



Pastoral Message from Bishop Vigneron  
to the  
Faithful of the Oakland Diocese

16 May 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

From the decision of our State Supreme Court last Thursday, we appear to be heading – at least for a time – toward a social order in which same-sex couples will be able to contract marriage. This is a profoundly significant matter. I, as your bishop, want to speak to you about it, to offer you my pastoral support and guidance.

My message today, because of circumstances, must be relatively brief. I cannot talk about all that needs to be said in a full discussion of this question. Nonetheless, I will offer some strategic points that give us a sense of our situation.

I begin with the most fundamental point: Marriage is a reality authored by God in his very act of creating the human race. According to his irrevocable plan, the marriage relationship is only possible between one man and one woman. The purposes of this relationship are (1) the mutual loving support of husband and wife and (2) their loving service of life by bringing children into the world and raising them to be virtuous and productive. The experience of history – both ancient and in our own time – has taught us that no government has the power to change the order which God has inscribed in our nature.

The conviction that same-sex couples cannot enter marriage is a conviction which all Catholics implicitly affirm when, in our baptismal promises, we profess that we share the Church's faith that the "Father Almighty [is] the Creator of heaven and earth."

This conviction about marriage, while confirmed by faith, can be known from reason. Therefore, our efforts to enshrine this wisdom about marriage in the laws of our community are not an imposition of an ideology but a service of the truth which we make for the common good. This wisdom about the nature of marriage is not a form of discrimination, but undergirds our freedom to live according to God's plan for us.

Your priests and I, together with the deacons and our other co-workers, pledge to support you as you exercise your baptismal vocation. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, God gave you the mission to configure the civil order to his design. In this way, through Christ and with the help of His Holy Spirit, you are making of this world a gift pleasing to the Father. This is the most fundamental act of your baptismal priesthood.

As I see it, the challenges ahead fall into two classes: (1) those of the short term and (2) ones for the long haul.

In regard to the short term: As faithful citizens Catholics are called to bring our laws regarding marriage into conformity with what we know about the nature of marriage.

In the long term: If such efforts fail, our way of life will become counter-cultural, always a difficult situation for Christians -- one our forebears faced in many ages past, one that the Lord himself predicted for us. Indeed, even if such efforts meet with success, our work is far from done. We would still be living in a society where many accept a set of convictions that is ultimately detrimental to the integrity of human life, with negative consequences for one's happiness in this world and the next. Your mission then will be, as it always has been, to be a light and leaven for the new creation established in Christ. The resources of the Theology of the Body, worked out by the late Holy Father, John Paul II, will be an especially helpful resource for this task.

I will do my best, as the principal pastor of the Church in the Diocese of Oakland, to lead you in your response to this situation in the months and years ahead. And I know that your priests are one with me in pledging you this service.

Above all, let us not lose heart. As Pope John Paul II constantly reminded us: "Be not afraid." Christ is risen. His vision for our world, and for the place of marriage in it, will, according to the time he has appointed, become the truth of our world.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Allen Vigneron