



Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our state's elected lawmakers will soon consider a bill called "The Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act." A more fraudulent title for this dangerous measure could not be imagined. The proposed law is, in truth, a grave assault upon *both* religious liberty *and* marriage. All people of goodwill, and especially Christ's faithful committed to my pastoral care in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, should resolutely oppose this bill and make their opinions known to their representatives.

The pending bill would, for the first time in our state's history, redefine marriage to legally recognize same-sex "marriages." But neither two men nor two women – nor, for that matter, three or more people – can possibly form a marriage. Our law would be lying if it said that they could.

The basic structure of marriage as the exclusive and lasting relationship of a man and a woman, committed to a life which is fulfilled by having children, is given to us in human nature, and thus by nature's God. Notwithstanding the vanity of human wishes, every society in human history – including every society untouched by Jewish or Christian revelation – has managed to grasp this profound truth about human relationships and happiness: marriage is the union of man and woman.

The bill's sponsors maintain that it would simply extend marriage to some people who have long been arbitrarily excluded from it. They are wrong. The pending bill would not expand the eligibility-roster for marriage. *It would radically redefine what marriage is – for everybody.*

It would enshrine in our law – and thus in public opinion and practice – three harmful ideas:

1. What essentially makes a marriage is romantic-emotional union.
2. Children don't need both a mother and father.
3. The main purpose of marriage is adult satisfactions.

These ideas would deepen the sexual revolution's harms on all society. After all, if marriage is an emotional union meant for adult satisfactions, why should it be sexually exclusive? Or limited to two? Or pledged to permanence? If children don't need both their mother and father, why should fathers stick around when romance fades? As marriage is redefined, it becomes harder for people to see the point of these profoundly important marital norms, to live by them, and to encourage others to do the same. The resulting instability hurts spouses, but also – and especially – children, who do best when reared by their committed mother and father.

Indeed, children's need – and right – to be reared by the mother and father whose union brought them into being explains why our law has recognized marriage as a conjugal partnership – the union of husband and wife – at all. Our lawmakers have understood that marriage is naturally oriented to procreation, to *family*. Of course, marriage also *includes* a committed, intimate relationship of a sort which some same-sex couples (or multiple lovers in groups of three or more) might imitate. But our law never recognized and supported marriage in order to regulate intimacy for its own sake. The reason marriage is recognized in civil law at all (as ordinary friendships, or other sacraments, are not) is specific to the committed, intimate relationships of opposite-sex couples: they are by nature oriented to having children. Their love-making acts are life-giving acts.

Same-sex relationships lack this unique predicate of state recognition and support. Even the most ideologically blinded legislator cannot change this natural fact: the sexual acts of a same-sex couple (regardless of how one views them morally) are simply not of the type that yield the gift of new life. So they cannot extend a union of hearts by a true bodily union. They cannot turn a friendship into the one-flesh union of marriage. They are not marital. This is not just a Christian idea, but one common to every major religious tradition and our civilization's great philosophical traditions, beginning with ancient Greece and Rome.

The pending bill is not only a dangerous social experiment about marriage. It is also a lethal attack upon religious liberty. This so-called "religious freedom" bill would not stop the state from obligating the Knights of Columbus to make their halls available for same-sex "weddings." It would not stop the state from requiring Catholic grade schools to hire teachers who are legally "married" to someone of the same sex. This bill would not protect Catholic hospitals, charities, or colleges, which exclude those so "married" from senior leadership positions. Nor would it protect me, the Bishop of Springfield, if I refused to employ someone in a same-sex "marriage" who applied to the Diocese for a position meant to serve my ministry as your bishop. This "religious freedom" law does nothing at all to protect the consciences of people in business, or who work for the government. We saw the harmful consequences of deceptive titles all too painfully last year when the so-called "Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act" forced Catholic Charities out of foster care and adoption services in Illinois.

These threats do not raise a question about drafting a better law, one with more extensive conscience protections. There is no possible way – *none whatsoever* – for those who believe that marriage is exclusively the union of husband and wife to avoid legal penalties and harsh discriminatory treatment if the bill becomes law. Why should we expect it to be otherwise? After all, we would be people who, according to the thinking behind the bill, hold onto an "unfair" view of marriage. The state would have equated our view with bigotry – which it uses the law to marginalize in every way short of criminal punishment.

The only way to protect religious liberty, and to preserve marriage, is to defeat this perilous proposal. Please make sure our elected representatives understand that and know that they will be held to account.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois