



**ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**  
**CONFERENCE DES EVEQUES CATHOLIQUES DE L'ONTARIO**

March 15, 2005

Dear (Members of the Parliament of Canada for Ontario Ridings)

In the ongoing debate over Bill C-38, a line of reasoning has emerged suggesting that, since the Bill includes legal protection of religious rights, Churches have no reason to oppose it. This argument cannot be supported, for two fundamental reasons.

First, Bill C-38 does not actually contain any protections for religious rights. The Supreme Court of Canada stated clearly that enacting legislation to protect the right of Churches to celebrate marriage according to their doctrine is a provincial, not a federal jurisdiction. The Bill offers an assurance that the federal government knows it does not have the constitutional authority to provide.

Second, with respect to the issue of changing the definition of marriage, far more is at stake than religious rights. Citizens from many different backgrounds are rightly concerned about the effects that this legislation will have on the institution of marriage itself, the family unit, our children, and education.

In Ontario a Bill put forward by the provincial government grants some legal protection for Churches to celebrate marriage according to their doctrine. Sadly, however, this protection was granted in the context of judicial and legislative changes to the legal definition of both “marriage” and “spouse”.

The opposition of the Bishops to any change to the definition of marriage has been clearly stated many times, and is well known. The provision of legal protection for religious rights by the province of Ontario in no way lessens our deep concern over the serious and detrimental long-term effects that the changes proposed in Bill C-38 by the federal government will have on our society.

We continue to call upon all Members of Parliament to uphold in Canadian law the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Sincerely,

Most Rev. Richard Smith  
President, Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops