

What Next for the Marriage Movement?

WE COME TOGETHER at a time of crisis and opportunity to declare our intention to lead a marriage renaissance in the United States.

Since our first statement of principles in 2000, the marriage movement has learned much and grown stronger. Now, four years later, we see new opportunities and emerging crises for those who wish to recreate a marriage culture.

The crisis concerns marriage law on two fronts. First, many leading voices in the field of family law, including the American Law Institute, are today calling for changes intended to blur or eliminate entirely many of the legal distinctions between married and unmarried couples. We are troubled by this trend. We know from our experience with couples and families — and we know from a large and growing body of social science research — that marriage is distinctive and that marriage is worth protecting. We know that getting married and living together are not the same thing. We know that marriage is more than a private lifestyle option. We know that healthy marriages generate important benefits for adults, children, and society as a whole. For these reasons, we believe that family law should aim to recognize and strengthen, rather than ignore and weaken, marriage's vital public purposes.

The second legal challenge is today's great debate over whether or not to permit same-sex couples legally to marry. At issue is whether it is possible, and in what ways it could be possible, to reconcile two important social values — one value being the importance of equal dignity and treatment for all citizens, and the other being the importance of marriage as a vital, pro-child social institution. From the perspective of marriage and the marriage movement, the current controversy over equal marriage rights for same-sex couples is the most important social policy debate of our generation. It is also an issue on which we in the marriage movement currently hold divergent views.

The issues in this marriage law crisis are not simple. They are also frequently emotional and divisive, in part because they touch upon core social, religious, and personal values, and in part because they concern the very existence of a fundamental social institution.

The challenge for us in the marriage movement is to model and help to lead a deeper national conversation on possible solutions — a conversation that is civil

and democratic, that emphasizes first the well-being of children, and that aims toward the renewal of marriage in the United States. We in the marriage movement do not shrink from this challenge. We embrace it.

We also come together at a time of great opportunity. For years, many leading voices in our society have insisted that the decline of marriage in the United States is inevitable and irreversible. Nothing can be done to change the trend, they told us. High and probably steadily growing rates of divorce and unwed childbearing are here to stay, they insisted. The only realistic solution, they advised us, is to get over it, to get used to it, and to help everyone learn to live with cycles of coupling and decoupling, because such is the nature of the postmodern family.

Meanwhile, something new, surprising, and quite encouraging has apparently happened in our society. A series of recent independent reports suggests that this supposedly unstoppable trend of U.S. marital decline has largely stopped in its tracks. It now seems clear that the voices of passivity and despair have been wrong, or at the very least premature, in announcing the death of the stable, marriage-headed family. Divorce rates are now modestly declining.¹ Rates of unwed childbearing, after increasing sharply year after year for decades, have changed very little since 1995.² Teen pregnancy rates have declined dramatically.³ Rates of reported marital happiness, after declining steadily from the early 1970s through the early 1990s, have stabilized.⁴ Perhaps the most encouraging news is that, from 1995 to 2000, the proportion of African American children living in married-couple homes rose by about 4 percent.⁵ Among all U.S. children, the proportion living in married-couple homes has stabilized and may be slightly increasing.⁶

These changes are not large or definitive. But they are certainly suggestive. If they continue, they will change the lives of millions of U.S. children and families for the better. For the first time in several generations, those working for the renewal of marriage in the United States may have the wind at their backs.

This much we know: There is nothing inevitable about the decline of marriage in America. What will happen to this vital institution in the future is not an externally structured or preordained historical process. It is an event in freedom, dependent upon the conscious choices that we make as individuals and as a people.

The Marriage Movement

IN 2000, the 113 original signatories to *The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles* made this public commitment:

“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, and so that each year more adults’ marriage dreams will come true.”

Today, four years later, are we making good on that pledge? What have we achieved? What are our main challenges for the rest of this decade? What are our goals for the immediate future?

Of course, accurately determining what is causing a particular set of social changes is notoriously difficult. But it seems plausible that today’s more promising demographic news about marriage stems at least partly from value changes in the society, and that in turn, today’s more pro-marriage attitudes and values stem at least partly from the work of the grassroots marriage movement. It also seems plausible that the mushrooming number of marriage support programs in our society, offering skills-based marriage education to couples who want to improve their relationships, are contributing to stronger marriages and fewer divorces.

Only a few years ago, the number of grassroots efforts aimed at strengthening marriage was extremely small. Today, there are hundreds of such efforts, in communities across the country. One sign of this growth is that the first Smart Marriages conference for marriage educators and leaders, held in 1997, drew about 400 participants. The 2000 conference drew about 1,200 participants. The 2004 conference drew more than 1,800 participants from all over the globe.

Moreover, recent research suggests that these community-based marriage education and renewal programs are achieving measurable gains in reducing divorce and strengthening marriage. For example, a recent independent evaluation of clergy-led Community Marriage Policies, presently active in 186 U.S. cities, found that, while divorce rates in matched counties without CMPs declined by an average of 9.4 percent over the course of seven years, divorce rates in counties with CMPs declined by an average of about 17.5 percent over the same period of time.⁷

We are heartened by these and other impressive advances in the field of marriage education. We are pleased that researchers and family scholars increasingly recognize the importance of marriage. For example, describing what it calls the emergence of a “powerful consensus” among social scientists, the

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New York Times reports: “From a child’s point of view, according to a growing body of social research, the most supportive household is one with two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.”⁸

We are pleased that policy makers on both sides of the aisle increasingly realize that strengthening marriage is one effective strategy for reducing child and family poverty and other social problems. We are pleased that the Bush Administration has launched a Healthy Marriage Initiative aimed at strengthening marriage in low-income communities and improving the number and quality of community-based marriage programs. We are pleased to see bipartisan support for many state-level marriage initiatives. We are pleased that print and broadcast media journalists are paying more attention to the issue of marriage.

But our work is only beginning. The marriage movement is still being born. Our most difficult challenges lie ahead. The recent good news on marriage is tentative and faint. It could be — it might well be — soon reversed. While the research on the benefits of good marriages is definitive, much remains to be learned about improving marriage at the population level. Moreover, the United States still has what is probably the world’s highest divorce rate. The number of children living with cohabiting adults continues to climb. One-third of all U.S. children today are born to unmarried mothers, and most of these children soon lose their ties to their fathers. Millions of U.S. children, deprived of growing up with a mother and father who love their child and love each other, continue to suffer in myriad ways from this terrible social problem. So our task is great.

Whether we will ultimately succeed or fail — whether we will help to transform a divorce culture into a marriage culture — remains an open question.

What are our next steps?

Our immediate challenge is to take our fledgling social change movement to a higher level of capacity and competence. This task is complex. We are a diffuse, diverse, multi-faceted movement, bringing together conservatives and liberals, religious and non-religious people, activists and scholars. Moreover, there is no national headquarters. There is no central committee. No one person or group is in charge. Much of the vitality and creativity of our movement — much of the strength of any genuine social movement — flows from this diversity and decentralization.

But this strength can also be a weakness. Particularly now. This current period of crisis and opportunity — this vivid and precarious marriage moment that we live in — clearly calls us to a greater unity of action. It calls us to coordinate our efforts more effectively at the regional and national

levels. It calls us to invest more intellectual and material resources into identifying and shaping key national issues. It requires us to begin to speak in one voice to the nation as a whole. The time we live in requires our movement to become a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

In that spirit, and with that goal in mind, we today commit ourselves collectively to the following course of action.

Our Mission

WE UNITE around a vision of America where more children are raised in nurturing homes by their married mother and father, and where more adults enjoy mutually fulfilling and lifelong marriages.

Our Shared Goals through 2006

TO HELP make our vision a reality, we will work together as a united movement in the months ahead to achieve these seven goals:

One.

We will work with state legislators and our fellow citizens to win passage of new state laws across the country offering financial and other incentives, such as reduced marriage license fees, tax credits, and shorter waiting periods, to couples who choose to participate in pre-marriage education.

Two.

We will work with members of Congress and our fellow citizens to win passage of national legislation increasing federal funding for marriage education and support programs serving low-income communities, as a part of the reauthorization of the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, and we will work to encourage state governments to take advantage of those funds.

Three.

We will work with state and local officials, educators, and our fellow citizens across the country to win passage of new policies adding high-quality marriage and relationship education to the public school curriculum.

Four.

We will work with state legislators and our fellow citizens in selected states to reduce unnecessary divorce by reforming divorce laws, primarily by combining longer waiting periods for divorce with stronger provisions for family courts to refer couples to marriage education.⁹

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Five.

We will work with each other, and our fellow citizens, to create forums for thoughtful examination of the various possible legal and public policy solutions to the issue of same-sex unions, evaluating each proposed solution according to whether it would be likely to bring us closer toward or take us further away from our mission.¹⁰

Six.

To assist and guide us in achieving these shared goals, we today announce the formation of a Task Force on Marriage, composed of marriage leaders and accountable to the movement as a whole, as represented by the signatories to this Statement. The Task Force has three duties: First and foremost, to develop model legislation, direct our movement-wide legislative agenda, and monitor progress toward achieving our legislative goals; second, to evaluate and help to coordinate and improve the movement's public communications and public education strategies; and third, to encourage greater private philanthropic support for U.S. marriage programs and initiatives.

Seven.

We will work with each other, and with our colleagues and fellow citizens, to expand the number of leaders and participants in the marriage movement, recognizing that a social change movement that is not getting bigger is getting weaker, and recognizing that inclusiveness and a wide diversity of philosophies and approaches are essential strengths of our movement.

Our Sectoral Goals through 2006

THE BROAD, unifying goals stated above, while important and new, constitute only one dimension of our work. These movement-wide goals are strongly complemented and reinforced by a range of activities taking place in the eleven diverse areas of our movement.

Accordingly, we hereby declare the eighty-six goals of the various sectors of the marriage movement through 2006, as formulated by representatives of those sectors, and appreciated and supported by each signatory to this Statement.

Community Organizers

Community Organizers seek to unify communities around a common marriage vision and plan of action. Through their organizing, they strive to develop community-wide marriage standards; create local coalitions that foster support for marriage; forge pro-marriage alliances across institutions

and sectors; and identify key partners — political, business, government, religious, and civic leaders, members of the print and broadcast media, and others who can be catalysts for change.

Their goals through 2006 are:

1. Provide training for more local leaders in community organizing strategies.
2. Expand the number of communities who use organizing strategies.
3. Disseminate ways to use large public events to create media attention, attract more stakeholders, and seed cultural change.
4. Develop better funding strategies for local community organizing efforts.
5. Connect activated communities with one another across the nation.

Culture Changers

Culture Changers seek to shift cultural values in a pro-marriage direction. They believe that the most important thing we need to change is our minds.

Through publications, public speaking, media interviews, conferences, research, and other activities, they strive to persuade their fellow citizens on the benefits of marriage, the importance of marriage as a social and legal institution, the harmful consequences of divorce and unwed child-bearing, and the ingredients of successful marriages. They also strive to bring together the diverse sectors of the movement into a unified and more powerful whole.

Their goals through 2006 are:

6. Make the case that each child has a right to grow up with his or her own mother and father who love the child and love each other, and that supporting marriage is society's main way of giving children this right.
7. Make the case for the importance of marriage as a public and legally recognized and protected institution. In doing so, challenge the idea that public policy should treat marriage and cohabitation in the same way, and challenge the notion of marriage as only a private relationship between two individuals.

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8. Make the case for deeper how-to-support-marriage conversations in those sectors of society in which marriage is currently downplayed, ignored, or denigrated, including family law, health care, the arts and entertainment, philanthropy, and business.
9. Advocate for expanding the public's access to marriage education.
10. Advocate for including marriage education in public schools and colleges and universities.
11. Create new pro-marriage public service announcements, including those with celebrity spokespersons.
12. Expand the leadership of the marriage movement and deepen the movement's sense of collective mission and shared national goals.

Marriage Educators

Marriage Educators equip individuals and couples of all ages and relationship stages with the knowledge, practical skills, and attitudes that are necessary to form and sustain lasting, satisfying marriages. They seek to provide a road map of what to expect in the course of marriage and the behavioral skills to "do" marriage and other relationships more effectively. They also train lay leaders, clergy, and other professionals to deliver existing programs and to develop and test new ones.

Their goals through 2006 are:

13. Make marriage education widely available to all couples who seek it, with a special focus on low-income communities and communities of color.
14. Develop and disseminate effective, research-based programs suited for culturally diverse and low-income communities.
15. Develop strategies that will result in more and broader segments of the U.S. population seeking marriage education.
16. Increase the number of communities with access to user-friendly websites with information on local programs and connections to the larger marriage movement.
17. Expand marriage education services beyond traditional formats to incorporate the Internet and other media that will increase access to these services and attract a wider audience.

18. Disseminate successful strategies for building community partnerships with local businesses, faith communities, schools, organizations, and professional associations, thereby increasing community capacity to support marriage education and increasing community demand for marriage education.
19. Publish and disseminate models of effective program delivery, so that communities can be equipped quickly to launch marriage education activities.

Government Officials

Government Officials seek laws and public policies to strengthen marriage. They strive to allocate public funds for marriage programs; reorient social service delivery systems to promote healthy marriages; examine whether current policies recognize and support marriage; engage local communities to implement marriage programs; and use their public visibility to describe the benefits of healthy marriages, warn of the consequences of the weakening of marriage, and make the case for the importance of government action in strengthening marriage. They seek not only to remove marriage disincentives, but also to support marriage directly as a positive social good.

Their goals through 2006 are:

20. Provide support and technical assistance to integrate healthy marriage programs into policies and programs at all levels of government, and work to integrate healthy marriage programs into the broad array of support programs offered by federal, state, and local governments.
21. Advocate for increased federal funding for marriage programs, especially through TANF reauthorization.
22. Provide public funding for comprehensive community marriage initiatives.
23. Provide public funding to evaluate community marriage initiatives and marriage education programs, and disseminate widely the results of those evaluations.
24. Support a best practices approach to marriage education programs and community marriage initiatives.
25. Persuade the public and government officials at the state and local levels of the benefits of healthy marriages.

The proportion of American children living in married-couple homes has stabilized and may be slightly increasing.

26. Provide funding to develop both a cadre of personnel and a set of programs sufficient to build a permanent constituency for universal marriage education in the United States, if and when public funding for marriage education declines.

Legal Reformers

Legal Reformers are lawyers, judges, mediators, and others who point out the ways in which current marriage and divorce law works to undermine marriage; who work to oppose the legal trends toward the deinstitutionalization of marriage; and who advocate for specific marriage-supportive legal reforms. They advise state legislators; lobby; participate in drafting and reviewing proposed legislation; provide public officials and journalists with information on marriage and divorce law; and are often the marriage movement's liaisons with lawmakers and the legal profession.

Their goals through 2006 are:

27. Work with the broader marriage movement to begin a state-by-state campaign to lengthen and improve waiting periods for divorce, including measures to encourage marriage education.
28. Organize reform-minded legal professionals to write and issue a public statement on the rationale for legal reform, including a template for legislation aimed at reducing unnecessary divorce.
29. Integrate marriage education into the programs offered by family courts.
30. At a moment in U.S. history when developments in constitutional law may soon sweep away many of the traditional rationales for government involvement in family life, articulate new, durable rationales for the legal protection of marriage as a distinct institution.
31. Inform members of the legal profession about developments in the social sciences and in marriage education indicating that we as a society can and should reduce divorce and unmarried parenthood.
32. Inform lawmakers and the general public about the negative impact of current laws and judicial practices on the institution of marriage, and in doing so, suggest practical, achievable alternatives.
33. Make the case for the important role that family law can play in improving society — the law not only regulates and punishes, it also provides moral guidance, states community standards, and shapes institutions and social interactions.

34. Lead a dialogue within the marriage movement about a range of possible pro-marriage legal reform measures, including covenant marriage, collaborative divorce, making mutual consent the basis for divorce in long-term marriages and marriages with children, and requiring counseling before granting divorces in these situations.
35. Increase the institutional, personal, and financial resources committed to achieving marriage-supportive legal reform.
36. Advocate better state and federal collection of divorce rate statistics to enable researchers to measure more precisely the rate and impact of divorce.

Policy Analysts

Policy Analysts link government initiatives and other areas of the marriage movement. They strive to improve the design and implementation of publicly funded marriage programs; synthesize and disseminate relevant research findings through published reports, conferences, and press events; educate lawmakers, government officials, the media, and the general public about marriage and marriage policy; and craft and promote specific legislation and regulatory initiatives concerning marriage and child and family well-being.

Their goals through 2006 are:

37. Advocate for public funding for ongoing experimentation in program design and implementation in order to determine what marriage strategies work best for which populations, and at which stages of individual and couple development. Rigorously evaluate these programs.
38. Inform public officials and the general public on the benefits of marriage and marriage education.
39. Make the case for linking marriage and two-parent families to the public policy goals of reducing poverty and increasing child well-being.
40. Make the case that supporting marriage can reduce the public costs connected to income support and social service programs.
41. Advocate for public policies that make marriage education and other marriage support services available to low-income communities.
42. Help to build collaboration between leaders in the marriage movement and other groups who share the same overarching goals of child

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well-being and healthy relationships, but who are skeptical of the marriage agenda.

43. Engage individuals working in the area of marriage policy, but who are not currently associated with the marriage movement, as potential partners in developing policies to strengthen marriage.

Religious Leaders

Religious Leaders perform the great majority of U.S. weddings, conduct most of the premarital education, and are often the first professionals contacted when a marriage is in trouble. Most marriage mentor programs in the country operate within faith communities, and lay marriage leaders constitute the largest single group of workers in the marriage movement.

Clergy and other religious leaders can and increasingly do adapt tools from the social and behavioral sciences in their work with couples; collaborate across congregations in order to create community-wide standards for marriage preparation, education, and intervention; and as theologians and social critics, play a role in the public dialogue about marriage.

Their goals through 2006 are:

44. Expand high-quality premarital education programs within faith communities, and require all engaged couples to participate.
45. Make marriage education a regular part of programming within faith communities.
46. Incorporate marriage mentoring as a regular part of congregational life.
47. Enlist more clergy as leaders for marriage in all communities, including the African American community and other communities of color.
48. Widen the denominational scope in the marriage movement to embrace more mainstream and liberal Christian denominations, Jewish leaders and congregations, and other religious groups, including non-Western religions, that are not yet visible in the marriage movement.
49. Organize religious congregations into Community Marriage Policies and other community partnerships for offering premarital and marriage education and for speaking with a common voice for marriage.

50. Through reflection, critical dialogue, writing, and speaking, expand the theological analysis of the larger culture's values about marriage and social trends influencing marriage.
51. Work to institute community marriage policies more widely in communities across the United States.

Researchers

Researchers provide the scientific basis for the marriage movement. They examine the psychological, interpersonal, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of marriage; conduct basic research on the predictors of marital quality and stability; conduct applied research on the effectiveness of marriage education and other marriage-supportive initiatives; and inform the general public and societal leaders about current research findings.

Their goals through 2006 are:

52. Determine the value of marriage for different subsets of the population — who benefits most from marriage and how do they benefit?
53. Develop better knowledge about marriage formation and marriage success in communities of color.
54. Learn more about the ecology of successful marriage, in particular the role of kin networks and communities.
55. Develop a research-informed definition of marital success and examine the processes of marital success within different subsets of the population.
56. Measure the effects of public policy and public opinion on the stability and quality of marriage.
57. Determine the long-term effectiveness of current marriage education programs, especially for divorce prevention.
58. Determine the active ingredients in effective marriage education programs in order to define the core information and skills that should be included in every program.
59. Determine which content and delivery methods are most effective with specific subsets of the population, including low-income couples and couples of color.

One-third of all U.S. children today are born to unmarried mothers, and most of these children soon lose their ties to their fathers.

60. Evaluate the effectiveness of community-wide coalitions and programs, especially by tracking “hard” measures such as divorce rates, tax dollars saved, and decreased absenteeism at work.
61. Develop mentoring programs to encourage young scholars, especially scholars of color, to see the importance of this area of inquiry and to develop the skills for conducting high quality research.
62. Make current marriage research databases more widely available to scholars and researchers in training.
63. Develop better strategies for translating and disseminating basic and applied research findings to the general public.

Theoreticians

Theoreticians strive to articulate fundamental, underlying principles related to marriage and society. They critically evaluate the work of all the sectors of the marriage movement and propose ways for marriage activists to avoid overemphasizing any single area of activity. They emphasize that creating a marriage-supportive culture requires addressing countervailing cultural and economic forces. Through published books, articles, and special reports, theoreticians bring intellectual coherence to the marriage movement and disseminate its ideas into the larger culture.

Their goals through 2006 are:

64. Foster rigorous analysis of the marriage movement.
65. Issue joint statements on major marriage-related cultural issues.
66. Analyze current challenges to the goals of the marriage movement, including legal scholarship questioning the legitimacy of marriage as a legally recognized social institution.
67. Analyze and help to create forums for the thoughtful exploration of divisive issues facing the marriage movement, including same-sex unions.
68. Provide cogent arguments on the meaning and importance of marriage.
69. Create a more visible presence for theory and scholarship at national conferences such as Smart Marriages.

Therapists

Therapists help individuals and couples preserve and improve relationships during times of stress, pain, and confusion. Therapists in the marriage movement believe that while every marriage may not be salvageable, many and maybe even most marriages that run into difficulties have potential to become healthy, safe, and secure. Exploring this potential is a primary responsibility of a marriage therapist. While therapists must respect the autonomy of their clients' decision-making, therapist neutrality regarding marriage may not be consistent with research on best practices in couples therapy, nor is it always in the best interest of couples and families.

Therapists in the marriage movement therefore work to educate their colleagues that neutrality as a therapeutic stance may interfere in the successful resolution of marital distress and may actually foster hopelessness. Many therapists in the marriage movement are also involved in marriage education and research, and many strive to create a more marriage-supportive environment in the therapeutic community through writing, speaking, and training.

Their goals through 2006 are:

70. Educate the therapeutic community at large on the benefits of marriage and work to improve negative professional attitudes toward the marriage movement and marriage education.
71. Clarify that the standard of professional competency for all therapists who work with couples must include knowledge of the communication and conflict resolution skills essential to healthy marital functioning, knowledge of the technical skills unique to couple treatment, and knowledge of the impact of individual treatment on married couples with a wide range of personal difficulties.
72. Increase attention to the role of marriage education by the therapeutic community as an important adjunctive service for distressed couples.
73. Create visible communities of therapists who are pro-marriage and who are developing educational models for working with distressed couples.
74. Improve the training of therapists on the knowledge and skills for providing effective premarital and marriage education, and for incorporating marriage skills education into couple therapy.
75. Make best practices marital therapy that supports use of marriage education as an adjunct widely available, including in low-income and communities of color.

Whether we will ultimately succeed or fail — whether we will help to transform a divorce culture into a marriage culture — remains an open question.

76. Research the impact of marital therapy and marriage education for distressed couples. Explore which mode, therapy or education, is appropriate at what time and for whom, with the understanding that many and perhaps most distressed couples will do best with a combination of therapy and marriage education.

Youth Educators

Youth Educators equip young people with the knowledge, relationship skills, and attitudes to navigate successfully their current relationships, choose a spouse wisely, and eventually develop healthy, lasting marriages. They develop curricula and programs for schools, colleges and universities, and faith communities; train teachers to address topics such as love, marriage, and relationships that have not historically been taught in the classroom; consult with parents and community organizations; assist in grant proposals; and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs.

Their goals through 2006 are:

77. Develop and issue reports on research-based and age-appropriate best practices for youth relationship education.
78. Participate in longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of youth relationship programs and determine how this education impacts later marital quality and stability.
79. Develop and evaluate comprehensive youth programs that include character development, relationship and communication skills, partner selection skills, realistic marriage expectations, and common problems and solutions in marriage.
80. Pay special attention to the needs of youth who are at risk because of a "poverty of connections."
81. Work to transform the current sex education paradigm in the U.S. from a narrow health focus to a broader relationship focus.
82. Increase the number of locations, including schools, religious settings, and youth agencies, where young people learn relationship skills.
83. Increase public awareness of the benefits of teaching relationship and marriage skills to students in the schools.
84. Enlist the support of parents as advocates for, and collaborators in, the teaching of relationship and marriage courses in the schools.

85. Encourage and inspire marriage courses at the undergraduate level. Develop curricula for college students that can be disseminated to interested instructors.
86. Engage young people themselves as citizens and advocates in their families and communities for healthy relationships and marriages.

Conclusion

WE COME TOGETHER at a time of crisis and opportunity to lead a marriage renaissance in the United States.

Why? Because we can do no other. A society in which up to half of all marriages fail, and in which millions of parents fail to marry, is a failing society.

Why? Because a renaissance is possible. For the first time in at least three decades, our society as a whole seems to be rediscovering the importance of marriage.

Why? Because we know that we must try. Most of us know in our hearts that the divorce and unwed childbearing revolutions have failed. Many of us have been a part of these trends. Very few of us want our children to be a part of them.

Why? Because the times demand it. What we do during this crucial “marriage moment” in our national life will strongly and perhaps decisively shape marriage as an institution for the foreseeable future.

Why? Because we humans are pair-bonding creatures who need and deeply desire to love and be loved — erotically, unselfishly, and permanently.

Why? Because every child deserves to grow up with her own married mother and father who are committed for life to the child and to each other.

Just as we are, pledged to our cause and buoyed by hope, we sincerely invite our fellow citizens to join us. We welcome — we need — your voices, energy, wisdom, and best ideas.

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How to Join the Marriage Movement

HOW DO YOU JOIN a social movement? There are many ways, but you can start by contacting the organization from which you received this Statement. They can give you information and help answer your questions. This Statement was provided to you by: Institute for American Values.

For an overview of the marriage movement, you can also visit the Marriage Movement website (www.marriagemovement.org). Or you can contact any of the signatories to this Statement. Or you can contact the Task Force on Marriage's executive secretary, Sara Butler at sara@americanvalues.org.

Please do contact us. We are only as strong as the diverse individuals — mostly volunteers — who make up our ranks. We value and need your help in changing our country for the better.

Endnotes

1. Joshua R. Goldstein, "The Leveling of Divorce in the United States," *Demography* 36, no. 3 (August, 1999): 409-414.
2. Joyce A. Martin, et al., "Births: Final Data for 2002," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 52, no. 10 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, June 25, 2003): 8-9.
3. *Ibid.*, 5.
4. *General Social Surveys, 1973-2002* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago). See also Paul R. Amato, et al., "Continuity and Change in Marital Quality Between 1980 and 2000," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 65 (2003): 1-22.
5. Allen Dupree and Wendell Primus, *Declining Share of Children Lived with Single Mothers in the Late 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 15, 2001).
6. Sharon Vandivere, Kristen Anderson Moore, and Martha Zaslow, *Children's Family Environments: Findings from the National Survey of America's Families* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2001). Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson, *Changes in Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Evidence from the 2002 National Survey of America's Families* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, August 15, 2003).
7. Paul J. Birch, et al., "Assessing the Impact of Community Marriage Policies on U.S. County Divorce Rates," *Family Relations* 53 (in press, 2004).
8. Blaine Hardin, "2-Parent Families Rise After Change in Welfare Laws," *New York Times*, August 12, 2001.
9. As we envision this reform, longer waiting periods would not apply in cases in which there is a domestic violence protection order.
10. Our mission statement is not intended to endorse or reject particular public policy proposals regarding same-sex unions. Instead, we seek here to express as clearly as possible the broad social change goal to which we in the marriage movement are committed. How best to achieve that goal when it comes to public policies for same-sex unions poses issues on which people of goodwill can disagree, on which we in the marriage movement currently hold diverse views, and about which we believe that we, and the nation as a whole, should have civil and serious discussion.

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About this Statement

T^{WENTY-FIVE MARRIAGE LEADERS} and scholars gathered in April of 2003 in Osprey Point, Maryland, to begin the discussions that led to this Statement. Afterward, a coordinating team led by Jared Anderson of the University of Minnesota, David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values, and William Doherty of the University of Minnesota evaluated the results of the Osprey Point meeting and, as a next step, prepared a questionnaire on the status and future of marriage and the marriage movement in the United States. They sent the questionnaire to 209 persons, selected by the coordinating team to represent the breadth and diversity of today's marriage movement, and received written responses from 126 of them. In March of 2004, 55 of these respondents also attended a two-day meeting in New York City to review the results of the survey and to analyze and critique a first draft of this Statement. A second draft of the Statement was circulated at the 2004 Smart Marriages conference in Dallas, Texas, as well as to the original 209 marriage leaders, for review and comment. The goal of this process has been to produce a Statement that accurately reflects the marriage movement in both its unity and diversity, capturing as fully as possible the vision and goals of today's marriage leaders.

For their assistance and support in this project, the coordinating team wishes to thank the William H. Donner Foundation, Maggie Gallagher, Paul J. Klaassen, Arthur E. Rasmussen, and the other staff colleagues, leaders, and financial supporters of their respective organizations. The coordinating team is also deeply grateful to the leaders of today's marriage movement, whose idealism and hard work are doing so much to help our country, and who are both the subjects and authors of this Statement.

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