

**ONTARIO CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**

To: Diocesan Marriage Contacts

**Re: Update #9, February 28, 2005**

The Special Committee

The Special Committee to consider Bill C-38 has now been established. Those groups wishing to make a presentation to the Committee, and the bishops hope that there will be many, should contact the Clerk of the Committee to request time. Indicate clearly your reason for wishing to present. The Clerk of the Committee is: **Jean-François Pagé**, 6th Floor, 180 Wellington Street, House of Commons [Pagej@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Pagej@parl.gc.ca)

The details of the Committee follow:

**Special Committee to Deal with Bill C-38**

**An Act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes**

**Membership**

**CHAIR**

**Marcel Proulx**

**MEMBERS**

Rona Ambrose_____	Françoise Boivin
Don Boudria_____	Gord Brown
Paul Harold Macklin_____	Richard Marceau
Réal Ménard_____	Rob Moore
Anita Neville_____	Michael John Savage
Bill Siksay_____	Vic Toews

**CLERK OF THE COMMITTEE**

Jean-François Pagé

Novena to St. Joseph

Dioceses and parishes are going to be asked to participate in a Novena to St. Joseph on behalf of marriage and family values. This is being organized by a group of bishops

located in all of the regions of Canada. The Novena prayers are being sent to dioceses this week. The Novena should culminate on the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 2005.

### **The Ontario Bishops are Opposed to Same-Sex Union being called “Marriage”**

On February 22, the Ontario government introduced Bill 171, which updated many pieces of legislation to bring them into line with the 2003 decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal which permitted same-sex partners to marry. Bill 171 also contained provisions to give some protection to clergy, church facilities and services from having to be involved in same-sex services.

On the day that Bill 171 was introduced, I put out the following press release, which I regret to say gave many people the wrong impression.

#### **[OCCB LETTERHEAD]** **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Ontario Catholic Bishops support protective legislation**

*On February 22, 2005 the Government of Ontario tabled legislation to respond to the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal to redefine marriage as “the voluntary union for life of two persons to the exclusion of all others”, a decision that we continue to oppose.*

*The Ontario legislation, however, provides protection for religious officials so that they are not compelled to solemnize same-sex marriages that are contrary to their religious beliefs or those of the religious body to which they belong. “The Ontario Government has followed the clear instructions of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Same-Sex Marriage Reference to legislate in a way that protects the rights of religious officials,” said Tom Reilly, General Secretary. “The Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops supports protection for religious officials and commends Premier Dalton McGuinty and his government for proposing this legislation,” he added.*

*One area of particular concern to the Catholic Bishops of Ontario is the use of church property. “The Bishops wanted to be sure that religious bodies could not be compelled to allow their properties to be used for purposes associated with same-sex unions if such are contrary to their teachings, as is true for the Catholic Church” said Mr. Reilly. “The Bill clearly provides this protection and the Ontario Bishops accordingly support it”, he added.*

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The press release states that the bishops continue to oppose the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal. I should have gone into more detail, making it clear that the bishops’ opposition is to all aspects of the federal and provincial political processes which

facilitate the Court of Appeal decision. The bishops do not, for example, condone the change in the definition of spouse or other such changes.

The press release was meant to express relief that there was to be in place some protection for religious groups in the face of pressure to conform to what parliament may impose on the country.

I regret the consternation that this has caused and that I misled people about the full position of the bishops.

Tom Reilly, General Secretary