



# MARRIAGE AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCCB Fact Sheet

2015

## Redefining Marriage and the Threat to Religious Liberty

The Catholic Church teaches: “Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 29). The following examples illustrate that efforts to redefine marriage are harming the religious freedom of believers in the true definition of marriage.

**Idaho** – In 2014, two Protestant ministers (a husband and a wife) who operate a wedding chapel in Coeur d’Alene said they would not officiate at a same-sex “wedding.” City officials informed the ministers that their refusal to officiate violated the city’s ordinance outlawing discrimination in public accommodations on the basis of “sexual orientation.” The city eventually declined to prosecute the ministers.

**New Mexico** – The owners of a photography studio would not take the pictures of a same-sex “commitment ceremony” because they did not want to participate in behavior contrary to their religious beliefs. In 2013, the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled against the owners of the studio. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

**Washington** – A florist who declined to provide flowers for a same-sex “wedding” was sued by the state Attorney General. In February 2015, a state judge ruled against the florist and found that she “cannot comply with both the law and her faith if she continues to provide flowers for weddings as part of her duly-licensed business, Arlene’s Flowers.”

**Colorado** – Two men “married” in Massachusetts requested a Denver bakery make a “wedding” cake for their wedding

reception in Denver. For religious reasons, the owners of the bakery declined to make the cake. The two men filed a complaint with the Colorado Division of Civil Rights, which found that the bakery violated the law. Then the Attorney General’s office filed a complaint against the bakery, resulting in further court rulings against the bakery.

**Vermont** – For allegedly not hosting a “wedding” reception for a same-sex “couple,” Catholic owners of a bed and breakfast settled a discrimination lawsuit, requiring them to (1) pay a \$10,000 civil penalty, (2) pay \$20,000 to a charitable trust, and (3) not host wedding receptions of any kind. Upon settling the lawsuit, the owners of the bed and breakfast said, “But no one can force us to abandon our deeply held beliefs about marriage.”

**New Jersey** – The New Jersey Division on Civil Rights found that a Methodist organization violated a public accommodations law by not allowing a same-sex civil union ceremony at its boardwalk pavilion.

**Catholic Charities** – Catholic Charities of Boston (2006), Catholic Charities San Francisco (2006), Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. (2010), and Catholic Charities affiliates in Illinois (2011) had to cease adoption services or face civil liability for not placing children in the homes of same-sex couples.

**Legislation called the Marriage and Religious Freedom Act has recently been introduced in the U.S. Congress to try to remedy some of these problems and ensure that people can live out their beliefs on marriage.**

*What can you do to ensure the protection of religious freedom at home and abroad?*

The U.S. Bishops have called for a Fortnight for Freedom from June 21 to July 4, 2015. Please visit [www.fortnight4freedom.org](http://www.fortnight4freedom.org) for more information on this important time of prayer, education, and action in support of religious freedom!