

January 26, 2005

My dear People,

By all accounts, the federal government appears prepared to introduce legislation which would presume to alter substantially the nature and definition of marriage. As you are no doubt aware, the Supreme Court of Canada refused to give an opinion on the constitutionality of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

The Ontario Bishops, in their response to the Supreme Court opinion, expressed their dismay although they found consolation in the Court's acknowledgement that religious groups would not be forced to conduct or support marriages which do not conform to their beliefs and convictions. However, government employees may be forced to perform civil union ceremonies even if they are against their personal beliefs. Nonetheless, the Court placed responsibility for the final decision on a definition of marriage in the hands of our Members of Parliament. It is essential that each of us, as Roman Catholics and citizens of this country, ensure that our own Members know our position: that marriage is the union of one man and one woman. It is important for Members of Parliament to remember that they can leave the traditional definition of marriage unchanged, while meeting the legitimate needs and rights of those in other inter-dependent relationships. The term 'marriage' should be retained only for unions of one man and one woman.

Although it is true that our Archdiocese formally presented an 18,000 signature petition to Parliament, through former MP Eugene Bellemare, in October 2003, as Catholics, it appears to me that we have a duty to make known our point of view again. In an effort to formulate a plan of action for our archdiocese, I first of all consulted my Episcopal Council. I then called urgent meetings of the Diocesan Pastoral Councils, in order to hear their opinions and suggestions.

Everyone agreed that the most effective action is for each of us to write, telephone or e-mail our Prime Minister, our own Members of Parliament, Senators and the leaders of each of the political parties and insist that the traditional definition of marriage must be upheld for the common good of our society. It is equally important that a totally free vote be allowed so that all MP's can vote according to their conscience. A list of names and addresses of those who should be contacted has also been provided.

We also ask everyone to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the deliberations and consciences of all our elected officials as they vote on matters which will affect present and future generations. As lay people, you are the ministers and beneficiaries of marriage. Let us now take every step to ensure that our society also reflects these realities in its laws. Every voice counts. Every voice is needed. I thank each of you in advance for taking up this important work and entrust it to the Lord.

May God bless you all!



Sincerely yours in Christ our Lord,

+Marcel Gervais
Archbishop of Ottawa