

Executive Summary of the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey's Message on Marriage

Prepared by the New Jersey Catholic Conference

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In the face of the attempts to establish same sex "marriage", the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey have issued a comprehensive message, "The Call to Marriage is Woven Deeply into the Human Spirit." The Bishops' message calls upon all Catholics to:

- Protect and promote marriage.
- Hold firm to the Church's teaching on marriage and the complementarity of the sexes.
- Support all family members, including those who choose to remain single.
- Help those entering marriage to prepare for the challenges, sacrifices and joys to come.
- Reach out with the special compassion of Christ to those married couples and families experiencing difficulties, anxiety, and illness.

The Bishops emphasize that the Church has always and everywhere taught that marriage is the union of one man and one woman as husband and wife. This great truth about marriage is not some obscure doctrinal fine point but a fact of human nature, recognized from time immemorial by people of virtually every faith and culture.

The Church teaches that man and woman are equal. However, man and woman are *different from each other but created for each other*. This complementarity, including sexual difference, draws men and women together in a mutually loving union that always should be open to the procreation of children (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1602-1605).

The Church asks Catholics to become involved in how government treats marriage because civil authorities are charged with protecting children and the common good, and marriage is indispensable to both purposes. The Bishops also note that Catholics have the right and responsibility to oppose laws and policies that unjustly target people as bigots or that subject people to charges of unlawful discrimination simply because they believe and teach that marriage is the union of man and a woman.

The stable, life long loving relationship of a mother and father, found only in marriage, provides the ideal conditions for raising and socializing children. All available empirical evidence indicates that marriages with a mother and father are the gold standard for insuring optimal outcomes in a child's development.

The Bishops recognize that some children are raised in situations other than the traditional two-parent family and that responsible loving single parents, and other family members make important and valuable contributions to the welfare of these children. But supporting single-

parent families, as a just and compassionate society must do, is far different than deliberately creating motherless and fatherless families and holding them out to be the same as marriages.

In the Church's view, same-sex "marriage" is not a civil right. A strong desire does not make a civil right. Every man and every woman has a right to enter into marriage, but marriage as an institution can only be between a man and a woman. Governments do not have the power to define marriage otherwise, because it is a permanent human institution that does not owe its existence to governments. Marriage as a union of man and woman existed long before any nation, religion, or law was established. In fact, the marital union is the human and social institution upon which civilization has always been structured.

Same-sex "marriage" is not a civil right because same-sex couples cannot fulfill the core public purpose of marriage: protecting children by bringing men and women into the only kind of union that can bring new life into the world, and give children mothers and fathers.

In New Jersey, what is the debate on same sex marriage all about? In New Jersey, the debate is not about benefits and rights. The Civil Union Act [N.J. Statutes 37:1-31(a)] settled that issue once and for all. In New Jersey, same sex couples have every benefit, right and protection whether these rights derive from statute, administrative or court rule, public policy, common law or any other source of civil law, as are granted to spouses in a marriage. The same sex "marriage" political initiative is an attempt to change the historic structure of marriage as a union only of a man and a woman. This initiative ignores human nature, because throughout all of human history marriage has required the complementarity of man and woman.

Same sex civil unions may represent a new and a different type of institution, one in which government grants to same sex couples benefits and protections, but same sex unions are not marriage.

The Bishops' message is not just a brief in opposition to same sex "marriage." Citing secular scholars at Rutgers University, the Bishops note that the crisis in family life that society faces today has deep roots in a broad cultural shift away from religion and social traditionalism and toward faith in personal independence and tolerance for diverse life styles known as "secular individualism." This cultural shift has led to increases in divorce, non-marital cohabitation and out-of-wedlock childbearing as well as the current call for same sex "marriage."

Fundamentally, the Bishops' message is a call for a cultural awakening and an increased recognition of the importance of stable marriages in which mothers and fathers willingly commit themselves to each other and to openness to children. The Bishops call for people to reject "secular individualism" and to embrace and support the historic role of marriage which includes spouses sacrificing self-interest to foster long term commitment to each other, to children and to the future of our society.