



Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Denver

September 21, 2006

Protocol 06-18

The Pious Pastors of
the Holy Metropolis of Denver

Beloved in the Lord,

I recently read the enclosed article which I am sending to you with the expectation that you will find it useful in your parish ministry.

It is a known fact that the family is the foundation of society, more importantly it is the normative milieu in which we work out our salvation.

Alarming for the future of civilization, the family, especially the Christian family, has been under severe attack for the past forty years or more.

Cohabitation, once regarded with shame, has become so commonplace that it is hardly noticed by many people. It is truly amazing that individuals and even relatives seem to have no reluctance in acknowledging people who are "shacked up." On most of the affidavits for license to marry received at my office the bride and groom brazenly record the same address!

In the past year the matter of so-called "same-sex marriage" has been in the headlines. A surprisingly large number of people seem to regard this with indifference. We even see children being adopted by homosexual "couples" and church agencies – such as Catholic Charities in Boston – being forced out of adoption placement because they refuse to allow such couples to adopt children.

Whereas it was once rare for children to even know of divorced couples, "blended families" are now rapidly becoming the norm in most neighborhoods.

Since our faith has steadfastly taught that marriage is a reflection of the Church and Her relationship with God, and since children gain their first concept and understanding of God from the relationship they have with their parents, these commonplace situations have extremely profound and serious soteriological consequences.

There are, of course, excellent examples of children being raised by a single parent in a most nurturing and Christian manner. We do not mean to denigrate this heroic effort.

At the same time, however, I urge you to do all that you can to nurture a deep understanding of Christian marriage and family life among the faithful of this Metropolis and to encourage husbands and wives to remain faithful to each other; and if they have children, to place their first priority on their children whom they brought into the world and for whom they are responsible to God.

With Paternal Blessings,

✠ Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver

Enclosure

Why Marriage Matters to Children and to the Common Good

By Maggie Gallagher

For Christians marriage is a sacrament, revealing Christ's indestructible love. The Christian tradition has always recognized that marriage is also a natural relationship.

People of any faith or none can marry, and their marriages matter to God, to each other, to their children, and to the community.

A group of respected marriage and family scholars recently met to document the social science evidence that marriage matters. While there are, of course, single parents who do a splendid job of childrearing under very difficult circumstances, the scholars reached these conclusions among others:

- Marriage reduces the risk of poverty for children and communities. The majority of children whose parents don't marry or don't stay married experience at least a year of poverty.
- Fatherless households increase crime. Boys whose parents divorced or never married are two to three times more likely to end up in jail as adults.
- Marriage protects children's physical and mental health. Children whose parents marry and stay married are healthier and much less likely to suffer mental illness, including depression and teen suicide.
- Both men and women who marry live longer, healthier, and happier lives. On virtually every measure of health and well-being, married people are better off.

Cohabiting is not the same as marriage. Couples who just live together without the commitment of marriage do not get the same boost to health, welfare, and happiness, on average, as spouses. Children whose parents cohabit are at increased risk for domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect.

Parents who don't marry or stay married put children's education at risk. Children whose parents divorced or never married have lower grade-point averages, and are more likely to be held back a grade, and to drop out of school.

When marriages fail, ties between parents and children typically weaken, too. In one large national survey, 65 percent of adult children of divorce reported they were not close to their fathers (compared to 29 percent of adults from intact marriages).

Any development that weakens the norms of the married family will increase all these risks to children and to the communities in which these children live. An impressive number of studies confirm that individual children are more likely to engage in criminal conduct when raised in fatherless households.

Relatively little is known from a scientific standpoint about how children fare when raised by same-sex couples. After reviewing several hundred studies, University of Virginia sociologist Steven Nock concluded:

“[N]ot a single one of those studies was conducted according to generally accepted standards of scientific research.”

Children raised by same-gender couples remain a social experiment, about which we can say little with scientific certainty.

Marriage matters for the common good of society

Reconnecting marriage with its great historic cross-cultural task of encouraging men and women to beget and raise the next generation has never been a more urgent priority. On the one hand, a large majority of modern democracies are now experiencing very low birthrates, amid increasingly urgent concern about the social, economic, and political consequences.

As the eminent legal scholar and religious historian John Witte notes:

“Procreation ... means more than just conceiving children. It also means rearing and educating them for spiritual and temporal living. ... The good of procreation cannot be achieved in this fuller sense simply through the licit union of husband and wife in sexual intercourse. It also requires maintenance of a faithful, stable, and permanent union of husband and wife for the sake of their children.”

Marriage is also important for the intergenerational transmission of faith. Getting married, staying married, building loving marriages, and having children are the principle means through which a community propels itself into the future. When a nation or faith community succeeds in transmitting a powerful vision of marriage to the next generation, the result is not only good for children, it is vital to the future of the whole community.

Is it possible to do a better job building a stronger marriage culture among Christians?

Yes. We can take inspiration from other religious groups who are fighting the same deconstructing forces in the public culture.

The family is the prime evangelizer, one of the most powerful incubators of religious faith and identity. Christianity grew from a tiny group in Jerusalem to the faith of the Roman Empire in just 300 years. Playing no small part in this rise was Christian sexual ethics which, unlike secular Roman ethics, forbade infanticide, contraception, and non-marital sexuality, and discouraged family disruption and desertion.

If the Church community succeeded in finding the energy and means to transmit a Christian vision of marriage and family only to churchgoing Christians and their children, so that they became 10 percent more likely to marry, stay married, and have children who grow up with a similar commitment to building families, both the Church and the public square would be transformed within 30 years.

We can and must inspire, re-educate, serve, and protect those Christians who want to recommit to a Christian vision of marriage and family. The next generation is watching.

Maggie Gallagher is president of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy and a coauthor of “The Case for Marriage.”