

ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Statement on Marriage

To: Our Catholic Sisters and Brothers in Ontario:

In recent weeks the Government of Canada has proposed to redefine marriage. The definition until now has been: “the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others”. The proposed redefinition would be: “Marriage, for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others.” The Government of Canada’s stated purpose for this proposed redefinition is to recognize legally the unions of same-sex couples as marriages.

The Catholic Bishops of Ontario are profoundly concerned about this proposed change.

The very concept of marriage pre-dates any known religious dogma and recorded history. Through life experience, historical record and literature, all of us, religious persons or not, have emblazoned on our consciousness the image of marriage as the coming together of a woman and a man to form their own family, unite their extended families and make their contribution to the life, traditions and vitality of their people. Marriages and families bind societies together.

Parliamentarians must realize that they are undertaking a huge experiment in social engineering. On the basis of what evidence, in terms of the common good, are they intending to proceed?

A change in the legal definition of such a foundational institution as marriage cannot but have far-reaching consequences. The institution of marriage will not be simply modified; it will be irrevocably altered. A change in definition now will produce a change in lived reality later for everyone.

Similar experiments in the past, such as changes in the law concerning divorce, have had detrimental, not to say disastrous, effects on our society. Those who advocated ready access to

divorce have undoubtedly been surprised by the degree to which it has encouraged marriages to be undertaken without appropriate preparation and commitment, and has encouraged some married couples to divorce without making real attempts to work out their differences. The legacy is a trail of wrecked families and a reservoir of social problems, particularly for children. We must all remember that there is a price to pay for these experiments. Our children and grandchildren will pay it.

Governments, then, have an obligation to safeguard and strengthen marriage because of the contribution that marriage makes to the common good. There is compelling evidence that heterosexual families, into which most children are born, provide the best setting for their healthy formation. In view of this, we expect our government to support the distinctiveness of marriage and the family, as we have known them, for the good of its future citizens.

What does our faith teach us about marriage? The teaching of our faith accepts and sheds light on what we know about marriage from human experience and reason. The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up for us the long tradition of our faith:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

For Catholics marriage is a vocation, as are the ordained, consecrated and single lives that people lead. Marriage is the life-long union of a woman and a man in which they give themselves totally to each other. By its very nature married love, which perfects the spouses, is meant for the procreation and education of children and in them it finds its crowning glory through the joys they bring and sacrifices they demand. In this great vocation, Christian married couples are aided by the gift of God's grace, which they receive in the sacrament of matrimony.

In accordance with Catholic moral theology, we have a deep respect for people with a same-sex orientation. Here, however, we do not enter into the question of the fidelity or the durability of same-sex relationships. Our claim is that they cannot be marriages. The union of a man and a woman allows for the essential diversity of gifts in the raising of children. To equate same-sex unions and marriage in law is to undermine marriage and harm the common good. The law not only sets boundaries; it teaches.

The Catholic bishops of Ontario call upon Catholics to ponder deeply and prayerfully the implications of the change being proposed by the federal government. Marriage and the family are fundamentally important aspects of our social fabric and of our faith. As the Holy Father has said: "...the family is the first school of social virtues that every society needs." We encourage you to reflect on this issue in the light of the heritage of Catholic moral teaching and the vision

of society that you would wish to hand on to future generations.

When you have done so, you have the same right as all other citizens to make your conclusions known to your fellow citizens and to your political representatives. Indeed, on an issue as profoundly important as this one, you have an obligation to make your position known.

Original signed by

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