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August 22, 2013

**URGENT LETTER TO ALL CATHOLICS IN THE STATE OF HAWAII  
FROM BISHOP LARRY SILVA**

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The issue of same-sex marriage is in the limelight once again in our community, with a move for a special legislative session to vote on a bill that would legalize same-sex marriage in Hawaii.

While the Catholic Church is clear in its insistence that true marriage can only be between one man and one woman, there are many people, even among Catholics, who perceive such insistence as unjust discrimination against our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. Therefore, it is urgent to clarify certain issues.

People with same-sex attraction are a part of our community, even our Catholic community, and they deserve dignity and respect. Unjust discrimination against them is not acceptable. However, not all discrimination – that is, making distinctions – is unjust. We discriminate quite justly between adults and minors, even though both have equal dignity. We justly discriminate between those who are married and those who are not, because marriage is a special societal bond that assures the continuation of the race in the context of raising children in the loving environment that appreciates the complementary nature of male and female. (If there were no such discrimination, same-sex marriage would not be an issue, since anyone who wanted to apply for any benefits could do so, whether married or not.) There is just discrimination between parents and children, professors and students. While they are all equal in dignity as persons, they are not equal in their roles. We must therefore be discriminating about the very language of discrimination, because there are those who demonize the word and who presume that any kind of discrimination is unjust. To discriminate between heterosexual and same-sex couples regarding marriage is not, despite the hype on the streets, unjust discrimination.

If same-sex marriage becomes the law of the land, its implications will go far beyond the relationship of this or that couple. There will be long term and definitive changes in our entire culture. If same-sex marriage becomes the law, it will become “normal” or the norm for our land. If one may marry without discriminating whether the partner is of the same sex or the opposite sex, then such “non-discrimination” will become the norm in other areas, too. Our school textbooks will have to portray sexual attraction as normal, no matter to whom one is attracted. When schools have dances, boys will have the choice of inviting a girl on a date or another boy on a date. Our youth, whose sexual identity is formed over time, will be forced to decide prematurely if they are heterosexual or homosexual, thus curtailing normal sexual maturation, with all its stumblings and challenges.

If same-sex couples are given the legal right to marry under the pretence that discrimination that excludes them from marriage is unjust, why would people who prefer several spouses at the same time not be afforded the same right? Why would we taxpayers be exempt from paying for marital benefits for all those spouses? Why would there be discrimination against those who decide to marry their mother or father, brother or sister, so that they can gain spousal benefits for them? Once we give in to the false notion that same-sex couples have a right to marry, how can we reasonably deny the same “right” to anyone who chooses to enter a “marriage” with a close relative, a minor (with consent)?

If same-sex marriage becomes “norm”-alized, would parents be considered bigoted if they raised their daughters to be attracted to boys and their sons to be attracted to girls? Or must parents now be completely neutral in steering their children toward the choice of a mate?

Would people who firmly believe that God made us male and female, and that God has revealed that homosexual ACTS are sinful be allowed to hold such beliefs? Or would they have to be “re-educated” to think as “normal” people think? Would churches that refuse to celebrate same-sex marriage because of deeply held religious convictions be deprived of the freedom to live those convictions? Would Christians, Muslims, and others who believe that homosexual ACTS are contrary to God’s law (the law that governs those whom God himself has created in such wonder) be persecuted for holding on to those beliefs that have been so sacred to us for centuries? Will the religious freedom we treasure be only a paper freedom, while we will be told what we may or may not believe?

Children will be the greatest casualties, in that they will be deprived of being raised in a loving home by a mother and a father who loves them and whose love cooperated with God’s plan in creating them. When children are deprived of such a home, there will be more poverty, more social ills, more juvenile suicides, and more problems than we can imagine.

The issue goes far beyond simply the private relationship of this or that couple, and its implications will be far reaching and profound. The language of the proponents is meant to convince us that this is a civil rights issue and that anyone who does not agree is bigoted. Do not be led astray with such language, and do not allow yourself to be bullied by it. Remember, Adam and Eve themselves fell for the serpent’s manipulative promise that they would be like gods, knowing good from evil, if they just ate the fruit God had forbidden them to eat. The fruit might have been tasty at the moment, but it ultimately brought us all into a very sorry state.

Several legislators who are not in favor of same-sex marriage have told me that the loudest voices on the issue are those who favor it, while those who say they are opposed are relatively silent. They pointed out that legislators do respond to their constituents and do care what they have to say, but if they only hear from one side of the issue, they presume that everyone is fine with same-sex marriage.

**IT IS TIME FOR OUR FAITH COMMUNITY TO MOBILIZE INTO ACTION.** The timing is critical, since this issue may be presented in a special legislative session within the next couple of weeks. **YOUR LEGISLATORS NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU NOW!** I therefore ask everyone to do the following within this coming week:

- Contact both the State Senator and Representative who represent your district, and let them know how you want them to vote on this critical issue for our community. A list of legislators by district is attached to this letter, along with phone numbers and email

addresses. Please be courteous, thanking them for the very difficult work they do, but be clear. It is said that some have already made up their minds, and that may be so. But minds and hearts can be changed with the influence of constituents.

- Ask your friends and neighbors who believe that marriage should only be between one man and one woman to contact their legislators as well.
- Pray for your legislators. (But do not let your prayers be mere words! See above.) Pray for the wisdom, courage, and commitment to contact your legislators and let them know what you think. I recommend that all Catholics offer ONE ROSARY (or at the least a decade of the rosary) each day in the next several weeks, so that the power of prayer will shape the discussions and deliberations about this critical issue. If possible, pray at all hours, walking around the block that surrounds the State Capitol (without forming an assembly that would need a permit), so that just as God tumbled down the walls of Jericho, he will be able to do so through the prayers AND ACTION of his beloved people.
- Be understanding and loving toward those who do not agree with you – even Catholic legislators who have committed to vote for same-sex marriage. Pray for a change of heart and the formation of an informed conscience, and let your love be the most powerful agent of change. After all, God is love!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Silva". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Larry Silva  
Bishop of Honolulu