

California Catholic bishops affirm sanctity of marriage

SAN FRANCISCO – Less than a week after couples of the same sex began marrying under California law, Archbishop George H. Niederauer of San Francisco released a statement explaining that church teaching about marriage stresses its “unique place in God’s creation.”

In the June 23 statement, the archbishop said the purposes of marriage “are the mutual loving support of husband and wife, and their service of human life by bringing children into the world and raising them with cherishing love and true wisdom.”

The California Supreme Court’s May 15 decision – which struck down the state’s ban on same-sex marriage, allowing the state’s counties to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples – became final June 16 at 5 p.m.

Californians will vote in November on an initiative that would ban same-sex marriage by amending the state constitution to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Archbishop Niederauer described marriage as an institution rooted in history and culture that has “preceded the existence of any nation or state.” He also said marriage is not “a design of two persons, with no relationship to family and society.”

The archbishop also pointed out that society and civil authority are “obliged to protect and support marriage and family life, not to revise, redesign or alter them.”

It is not necessary to “reinvent the institution of marriage in order to enable citizens to own property jointly, to designate a beneficiary or to choose someone to make health decisions when one cannot do so oneself,” he added.

Church teaching about marriage is not meant to be discriminatory toward any person or groups of people, he said.

“The church teaches that every person is a child of God and must be treated with respect and dignity,” he said. “Again and again the Catholic Church has stated that persons with a homosexual orientation must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity, and that all forms of violence, scorn and hatred against women and men who are homosexual must be condemned.”

Archbishop Niederauer said he wished to “respectfully point out to those who govern us that the overwhelming majority of our sisters and brothers in the human family around the world define marriage as a union between one man and one woman and they value this meaning of marriage as part of the common moral heritage of humanity.”

“More profoundly, for us as Catholic Christians,” he added, “marriage between one man and one woman is the gift of a wise and loving creator.”

San Jose Bishop Patrick J. McGrath, in a letter June 17, called “upon people of good will to respect the dignity of every person and to protect the sanctity of marriage. Let us ask God to guide us in the same mutual respect and civil discourse that is fundamental in a free and democratic society.”

A June 16 statement signed by Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony and his six auxiliary bishops described marriage as “deeply rooted in history and culture” and “shaped considerably by Christian tradition.”

Similarly, Santa Rosa Bishop Daniel F. Walsh noted in a June 16 statement that marriage is grounded in natural law and is not subject to social change.

“In the current situation,” he wrote, “some voices define marriage only in terms of ‘personal choice,’ as if marriage were merely a design of two persons – with nothing to do with family or society.”

“Marriage is a relationship defined by nature, a reality which takes its origin in creation itself. Society does not create marriages, even though it sets parameters protecting it such as the ban on polygamy and an age requirement to protect a mature decision to enter marriage. The state has a primary and fundamental obligation to protect and promote the family, which is rooted in marriage and

sustained by it," he wrote.