



ARCHDIOCESE OF WINNIPEG

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Dear Members of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg,

Our Canadian Parliament is preparing to make a decision on the meaning of marriage in Canada. Seldom have we been called upon to make a decision which will have such a profound impact on our future, on the kind of society we want to become.

Because this is such an important moment in our history, all of us should become fully informed about the question and all of us, too, should be in touch with our political leaders.

The Canadian public is in so many ways being manipulated in the debate. The courts have decided that marriage has nothing to do with begetting and raising children; marriage is solely about a relationship between two persons and therefore it is unconstitutional to deny the right of two persons of the same sex to enter marriage. I believe most Canadians are people of good will, interested in fairness. If we can be convinced that this is a question of equality of rights, most of us will support the concept. The problem is that same sex marriage only becomes a right once we have changed the definition.

Canada has been led down the same path on the question of abortion. We have been convinced that it is a matter of "choice". Who can be against choice? However, the matter at the heart of abortion is the depriving of an innocent child of life, not the matter of choice. In the present debate, in a similar way, we are being told that the real issue is minority rights, when in fact the real issue is the meaning, purpose and future of marriage.

In our western world marriage has always been seen as the foundation of society. Marriage is the loving union of a man and a woman whose very love brings new life into the world. Their partnership gives them the strength and generosity to raise their children so that they can be assets to the larger society. When families are strong, children will be lovingly cared for and the whole of society benefits.

To equate any other kind of relationship with marriage undermines the importance and the uniqueness of this important institution. We were told some forty years ago when the Canadian Parliament allowed for easier divorce that this would affect very few people, not marriage or the family. How differently have things turned out. Almost half of Canadian marriages end in divorce, damaging so many children and weakening our social fabric. Marriage and the family are the cornerstones of our society and more support is needed, not less.

As Catholics we are recipients of a long, rich tradition about marriage. God's Spirit has guided the Church in its insistence on the meaning and the importance of marriage for the spouses, for children, for the Church and for society. We are privileged to have an important God-given body of wisdom and teaching which should inform our consciences in this matter. Since in a democratic country all of us are involved in making a decision, we are invited to know and study the teaching of the Church. I believe our tradition is a much surer guide in this important matter than is the self interest being displayed by our political parties.

I invite all members of the Church to bring this important matter to prayer. Let us pray that each of us will come to a personal judgment which reflects the goodness and intent of God. Let us pray that, as a believing community, we will have the determination and generosity to inform our political leaders about our views in this matter. Prepared post cards and petitions are of some help, but nothing is more effective than a personal letter written to one's Member of Parliament. My hope and my prayer is that we all become involved in this momentous decision. The future of Canada deserves our concern.

Fraternally yours in Our Lord,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+V. James Weisgerber
Archbishop of Winnipeg