

Statement of the Alaska Conference of Catholic Bishops Concerning the April 3, 2007 Statewide Advisory Vote

The Alaska State Legislature has placed a measure before the Alaska voters seeking advice on whether the marriage provision of the Alaska State Constitution should be amended. The amendment would make clear that same-sex couples are not similarly situated to married couples and, therefore, would prohibit the state, municipality or other subdivision of the state from providing employment benefits to same-sex couples on that basis.

We, the Catholic Bishops of Alaska, urge Catholic voters and other persons of goodwill to respond to the Legislature's request for guidance by carefully considering the issue and voting on April 3rd.

At the time of the Constitutional vote on marriage in 1998, we publicly spoke on our view of marriage as "*a relationship that identifies a man and a woman as husband and wife, makes them two in one flesh, brings children into the world, [and] transforms two individuals into mother and father.*"

The voters of Alaska, at that time, overwhelmingly voted to amend the Alaska State Constitution to protect this traditional view of marriage by adding the words: "To be valid or recognized in this State, a marriage may exist only between one man and one woman."

The Alaska Supreme Court, however, has since ruled that same-sex couples are "*similarly situated*" to married couples. Consequently, the Court has ordered that whatever benefits of marriage the state, or subdivisions of the state, provide to married couples must also be provided to same-sex couples.

We respectfully disagree with the Court's opinion which has the effect of undermining both the institution of marriage and the marriage provision of the State Constitution itself.

Same-sex relationships are not the same as marriage. Recognizing the social and legal status of marriage as a relationship different from other forms of cohabitation is not opposed to justice; on the contrary, justice requires it. Differentiating marriage from same-sex relationships is exactly what the marriage amendment passed in 1998 was about, which the Court's opinion effectively negates.

The Legislature, in response, has asked each of us, as voters, for our input through the ballot box on April 3rd. In this Lenten season where we are asked not only to deny ourselves but also to do things for the good of society, we ask you to carefully consider the importance of the institution of marriage to the common good and to vote in the statewide advisory election on April 3rd.

Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz, OMI, Archdiocese of Anchorage

Archbishop Emeritus Francis T. Hurley, Archdiocese of Anchorage

Bishop Donald J. Kettler, Diocese of Fairbanks

Bishop Michael W. Warfel, Diocese of Juneau