



February 28, 2006 - Statement Of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference On Behalf Of Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley (Boston), Bishop George W. Coleman (Fall River), Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell (Springfield), And Bishop Robert J. Mcmanus (Worcester)

As the four Roman Catholic diocesan bishops of Massachusetts, we are pastors of local churches across the Commonwealth. While our principal responsibility is the pastoral care of Catholics, our dioceses collectively over the last century have created institutions of education, health care and social service, which are designed to contribute to the common good of the citizens of this state. We purposely direct our institutions to educate the young, care for the sick and serve the poor of the Commonwealth. It is our religious and moral obligation to collaborate as fully as possible with public institutions, other religious communities and citizens of good will to enhance the social welfare of all the citizens of the Commonwealth. We have tried to do this consistently for over a century and it is our firm desire to continue in this work of the Gospel.

We recognize that our service takes place in the context of a broader civil community where laws and policies change over time. It is necessary, therefore, for us to guarantee both the provision of our education, health care and social services and the Catholic identity of our institutions. The latter responsibility means that our educational, health care and social services must be rooted in the foundation of Catholic moral and social teaching even as we offer the services of these institutions to all in the Commonwealth.

Presently, we face a serious pastoral problem in which our religious freedom is challenged. In its 2003 statement on same sex marriage, the Catholic Church, through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, declared its opposition to the adoption of children by same sex couples. Existing Massachusetts regulations could require social service agencies to place children with same sex couples. We have provided adoption services in the Commonwealth for over 100 years. We do so out of religious and moral conviction that we should act in support of children in need and parents who seek to respond to those needs.

Because of the Church's teaching, Catholic agencies may not provide adoptions to same sex couples. Hence we intend to seek relief from the regulatory requirements of the Commonwealth on this issue. We do this in the hope that we will be able to continue focusing our attention on serving children in need of adoption, and to do so in a way which does not conflict with Catholic teaching and practice. We are asking the Commonwealth to respect the Constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and allow the Catholic Church to continue serving children in need of adoption without violating the tenets of our faith.

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