

## ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

To: Diocesan Marriage Contacts

**Re: Update #6, February 7, 2005**

### The Likely Process of Bill C-38 in Parliament

The following impressions were derived from a conversation with an MP who is opposed to Bill C-38.

- The government is saying that the target date for the passage of the Bill is June. The speed with which they bring it to second reading will indicate if they would like to move faster. The date for second reading has not been set at the time of writing.
- However, in a minority situation it is unlikely that the government will be able to invoke closure, that is, close off debate.
- There will be a debate but little chance for amendments. Amendments will likely be ruled out of order.
- The Bill is to be sent to a Special Committee rather than a Standing Committee. It is easier for the government to control the membership of a Special Committee.
- The Committee will create its own rules of procedure. It is important for groups to try to influence those rules.
- To preserve the definition of marriage, it will be necessary to defeat this Bill and introduce another Bill, which would need to be a Bill by a private member.
- It is anticipated that, if the Commons pass it, then it will pass the Senate easily.

We were told that MP's are now receiving thousands of messages from constituents and they are running heavily against the Bill. Nevertheless the Prime Minister's office is insisting on its passage and is putting pressure on cabinet ministers to vote for it and on those opposed to change or be absent.

### Messages we Need to Send

The current situation influences the priorities we need to set and the messages we need to send:

#### **The Procedure of the Special Committee**

We need to be insistent on the following:

- The Committee should hold hearings in every province and territory to give people a chance to express their views.
- Everyone who applies should be heard.
- If any limits are placed, the time available should be allocated equitably between those for and against the Bill.
- Ample time should be allowed for written input from the public.

*Letters on the Committee's procedures could begin immediately to the offices of the Prime Minister and the Attorney General and then repeated to the Chair of the Committee and Clerk as soon as they are appointed.*

### **MP's who are against the legislation**

We need to communicate our support to these MP's so that they will not waver under the pressure being placed upon them.

### **MP's who are undecided**

We need to put to these MP's our reasons for being against this Bill in writing and in person, if possible.

### **MP's who support the Bill as tabled**

We need to point out to these MP's that the Bill is misleading and unjust in that it promises protection for religious rights that the federal government cannot provide. In addition, it offends charter values in that it provides no provision at all for freedom of conscience on the basis of religious conviction.

There is an analysis of MP's voting intentions on the OCCB web site ([www.occb.on.ca/celebratemarriage/](http://www.occb.on.ca/celebratemarriage/)), although these intentions seem to change daily for some.

### **Action by Other Groups**

On Thursday, February 3, 2005, I was present at a meeting at St. Joseph the Worker parish in Vaughan at which members of the Islamic, Arab Christian, Orthodox Jewish communities were in attendance. It was also attended by members of the Knights of Columbus. The meeting took place thanks to the efforts of Tony Markwick, a parishioner and Fr. Love. Each of the communities present is taking action in the same way we are. It was agreed that we would share materials and support each other's initiatives in so far as that is possible.

On Friday evening, I attended a meeting in Malton of the Sikh community. It is clear that that community is shocked and dismayed by what is happening. The meeting was well attended and both local MP's spoke against the Bill. The meeting was also addressed by three representatives from the Christian and one from the Muslim communities.  
We are not alone.

### **Additions to the Web Site**

This past week, the following were added to the web site: (On the index page when you go to [www.occb.on.ca](http://www.occb.on.ca) you will see "Celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage" and "Celebrons le sacrement du mariage". Click on the one of your choice and you will be taken to the list of documents.)

#### **English**

- Statement on Marriage given on Salt and Light TV by Fr. Tom Rosica
- A Statement by Archbishop Weisgerber of Winnipeg
- Letter to Parishioners by Archbishop Gervais of Ottawa
- Statistics on Religious Affiliation in Canada from StatsCan
- The text of Bill C-38
- MP Voting Intentions from the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
- Commentary from the CCCB on Bill C-38

**French**

- **Lettre aux paroissiens du Mgr Gervais**
- **Le texte du projet de loi C-38**
- **Commentaires de la CCCB**

Please remember the Conference Call on Wednesday.

Tom Reilly