



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



**PASTORAL LETTER REGARDING U.S. SUPREME COURT DECISION IN
OBERGEFELL VS HODGES LEGALIZING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christ teaches us that we are always to love God and our neighbor. Our neighbors include every human person. Each human person is created in the image and likeness of God thereby establishing his or her basic human dignity. Thus, the manner in which we treat our neighbor is the manner in which we treat God. It is always wrong and sinful to deny deliberately any human being the basic rights inherent in their dignity as human persons. These rights have correlative responsibilities that connect us with each other as members of our common home. Such rights include the fundamental right to life, the right to basic health care, the right to an education required for participation in society, the right to own property as a contributor and participant in the common good of society, the right to exercise and to express one's religious faith, and the right to act in accord with one's well-formed conscience. These rights inherent in human nature and their accompanying responsibilities are known to us both through our faith and also through our natural reason.

In an attempt to redress real incidents of "*animus*" against homosexual persons' legitimate human rights to participation within society, the Supreme Court of the United States has articulated an attempted redefinition of marriage in its 5-4 majority decision in the case *Obergefell vs. Hodges*. The Court has done so based upon the "right to privacy," based in autonomy (self-law) and not in human nature.

This principle of autonomy, steeped in individualism, prevents us from grasping our natural connectedness to other persons in our common human nature including its distinctions of masculinity and femininity. As Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si*, "valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it."

The majority decision of the Supreme Court states that "the nature of marriage is that, through its enduring bond, two people together can find other freedoms, in particular, the freedom of expression, privacy, and spirituality, regardless of their orientation." This statement within the majority decision introduces into law, without rational justification, a new and convenient definition of marriage as being ancillary to such relativistic and narrative-driven freedoms as expression, privacy, and spirituality.

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This new definition ignores the essential qualities of marriage as indissolubility, fidelity, and openness to the natural transmission of human life through the procreative act shared by a husband and a wife. In so doing, the decision formally, socially, and legally changes our understanding of what objectively constitutes a marriage more than simply by allowing gay people access to the social good of a marital relationship. The decision more directly changes “opposite-sex” marriage from possessing objective qualities to simply being a means to finding other freedoms like expression, privacy, and spirituality in the name of “marriage equality.” Thus, the decision’s stated attempt to redress the injustices against homosexual people is ineffective.

The legal ramifications of the decision will offer us challenges to our religious liberty and to the moral and social equilibrium of our families. These are challenges that we can and will face within the Church and in our society with confidence in God’s love for each and every human being. Yet, the decision will not change what the Church knows and teaches to constitute a marriage nor will it force us to celebrate ceremonies for same-sex couples. We must be humbly faithful to the Truth in Charity without fear to exercise our religious liberty in our public ministries and institutions.

I close this letter with a call for prayer for all who are affected by this decision. I ask for prayer for all of those homosexual people who have been hurt through actions of disrespect and even violence throughout our history and in current times. They are created in God’s image and likeness and deserve respect and love. They are our brothers and sisters. They are members of our families. They are good friends, and baptized members of the Church. They share our common call to holiness and virtue including chastity. They have responsibilities to the common good. I ask that we pray for the wisdom to articulate the understanding of marriage’s true nature with greater clarity as well as with stronger certitude. I ask that we pray for strength and perseverance for our Catholic married couples, that they might witness more clearly to their marital vocation by joyfully and gratefully living their promises of indissolubility, fidelity, and openness to God’s gift of children. Their marital vocation is a sign of hope and confidence in Christ’s unconditional love for His Bride the Church. Finally, I ask that we pray for docility and patience with each other in listening for the authentic voice of God as expressed through the Gospel and the teaching office of the Church. With prayers for peace and your happiness I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael F. Olson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Michael F. Olson, STD
Bishop of Fort Worth