



FUTURE OF THE FAMILY COMMISSION

Notes from Meeting #3 – May 5, 2016

The third meeting of the Commission was held on May 5, 2016, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was attended by the following members of the Commission:

1. Secretary Eloise Anderson, Chair
2. Dr. Sarah Campbell
3. Ms. Rachel Campos-Duffy
4. Mr. Delvyn Crawford
5. Mr. Mikel Holt
6. Archbishop Jerome ListECKi
7. Ms. Alicia Manning
8. Ms. Greta Munns
9. Mr. Jeff Pralle

Mr. Jim Kacmarcik was unable to attend.

The meeting was conducted by staff from Credens LLC, and supported by staff from Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Meeting agenda, expert and other presentation slides and other material handed out separately are incorporated here as reference, but have not been appended to these notes. The notes are organized in the following manner:

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Opening Remarks

DCF Secretary Eloise Anderson officially opened the 3rd meeting with the following remarks:

1. This meeting is subject to Wisconsin's open records law.
2. Secretary Anderson welcomed and thanked the commissioners, and hoped they have been thinking about the issues of this Commission.
3. Archbishop ListECKI distributed "The Joy of Love" to commissioners. Published last month, the book shares the results of Pope Francis' international synod on family life. The Archbishop noted that this book includes reflections from Catholics around the world, and that the first five chapters are about the stability and transcendence of marriage, making it relevant to this Commission's purpose.

Facilitated Discussion

Question: What factors influence and challenge the formation and sustainability of healthy families?

Due to a last minute cancellation of the speaker on this topic, a facilitated discussion held on the topic yielded the following factors and trends as identified by Commissioners (not prioritized):

1. **Religion and beliefs:** Differences in religion, beliefs, and spirituality or world views make challenges faced by a family more difficult, particularly when raising children together. A lack of hope can occur even when faith, religion and beliefs are shared.
2. **Economic circumstances:** Adjusting to changes in economic circumstances creates significant stress for spouses and can lead to conflict.
3. **Personal Introspection:** It is not easy to look inward and be unselfish, nor to understand the sacrifice it takes to remain committed in a family.
4. **Childhood Experiences:** A person's exposure to marriage and the family culture in which a person was raised (single parent, multigenerational, etc.) affects how that person views family life.
 - One's upbringing affects how one views work and poverty. For example, childhood experiences vary depending on whether their parents worked, whether the parents married for love or for necessity.
5. **Immigrant Families:** Perspectives on poverty tend to vary between immigrant and non-immigrant families, and this can lead to different economic expectations of a couple.
6. **Culture:** There is much cultural variation regarding sexual education and generational shifts regarding the value of getting married after a teen pregnancy.
 - Is the issue of absent fathers more of an economic issue than a social issue?
7. **Family Planning:** It matters how parents arrive at parenthood. There is a difference between parents who planned to be married and have children, vs. those who became parents because they did not have access to family planning. Lack of family planning means "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail."
8. **View on Marriage and Sex:** Marriage is no longer viewed as a lifetime commitment and lifelong marriages are looked down upon. We have created a selfish society. Sex is no longer reserved for marriage. It is easy to change partners and easy to get a divorce.
9. **Father Figure:** A strong father figure is not evident today. One man can have children with multiple mothers and is therefore not a strong father figure for a single family. This is equally applicable to

strong mother roles, too. Many factors will fall into place with a strong and positive father figure, but strong mothers are also needed.

10. **Faith and Marriage:** The common bond of faith in marriage is not as strong as it once was.
11. **Affordable Daycare:** Students who get pregnant in college tend not to return to college. The lack of affordable daycare means young moms cannot go to class, and their upward economic mobility is compromised because they can't graduate.
12. **Support Network:** Especially for foster children, there is a lack of people's stake in each other and they do not have access to "go-to" support of in times of struggle, making derailments worse.
13. **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE):** ACEs accentuate trauma, make it more challenging to have a sustainable healthy family because personal attachments become more difficult, and there is low "social capital".
14. **Social Isolation:** In the context of a robust civil society, social isolation vs. connectivity are important factors for a healthy family. Regardless of economic status, it is difficult for couples to stay married and have children. Due to increased economic mobility today, couples have family spread all over the world; this increases social isolation. Immigration or significant geographical relocation makes it difficult for families to create their emotional safety nets (beyond government support) in the community.
15. **Education:** The level of parents' education affects the investment parents make in their children's education, and their expectations about their children going to college. For example, if both parents are college-educated, they automatically expect their children to go to college.
16. **Economic Factors:** "You may marry for love but you can't eat love." Economic situations place considerable stress on families, and they particularly change as children are born. Varying expectations of each partner about finances are accentuated when they have children.
17. **Religion or ethics:** if there is strong religion or ethics, self-policing within a family is more common. When couples vary in their strength of faith, it can be challenging to parent.
18. **Communitarianism:** America's culture of "rugged individualism" means self-determination, but we forget about communitarianism (solidarity with all other beings).
19. **Health Issues:** Challenges with physical and mental health can have a polarizing impact on families – they create a lot of tension for families or bring them together and cause them to think beyond themselves.
 - There is a societal deficiency in understanding the factors that affect mental health and its impact on families and cost.
20. **Addiction:** Alcohol, drug and pornography addictions leads to physiological changes, and all addictions affect the family.
21. **Role Models:** in traditional heterosexual families, there are two roles model, one for each gender. With an increase in single parents, there is an absence of one of the two important gender role models.
22. **Television & Entertainment:** TV culture today exploits sex, and promotes viewing sex as a recreational sport. There is a trend towards degrading and dumbing down men and fathers in entertainment. Single parenthood is glorified.
23. **Technology:** As technology increasingly replaces manual labor, it reduces the earning potential of men and makes it impossible for manual laborers to support a family.
24. **Superficial Solutions:** Widespread pharmaceutical use teaches us to rely on drugs when things go bad. If something goes wrong, we take a pill instead of addressing the root causes.

25. **Social Stigma:** Women, not just men, have children with multiple partners but do not face the same stigma as men do.
26. **Readiness for Marriage:** Increasingly, people see romance as a sufficient reason to get married, regardless of their readiness for a successful marriage. More work is needed to get people ready for marriage.
 - Couples don't have conversations about finances before getting married and thus bring different financial assumptions and goals to the relationship. Differences in how couples save and spend money are a common reason for marital disagreements.
 - The decline of Judeo-Christian faiths and "Christmas Phenomenon": Couples get married without knowing each other well enough, and discover their differences when their first Christmas together comes around.
27. **Cost of Raising Children:** The cost of children's basic needs is out of reach for many people.
28. **Social Norms:** Society frowns on families of more than one or two children, despite the fact that we need more kids to take care of aging parents.
29. **Role of Men:** Society has not looked at men historically as having a key role in family (for example, women typically are favored in child custody cases).

Expert Presentation: Joseph Price and Brad Wilcox

Prof. Joseph Price, Associate Professor of Economics, Brigham Young University and **Dr. Brad Wilcox**, Director of National Marriage Project, University of Virginia and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies (authors of *Strong Families, Prosperous States: Do Healthy Families Affect the Wealth of States?*) spoke to the Commission about their research into the benefits of marriage, and why marriage matters. Their detailed presentation slides are available at: <http://www.dcf.wi.gov/familycommission/meeting-notes.htm> .

Introduction

Social science and medical research show that children who are raised by their married, biological parents enjoy better outcomes. One woman putting a child up for adoption can have a "million-dollar" impact, as it leads to successes across families and generations.

Four outcomes that influence state politics are affected by marriage rates:

1. Economic growth
2. Child poverty
3. Family median income
4. Upward income mobility (the American Dream).

States need to review / renew the economic, policy-related, civic and cultural foundations of marriage and family life for the 21st century.

HOW marriage matters

1. If society could go back to 1980 levels of marriage, national GDP would be higher, child poverty rates would be lower, and family median income would be higher.

2. WI is #19 among states in the U.S. for the share of children living with married parents (70%). If WI enjoyed 1980 levels of married parenthood, GDP would be 3.2% higher, child poverty would be 12% lower, median family income would be about 7.4% higher (Slide 13).
3. Economic growth, child poverty, family income and the American Dream are all affected by the health of the family in Wisconsin.

WHY marriage matters

1. Men settle down when they get married, and marriage motivates men to work more (Slide 18).
2. Married families have more money to manage and manage it more prudently, due to economies of scale, income pooling, higher savings rates, greater family support, more long-term stability (Slide 20).
3. Children from intact married families are more likely to flourish and acquire the human capital needed to graduate from college and be gainfully employed (Slide 22).
4. Teenagers and young men from intact married families are less likely to commit crime or end up in jail, leaving government with lower public safety and security costs, and greater upward mobility (Slide 24).

The States of Our Unions

1. Northern states have stronger and more stable families; southern states have less stable families (Slide 30).
2. States with low levels of education or median income for men without a college education are most affected by retreat from marriage (Mississippi, Georgia); states with high level of education and median income for men without a college education are least affected (Minnesota and New Hampshire) (Slide 31).
3. States with middle or low levels of education, but high degree of cultural conservatism are most resistant to retreat from marriage (Idaho, South Dakota, Utah) (Slide 32).
4. Both structural and cultural factors explain why some states are more successful in resisting the nationwide retreat from marriage (New Hampshire and Minnesota, Idaho and Utah) (Slide 33).

Recommendations

1. Reform TANF, SNAP and Medicaid to minimize the marriage penalty. Public policy should “do no harm” to marriage, especially for low-income families; 40% of American families receive government benefits, but many benefits penalize marriage.
2. Expand vocational education and apprenticeship programs. Most Americans will not get a college degree, and we need to improve economic prospects of Americans from working-class communities. Wisconsin’s Career Academies and Youth Apprenticeship program are steps in the right direction.
3. Invest in families because raising children is expensive. Expand child tax credit to \$2500 and encourage investments in future workers and taxpayers.
4. Expand civic and cultural supports for marriage. Promote the “success sequence” of finishing school, working, marrying and then becoming a parent. Concentrate this campaign on men with lower education.
5. Take cues from the success of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Q & A Discussion with the Experts

1. The “success sequence” is best; but how do we help those that fall out of the sequence?
2. Adoption rates are very low; adoption could help with unwanted pregnancies.

3. Dating has shifted from being about social skills and meeting people to being more about sex.
4. A legal marriage brings specific impacts—joint commitment, legal rights—that no other relationship does.
5. Can having children out of wedlock, which is evidence that you had sex outside of marriage, become unlawful?
6. Civil changes will require the church, media and civic institutions to reshape the message of the “success sequence,” and have a positive influence.

Reflections

Following the expert presentation, the Commissioners reflected individually on the discussion and shared their thoughts as follows (not prioritized):

1. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reform is needed.
2. A marriage license is expensive, and has different cost in different counties.
3. We need to focus on the “success sequence” by encouraging cultural change and vocational training.
 - The “success sequence” has strong evidence – how should we begin meaningful conversations about it? It is often seen as a binary issue (on a success sequence or not) – in reality, it is a continuum, and regardless of where individuals and families are on that continuum, there are benefits in moving towards the “sequence.”
 - We need to meet people where they are, even if they are not on the “success sequence.” There is room to be gracious to each other if we can come together about the sequence.
4. How do we approach unplanned pregnancy? Options include prevention, focus on adoption as a viable alternative, and leading those who are pregnant on a road to marriage.
5. Minnesota and Wisconsin are very similar in many respects, yet have significantly different outcomes re: families. Examine what makes Minnesota different: Is it cultural? Industrial? Jobs creation? Policy?
Comments included:
 - Milwaukee’s economic base is manufacturing; Minnesota’s economic base is agricultural movement and trade. As a city, Minneapolis does not have much competition, while Milwaukee competes with Chicago. Milwaukee has a large refugee population from southern Africa, which tends to be Christian, while Minneapolis has Northern African population, which tends to be Muslim. Milwaukee has always been an ethnically segregated city, unlike Minneapolis.
6. Encourage a cultural shift around healthy sexual relationships. We strive for them, and still a lot of people are having sex but not healthy relationships.
7. We need to increase the number of vocational schools. What can be done to start kids on a vocational path earlier? How do we deal with the stigma of vocational training and careers? How do we address parents’ expectations re: vocational training?
8. How can we find consensus on political strategy re: cultural influences?
9. If we can’t influence culture, then policies should “do no harm” to marriage.
10. How can the state help de-stigmatize adoption.?

11. Pornography among young people distorts their perceptions of sex. Young children have easy access to pornography through cell phones.
12. Stronger families lead to safer streets. How can we raise awareness that healthy families can reduce crime?
13. Despite pop cultural references, two parents are necessary, not just one.
14. Family is the foundation of the state's prosperity; how can we educate youth about the structure and roles of family?
15. How can we frame the public debate in a manner that helps increase / inspire the "demand" for marriage?
16. The teen pregnancy rate has gone down but the unwed pregnancy rate has not.
17. We need to support the long-term costs/benefits of marriage.
18. We need to encourage and support new parents—would that help young parents stay together?
19. More qualified foster homes are needed because the foster care system is already overburdened. Let's consider the costs to the kids that never find a permanent family. How should we handle worst case scenarios when kids "age-out" with no foster family or close ties?
20. Economics is key. In order to influence marriage rates, poor men need access to economic success through skilled training since women don't marry men without jobs.
21. We need to emphasize education for men, especially young men. Math is essential for success in our society. We need to quit making kids and people afraid of math (algebra, trigonometry and geometry).
22. The government has never invested in programs that support a married man in the house.

Prioritized Summary Issues

After the above reflection sharing, the Commissioners identified key barriers / challenges / problems that they found relevant for the day’s topic, listed in the 1st column in the table below. These barriers were grouped into Summary Issues, presented in the middle column.

Lastly, each Commissioner voted for his / her top four (4) priorities related to the Summary Issues (total = 32 votes from 8 Commissioners present for voting; one Commissioner had to leave early without voting), shown in the last column.

These priorities are preliminary, and will be reviewed by the Commissioners in future meetings.

Table. Prioritized Summary Issues

Key barriers / challenges / problems	Summary Issue	Votes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is not enough focus on men, whether married and single. 2. Current government programs and support mostly focus on women, and not on men. 3. Proficiency in mathematics is lacking, though it is essential for success in society. 4. Men without college education have insufficient opportunities for economic progress. 5. Work is not viewed as something that confers dignity, money and personal self-esteem. 6. There are not enough work opportunities that provide sufficient income for high school kids and convicts after prison release. 	Economics	6
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. TANF policies currently have marriage penalties, and not much “credit” for forming and sustaining healthy families. Our current policies and laws have impediments to upward mobility embedded in them. How can we remove such impediments? 2. Marriage seems to have a religious connotation and potential stigma. Should we discuss “marriage” or “civil union”? 3. There are cultural and political barriers to marriage. 4. How do we increase / inspire the demand for marriage? 	Do no harm to marriage	5
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is still a high rate of unplanned pregnancy; how can that be addressed? 2. How can adoption (as a solution to unwanted pregnancies) be made more viable? 3. How can we encourage marriage for those who are pregnant? 4. Men come to sexuality and parenting differently than women do; how can we help men delay being a parent? That would take some of the parenting pressure off women and put it on men. Family planning is not just for women. 	Unplanned pregnancy / family planning	4
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technical and vocational education continues to have a stigma or label 	Vocational	3

Key barriers / challenges / problems	Summary Issue	Votes
<p>associated with it. The word “Technical” in the name of vocational colleges seems to emphasize that stigma. How can we overcome it?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> There is insufficient capacity in our vocational schools. There is insufficient funding for vocational schools and training. Vocational training should start in junior high or high school, and not wait till after secondary education. Young men today seem to lack the skills needed for modern jobs. How can we create options for kids a large proportion of whom will not go to a traditional 4-year college? The value of an expensive, traditional 4-year college is also coming under increasing scrutiny. 	<p>education</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing numbers of single-parent households reduce the opportunity for children to see both role models at home. Educating youth about the structure of family is becoming increasingly difficult in today’s society It is becoming more difficult to increase the demand for marriage. New parents face many challenges, and have minimal support network to help them through difficult times. Geographic mobility driven by economic reasons makes it more difficult to develop the emotional support networks that can help keep families intact. There is a pervasive lack of civic-mindedness in the society today. 	<p>Stronger intact families</p>	<p>3</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult to help those who fall off the “success sequence”, or those who are not on it to begin with. Success sequence is typically seen as a binary situation (on or off), not as a continuum of viable choices. This makes it harder for those who fall off it, to get back on. 	<p>“Success sequence”</p>	<p>2</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Our current political climate makes it difficult to frame the debate and to promote policy change in a bipartisan manner to promote healthy and successful families. Marriage has become very controversial in the political arena, making it more difficult to have meaningful conversations to find solutions with bipartisan support. 	<p>Political context</p>	<p>2</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> There are organizations and industries that depend upon taking advantage of the poor. The State has considerable ability to influence this issue. 	<p>Poverty industry</p>	<p>2</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do we identify and help those with mental illness? There is a stigma associated with receiving mental health services. How can we help people see mental health as a priority area, particularly due to its devastating impact on families, and the associated costs? Experiencing trauma hinders the ability to form attachments to other people. This affects formation and sustainability of healthy families. How can we address the influence of negative thinking patterns? 	<p>Mental illness</p>	<p>2</p>

Key barriers / challenges / problems	Summary Issue	Votes
5. There is not enough focus on developing long-lasting relationships for foster children in the foster care system. This affects them throughout their lives, and hinders the ability to form and sustain healthy families.		
1. When does the number of kids a person has affect their “marriageability?” Does economic stability affect this? How can the state help?	Stigma of Marriage	2
1. How can we encourage healthy sexual relationships vs. treating sex as a sport? 2. Pornography’s widespread access has huge negative impact on young people. 3. Media influences re: marriage, two-parent households and sex are often negative. 4. There is a belief that men should pull them up by their bootstraps without help, and that men don’t need social support. How can we help change that belief, so that men have the support that they need in life?	Cultural attitudes	1

Additional Items

The Commissioners also mentioned the following at different times during the meeting, but these items were not included in the table above:

1. We need to link families, students, and the industry to help remove stigma of vocational training.
2. We should consider marriage and child tax credits.
3. There are examples where incarcerated men who spend time with their kids received credit towards their child support arrears or payments.
4. Explore the impact of incarceration rates of African American and Native American men.
5. Rural and urban needs and available resource are different. We need solutions that work for all parts of the state, without leaving rural WI behind. The weight of regulations may be too high for small towns in rural areas due to limited resources.
6. Wage disparity between genders and races could exist due to discrimination, choices made by individual workers, educational preparedness, # of years of work experience (e.g., women come out of careers more than men do in order to have babies or to care for kids), etc.