



Setting the Record Straight

*The Archdiocese of Washington's Position on
the Same Sex Marriage Bill*

December 2009

If you are following the news lately, you may have heard that the Catholic Church was giving “ultimatums” and “threatening” to walk away from serving the poor in the District of Columbia if same-sex marriage is legalized. It simply is not true. Sensational headlines sell, and they get repeated and soon become accepted as reality even if they aren’t true. The truth is that the Catholic Church and Catholic Charities are committed to continuing to serve the vulnerable in our nation’s capital, no matter what the D.C. Council does.

The Church's position has been clear

The Catholic Church has made its position clear from the outset. We oppose the bill to legalize same sex marriage in the District of Columbia. However, because this bill had 10 co-sponsors in a 13-member Council, we recognized it was likely to pass. What we asked of the Council was to enact legislation that would recognize and protect the free exercise of religion in a meaningful way.

Religious freedom is at the heart of this debate and it is the very principle we defend when we urged the Council to broaden the exemption contained in the bill for religious organizations whose teachings uphold marriage as between husband and wife.

Why we are speaking out

Marriage is the exclusive, life-long, faithful union between one man and one woman. This is the definition of marriage revealed in the natural order and upheld by the teachings of the Catholic Church. Our support for marriage is not meant to discriminate against any individual or family; it is intended to affirm that the complementarity of man and woman is intrinsic to the definition of marriage.

As the United States Bishops recently stated, the legal recognition of same sex marriages “affects all people, married and non-married: not only at the fundamental levels of the good of the spouses, the good of children, the intrinsic dignity of every human person and the common good, but also at the levels of education, cultural imagination and influence, and religious freedom.”



Protecting our ability to serve

Expressing Christ’s love through service to others is a core tenet of our faith. The very reason we are involved in this public debate is to ensure that the Archdiocese and Catholic Charities would not be restricted from serving the residents of this city because of our religious beliefs.

The Church has sought to work with the Council to fashion a bill that more fairly balances the different interests – those of the city to redefine marriage, and those of faith groups to not have to abandon their deeply held religious beliefs in order to be eligible to provide social services or to receive government contracts or licenses.

Why our concerns are reasonable

In the three states where same sex marriage has been legalized through the legislature, the final bills have made room for the free exercise of religion. Particularly in the District of Columbia, where protective federal statutes come into play, this balanced approach must be used as a guide to developing fair provisions for this bill.

For the record

No matter how the media may choose to spin it, this advocacy is an honest effort to uphold the right to exercise religion freely in pursuit of the church’s mission of service. No threats, no ultimatums, just service to those who need it the most.

The Archdiocese and Catholic Charities are steadfast in their commitment to continue to serve those in need without regard to race, gender, creed, nationality and sexual orientation, as we have for over 80 years.

Catholics, the Catholic Church and her institutions, her schools, her social service ministries, her many parish outreaches to the poor and needy, and Catholic Charities are all good neighbors in this community. Nothing will change that.

For more information, visit www.MarriageMattersDC.org.