the Minnesota Marriage Initiative, for example, are “to generate community support to help people achieve their goal of a successful, lifelong marriage.” In Philadelphia, the Family Relations Success Council has a similar goal of raising awareness of premarital education and divorce prevention programs among clergy, lay ministers, mental health providers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, family life educators, business leaders, attorneys, judges, and family advocates.

- The African American Family Life Education Program, a collaborative partnership between the Indiana University School of Social Work and its community partners, aims to teach the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to create stable and satisfying families. One of the modules, the seven-week African American Marriage Enrichment (AAME) program aims to strengthen committed relationships between men and women.⁶⁸

- Chesterfield County in Virginia recently became the first U.S. county to subsidize marriage education courses. Pat Cullen, a director at the county mental health

clinic, helped create the program after witnessing the limited returns—“too little, too late”—to a county-mandated divorce education program.

- Saddened by divorce court carnage, court workers in Cobb County, Georgia, created their own four-hour marriage education course, staffed by volunteer therapists and financed in part by asking jurors voluntarily to donate their jury-duty pay.

- The U.S. military recently began teaching marriage education skills (such as PREP, Pairs, and Couples Communication)⁶⁹ on military bases around the world.

- Growing numbers of hospitals are adding marriage education components to their childbirth classes, such as the Becoming Parents Program, developed by Pam Jordan at the University of Washington.

- In 1999, the Texas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy issued a white paper calling on the state to fund “effective relationship and marriage skills” programs, as well as making premarital education a prerequisite to obtaining a marriage license.

- Oklahoma, Florida, Minnesota, Maryland, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Michigan, and other states have passed or are considering passing laws giving tax incentives or marriage-license discounts to engaged couples who agree to take marriage preparation courses.

One marriage mentoring ministry, which uses formerly troubled couples as mentors, reports saving 90 percent of troubled marriages

The Faith-Based Marriage Movement

- The growth of Marriage Savers, a lay ministry headed by Harriet and Mike McManus that has helped 5,500 clergy in 125 cities organize Community Marriage Policies and Covenants. For these programs, clergy agree to require engaged couples to undergo four months of marriage preparation, encourage marriage enrichment and intervention programs such as Marriage Encounter or Family Life Weekends or Retrouvaille,⁷⁰ create stepfamily support groups, and train lay mentor couples to help engaged couples, newlyweds, and troubled marriages. One such mentoring ministry, pioneered by the Rev. and Mrs. Dick McGinnis, uses formerly troubled couples (much like Alcoholics Anonymous) and reports saving as many as 90 percent of the most troubled marriages.⁷¹

- The April 6, 2000, groundbreaking ecumenical agreement by leaders of the National Council of Churches, the Southern Baptist Convention, the U. S. Catholic Church, and the National Association of Evangelicals to work together to promote marriage. These efforts include organizing up to 16 regional conferences to be attended by bishop-level executives of the different Christian traditions; drafting a statement of common goals for strengthening marriage; creating an ecumenical ad campaign promoting marriage; and endorsing a World Marriage Day.

- The 1999 launch of a new, non-political, church-based “Covenant Marriage Movement” (patterned on the success of Promise Keepers) by a diverse group of 35 national Christian organizations with a combined constituency of 31 million people. The Movement plans to hold conference events in major cities and urge married couples to sign a renewed vow to God, each other, their families, and their communities.

The Scholarly Marriage Movement

•Over the last ten years, a growing number of important family scholars have modified earlier views in response to new evidence about the potentially damaging consequences of divorce and unwed childbearing. *In Second Chances* (Ticknor & Fields, 1990), *The Good Marriage* (Houghton Mifflin, 1995), and *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (Hyperion, September 2000), Judith Wallerstein has helped to bring national attention to the long-term consequence of divorce for children. *Growing Up with a Single Parent* by Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur (Harvard University Press, 1994), *A Generation at Risk* by Paul Amato and Alan Booth (Harvard University Press, 1997), and *The Case for Marriage* by Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher (Doubleday, October 2000) are also examples of this type of scholarly work.

Other recent scholarly initiatives include:

•In May 1995, the Council on Families, a nonpartisan and interdisciplinary group of family scholars and writers, released *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*, urging new action to “increase the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents and decrease the proportion who do not.”

•In November 1996, the Communitarian Network sponsored a “Conference on Communitarian Pro-Family Policies” that focused in part on ways of strengthening marriage, including a new focus on marriage education (as distinct from marriage therapy) and on the role of churches and divorce law in strengthening marriage.⁷²

•In 1997, David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead established the research-oriented National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Its report, *The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America*, released annually, receives wide press attention.⁷³

•In June 1997, the Family Impact Seminar held a two-day roundtable of experts and public officials in Washington, D.C. that resulted in the report, *Toward More Perfect Unions: Putting Marriage on the Public Agenda*, urging both “the federal government and key national organizations” to “make marriage a priority.”⁷⁴

•The Fragile Families and Child Well Being Survey, a major new study of low income couples in 20 U.S. cities by Sara McLanahan and Irving Garfinkel, will address the huge gaps in knowledge about marriage and cohabitation among the poor.⁷⁵

•Other recently formed scholarly initiatives include Duquesne University’s Family Institute; the University of Virginia’s Center for Children, Families, and the Law; and Creighton University’s Center for Marriage and Family. In 1998, the National Institutes for Health sponsored a “Ties That Bind” conference on marriage and family formation, leading to a book, *The Ties That Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation* (Aldine de Gruyter, 2000).

•New marriage research labs, such as those directed by John Gottman at the University of Washington, Howard Markman and Scott Stanley at the University of Denver, Andrew Christiansen at UCLA, and Thomas Bradbury, also at UCLA, are putting marriage education and therapy on a more scientific footing.

•In 2000, Oklahoma State University appointed the state’s first marriage scholar-in-residence, and is initiating baseline research on marriage and divorce trends in the state.

•At the University of Chicago Divinity School, the Religion, Culture, and Family Project, led by Don S. Browning, has embarked on a rigorous scholarly examination and recovery of the broad mainline Protestant marriage tradition. Publications by the Project include: *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* by Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon, and Robert M. Franklin; *Covenant and Commitments* by Max L. Stackhouse; and *From Sacrament to Contract* by John Witte, Jr.

•The newly formed Washington, D.C.-based Couples and Marriage Policy Resource Center provides technical assistance and consultation to national, state, and community leaders on a wide range of strategies to strengthen marriage and two-parent families, with a special focus on helping low income and welfare populations.⁷⁶

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The Marriage-Friendly Fatherhood Movement

•The rise of a marriage-oriented fatherhood movement has sparked interest in strengthening marriage by highlighting the costs of father-absence and the importance of marriage in sustaining fatherhood. The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) organizes public media campaigns on fatherhood, collaborates with governors and mayors in local fatherhood initiatives, and is now building local chapters. NFI, along with others, such as Charles Ballard at the National Institute for Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, are marriage-friendly in programming and message.

•In November 1998, the Morehouse Research Institute co-sponsored the Morehouse Conference on African American Fathers, funded in part by the Ford Foundation. This conference led to the 1999 joint statement, *Turning the Corner on Father Absence In Black America*, in which prominent, mostly African American, scholars and reformers agreed that “. . . a key goal of the fatherhood movement must be to encourage both enhanced marriageability and healthy marriages.”⁷⁷

The School-Based Marriage Skills Movement

•In 1998, Florida became the first state to mandate marriage and relationship skills training in all public and private high schools.

•As many as 1,000 schools in at least 35 states include marriage education within life skills, family life, domestic science, health, teen pregnancy and abstinence education classes.⁷⁸

The Divorce Law Reform Movement

•New research has led scholars to reconsider the impact of no-fault divorce on marriage. While the scholarly debate continues, recent research suggests that the move to unilateral divorce by itself accounts for 17 percent of the overall increase in divorce rates between 1968 and 1988.⁷⁹

•In 1997, Louisiana became the first state, and in 1998 Arizona the second, to pass covenant marriage laws, which give couples the option of avoiding no-fault divorce laws, and also participating in mandatory marriage preparation and marriage counseling. Covenant marriage bills have been proposed in at least 20 states in the last two years.⁸⁰

- Other recently proposed marriage law reforms include requiring mutual consent for no-fault divorces and lengthening the waiting periods for no-fault divorces when children are involved or when one spouse contests the divorce.⁸¹

- New laws and/or court procedural changes have been proposed to establish “marriage friendly” divorce mediation and education. About half of U.S. counties now have some form of court-ordered divorce education or mediation,⁸² but most aim primarily to process divorces more quickly and with less acrimony and litigation. The new initiatives add two goals: to encourage reconciliation by offering a realistic picture of the risks of divorce and by offering conflict-management skills and mediated parenting plans early in the divorce process; and to help prevent redivorce by offering skills-based marriage education at the point of divorce.⁸³

The Governors’ Marriage Movement

- In 1999, governors in two states—Arkansas and Oklahoma—publicly made 30 to 50 percent reductions in the divorce rate an important goal of their administrations.

- In 1999, Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating convened the Governor’s and First Lady’s Conference on Marriage, pulling together leaders from business, churches, government, social services, education, and the media to help forge the nation’s first state-level action plan for reducing divorce. In March 2000, Governor Keating announced the result: an innovative new \$10 million marriage initiative, financed by using 10 percent of the state’s unspent welfare funds, making Oklahoma the nation’s first state to earmark a substantial portion of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) funds for reducing divorce and strengthening marriage. The state’s divorce reduction plan includes community marriage covenants, a marriage resource center, a statewide service delivery system for marriage skills training, and a public information campaign to aid in changing the culture of divorce. Social service caseworkers, public health nurses, counselors, and educators will be trained and educated to promote marriage. The Governor has also asked state agencies to review and evaluate public programs to establish marriage-neutral or marriage-friendly policies. The state Department of Human Services, for example, recently decided to include the income of both partners in cohabiting (as well as married) couples in determining assistance eligibility, thus eliminating any financial incentives for informal unions.

- In 1998, Florida Governor Lawton Chiles signed “The Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act of 1998,” making Florida the first state to require marriage skills as part of the high school curriculum. In 1999, his successor, Jeb Bush, became the first governor to sign a Community Marriage Policy.

- In 1998, Governor Michael Leavitt of Utah organized the Governor’s Commission on Marriage, charged with identifying programs and tools to strengthen marriage in Utah. Similar marriage summits involving marriage stakeholders in business, health care, education, counseling, clergy, social work, media, and marriage education have been held (or are planned) in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, New Mexico, and Iowa.

- In 1998 and 1999, governors in three states—Louisiana, Utah, and North Carolina—signed marriage proclamations, recognizing the importance of marriage to the public good.

- In April 2000, Arizona Governor Jane Hull signed a new marriage initiative (proposed by Rep. Mark Anderson) authorizing \$1 million to develop community-based marriage skills courses, \$75,000 for subsidized marriage skills classes for low-income couples, and \$500,000 for a marriage media campaign.

- In 1999, Texas Governor George W. Bush signed a bill increasing the marriage licensing fee by \$5.00 to create a premarital education manual for distribution to all marrying couples and to fund new premarital and marital education research. In addition, the bill directs county clerks to keep a register of premarital educators to be supplied to potential spouses and also outlines suggested course content for premarital education.

Virginia has added to its teen pregnancy programs a new goal: reducing births to unmarried women in their twenties.

Other recent state initiatives include:

- In Virginia, the public health department's Partners in Prevention program has widened the scope of teen pregnancy programs, adding the goal of reducing out-of-wedlock births among women in their twenties to the programs' official goals. Innovative efforts like these recognize that, as Isabel Sawhill has written, "The goal among

those concerned about the breakdown of the family should be to discourage both too early childbearing and childbearing outside of marriage. Very early childbearing, even were it to occur within marriage, is inconsistent with the growing requirements of the economy for workers with high levels of education and with evidence that teenage marriages are highly unstable. But we should also recognize that the breakdown of marriage as the normative context for raising children may have consequences for our society that are at least as profound as the age at which childbearing begins."⁸⁴

- In Wisconsin, the legislature designated \$210,000 in unspent TANF funds to create a new Community Marriage Policy Project to coordinate and assist local members of the clergy to develop community-wide standards for marriage.

- In 2000, proposals to encourage marriage education were passed by legislatures in Minnesota and Maryland, but vetoed by the governors of those states.

The Civic Marriage Movement

- The Greater Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy, developed by civic, business, clergy, professional leaders, and social service providers in Michigan, establishes agreed-upon guidelines for premarital preparation and community support for marriage in order to empower couples for healthy, lifelong marriage.

- The Chattanooga Initiative, led by First Things First, Inc., in Tennessee, is a coordinated marriage campaign that trains marriage educators, conducts public outreach, and mobilizes churches around marriage issues. A broad media outreach campaign aims to educate the public, recruit marriage mentors, and attract church partners.

- In 1997, in Lenawee County, Michigan, judges, mayors, and magistrates agreed not to marry couples unless they take a marriage preparation and skills course. On May 11, 2000, Lenawee County held a divorce mediation summit (including leaders from academia, the bar association, social work, and the courts) to find new ways to use divorce education and mediation to encourage reconciliation and reduce divorce. A proposed new Michigan court rule would give judges new authority to require divorce mediation earlier in the process, when reconciliation is more likely to be possible.

- Nonprofit community-based organizations across the country are using public/private partnerships—including local, state, and federal governments; philanthropic organizations; businesses; the United Way; and individual donors—to provide family and marriage strengthening services. Comprehensive community-based “one stop shopping” family centers are being established in churches and synagogues, schools, and community centers. Culturally relevant services are offered to family members within a certain geographic area, thus strengthening the social support network and community.⁸⁵

- Nonprofit citizens organizations in Michigan, Washington, South Carolina, Georgia, New Jersey, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Alabama, among others, have made strengthening marriage and reducing divorce significant parts of their agendas. In the state of Washington, for example, the Washington Family Council (WFC) is conducting ongoing research into the attitudes of Washingtonians—especially young people—on marriage, divorce, and family life, and has created a Marriage Builders program for local clergy. To date, according to the WFC, 550 Washington churches have signed 18 “community marriage agreements,” representing more than 15 counties and 130 cities and towns.

The Federal Marriage Movement

- In 2000, both Vice President Al Gore and Governor George W. Bush offer proposals to reduce the marriage penalties in the federal tax code.

- The currently pending “Fathers Count” and “Responsible Fatherhood” U. S. Congressional legislative initiatives both recognize that strengthening fatherhood requires more and better approaches to promoting both marriage and marriageability among low-income fathers.

- The passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act made promoting marriage a goal of federal welfare policy and opened the doors to new state marriage initiatives using unspent welfare funds. Three out of the four legal goals of welfare law are now marriage-related, including “promoting . . . marriage,” “encourage . . . two-parent families,” and “reduce . . . out-of-wedlock” births.⁸⁶ A new study suggests that welfare reform can increase marriage and reduce divorce (and also domestic violence) in low-income families.⁸⁷

- Leaders in the marriage movement are also calling on federal agencies, including the U. S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics, to put marriage back on the research agenda and to make collecting accurate data on marriage and divorce a higher priority.

What Should We Do? A Call to the Nation

WE CALL UPON AMERICA'S CIVIC, political, moral, religious, professional, policy making, and intellectual leaders to join with us in the great task of renewing a marriage culture. We propose five principles to guide our effort:

1. Make supporting marriage—not just marriage neutrality—the goal. Healthy marriages benefit the whole community. Conversely, when marriages fail, huge personal and public costs are generated. If we can help more marriages to succeed, it would be foolish and wrong to settle for policies that are merely neutral about marriage.

2. Respect the special status of marriage. Do not extend the benefits of marriage to couples who could marry, but choose not to. Offering the social and legal benefits of marriage to cohabiting couples unfairly and unwisely weakens the special option of marriage.

3. Reconnect marriage and childbearing. Do not discourage married couples from having children as they choose, and encourage young men and women to wait to have children until they have made good marriages, not just until they have high school diplomas or turn twenty-one.

4. Do not discourage marital interdependence by penalizing unpaid work in homes and communities. Couples should be free to divide up labor however they choose without pressure from policies that discriminate against at-home parenting and other activities that serve civil society.

5. Promote both the ideal of marital permanence and the aspiration couples today have for more satisfying marriage relationships.

*Make
supporting marriage
and not
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Next Steps

We offer these concrete suggestions as starting points. Not all of us agree with every single suggestion, but we are united in agreeing that it is time to engage in substantive deliberation about what can be done to strengthen marriage:

To married couples:

- Deepen your commitment to your marriage promise. Seek clergy, marriage mentors, or professional counselors who are not “marriage neutral,” but committed to helping you and your marriage succeed. If your marriage has recovered from serious troubles, consider volunteering at (or starting) a marriage mentoring program at your local church, synagogue, temple or other community forum to help turn around other marriages.

To parents:

- Make raising children who succeed in marriage at least as important a goal as raising children who succeed in careers. Ideally, parents should view this goal as part of a larger effort to resist the intrusion of market mores into family life, the beginning of a larger fight for “a new bottom line” in which institutions and social practices are seen as “productive” not only to the extent that they maximize money and power, but also to the extent that they maximize people’s capacity to value love, sustain their marriages and to raise emotionally and physically healthy children. Parents who want their children to marry before having children, and who prefer marriage to cohabitation, should explicitly communicate this message to their children. If, as a parent, you want to tell your children that sex is best reserved for marriage, do not let unmarried couples sleep together in your own home. Take advantage of the resources of your spiritual tradition; faith can place skills within the context of deep religious meaning and of commitment to the divine purposes of marriage.

To friends and family members:

- When people you care about are facing divorce or marital problems, offer them your help and your hope. Refer them to mentor couples or marriage inter-

vention, counseling, or education programs. Remind them — despite how they may feel today—that staying unhappily married may not be the only option: In one study of a nationally representative sample, three out of four very unhappily married couples that did not divorce were able to turn their marriages around.⁸⁸

To clergy and faith communities:

- Recover your historic role as custodians of the marriage covenant or sacrament. Deepen your own and your congregation's understanding of the importance of marriage as a sign and symbol of divine love. Create or improve faith-based marriage preparation programs, incorporating the latest skills research without subordinating the religious dimension of marriage. New research is showing that trained clergy and lay leaders can be even more effective marriage educators than the best-trained professional counselors and therapists.⁸⁹ Marriage skills help committed couples negotiate their way to more satisfying relationships. But they cannot tell couples as persuasively why marriage matters. Clergy are thus often in a unique position to offer struggling couples new hope and new reasons to resolve their marital problems.

- Develop lay marriage mentoring ministries to help engaged, newlywed, and troubled couples. Lay mentor couples can play a role that no professional can. Alcoholics Anonymous is as successful, or more successful, than the most highly trained professional in getting alcoholics sober, because people who have been there can provide daily support, skills, tips, and, above all, inspiration: the difficult faith that success is possible.

- Embrace the goal of lowering divorce in your faith community and your denomination. Maintain the integrity of marriage vows exchanged in your church, requiring all couples who marry to participate in a serious, theologically informed program of church-sponsored premarital education. Create a marriage culture within your religious community that is distinct. Educate your faith community about the value and importance of marriage. Be aware of research on the benefits of marriage and the consequences of divorce as well as the existence of effective marriage preparation mentoring and interventions.⁹⁰ Convey a clear message that marriage is not just a private matter, but an accountable promise before God and the faith community.

To youth pastors, abstinence educators, and other community youth workers:

- Today's young people need positive, moving portraits of the good marriage, and of the value and importance of marriage for adults and children. They also need new hope that they, too, can, through marriage, achieve a loving, lasting family bond. Do not wait until children are grown, or couples are engaged, to begin the process of marriage preparation and education in your congregation or community. Reconnect marriage and childbearing in the minds of young people; point out the limits of cohabitation for adults and children alike.

To marriage counselors, therapists, and educators:

- Take advantage of new marriage therapy and education research, especially new models of healthy marriage and marriage intervention that are on a far sounder scientific footing.

- Treat your clients as spouses and parents, and not just as individuals. While recognizing that not all marriages should be supported, we believe that marriage counselors should embrace the obligation to consider the interests of the family as

a whole, including dependent children, and not just the desires of adult clients, in counseling those with marital problems.

To obstetricians, pediatricians, pediatric and obstetric nurses, Lamaze and La Leche instructors, and other medical professionals:

- Educate yourself on the importance of healthy marriage for children's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Recognize that the birth of a child is a highly stressful time in marriage and therefore a potential flash point for divorce. Look for opportunities to incorporate marriage and parenting support into the professional relationship. Encourage your medical facility to offer marriage and parenting education programs, such as "Boot Camp for New Dads" or the "Becoming Parents Program." Helping more young married couples successfully negotiate the stress that parenting places on marriages would be a major contribution to public health and to children's well-being.

*Helping more young,
married parents avoid divorce
would be
a major contribution
to public health.*

To family lawyers, bar associations, and other legal groups:

- Remember that lawyers are officers of the court, invested by the state with considerable authority, and that you have a grave responsibility as counselor as well as advocate. Do not forget that the plans that the parents make for children will last far beyond your stewardship and will influence their entire life. Encourage clients to consider alternatives to divorce, where domestic violence is not an issue. Maintain a list of marriage intervention, counseling, and education programs to offer to clients who express ambivalence about divorce or interest in reconciliation. Maintain a similar list of professionals with expertise in working with children to buffer the trauma of divorce. Become an advocate within the legal profession for divorce laws and court rules that aim to promote reconciliations, where appropriate, rather than simply processing divorce as rapidly as possible. Oppose legal changes (such as those recently adopted by the American Law Institute) that would weaken the special legal status of marriage by extending marital benefits to cohabitators who are legally able to marry.

To federal, state, and local governments:

- Make supporting and promoting marriage an explicit goal of domestic policy, accompanied by explicit criteria to measure success, such as a reduction in the divorce rate and an increase in the proportion of children born inside of marriage.

- Increase funding for marriage research, including: basic research on marital processes that impact mental health and the success of marriages; intervention research designed to investigate ways to improve marriages; and evaluation research to establish the impact on divorce and marriage of current and proposed public policy changes in taxes, welfare, marriage education, divorce law, and court-connected mediation, parenting, and divorce education plans. Support new research to investigate the economic costs shifted to business and taxpayers when marriages fail or fail to form.

- Given the powerful relationship between marriage and mental and physical health, the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Institutes of Health, the

National Institute for Mental Health, and state public health departments should make collecting and analyzing data on marriage and divorce an important priority.

- Consider using part of unspent welfare (TANF) money to fund marriage-supportive activities, from sponsoring marriage mentoring and education campaigns for low-income communities to public education campaigns about the value and importance of marriage, especially for children. Earmark funds for evaluation research, so that effective program components can be identified and replicated.

- Consider subsidizing marriage education by providing vouchers, free classes, or tax credits to those served by counselors, therapists, and lay educators who donate their services. Promote community marriage policies, premarital inventories, and marriage education programs through marriage license tax breaks, subsidized classes, and vouchers for low-income couples.

- Reduce marriage penalties in the tax code and in other programs, without creating inadvertent homemaker penalties in their stead.

- Incorporate a marriage dimension in all existing teen pregnancy, fatherhood, and sex education programs. Make persuading teens to wait to have children until they are mature enough to make a good marriage—not just until they get a high school diploma or turn twenty-one—an explicit goal of all government-subsidized teen pregnancy programs.⁹¹

- Hold marriage summits to pull together stakeholders in marriage from religious, business, counseling and therapy, child welfare, and family organizations, as well as from federal, state, and local governments, to highlight the importance of marriage.

- Highlight the public health and other benefits of marriage through public education campaigns. Alternatively, education campaigns could focus on the risks of divorce or unwed parenting to children and on the relative loss of control that divorce brings to both custodial and noncustodial parents.

- Reform court-connected divorce education and mediation programs so that they seek to facilitate reconciliations, rather than merely expedite the divorce process. Fund evaluation research to see which divorce education programs meet the goal of both reducing divorce acrimony *and* preventing unnecessary divorce.

- Reconsider no-fault divorce laws and find innovative new ways to give legal weight to the marriage vow. For example, a longer waiting period (at least 18 months for contested no-fault divorces), slows down the divorce process, gives counseling a chance to work, offers some power to the spouse who wants to stay married, and at the very least gives the spouse who is being divorced time to recover emotionally before being plunged into life-altering legal decisions. Other divorce

law reform proposals include offering couples the option of stronger “covenant marriage” vows; allowing judges to consider fault in custody or property division in instances of one-sided, walkaway divorces; and requiring mutual consent for no-fault divorces. Other states have passed, or are considering, legislation requiring couples contemplating divorce to attend classes on the possible repercussions of divorce for their children’s well-being.⁹²

We seek nothing less than to rebuild the shattered dream of lasting love and to pass on a healthier, happier, and more successful marriage culture to the next generation. Toward this end, we pledge our time, our resources, and our intellectual and moral energy.

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About Jean-Michel Folon

BORN IN 1934 IN BRUSSELS, Jean-Michel Folon is a widely known contemporary painter and illustrator. Since the 1960s, his posters and prints, book illustrations, magazine covers, advertisements, animated cartoons, and public murals have appeared frequently in Europe and in the U.S. In 1990, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presented an exhibition of his work. Folon typically uses simplified forms and soft, pastel colors to evoke the humor and pathos of modern life.

This Statement features two of Folon's works: *Naked Love* (1981), and *To Jacques Prévert* (1979). Each of these works clearly suggest movement—a sense that individuals and societies can change, and that life can be better and freer than it is now. In *Naked Love*, a heart that has been under water begins to emerge, in plainer view, welcomed by a halo or rainbow the color of sunrise. This sense of hope and optimism—the belief that renewal is not only desirable, but also possible—is a defining trait of the new movement to strengthen marriage. At the same time, these works also suggest isolation and fragility, reminding us of the current status of marriage in our society. Love is “naked” when it is not encouraged or supported by the larger community.



About The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education

THE COALITION FOR MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND COUPLES EDUCATION (CMFCE), founded in 1996, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization whose members are convinced that family breakdown can be reduced through couple-empowering, skill-based education and accurate, up-to-date information about marriage. CMFCE serves as a clearinghouse and provides consultation to national, state and community leaders, and sponsors a website, e-newsletter, directory, and the Smart Marriages Conference—an annual summit of researchers, educators, clinicians, clergy, teachers, scholars, policy makers, journalists and the public interested in strengthening marriage. The conference also trains marriage and family educators. CMFCE is funded solely by the proceeds of its annual conference.

About the Institute for American Values

THE INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN VALUES, founded in 1987, is a private, nonpartisan organization devoted to research, publication, and public education on issues of family well-being and civil society. By providing forums for scholarly inquiry and debate, the Institute seeks to bring fresh knowledge to bear on the challenges facing families and civil society. Through its publications and other educational activities, the Institute seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship and policy making, bringing new information to the attention of policy makers in the government, opinion makers in the media, and decision makers in the private sector.

About the Religion, Culture, and Family Project

THE RELIGION, CULTURE, AND FAMILY PROJECT is a national research initiative whose purpose is to create scholarly resources aiding understanding of the relation of religion to family issues. It is funded by the Division of Religion of the Lilly Endowment, Inc. It has published a 10-book series with Westminster/John Knox and has begun a second series with William B. Eerdmans. It produces videos, holds conferences, and supports a variety of practical projects. The Director is Don Browning.

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