

February 23, 2005

**LETTER ADDRESSED TO ALL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
AND THE SENATE CONCERNING BILL C-38**

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) is well aware of the delicate situation that members of Parliament are facing in regards to the current marriage debate. COLF believes that it is essential to pursue the debate initiated by the Bill recently tabled by the federal government, *An Act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes*, in order to give all Canadians an opportunity to express their points of view.

Given that different charters now protect persons of homosexual orientation from discrimination and guarantee the respect of their rights within our society, COLF is disappointed and greatly concerned about Bill C-38, which would redefine marriage.

We are especially concerned about this initiative because it would radically modify the nature and meaning of an institution that has been around for thousands of years. All religions and cultures have recognized the vital importance of marriage for the stability of families and the future of societies.

We are writing today not only because of our Christian values, but also to defend a conception of marriage and society that is held by believers and non-believers alike and that is seriously called into question by the redefinition of marriage in this Bill. Below are several important points to consider:

1. A person's dignity and equality do not depend in any way on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or civil state. One's dignity and equality are based on the simple fact that one is human. As for rights, some are absolute—the right to life, for example. Others are conditional - such as the right to practise medicine, on the *condition* of holding a diploma in that discipline. Likewise, people have a right to marry - a right defined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (art. 16) - as long as they fulfill the *conditions* inherent in this right. In this particular case, heterosexuality has always been recognized as an inherent condition for marriage.

2. Neither States nor religions invented marriage. Over the centuries, both recognized that this natural institution, made up of a man and a woman, serves the needs of society by providing new citizens and educating them, which assures the society's future. This is the reason why, through the privileges attached to civil marriage, States chose to support heterosexual couples who marry, because in this way these couples contribute to the common good.

3. What has happened to the issue of procreation, which in our opinion has too often been excluded from the debate? Along with the well-being of spouses, the potential for procreation is one of the two essential elements of marriage. By including gay and lesbian unions in the definition of marriage, we would destroy marriage, because same-sex couples do not have the biological ability to reproduce. Even though assisted procreation can help overcome this biological problem, this possibility is an exception to the rule. And while some heterosexual couples do not have children, they do have the anatomical complementarity needed to procreate.

4. There is nothing discriminatory in giving different names to two types of unions that are so fundamentally different and in treating them differently—it avoids confusion. We acknowledge the fact that it is important to recognize and protect individual rights, but never to the detriment of public interest and the common good. The social costs of this unprecedented social experiment will become apparent only with time, as was the case after divorce was legalized.

Furthermore, considering the numerous negative impacts of divorce on the lives many of children and adults (emotional instability, depression, poverty, dropping out of school, delinquency, suicide,

etc.), we are unable to understand why this government is willing to create other unfavourable situations.

The most recent social studies prove not only that the most stable foundation for the family is marriage, but also that children have the best chance of blossoming in the company of their two parents: a father and a mother. A national Canadian study (National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Statistics Canada and Human Resource and Development Canada) of children and youth demonstrated in 1999 that only 13 per cent of children born to married parents who had not lived together before the marriage saw their families break up, compared to 63 per cent of children born from common-law unions.

It is clear that a decrease in the number of marriages (heterosexual) has a harmful impact on the health of families and therefore on the health of society as a whole. All States have the serious responsibility of fostering the national interest and the common good. In this sense, this Parliament must favour, protect and promote as a social norm marriage between a man and a woman.

Laws have a definite educational impact on the mentality of a society, and families are the first to suffer the negative consequences. The mail that we receive shows us that many citizens—whether they are believers or not—reject the idea that marriage between two persons of the same sex be presented to their children, at school or elsewhere, as yet another alternative model for couples and families.

5. Bill C-38 attempts to impose respect for the individual human rights of same-sex couples by recognizing their “right” to marry. Astonishingly, we don’t hear about the needs and rights of our most vulnerable citizens—children: their right to have a mother and a father, and their right to know and grow up with their biological parents. These rights are protected by the institution of marriage; this is yet another reason to keep marriage (heterosexual) as our basic social norm.

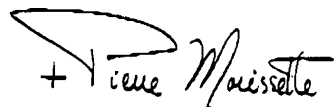
By including unions between people of the same sex in marriage, we would ignore these rights of children, and, in the words of French psychoanalyst Tony Anatrella, their need to grow up with “the double figure of man and woman, father and mother, in order to develop

coherently, knowing that only a man and a woman can conceive a child.” The education provided by these complementarities and this interaction is necessary to the development of children; their emotional development, self-esteem, confidence, capacity to love and capacity to contribute to society depend on it.

Young Canadian men and women need to feel that the State gives a primordial importance to the institution of marriage (heterosexual), and that it is ready to support in a privileged way those who take that step. This encouragement can only benefit the State and society as a whole. To decide to place marriage and same-sex unions on an equal footing would bring about a harmful devaluation of marriage and would discourage young people from making this commitment. They will choose common-law unions with their sad statistics on broken families.

In conclusion, let us remember that not all social evolution is progress. Progress can only be defined as an evolution that respects the common good of society. We strongly recommend that this Parliament maintain for Canada the natural institution that, since the beginning of humanity, has proven to be the most stable for the family group, and the most likely to bring about the fullest development of their members and the preservation of the common good. Canadian citizens are counting on their elected officials, including the members of the Cabinet, to cast their votes on Bill C-38 according to their conscience, and with a great deal of caution and reflection.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Pierre Morissette". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "P" and a small cross at the beginning of the name.

†Pierre Morissette
Bishop of Baie-Comeau
Chairman of the Catholic
Organization for Life and Family