

# Statement from Bishop William Murphy on Nassau County Executive Tom Suozzi's support of gay marriage

The Nassau County Executive, Tom Suozzi, has announced in *The New York Times* that he "now supports gay marriage." In his op-ed piece he states he is concerned about equality for gay couples but "as a practicing Catholic felt that the state should not infringe on religious institutions' right to view marriage in accordance with their own convictions." This second point is correct and one that every state is bound to respect. No state can legitimately infringe on a religious institution's right to live by their beliefs. That, however, is not the heart of the wrongheadedness of Mr. Suozzi's argument.

The logic of Mr. Suozzi's argument is difficult to discern. It seems that he has become convinced that because he has met homosexual persons who have suffered discrimination, they now have a "right" to insist that the state redefine their private sexual relationships and give such the term of marriage. The issues Mr. Suozzi names such as employment benefits, life and health insurance and inheritance laws either are already enjoyed by individuals who wish to name a companion to benefit from these or they can be so granted by simple adjustment of existing laws. None of these require that homosexual relationships between consenting adults need to receive the state's blessing declaring them marriage. Mr. Suozzi's argument fails logically because all the reasons he cites can easily be met without calling such relationships marriage.

Mr. Suozzi next wants to insure "equality" that he opines cannot be guaranteed if private homosexual relationships between consenting adults are given the status of mere "civil unions." In this he is correct. The answer, however, is not to give them a title, "marriage" that has a meaning with a purpose, a meaning and a purpose that homosexual relationships cannot fulfill. Whatever may be the intensity of a relationship between two persons, it cannot become what it is not. Some may find all kinds of positive qualities to such relationships, but it cannot be redefined into marriage. To use an absurd example, no matter how much a man might like so to do, he



## FAITH AND NEW WORKS

BISHOP WILLIAM MURPHY

cannot give birth to a child and if he is blessed to be the father of his child, he cannot claim he is really the mother.

At the heart of this is a truth that cannot be truthfully denied even by those who do deny it. The teleology (the natural meaning, end and purpose) of the human body demands that the sexual construct of human beings be respected. That construct and that teleology demonstrate only one legitimate conclusion. The sexual reality of

## THE MOST BASIC SOCIAL UNIT, PREDATING ANY OTHER SOCIAL INSTITUTION INCLUDING THE STATE, IS THE BOND BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN.

male and female is such that they are related to each other and to each other only in a complementarity that alone can naturally create new human life.

And that is why the state has a stake in having sound and healthy family life. I will pass over in silence Mr. Suozzi's remarks about the history of marriage in civil and religious society. He simply is wrong. But there is a point that is implicit in his remarks. Civil society has regulated marriage because, early on, the state has recognized that the most basic social unit, predating any other social institution including the state, is the bond between a man and a woman. For the good of the society, the state has made rules about marriage because the union of a man and a woman in faithful commitment to each other is a major factor in ensuring a healthy society as a whole. Other private sexual relationships are immaterial to the state because they have no impact on the common good which the state exists to foster and protect.

That is why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16) has included the marriage of a man and a woman as a basic human right. That would mean that it is a right that INHERES to us men and women because we are human, not because of sexual preference, nor because of a desire to give certain benefits to one group of persons or all persons. It is a HUMAN right to be exercised by the free choice of a man and a woman to appropriate this right to themselves. All a legitimate state can legitimately do is recognize a human right, protect it, foster it and not contradict it by some particular law that empties it of its meaning in response to the pressure of a powerful lobby or special interest group.

Such a group is the "gay lobby" which wants to claim the title "marriage" for gay and lesbian couples as a "civil right." That cannot be because there is no legitimate civil right here. To claim a CIVIL right is to contradict the HUMAN right of marriage between a man and a woman. True civil rights reflect and have to reflect, not contradict, human rights.

Mr. Suozzi predicts that his wish which he calls "equal civil marriage" will one day become law in New York. He may be right that this will happen. But this will mean nothing other than that a special interest group managed to persuade legislators or the courts to create a particular class and give it a label. The law will be as false as the claim. Unfortunately in our society where the government more and more feels free to create its own rules and definitions, the majority of people will then think that we have to acquiesce "because it is the law." Unjust and false laws are not binding except in a society that does not respect the freedom of its own citizens. We can hope and trust that the legitimate right to religious freedom Mr. Suozzi seeks to protect will in fact not be compromised by what I have called elsewhere "this journey into madness."

There is a further consideration that, as his bishop, I have to raise to Mr. Suozzi because he publicly identifies himself as a practicing Catholic. By so doing he certainly admits that he knows he is contradicting some basic moral teachings of his own faith. This

is not the first time he has done this. He has already placed himself publicly in the category of "pro-choice" on abortion. While homosexual orientation is a neutral reality on a moral level, homosexual acts are not morally neutral. They are wrong, and they are sinful. Abortion is wrong, and it is sinful. We bishops, the authentic teachers with the pope of the Catholic faithful, have made this abundantly clear. Our teaching is unambiguous, faithful to the Lord and binding on all Catholics. No Catholic is free to ignore or disregard this teaching. It is normative in the formation of the conscience of every Catholic who seeks to be faithful to the Lord and qualify as a "practicing Catholic." In saying this, I am not singling out Mr. Suozzi. I am speaking to all Catholics in our diocese and beyond, reminding them that what we bishops teach is not "another opinion" among many that Catholics may choose or not choose. Instead, such truths are "non-negotiable," binding on all of us who claim to be "practicing Catholics." Otherwise we are not faithful to our Lord, to His Church and to the ultimate truths about the human person which alone can bring us freedom, justice, joy and peace.

## BISHOP MURPHY'S CALENDAR

**TUES., JUNE 16 THROUGH FRI., JUNE 19**  
USCCB Spring Meeting, San Antonio, Texas

**SUN., JUNE 21**  
50th Anniversary of Parish and 100th Anniversary of Mission Church, St. Gertrude, Bayville, 11 a.m.

**MON., JUNE 22**  
Fidelis Care Board Meeting, New York City, 9 a.m.; New York State Catholic Conference Board Meeting, New York City, 10 a.m.

**TUES., JUNE 23**  
Mass and Leadership Meeting with Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood, 8 a.m.; Presbyteral Council Meeting, 12:30 p.m.; Catholic Charities Annual Board Meeting, 4 p.m.

**THURS., JUNE 25**  
Orthodox Jewish/Catholic Dialogue, New York City, 10 a.m.

**SAT., JUNE 27**  
Priest Ordination, St. Agnes Cathedral, 10 a.m.