

Statement by Cardinal William H. Keeler on Lawsuit Seeking Legal Marriage Status for Same Sex Relationships

Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore and Chairman of the Maryland Catholic Conference, released the following statement on behalf of the Catholic bishops of the three Maryland-serving dioceses—the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and the Diocese of Wilmington:

In the wake of last week's filing of a legal action by Marylanders who seek legal marriage status for their same-sex relationships, our archdiocesan offices have been contacted by members of our Catholic community and the greater Maryland community. Their message is the same—they are deeply troubled by the prospect that Maryland's constitution might somehow be interpreted in a way that grants to same-sex relationships the legal status that has been assigned historically to the marriage of a man and a woman.

As we join in that concern, we are comforted by Maryland Attorney General Joseph Curran's repeated legal advice that state law prohibits such an eventuality, and does so unambiguously. We fully expect that the Attorney General's office will pursue its responsibility to represent the state's interest in the matter. We can be expected to support the state's arguments in ways that are open to us.

Marriage is at once a basic human institution and a social institution. To be sure, church laws and civil laws regulate it, but it originated from neither church nor state. Rather, it derives from God and, because it does, is a sacred union that cannot be altered in its basic meaning and structure by church or state.

Its basic meaning is this: Marriage involves a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman who are joined in an intimate community of life and love. As they are equal, one to the other, they also are different from one another—in God's plan,

made for each other. This complementarity, which involves sexual difference, unites them in a mutually loving relationship that is open to the procreation of children.

These are truths that are evident to us in the natural order. They are truths readily apparent to us in the light of human reason. They have been confirmed for us in Sacred Scripture. They are truths our civil law should uphold and defend.

Since the state is obliged to promote the family, which is rooted in marriage, it can justly assign to married couples rights and benefits it does not extend to others. This is because marriage is about more than personal commitment; it is also about the commitment made by a husband and wife to the well-being of society. That said, it is also proper for the state to ensure that homosexual persons are not discriminated against unjustly. The Catholic Church teaches as much. Homosexual persons must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. But it would be wrong for the state, whether through its legislature or through its courts, to redefine marriage for the sake of providing benefits intended and structured for those who can rightfully enter into marriage.

It should be emphasized that benefits currently being sought by persons in homosexual relationships, including benefits sought in the lawsuit filed last week, are already legally available without regard to marriage. These include the joint ownership of property, the power to designate beneficiaries, and the right to assign decision-making authority in health care matters. But this suit is seemingly not about benefits. It is about the assignment of marriage status to same-sex relationships. We expect the state to stand firmly in the way of such a wholly inappropriate outcome.