



MARRIAGE AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCCB Fact Sheet

2013

Redefining Marriage and the Threat to Religious Liberty

Pope Benedict XVI taught: “Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 29). As the following examples illustrate, efforts to redefine marriage are harming our religious liberties.

Maine (December 2012) – The State of Maine has informed all notaries public (approximately 25,000) – including clergy – that regardless of religious objections, they must “wed” same-sex “couples,” if they wed opposite-sex couples. Otherwise, these notaries could be subject to a claim of discrimination. In the words of one notary: “I’m a Catholic and under no circumstances would I do a same-sex marriage.” He added, “I’m concerned that if I refused to perform a same-sex marriage, I could be challenged legally.”

Maryland (December 2012) – A small business owner has had to terminate the wedding portion of his business or face lawsuits for not servicing same-sex “weddings.” This small business owner anticipates now losing approximately \$50,000 in revenue annually.

New York (September 2012) – A same-sex “couple” is suing a restaurant for cancelling their rehearsal dinner and the catering of their “wedding” because the restaurant manager allegedly does not want to participate in “gay weddings.” The restaurant manager allegedly cancelled the business arrangement for spiritual reasons.

Vermont (August 2012) – For allegedly not hosting a “wedding” reception for a same-sex “couple,” Catholic owners of a bed and breakfast settled a discrimination lawsuit, requiring them to (1) pay a \$10,000 civil penalty, (2) pay \$20,000 to a charitable trust, and (3) not host wedding receptions of any kind. Upon settling the lawsuit, the owners of the bed and breakfast said, “But no one can force us to abandon our deeply held beliefs about marriage.”

New Jersey (October 2012) – The New Jersey Division on Civil Rights found that a Methodist organization violated a public accommodations law by not allowing a same-sex civil union ceremony at its boardwalk pavilion.

New Mexico (May 2012) – The owners of a photography studio would not take the pictures of a same-sex “commitment ceremony” because they did not want to participate in behavior contrary to their religious beliefs. In May 2012, the New Mexico Court of Appeals denied the owners’ appeal, affirming the lower court opinion that the studio violated the state Human Rights Act. The owners of the studio, who have also been ordered to pay almost \$7,000 in attorneys’ fees to the complainant, have appealed to the New Mexico State Supreme Court.

Catholic Charities – Catholic Charities of Boston (2006), Catholic Charities San Francisco (2006), Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., (2010), and Catholic Charities affiliates in Illinois (2011) had to cease adoption services or face civil liability for not placing children in the homes of same-sex couples.

What can you do to ensure the protection of religious freedom at home and abroad?

The U.S. Bishops have called for a Fortnight for Freedom from June 21 to July 4.

Please visit www.fortnight4freedom.org for more information on this important time of prayer, education, and action in support of religious freedom!