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July 21, 2003

Rt. Hon Jean Chretien
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Re. Proposed Legislation on Marriage

I am authorized by the Executive of the National Alliance of Covenanting Congregations to bring to you several serious concerns regarding the above. In what follows, you will see that, while our member congregations all belong to the United Church of Canada, the NACC's position on the proposed changes is quite different from that offered recently by national officials of our denomination. (That is, they spoke approvingly of how the Government has acted in this matter.) It is also our conviction that the views described below are congruent with those of the vast "grassroots" of the United Church.

Christian Scripture is the basis for our first, and over-riding, objection to altering the definition of marriage from the union of one man and one woman. A number of passages - e.g. Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-5; Mk 10:7-8; Eph. 5:31 - make it clear that God intends marriage to be limited to heterosexual couples.

We are aware that the Supreme Court of Canada has been asked to advise whether churches (and their equivalents in other traditions) will be permitted, in law, to refuse to perform non-traditional marriages. However, even if the Court advises that there is such protection, we predict that churches which do refuse will still be forced to defend themselves from "human rights" challenges. When that happens, many such institutions will feel forced to withdraw from performing any state-recognized marriages.

As stated, our primary objection to the proposed legislation is scriptural. However, while we see the following additional concerns as of the second order, they remain important - especially so for those who will be considering this matter from a purely secular perspective. Thus, should the House of Commons, under the leadership of the Government of Canada, approve the proposed legislation, we believe the general public will come to the realization that

1. This country will have acted contrary to the overwhelming consensus of religious and secular cultures around the world and across recorded history. *(For example, Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nation's foundational human rights document, clearly assumes marriage to be heterosexual.)* Any move to legislate otherwise should be

- undertaken only after the fullest thoughtful public debate, to which the Government had, until recently, seemed to have some commitment.
2. Given the well-documented value to society of healthy, stable families which are rooted in traditional heterosexual marriage, any move to destabilize the latter institution is dangerous in the extreme. The Government of Canada's failure to appeal the recent court rulings on marriage constitutes a serious betrayal of the people's trust, in that it has allowed the proper processes of democratic discourse and decision making to be pre-empted. The failure to appeal is striking, since (a) it is less than two years since the House of Commons overwhelmingly declared marriage to be "the lifelong union of a man and a woman", and (b) the as yet unreleased report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (*"Marriage and the Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Unions"*) is now rendered largely irrelevant, despite the extensive countrywide consultation which preceded it.
 3. The rationales cited for broadening the definition of marriage will eventually be used to justify a wide range of other possibilities, including "plural" marriage. (*For example, in December, 2001, the President of the Law Commission of Canada was asked, "What's wrong with polygamy? Why should it be excluded [as "marriage"]?" Her response: "In our view, what's interesting is that there is no reason for why [sic] it should be excluded."*) The likely result is obvious - "marriage" will eventually become a term without much meaning.

We regret most deeply the course to which your Government is now committed. Quite apart from our religious scruples, the concerns cited above (there are others) persuade us that the social fabric of this country will suffer critical, long-term damage if the House of Commons approves the proposed legislation.

Yours truly,

Geoff Wilkins, Chairman

cc S. Harper, G. Duceppe, P. MacKay, P. Martin, J. Manley, S. Copps, M. Cauchon, J. Layton