



From: Rt Rev Patrick O'Donoghue
Bishop's Apartment
Cathedral House
Balmoral Road
Lancaster LA1 3BT
Tel 01524 596050

26 May 2008

The Future of *Catholic Caring Services*

My dear people,

I write about the future of *Catholic Caring Services* in the Diocese of Lancaster, in the light of the implementation of the Government's *Sexual Orientation Regulations* (within the *Equality Act [2006]*). This must be one of the most difficult letters I have ever written as your Bishop. I am being forced to act because of the Trustees' view (8-2) that we have no choice, if we are to remain in the work of adoption, but to accept homosexual and lesbian partnerships for the adoption of children.

Let me be absolutely clear on this point – at present *Catholic Caring Services* operates as an agency working in the name of the Catholic Church and as such its practice in adoption is to assess only married couples and to approve those couples it judges suitable to act as adoptive parents. In approving the married couple we are also explicitly and officially approving their union. This is because we seek a married couple who love each other and will remain faithful. Thus approval of parenting ability and approval of the marriage are inextricably entwined.

From January 2009, the Government expects *Catholic Caring Services* to treat same-sex applicants in an identical manner to married couples thus giving explicit approval of homosexual and lesbian partnerships. *Catholic Caring Services* would no longer be able to promote the Church's moral teaching that a marital setting is better for children rather than being placed with a same-sex couple.

It should be clear to everyone that, as your Bishop, I simply cannot give permission to an agency of the Catholic Church to act in opposition to her teaching and her long and rich experience of the placement of children with adoptive parents. Since its inception *Catholic Caring Services* has been governed by Catholic values and principles. These values and principles have been the determining factor in the distinctive contribution the Church has made to the wider community.

The Catholic Church holds as true that marriage between a man and woman gives them the capacity – according to revelation – to be co-creators with God in a manner in keeping with their dignity as persons created in the image of God. It further gives them the capacity to form life-giving and nurturing families – where role-models are so important - in the raising of children.

On grounds of conscience, formed by faith, we believe that same-sex partnerships do not provide the essential dimensions necessary for the well-being and development of the child. And it is this well-being of the child which should be paramount in our consideration of adoption. Through her long experience the Church is convinced that the best interests of children are served when they live with and are brought up by a married couple. In the Church's view, any dilution of this fundamental principle can harm children and undermine their paramount place in the whole question of adoption.

As a result of the Government's *Sexual Orientation Regulations* there are three options open to the Diocese and our agency, *Catholic Caring Services*:

- defy *the Regulations*,
- withdraw entirely from adoption and fostering work,
- or seek a way out.

I say immediately that the Church would never seek to defy the law or to encourage anyone to do so, that is not our way. However the Church is as entitled as any other group of citizens to question how a law is being interpreted and applied. We are also entitled to demand that any legislation is applied in a way that respects freedom of religion, because the right to freedom of religion is itself part of the law.

After consulting with people from within and outside of the Diocese, I believe that despite the *Sexual Orientation Regulations* it is possible for *Catholic Caring Services* to continue to provide adoption services while at the same time upholding the moral teachings of the Church.

Let me explain: The *Sexual Orientation Regulations* arise from part 3 of the *Equality Act 2006* but part 2 of the same Act also prevents public authorities discriminating on the grounds of religion or belief. In addition the regulations must be applied in a way that respects freedom of religion which is protected by the *Human Rights Act*. Therefore, my recommendation to my fellow Trustees of the Diocese of Lancaster's *Catholic Caring Services* is that we amend the Constitution of *Catholic Caring Services* so as to make it crystal clear that it will operate in accordance with the religious and moral principles of the Catholic Faith. This would mean that unmarried heterosexual couples would be rejected as prospective parents in the same way and on the same basis as same-sex couples. This would be consistent with parts 2 and 3 of the *Equality Act*. (*Regulation 18* of the *Sexual Orientation Regulations* follows a similar approach). As the Bishop of

Lancaster, I am only one trustee among ten, and it is my earnest hope that this letter will convince my fellow trustees of the wisdom of taking this legal route.

If, on the other hand, the trustees choose not to follow my recommendation, and decide in the future to approve of homosexual and lesbian couples as adopters – against the teaching of the Church, I believe this will have enormous consequences *i.e.* the use of the name 'Catholic,' Property, access to parishes and schools, collections etc.

Catholic Caring Services does excellent work in a whole range of social welfare areas, from adoption and foster care services, including residential care of children and young people, support of adopted adults, pregnancy counselling, services for adults with learning disabilities, residential and supported living, advocacy, services to deaf and hard of hearing people, and community development projects etc. It also provides an environment in which dedicated Christian social workers can carry out their vocation in an environment which respects their faith.

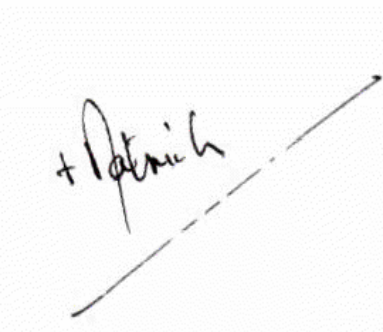
Over the generations thousands of Catholics have prayed and contributed to this vital work carried out by their Catholic Agency. It would not only be heart-breaking, but also a tragedy, if decisions are taken that break this relationship between the Diocese of Lancaster and *Catholic Caring Services*.

In the event of *Catholic Caring Services* not being able to continue in adoption work then I would hope that the Diocese would be in a position to set up an adoption group to canvass prospective adopters and support them following adoption.

I very much look forward to hearing from the Trustees of *Catholic Caring Services* as soon as possible.

With every good wish and prayer,

As ever in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Patrick O'Donoghue". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a dashed diagonal line that extends from the bottom left towards the top right.

+Patrick O'Donoghue
Bishop of Lancaster