



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD  
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OFFICE OF  
THE ARCHBISHOP

April 25/26, 2009

Dear Parishioners:

I am deeply grateful to you for your active support of the need to include religious-conscience protections in Senate Bill No. 899, which implements equal protection for same sex couples. Your response to my letter carried in the bulletins and pulpits of our parishes last week was superb. As a direct result of the concerns that you expressed to your legislators in phone calls, emails, and other messages, the bill was amended to provide three important exemptions:

- First, a religious organization or an entity controlled by or in connection with a religious organization would not be required to provide services or facilities for or relating to a marriage that violates the religious beliefs and faith of that organization. Any refusal to provide such services and facilities will not subject that religious organization or entity to any penalty and will not establish a civil cause of action. This exemption not only recognizes the Church's right to refuse to participate in the solemnization of a homosexual union, but it also ensures that no action can be taken against the Church and its related entities when they deny use of their facilities for such occasions.
- Second, religious organizations may continue to provide adoption and foster care services as they deem appropriate provided they do not receive state or federal funds for such programs. Our Catholic Charities' adoption and foster care services do not receive state or federal funds for their programs. This exemption, therefore, preserves Catholic Charities' ability to operate its adoption program pursuant to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, rather than face closure as was the fate of the Catholic Charities' adoption program in the Archdiocese of Boston.
- Third, fraternal benefit societies, such as the Knights of Columbus, are able to retain control over the admission of their members and the scope of their beneficiaries, and are not required to provide insurance benefits to persons if to do so would violate that fraternal benefit society's free exercise of religion.

As you know, the Supreme Court of the State of Connecticut last year legalized marriages for same sex couples. Our challenge was to assure that our religious freedoms would be protected as we go forward. The inclusion of the above exemptions for religious organizations and their affiliated entities in the Same Sex Couples Bill is a clear recognition by the State of Connecticut that religious freedom must be preserved. Thank you for the integral role that you have played once again in bringing the need to protect our religious freedoms to the forefront of our legislators' attention. It is a significant accomplishment, particularly given the tight timeframe in which we had to work.

I thank once again our clergy for their invaluable work on this and so many other matters. I am also very appreciative of the legislators who supported our initiatives to amend the bill. Be assured, dear parishioners, of my heartfelt gratitude and profound appreciation for you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Henry J. Mansell  
Archbishop of Hartford