

## **CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MINNESOTA: A BRIEF CATECHESIS ON MARRIAGE**

We, the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota, believe it is our responsibility to speak in support of marriage as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman in an enduring bond of love. This union is ordered to both the mutual good of the spouses and to the procreation and raising of children.

### **Marriage from the Perspective of Faith**

Based on God's Word given in divine revelation, we believe that marriage creates a sacred bond between spouses. We hold this to be true not only for ourselves, but for all humanity. In the context of faith, marriage is willed by the Creator from the beginning to mirror God's love for the human family, and it was raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament of the New Covenant of grace, a visible and effective sign of Jesus' sacrificial love revealed on the Cross. As such, marriage is a constant reminder of God's love for the human race, as well as a reflection of the permanent, faithful, and fruitful bond of love between Christ and the Church (cf. Genesis 1:27, 2:22-24; Ephesians 5:31-32.) The perspective we hold on this issue is also shared by many other people of faith both Christian and otherwise (cf. *Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience*, November 20, 2009, [www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx](http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx)).

### **Marriage from the Perspective of Human Reason**

Our convictions about marriage, strengthened and reinforced by our belief in divine revelation, find ample support in principles which can be discovered by human reason and which have been reflected throughout human history. The obvious and intimate connection between the conjugal act and conception, along with the universally recognized importance of stable marriages for the education and formation of children, removes marriage from the private sphere and places it into the public realm, an institution very much part of the common good and therefore a concern of the state. This has been true across all cultures. Both faith and reason agree, then, that marriage is an institution central to the life of human society. The committed relationship between one man and one woman calls forth the best of the spouses, not only for their own sake, but also for the well-being of their children and for the advancement of the common

good. It is neither possible for us to change the definition of marriage nor wise to attempt to do so.

### **The Question of Same-Sex Unions**

Authentic human rights make powerful moral demands on us, so the appeal to human rights in order to legitimize same-sex relationships appears persuasive to many. All persons, regardless of sexual orientation, do have rights to common, basic relational needs, rights that correspond to the duties imposed on us by our nature and knowable by faith and reason. The strongest such duty is love itself, which is the call to give oneself freely to another, a gift of self that is by no means limited to sexual expression.

Persons with same-sex attractions are our sisters and brothers, and their same-sex attraction does not define them as persons nor deprive them of their authentic human rights, including the most fundamental rights of all – the right to life and the right to love. Consequently, we oppose any discrimination against persons based on their having a same-sex attraction.

At the same time, meeting authentic human needs does not require changing society's definition of marriage or creating a marriage-like status for those with same-sex attraction. As pastoral leaders within the State of Minnesota, we believe that efforts to bestow legal recognition on same-sex unions are mistaken. They are based on the erroneous notion that "a committed homosexual relationship" is a human right and therefore can be legitimately defined as a marriage, enjoying the privileges that accompany marriage.

The specific privileges granted to married persons by the state are not granted for the personal advantage of spouses but to advance the common good, now and in the future. Protecting all persons, including those with same-sex attractions, from discrimination advances the common good. But not recognizing same-sex union as marriage is not discrimination, because it does not deny a basic human right. While we again acknowledge that all persons have a natural right to love another and to marry, that right is limited in significant ways by the very nature of the human person and the institution of marriage, which is a unique relationship that can only exist between one man and one woman.

### **Conclusion**

We urge our State government, our fellow Catholics, and all people of good will in the State of Minnesota to support marriage, both in theory and in practical measures that safeguard, promote, and enhance the institution of marriage and its inseparable counterpart, the family. One practical measure would be the passage of a constitutional amendment clearly defining marriage as a union of one man and one woman. On the other hand, changing the definition of marriage and legitimizing same-sex unions would work against the socially vital goal to support and strengthen marriage between one man and one woman, as it has always been understood.

For further reading, see: *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, by the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, 17 November 2009. See also the web site at <http://www.usccb.org/defenseofmarriage/>.