

A PASTORAL MESSAGE TO HOMOSEXUAL CATHOLICS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

**Cardinal Roger M. Mahony
and the Auxiliary Bishops of the
Archdiocese of Los Angeles**

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As Bishops of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, we are addressing this message first of all to the homosexual members of our Church. Given the controversy generated by the passage of Proposition 8, we want to reassure each of you that you are cherished members of the Catholic Church, and that we value you as equal and active members of the Body of Christ. At the same time, we would like to address this message to all the members of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and to all men and women in the wider community.

The passage of Proposition 8 in the State of California does not diminish in any way the importance of you, our homosexual brothers and sisters in the Church. Nor does it lessen your personal dignity and value as full members of the Body of Christ. The Church's support of Proposition 8 was our effort to resist a legal redefinition of marriage. Our support for Proposition 8 was in defense of the longstanding institution of marriage understood as the life-long relationship of a man and a woman ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of their children.

We are disappointed that the ballot information about Proposition 8 stated that the purpose of the initiative was "to ban gay marriage." From the very beginning, this was not our purpose.

When the United Nations was established in 1948, it proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which set in place some 30 Articles to embrace all rights of all peoples on the earth. Article 16 deals with marriage. In the context of the time when it was written, it is clear that the basic understanding of the family, as envisioned by the United Nations Declaration, was one founded on the marriage of one man and one woman. Subsection 3 states: "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." It is this universal understanding of marriage and family which Proposition 8 desired to guarantee in California.

Such an understanding of marriage is found in at least three major religious traditions which have described the origin, meaning, and intent of marriage in their sacred writings. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we find explicit reference to marriage between a man and a woman in 51 verses located in 19 books. The Christian Scriptures have 14 verses dealing directly with marriage in six books. The Muslim Koran records 14 passages dealing with marriage. Thus, our faith communities and their sacred writings are in agreement about the application of the term “marriage.” And there are other faith communities which, in their own sacred writings, concur with this understanding. Our faith communities have never understood this term to be applied to other types of relationships between people.

These sacred writings and traditions, spanning thousands of years, support the fundamental truth that God created the human family as male and female, sending them forth to be fruitful and multiply. This is the understanding of marriage which has prevailed throughout human history, and has been enacted in the laws of peoples, nations, races and religions everywhere. It is this truth that is at the heart of Proposition 8.

Proposition 8 was not crafted as a concern for civil rights but as an effort to resist a redefinition of marriage. “Marriage” is not a merely religious concept, but is so fundamental to human experience that it cannot be redefined legally.

The Catholic Church has historically opposed attempts to deny or to limit the exercise of the basic rights which are known through the natural law and which are expounded in Sacred Scriptures and in the charters and declarations of world bodies. Our efforts in this country to espouse equal rights for all citizens have frequently created adverse reactions for our Church: our somewhat belated efforts to prohibit slavery; our insistence on equal educational opportunities for all children; our strong support of immigrants rights; our struggles on behalf of unborn children and those at the end of life’s journey, and so many others. In 1997 the United States Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and the Family published *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, urging the Christian community and especially parents of homosexuals to offer them understanding and pastoral care.

Proposition 8 was never intended, directly or indirectly, to lessen the value and importance of gay and lesbian persons. Your intrinsic value as human beings and as brothers and sisters continues without change. If we had ever thought that the intent of this proposition was to harm you or anyone in the State of California, we would not have supported it. We are personally grateful for the witness and service of so many dedicated and generous homosexual Catholics. We pledge our commitment to safeguard your dignity.

Here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles we began our spiritual and pastoral outreach to homosexual people over twenty years ago. And we were pilloried by many

for doing so. We began the various Serra Residences for victims of HIV and AIDS when the public understanding and fear of this illness repulsed so many.

As we have come to learn over these past decades, there are many groupings of people residing under one roof across California. Some of these groupings are related family members, while others are companions and friends. There are now seventeen rights for such companions and friends specifically included in the State of California's legal structure.

We are saddened that some people who opposed Proposition 8 have employed hurtful and accusatory language, and even threatening actions, against those who voted for Proposition 8. This is most unfortunate since such strategies obscure the basic matter at issue: the preservation of the ordered relationship between man and woman created by God.

Supporting marriage as it has always been understood diminishes none of us. We welcome thoughtful and civil dialogue with you so that we can deepen our realization that all of us cherish God's creative life which we equally share. We are committed to find ways to eliminate discrimination against homosexual persons, and to help guarantee the basic rights which belong to each of us.

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony
Bishop Thomas Curry
Bishop Gerald Wilkerson
Bishop Edward Clark
Bishop Gabino Zavala
Bishop Alexander Salazar
Bishop Oscar Solis