

SISTERS OF LIFE

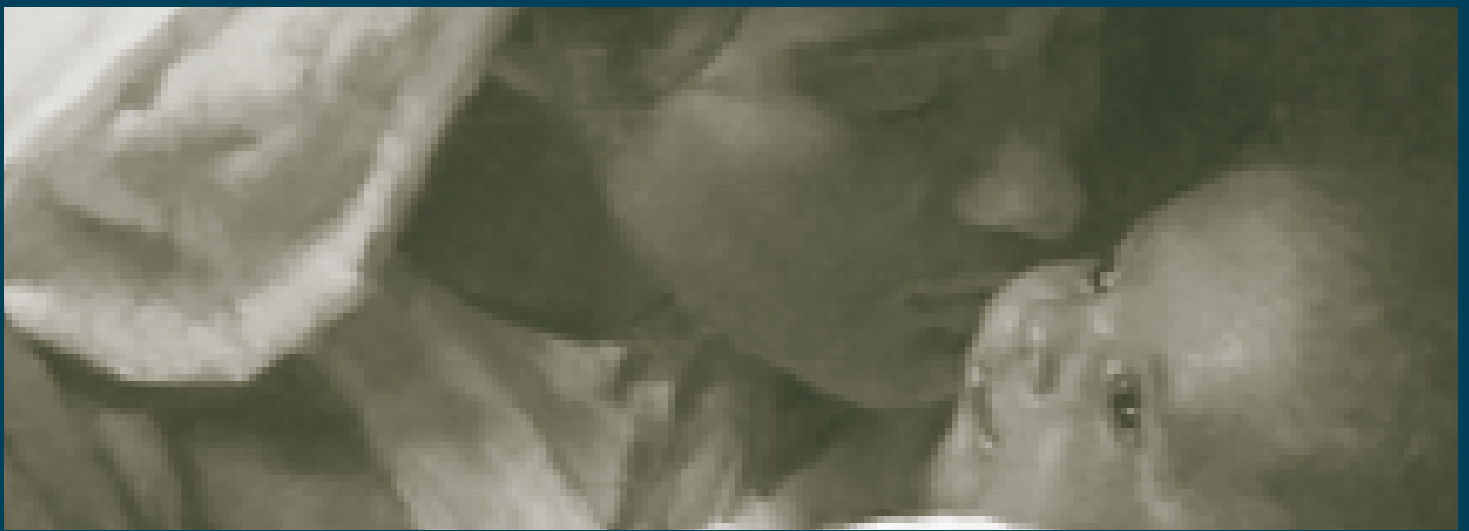
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She knelt and held Him
close against her heart,
And in the midnight,
adoration fused
With human love,
and was not separate.

-Rev. John Lynch

GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH

Consecrated for the Protection and Enhancement of the Sacredness of Human Life



Living in the MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS

Every Christmas we ponder anew the staggering truth that our God chose to teach us who He is (and who we really are) by wedding Himself to our humanity, even as an embryo in the womb of Mother Mary. Nine months later, angel voices summoned the shepherds to the stable in Bethlehem to witness God manifested in the flesh! Oh..., to have been in their company to witness such marvels! Perhaps, without recognizing it, we too have “kissed the face of Jesus.”

Here at the Sisters of Life we live the mystery of Christmas throughout the year. Even in the most difficult circumstances, once the drama of fear and despair has been conquered, a young woman entrusted with new life, finds during the months of waiting that the child becomes the cause of her joy and the source of a new-found sense of her own feminine dignity. With time, her love and courage is manifested in the flesh – *and for us a child is born!*

Our Bethlehem is St. Vincent's Hospital in lower Manhattan, and our summons comes night or day, not with angel voices, but with the whispers of a young woman who knows that the time for welcoming her child has come. Often, one or two Sisters, with whom she has walked closely through the months of pregnancy, assist at the birth of the child. Needless to say, this is a singular privilege.

As a gift to you this Christmas several Sisters share what they have learned about Jesus while accompanying a young mother at the birth of one made in His Image, and welcomed into the world under circumstances not unlike His own. Love gives life to a family – and our family is growing! Each year the Sisters welcome “home” the mothers and children born at Sacred Heart Convent to celebrate the birth of Love. Joy-filled experiences like these, together with the tangible mercy of God we witness in the lives of those who have suffered abortion, shine so that we “cannot deny what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Because we “cannot deny what we have seen and heard” Sisters evangelize both at home, and throughout the nation. Spearheaded by the Sisters, young Catholic New Yorkers have been bringing their faith in the sacredness of human life to the streets of New York. Finally, we reprint Cardinal Egan's reflection on the truth about marriage, and its importance to our families, our culture and our nation.

Christmas is the manifestation of God's Incarnation in the flesh - as we rejoice, let us ask how He is calling us to bring the truth of His love to the world.

With the Christmas prayers of all the Sisters,

M. Agnes

Natalie, Victoria and “the Lady”

There she was, the young woman whom I had journeyed with for so many months, crying and counting her newborn daughter's fingers and toes, kissing her beautiful 6 lb. baby's head full of curly jet black hair. I breathed a sigh of relief.

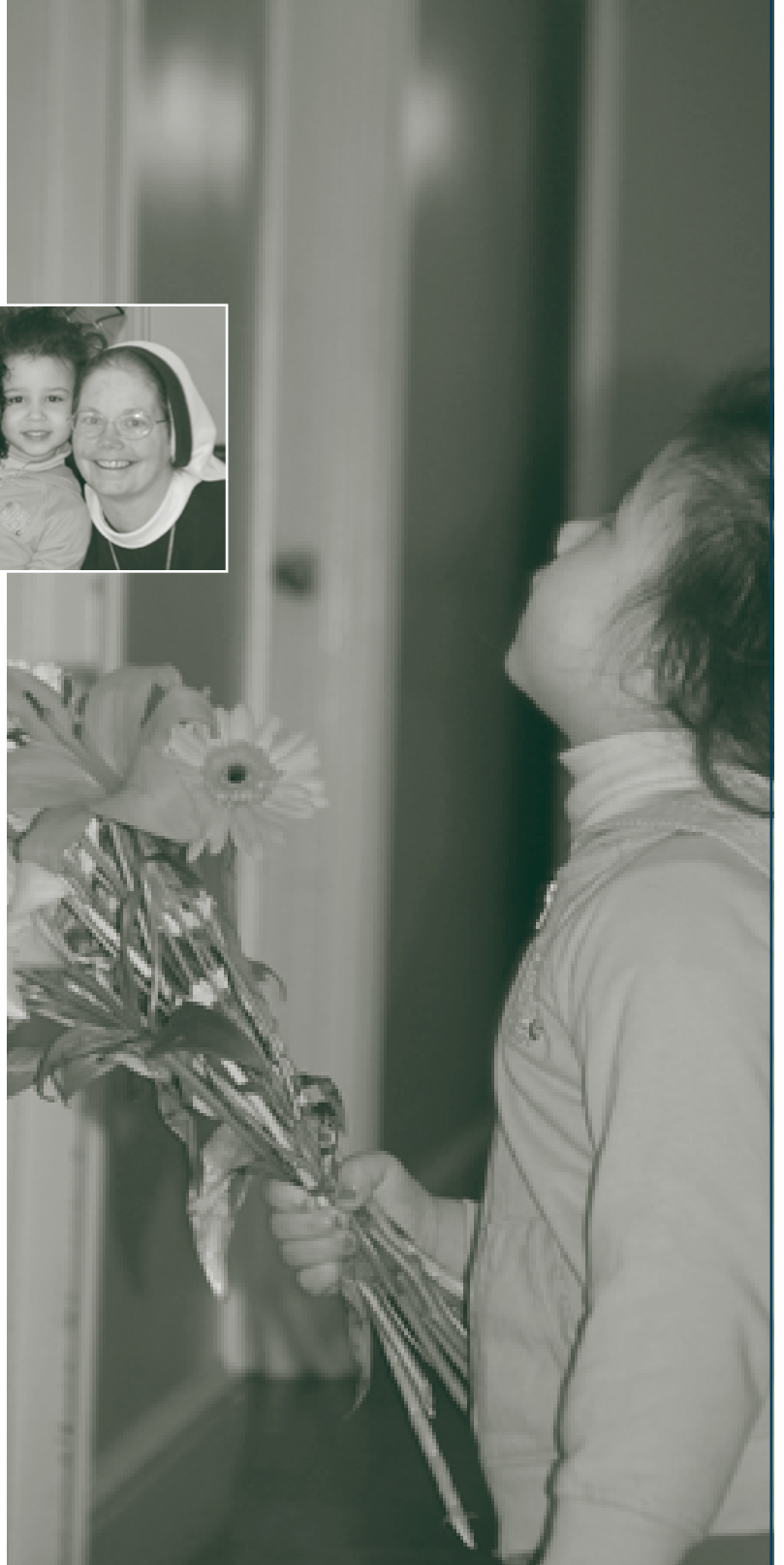
Natalie had suffered greatly to bring this little one to birth as she endured a serious medical problem that complicated her pregnancy (amidst extreme pressure from all directions to abort). For the last two months she was in constant pain and barely slept.



There she was, holding little Victoria Casey out to me, saying how blessed she was to have given birth on Mother's Day and talking all about “the Lady.” I too was overcome with emotion looking at her daughter for whom she had fought so hard, knowing that it was through this pregnancy that her faith was rekindled. She had developed a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother, whom she affectionately called *the Lady*, naming Victoria after Our Lady of Victory because she had helped her triumph over so many trials during her pregnancy. “Happy Mother's Day Natalie,” I whispered as tears rolled down my face. I was so proud of her, having watched her meet each obstacle and setback with new determination and an ever deepening faith.

After Natalie found an apartment, she would often stop by the convent, always bringing flowers for *the Lady* (to place by the statue of Mary in our chapel, before which she had prayed each night while living at Sacred Heart). When she stops by these days, it is little Victoria who rushes into the chapel to wave and blow kisses to Jesus in the tabernacle and to bring flowers to *the Lady*.

- Sr. Mary, SV



New Life: the cause of her joy and the source of a new-found sense of her own feminine dignity.



When I moved to Sacred Heart of Jesus convent as a novice, I stepped into mystery. Sure, the women who lived as our guests were each unrepeatable icons of God, but I didn't know any of them yet. I was a little nervous. Little did I know how real and how blessed a relationship built on trust in the midst of vulnerability could be. As the days went by, conversations shifted from small talk to matters of the heart. Hearing them, deep respect grew: hidden within each were stories of courage, resilience, and forgiveness that could move the world. From respect grew trust - and tears that needed to be shed, laughs that deserved to be shared, worries that crept up in the night and hopes that dawned each morning. A spontaneous delight welled up in me as I saw our guests becoming more free, and excited about giving birth. I truly loved these women and whatever I could do to help them simply flowed from that. I knew I wasn't alone in my experience and was deeply moved when one of the guests asked if a Sister could stay with her during the birth of her child. Soon it became clear that this wasn't unusual. The entrustment of such a sacred moment isn't isolated from the beauty of the whole: this, too, is born of respect and the love found in the Heart of God. How grateful I am to have stepped into the mystery!

A Glimpse of His Vision

- Sr. Giovanna Mariae, SV

I wasn't home when Marjorie went to the hospital, already in labor. As soon as I returned, and heard she had not yet had her baby, I packed up a few things and went back out the door with a thrill in my heart and eagerness in my step.

I arrived at the hospital to find that Marjorie was pretty close to delivering and, totally to my surprise, she was much more relaxed than I was! This gentle young woman was such a joy to me - and she was giving me the mind-boggling privilege of being one of the first persons in the world to see her tiny baby's face! I began praying the "Our Father" under my breath - praying on behalf of Marjorie and the baby to *our Father* in Heaven.

I was completely overcome with awe - all I could do was watch in joy and incredulity when, in the early hours of the morning, this tiny life slowly crossed the threshold of the womb and entered the world in a new way. The moment was so powerful that there aren't words complete enough to describe it. I can say, though, that I fell in love with that baby, with this person whom I had never seen before but had somehow come to know over the past few months. My love for Marjorie also grew that evening as I stood as a witness to her love and bravery, as I witnessed the fruition of her decision to give the gift of life to her child.

The Lord gave me a glimpse into His vision, an insight into how much He loves each of His children. I experienced in a small way how fervently He desires life for each of us -- not just physical life, but life with Him for all eternity. God's presence and love were so present in that room - not as a pleasant feeling, but as the determined choice to give of oneself no matter the self-sacrifice involved, as a decision to choose the good of another over oneself.



celebrating birthdays

-Sr. Mary Karen, SV

Long before I went to the hospital with Jeanette*, I knew the birth of her child would be something really beautiful. I knew it because everything Jeanette had already taught me was beautiful. I had no idea, though, that the birth of her child would be the most amazing experience of my life.

It didn't quite start that way, though. As the Doctor (who I had been excitedly telling about NFP for months to no avail) began to prep Jeanette for her Epidural, everything strangely and suddenly went into slow motion for me. I turned to Sr. Gemma and said in a funny, drone-like voice, "I don't feeel so good...." Before I could say Ave Maria, I was lying flat in a bed with smelling salts and all-day access to free Ginger Ale. Needless to say, the nurses weren't thrilled to have a second patient and the threat of expulsion loomed over my woozy head the rest of the time. Gratefully, Jeanette knew me pretty well by that point and nothing surprised her. It wasn't long before we were all back on track.

I had no idea how much I would be drawn up into the drama of the birth. I have never been so quiet in my life. And in the quiet, the whole event was relational – we were there with our friend, and we were

somehow (in a very little way) sharing her suffering, her love, her goodness. I couldn't even speak, you could feel the dignity and sacredness of the moment filling the air. It was utterly sublime. Then the baby came, and I can't put words on the joy that exploded through my whole being when he made his first little sound, as if he had been waiting a very long time to introduce himself. In the intense beauty of that moment, I thought there must be angels at every birth singing, "Glory to God in the highest! And peace to his people on earth!" I became aware of the dignity of every person's birth, and of the gift of life. I believed with all my heart that I was at the birth of someone very special. And then I realized – wow, this is what it feels like at every person's birth. There's a reason we celebrate birthdays.

Being at that delivery gives me a new perspective on Christmas. What was it like for Mary and Joseph to actually see the face of Christ for the first time? To look into his eyes, to hear his first sound as it broke the silence? Would that we always look upon each other with the reverence and gratitude that informs that first glance. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Her love and courage is manifested in the flesh...and for us a child is born!

WHERE JESUS ABID



There is Love.

ES



The chiming doorbell breaks through the din of laughter and the pitter-patter of sugar-filled children racing down hallways. Sr. Mary Kolbe walks towards the door as a voice cries out: "It's Tiffani!" A thousand memories

flash through Sr. Mary Kolbe's mind and heart as she opens the door. Beaming before her are two bright faces, one a clearly successful professional woman, the other, held close in Mom's arms, a little girl decked out for the Christmas party.



"We're here!!" little Kayla croons with delight on seeing Sr. Mary Kolbe. Squirming out of her mother's arms, she races past Sister into the crowd of children sliding down the waxed hall. Tiffani hugs Sr. Mary Kolbe and, exchanging Christmas greetings, suddenly remembers herself: "You were the first one I met!" With a smile and a nod, memories pass silently between them: the fears, the trust that grew, the late nights talking, the joy of birth, the changed priorities, the baptism, the new job, the new realization of her worth.

Laughing, they walk towards the smell of just-out-of-the oven Christmas cookies and the sound of Christmas carols. Joy is in the air; around the tall tree and crèche are people – lots of them - chatting, sipping hot cocoa, and singing along with the Sisters. As Tiffani enters the room she is immersed in a chorus of welcomes and hugs: this will always be home, no matter how many years have passed. She looks around at the others in the room; each with a remarkable story behind her, and finds the one who looks the newest, still pregnant, taking it all in. Sitting beside her, Tiffani holds out her hand and introduces herself with a "Merry Christmas!" and the sure knowledge that they are more sisters than strangers.

Welcome to the annual Christmas Party at Sacred Heart of Jesus convent. Each year, the women and children who once called this home return to celebrate the Lord's birth with "their" Sisters. Many of our former guests stay in contact with us regularly, but the Christmas party is a time guests reunite with old friends as well: stories are re-told, updates shared, the Christmas Story acted out and gifts given to the mothers and their children. Now a much anticipated Christmas tradition, it is far more than a social nicety. Observing a seven year old boy quietly slipping into the chapel during the party, one of the Sisters realized that this little party is a return to their roots for the children born here, a return to the place where the Eucharistic Jesus welcomed them into the world and where their mothers were welcomed back into hope.

we cannot deny what we have seen



the 40 Days for Life campaign

On September 23 at 11 pm on a dark city street in the Bronx a group of people gathered for a candle light prayer vigil to mark the beginning of the *40 Days for Life* campaign. From September 24 through November 2, thousands of people in 177 cities and 47 states took part in the initiative. Families, college students, young professionals, and retired people participated in 40 days of prayer, fasting and constant vigil outside facilities where abortions are performed, to heighten community awareness of the tragic reality occurring in their midst. Often people don't know or have grown numb to the fact that over one million abortions occur annually in the United States, and thousands in their own backyard.



As a result of the campaign in past years, we know of two abortion facilities that have shut down, hundreds of women who have received the practical help needed in order to choose life and several people who worked in these facilities have left their jobs to seek other employment. Who can measure the effect of thousands of hearts united in prayer, seeking the face of Christ to bring about a true culture of life?

On September 24, first thing in the morning, Chris Slattery stood outside of a South Bronx clinic to pray and to offer other options to the women headed in. Moments after the clinic opened two women who had abortions scheduled for that morning accepted Chris's help. He called our Sisters and the women soon found themselves welcomed into the peace of the Visitation Convent. There they were offered the practical, spiritual, and emotional support they will need in the upcoming months.



Witness to Life

Another initiative spearheaded by our Sisters and the young adults in NYC takes place the first Saturday of every month: Witness to Life. It begins with Holy Mass at 8 am at Old St. Patrick's Cathedral followed by a rosary procession to Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest provider of abortions. One Saturday, Msgr. Philip Reilly, founder of the *Helpers of God's Precious Infants*, an international movement of prayer and witness, reminded the young people that when they go to pray outside the abortion clinic they stand united with Christ at the foot of the Cross as witnesses of His love.

The spirit of the *40 Days for Life* and the *Witness to Life* are that of humble and peaceful intercession. People gather to pray for and to love the women who are going into the clinics; to love the children in their wombs whose lives on earth may soon end; and to love the men and women who work in the clinics. In the darkness surrounding so much evil and suffering, they are there as witnesses of hope. They are there to pray for the salvation of souls – and to stand faithfully with Christ at Calvary: to be His hands, His feet and His face of love. These are the people Pope Benedict refers to when he spoke at World Youth Day in Sydney, *"Empowered by the Spirit, and drawing upon faith's rich vision, a new generation of Christians is being called to help build a world in which God's gift of life is welcomed, respected and cherished – not rejected, feared as a threat and destroyed. A new age in which love is not greedy or self-seeking, put pure, faithful and genuinely free, open to others, respectful of their dignity, seeking their good, radiating joy and beauty."* And like the candles that pierced through the darkness of the streets on that late September night in the Bronx, the prayers and witnesses of those who seek His face, break through the darkness of evil and mark the way of hope.

Who are these people and how can I get involved?

Sisters of Life Co-Worker Training:
March 7th in Manhattan
for info call 212.737.0221
or email visitationmission@archny.org

www.40daysforlife.org
www.catholicnyc.com
www.helpersny.org



Maple Leaf Brief

After a year of evangelization throughout Canada, our Sisters are bringing our Visitation Mission of service to women who are pregnant and in need to Toronto. Currently visiting parishes to invite groups and individuals to become Co-workers of Life, they will hold the first Canadian Co-worker Training in Toronto on Saturday, February 28, 2009.



St. Barnabas in the year of St. Paul

Because our 16 novices have filled up St. Frances de Chantal convent, home to both our postulants and novices over the years, we needed to open a new convent this fall for our 7 postulants. In October, St. Barnabas Convent in the Bronx became our first postulant house.

Upcoming Events:

Family Life/ Respect Life Office Mission:

Family Life Conference

Saturday, March 21, 2009

at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, NY
featuring nationally known speakers

St. Ignatius' Discernment of Spirits Weekend Conference in Manhattan

with Rev. Timothy Gallagher, OMV

Jan. 31-Feb 1, 2009 at St. Vincent Ferrer Church

For more info or to register visit www.FLRL.org.

Co-workers of Life Training in Manhattan

Visitation Mission at St. Vincent Ferrer Church

Saturday, March 14, 2009

Days of Prayer and Healing (after abortion):

For Women: Jan. 10, March 7, April 18, June 13

To register call 866.575.0075

or postabortion@sistersoflife.org

For Men: May 9. To register call 877.586.4621

or lumina@postabortionhelp.org



Retreats at Villa Maria Guadalupe

◆ Sunday Advent Series

4:00pm: Nov. 30, Dec. 14, Dec. 21

◆ Fiesta Guadalupe - **Bring the Family!**

Dec. 14, 11:00 am Mass - festivities to follow

◆ Good News for Medical Professionals

Introduction to Natural Family Planning

Jan. 17, 11:30 am - 4:30 pm

◆ Women's Rest-Oration Retreat

(for women aged 18-30): Jan. 30 - Feb. 1

◆ Theology of the Body

Rev. Walter Schu, LC: Feb. 13 - 15

◆ Praying with Scripture

Rev. Timothy Gallagher, OMV: March 6 - 8

◆ Pro-life Retreat

Rev. Joseph Koterski, SJ: March 13 - 15

◆ Directed or Private silent retreats available:

(for women) Jan. 2 - Jan. 11, Apr. 15 - 24,
May 26 - June 4, July 26 - Aug. 4,

◆ Preached Retreat (for women) Aug. 16 - Aug. 25

For more information go to:

www.sistersoflife.org/vmg.html

or call 203.329.1492

MARRIAGE

definitions

By Edward Cardinal Egan



No one likes definitions of deeply human realities. For a definition can be cold and remote, or at least seem to be such. When what is defined is deeply human, one feels the need for a bit of poetry in the defining, lest the wonder of the defined be somehow lost.

Marriage is a case in point. It is a permanent, exclusive relationship of a man and a woman who seek fulfillment in acts of love, and especially in that act of love which in the ordinary course of events leads to the procreation of offspring. The definition is accurate, but the poetry is missing. Nor should this be a surprise. A definition of motherhood would never do the reality justice, and the same might be said of a definition of patriotism and so much else that is deeply human and inevitably entangled in feelings and emotions.

The reason, however, is not a lack of poetry in the timeless and classic definition, as some would suggest, but rather a desire to make marriage into something it is not. In the new definition, instead of being only a relationship between one man and one woman, marriage is to become also a relationship between two men or two women or any other combination or number of human beings that seek to relate among themselves. Accordingly, the definition would not require the male-female and procreative aspects of marriage and would therefore define little more than friendships or partnerships of any kind that look to achieve fulfillment by mutual caring.

Any harm in this? Yes, indeed. If ever in the history of this nation of ours, marriage in its full and authentic meaning needed to be protected, it is now. Children without a mother and a father may in certain circumstances "turn

He is calling us to bring the truth of His love and life to the world.

out well," as we all know. However, the chances that they will not so "turn out" in our time and society are asserted and documented by virtually all respected psychologists and sociologists, no matter what their philosophical or political leanings. The father has a unique and essential contribution to make to the development of the child, no less than the mother; and two fathers or two mothers are not a father and a mother. In the words of one of the wisest human beings I know: "Take away mom and dad, and you damage first our children and then the society in which our children are to work out their lives. Nature will have it no other way."

But does not this position entail discrimination, for example, against two men or two women who want to have their caring relationship considered and recognized as a marriage? Not at all. I might want to be considered an angel and to be recognized as such. Still, in point of melancholy fact, there are elements of the angelic that are simply not to be found in me. A friendship or partnership of two persons of the same sex, no matter how caring it may be, is not a union between a male and a female whose love is to inspire and include acts that by their nature lead to the begetting of offspring. This is reality, not discrimination.

Moreover, once marriage is stripped of its essentials and reduced to any form of endearing human relationship so as to avoid an accusation of discrimination, the slide down the slippery slope of a gravely damaged society is inescapable. In the new definition, must the relationship of two men and one woman or 10 women and one man be considered and recognized as marriages? If not, why not? Cannot members of these kinds of relationships also be the objects of discrimination? But even more importantly: if all of these various relationships are to be considered and recognized as marriage, must not society protect and promote them, just as it needs to protect and promote marriage in its timeless and classic sense if it wishes to thrive and even survive? As the ancient Romans expressed it: "From a false premise, anything can follow."

All of this may sound a bit overly theoretical. Perhaps it would be well to bring the issue down to day-by-day life in our very concrete and practical world.

Let us suppose that the new definition of marriage takes hold. It is considered appropriate and in due course becomes enshrined in law. Let us further suppose that a charitable agency believes that marriage is between a man

and a woman and will not therefore arrange for the adoption of a child by a couple of men or a couple of women or any other groupings that are not one man and one woman. Could the law force the agency to do what the agency knows to be wrong at least as regards the well-being of the child to be adopted? Lest you feel that this is an unlikely scenario, please know that it has been played out in Boston with the result that the adoption agency of Catholic Charities has had to close its doors. And the same fate awaits clergy who refuse to witness "marriages" that are not marriages and schools that refuse to teach the new and dangerous definitions of that essential, precious and—for us Catholics—sacred union of man and woman that is marriage.



Some weeks ago, against the clear will of the electorate, four federal judges legislated a new definition of marriage for the State of California, whereby a male can "marry" a male, and a female a female. Within a few days, the governor of our state announced that such "marriages" contracted in California are to be recognized as valid here in New York. [editors note: the decision was handed down in May 2008.]

The alarm has thus been loudly sounded, and it is time that people of common sense and fundamental morality make their voices heard. Here in the State of New York, we are blessed with an institution that is firmly in place and well-equipped to assist us in this crucially important effort.

It is the Catholic Advocacy Network, which is located on the Web site of the New York State Catholic Conference, www.nyscatholic.org. With all the urgency I can muster, I ask the People of God of the Archdiocese of New York to do three things:

1. Sign up with the Network: www.nyscatholic.org.
2. Learn from the Network more about the implications of so-called "same-sex" marriages, and
3. Join 55,173 members of the Network in protecting marriage and family life by telling legislators and judges where we stand in this struggle for common sense and fundamental morality.

There is no time to lose. If we hesitate, the damage may become such as cannot be easily reversed. And this, as citizens and Catholics, we dare not allow.

To learn more about how you can support marriage visit the National Organization for Marriage:
www.nationformarriage.org



SISTERS OF LIFE

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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