



# Diocese of Springfield

65 Elliot Street - P.O. Box 1730  
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## Office of the Bishop

September 15, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the document, *Faithful Citizenship*, issued last year by the American Bishops, there was a reminder about the rights and responsibilities we have as Americans.

*"One of our greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life. Everyone can and should participate...to have their voices heard on issues that affect their communities."*

In the civil sphere, our rights are balanced with our responsibilities – the citizenry has the responsibility to enter the civil arena, the responsibility to engage in civil debate, the responsibility to let opposing viewpoints be heard, the responsibility to vote for individuals and issues that provide society with positive direction.

Recently in Massachusetts, the entire citizenry has found one of its responsibilities taken over by four people. When the Supreme Judicial Court, by a vote of 4 to 3, redefined the age-old meaning of marriage, the citizenry were not consulted. If the matter had been put to a vote, perhaps the citizens of Massachusetts would have agreed with the Court's definition of marriage or perhaps not – but the citizens were never given a say.

Now an opportunity arises for people to have their say. A new Constitutional amendment is being proposed that would uphold the age-old definition of marriage as between one man and one woman. Some will support it; some will support the Court. But at least the opportunity to hear the voice of the people can be offered.

For the Amendment to be discussed and voted upon, however, several steps are necessary:

- enough valid voters' signatures must be gathered on a petition to have such a vote.
- fifty members of the legislature must act twice to endorse such a vote.
- the Amendment must be put on the 2008 ballot to be voted up or down.

I endorse the petition drive; I hope you will as well.

The challenge before us is to gather 120,000 valid voters' signatures by November 23<sup>rd</sup>. Copies of the petition are being made available in all parishes along with an introductory brochure on the new Marriage Amendment. I urge everyone who is registered to vote in Massachusetts to sign the petition, and, so, open up an opportunity to discuss the issue in depth. I would also encourage you to take additional petitions home and have other registered voters sign them. Because of stringent procedures for validating petitions, you are encouraged to have only one signature on each petition sheet. Leave the signed petitions with the parish so that they may be submitted before the deadline.

The petition is a vehicle for the people of Massachusetts *"to have their voices heard on issues that affect their communities."* It asks simply for democracy in action, for the voice of the people to be heard. By signing the petition, we're endorsing the right of the people to have their say.

After a successful petition drive, real discussion will come reflecting on marriage, on its natural, civil and religious meaning. But in our society that full discussion can only take place if the petition drive succeeds. I pray it does.

With every best wish,

In Christ,

Most Rev. Timothy A. McDonnell  
Bishop of Springfield