

Gathering Marriage Petitions: Suggestions for Parish Contacts

GOAL: Educate parishioners on the sacredness of marriage and the need to legally protect the institution, and urge their participation in a signature drive to put the issue on the ballot.

STRATEGY: Choose three weekends (**the earlier the better**, thus preferably Sept. 10-11, 17-18, and 24-25) to take three easy steps:

First weekend—distribute Informational Brochure;

Second weekend—distribute Bishop’s Message;

Third weekend—allow Marriage Petitions to be circulated for signatures.

Preliminary Notes

The following action plan is offered as a suggestion, recognizing that each parish is free to choose those elements deemed most suitable for that parish.

For example, if these weekends are not possible in your parish, the official period for turning in signatures is Sept. 21 to Nov. 23. Thus, a parish can choose any series of weekends up until Nov. 12-13 (to allow time for processing the petitions) to carry out these steps, remembering, again, **the earlier the better**.

Important: A parish contact should be designated to coordinate this effort in the parish. Catholic Citizenship will provide training and support to ensure that every parish contact will have a clear understanding of the process. **Provide names of parish contacts to the Massachusetts Catholic Conference (617-367-6060)**, which will forward the names to Catholic Citizenship.

SUGGESTED PLAN

First Weekend (Sept. 10 & 11 or Other):

1. Before the weekend, **obtain the brochure “The New Marriage Amendment: An Introduction for Catholics.”** A master can be downloaded from www.macathconf.org. Copies may be available for pickup in your diocese, so call Catholic Citizenship at 617-755-7668 for more information about that option.
2. Before the weekend, **produce enough copies of the brochure** and stuff in all the bulletins or otherwise prepare for handing out separately at all the Masses (recruiting volunteers etc.).
3. Before the weekend, **provide a bulletin blurb about the brochure** to the parish bulletin editor. Suggested bulletin blurbs are attached.
4. On the first weekend itself, **distribute the brochure** either as a bulletin insert or by handing it out separately at all the weekend Masses.
5. Mention the brochure during the **pulpit announcements**.

6. **Homily reflections** on the importance of defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman would be extremely helpful too, on this or any of the other two following weekends.

Second Weekend (Sept. 17 & 18 or Other):

1. Before the weekend, **obtain the Message from your Bishop** urging Catholics to support the marriage signature drive. A master will be available online at www.macathconf.org or your diocesan website. In addition, copies may be available for pickup in your diocese. Call the Massachusetts Catholic Conference at 617-367-6060 for more information about this option.
2. Before the weekend, **produce enough copies of the Bishop’s Message** and stuff in all the bulletins or otherwise prepare for handing out separately at all the Masses (recruiting volunteers etc.).
3. Before the weekend, **provide a bulletin blurb referring to the Bishop’s Message** and giving advance notice of the signature drive to be held the following week to the parish bulletin editor. Suggested blurbs are attached.
4. On the second weekend itself, **distribute copies of the Bishop’s Message** either as a bulletin insert or by handing it out separately at all the weekend Masses.
5. Mention the Bishop’s Message during the **pulpit announcements** and
6. Consider giving a **reflection on marriage** during the homily if not provided the previous week.

Third Weekend (Sept. 24 & 25 or Other)

1. Before the weekend, **arrangements must be made for acquiring blank signature petitions** for your parish. The Secretary of State will issue the official version on Wednesday, Sept. 21, and make available a limited number of hard copies along with an electronic version that can be downloaded and reproduced. The electronic master will be published online at www.macathconf.org. One option is to download the electronic master and make exact copies (two-sided on white 8 ½ by 11 paper) for circulation. Stacks of hard copies also will be distributed by VoteOrnMarriage.org and Catholic Citizenship to various locations around the state as another pickup option. For more information about this option call Catholic Citizenship at 617-755-7668.
2. **Plan the number of copies of blank petition sheets to circulate in your parish** by taking into account the number of bulletins printed for a weekend or the average weekend attendance of adults at your Masses. Also, VoteOrnMarriage.org encourages just one signature per petition sheet, to minimize the possibility of several signatures on a sheet being disqualified if for some reason that sheet is faulty (extraneous mark, etc.). Yet, please note that collecting sheets with multiple signatures is entirely acceptable.
3. Before the weekend, **provide a bulletin blurb to the parish bulletin editor announcing the petition drive**.

SUGGESTED BULLETIN BLURBS

First Week: In a couple of weeks, you will have the opportunity to sign a petition after Mass in favor of a new constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman. The Catholic Bishops back this effort and urge your support. The people have the right to vote on this matter. Make sure to take a copy of an informational brochure being distributed at all the Masses this weekend to learn more about the upcoming signature drive.

Second Week: Our parish is supporting a new petition drive to bring the marriage issue to the people. (Arch)Bishop _____ has issued a special message on this important matter. He urges your support for the marriage petition drive that our parish will be holding next week. Copies of the Bishop's message will be available at all the Masses this weekend. Please read this important message and share it with your family and friends.

Third Week: This weekend, our parish is participating in an important petition drive to put the marriage issue on the ballot. Anyone registered to vote in Massachusetts may sign the petition. The Catholic Bishops back the petition drive and urge your support. If successful, the effort would start the process for adding a new amendment to our state constitution defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman.

SOME TALKING POINTS FOR HOMILETIC REFLECTION

- The lifelong bond between one man and one woman deserves special recognition, not because a husband and wife are any better than anyone else, but because this relationship uniquely serves the common good. While not perfect, it is the best guarantee of a stable society. It promotes mutual respect between men and women and it ensures for children a mother and a father.
- John Paul II helped us see more clearly the role that marriage, understood as the union of man and woman, has in God's plan. The marital bond between man and woman mirrors the inner being of God and reflects Christ's love for humanity. If we ignore or downplay the gift of complementarity between the sexes, we will miss all that God wants to reveal to us.
- The institution of marriage predates government and religion. No judge, legislator, or public official has the right to redefine it. Catholics should join other concerned citizens to defend it.
- Our regard for the marriage bond between man and woman has nothing to do with hate, prejudice or disrespect for anyone else. Every human being is a child of God, deserving our love and appreciation. Yet, our duty to care for all people does not require us to accept the redefinition of marriage since the common good is at stake.
- Because of the 2003 ruling by our state supreme court creating same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, public schools have been mandated to promote same-sex marriage as a public good, and religious institutions are being forced to recognize same-sex marriages in their institutional policies. This contradicts the common good.
- As citizens, we have the right to determine how our laws define marriage, and we can exercise that right by participating in the process to amend our state constitution. In the last few years 18 states have adopted constitutional amendments affirming marriage as the union between one man and one woman. This fall, a petition drive to enact a similar amendment in Massachusetts is underway. The Catholic Bishops back this effort and urge your support. If you are registered to vote, please take the opportunity to sign a petition asking for the people's right to vote in 2008. Your support is critical!
- Getting involved is a responsibility of faithful citizenship. We are called to make a difference in the world, no matter how counter-cultural our convictions may be. It's time to stand up, lovingly but firmly, for what is right.

4. On the third weekend itself, have volunteers available to **distribute and collect the petitions**. Volunteers could hand out petition sheets as people come in (or have them stuffed in the bulletins to be handed out) before Mass, along with pens, and to collect the signed sheets after Mass. Petitions and/or pens could also be placed in the pews. Another method is to set up tables with blank petitions and pens in a convenient location, such as in the vestibule, church hall (during coffee and donuts, for example), or at the different church entrances. Finally, signatures can be collected outside the Church by volunteers at each entrance with petition sheets on clipboards. These last 2 methods often reduce the number of signatures you are able to collect due to the length of time people have to wait to sign up. However some parishes are able to overcome this issue and are very successful.

5. Before each Mass, **set up early enough** before other parishioners arrive and to be able to allow parishioners to obtain/sign petitions beforehand.
6. Remind parishioners during the **pulpit announcements** about the petition drive.
7. After Mass, **collect and report on the number of signed petitions**. Count the number of signatures. Parish contacts will be provided with a fax number by Catholic Citizenship for faxing a report indicating the parish name, town and total number of signatures gathered.
8. **Arrange to bring signed petitions to the nearest collection site**. That information can be obtained from VoteOnMarriage.org or Catholic Citizenship.

Contact Information

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Catholic Citizenship Tel: 617 755-7668
 Fax: 617 507-8263
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Catholic Citizenship Diocesan Coordinators

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VoteOnMarriage.org Tel: 617 795-2667
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