

December 6, 2006

**An Open Letter from the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey to the
Members of the New Jersey Legislature on Marriage as
Only a Union Between One Man and One Woman**

Dear Senators and Members of the General Assembly:

We, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, urge the Members of the New Jersey Legislature to maintain the definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. This is critical as marriage is the foundation of the family. The family, in turn, is the basic unit of society.

Marriage as a union of one man and one woman has its roots not only in human tradition and history, but also in natural law, which transcends all man-made law. This definition of marriage is not the creation of any state. Rather, it is a natural institution that is prior to any particular political or legal system.

Marriage is distinct in essence from every other arrangement because marriage is always between a man and a woman. The Catholic Church celebrates the covenant of marriage as sacred. As teachers, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey point to both the Old Testament and the New Testament where the definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman is clear:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.
(Genesis 2:24)

And in the New Testament, Jesus teaches that marriage is a union between one man and one woman:

Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh... (Matthew 19:5-6)

We understand the constraints under which you are working to respond to the Supreme Court's decision in *Lewis v. Harris*. Please know that we share your desire to bring about a law that will treat people with justice and respect.

In seeking to change the current law, the plaintiffs in *Lewis v. Harris* called on the Court to provide equity with others in the State in areas such as health and retirement programs, property rights, tax advantages, recognition under inheritance laws and other benefits. We believe that a need for justice in such areas may indeed exist, but that this need should not be determined solely on the basis of a sexual relationship.

As the shepherds of more than four million citizens of this state, we see many cases in which the granting of such equal benefits would ease the burden, and provide equality, for those whose political fortunes are not as strong as the plaintiffs in *Lewis v. Harris* – elderly siblings, single mothers and grandmothers caring for a dependent child, to name a few. Such individuals are prohibited by law from marrying, and therefore are barred from any benefits that the Legislature may extend to the plaintiffs in *Lewis v. Harris*. Are they any less deserving of equal treatment and justice under the law?

At this critical moment in the history of our State, we urge you to think boldly and *inclusively* by creating a new legal structure of relationship for adults. Such a statute would extend the right to enter into a mutual support contract to any two adults who wish to do so regardless of gender, orientation or blood relationship.

If New Jersey is to be a leader in the nation in terms of equitable treatment of its people, let it be a leader in how it treats all of its people. Let us remember that New Jersey, like other states, has from the beginning recognized marriage, honored it, and sought to support and protect it. Today, we ask you to continue that great tradition of protecting marriage.

May God continue to provide you with strength and wisdom as you work to serve all citizens in this great State in which we live.

+ John J. Myers
Archbishop, Archdiocese of Newark

+ Joseph A. Galante
Bishop, Diocese of Camden

+ Paul G. Bootkoski
Bishop, Diocese of Metuchen

+ Arthur J. Serratelli
Bishop, Diocese of Paterson

+ John M. Smith
Bishop, Diocese of Trenton

+ Joseph Younan
Bishop, Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

+ Andrew Pataki
Bishop, Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese