

## Good News for Marriage: The Marriage Movement States its Principles

A movement in support of marriage, which has been gaining strength among people who work with and care about marriage, resulted in the release of a Statement of Principles at the Smart Marriages conference in Denver this summer. Beyond politics, a broad-based, bipartisan marriage movement has been born.

More than one hundred prominent scholars and religious and civic leaders have pledged that by 2010, they will begin to reverse the pessimistic trends that surround marriage. "In this decade we will . . . reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing, so that each year more children will grow up protected by their own two happily married parents and more adults' marriage dreams will come true."

Diane Sollee, director of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, a co-sponsor of the statement, said, "Our current policies are based on acceptance of family breakdown and are focused on dealing with the aftermath and fallout. This statement leads the way to positive, preventable supports for marriage. It's filled with hope."

Signers of The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles include Arizona Rep. Mark Anderson, Robert Bellah, Francis Fukuyama, Jean Bethke Ehlstain, Amitai Etzioni, James Q. Wilson, Judith Wallerstein, Wade Horn, Maggie Gallagher, Mary Pipher, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Charles Ballard, Linda Waite, Father Richard John Neuhaus, Mary Ann Glendon, Robert M. Franklin, and William J. Doherty. Initial signers from Brigham Young University include Brent A. Barlow, Alan Hawkins, and Lynn D. Wardle.

The divorce revolution hasn't delivered on its promise of happier relationships and families, these experts and leaders warn: "Nostalgia . . . should not blind us to the hard truths discovered over the past thirty years: When marriages fail, children suffer.

. . . 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. 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 high rate of unwed childbearing produced greater equality and justice for women: "Because few single men become nurturing, dependable fathers, few unwed mothers enjoy the benefits of an equal parenting partnership."

Signers say support for marriage does not require "turning back the clock on desirable social change, promoting male tyranny, or tolerating domestic violence." Nor do they seek to denigrate single mothers: "Many of us in the marriage movement are single parents or the children of single parents. We know first hand how children suffer and parents struggle when marriages fail. . . . Few parents, single or married, dream of the day their daughters will become single mothers, or their sons turn into absent fathers." The goal is not to bring "shame and distress" but new "hope and support" to the nine out of ten Americans who choose to marry.

Drawing on the latest research and signed by diverse experts in social science, psychology, law, political science, relationships, therapy, and theology, The

Marriage Movement emphasizes that marriage is public and not just a private relationship, for several reasons.

- Children raised outside of intact marriages are more likely to suffer a wide variety of problems: to be poor, to have health problems and psychological disorders, to commit crimes and exhibit other conduct disorders, to have somewhat poorer relationships with both family and peers, to get less education, achieve less job success, and have more unstable family lives, even after controlling for race, income, and socioeconomic status.

- Additional consequences, these experts note, include "substantial public costs, paid by taxpayers, in the form of increased education, welfare, Medicare and Medicaid, day care, child support collection, foster care, and child protection services costs" in cases of divorce and unwed childbearing.

The signers detail a wide array of existing efforts as evidence that a growing, grass-roots marriage movement exists. They also make concrete recommendations, pointing to new ways that parents, families, faith communities, civic leaders, the legal profession, youth workers, marriage counselors, therapists and educators, and medical professionals, as well as federal, state, and local governments, can help strengthen marriage.

Marriage is not a divisive goal, but a shared aspiration. It is time, these leaders say, to focus the nation's attention on a new question: how "to rebuild the shattered dream of lasting love and to pass on a healthier, happier, and more successful marriage culture to the next generation."

The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles was prepared under the sponsorship of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, the Religion, Culture, and Family Project of the University of Chicago Divinity School, and the Institute for American Values.

The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles may be downloaded from <http://www.marriagemovement.org> mf