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## BISHOP'S COLUMN

# The Truth will set us free

 25 February 2022

*by Bishop James Conley*

I am privileged to serve on the United States Bishops' standing Committee on the Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone is our chairman. Earlier this month we celebrated National Marriage Week and World Marriage Day, where we took the opportunity to focus on and celebrate the vocation to marriage. The theme this year is "Called to the Joy of Love."

We all know that traditional marriage between a man and a woman, who pledge themselves to each other in an unbreakable bond of love, is under attack in our culture today.

In 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage throughout the land for the first time in our history.

In more recent years we have experienced in our society an ideology that accepts the understanding that we are free to choose our own gender and even physically alter our body from the biological sex we received at birth.

Those who find themselves confused about their own gender and identity, something known as gender dysphoria, deserve our mercy and compassion. We must be slow to judge and quick to show mercy to anyone who is struggling to understand the meaning of their life and their own identity.

But mercy without truth is a false kind of mercy, a mere sentimentalism. And truth without mercy is a cold and cruel dictate that does not recognize the struggles and weakness of our fallen humanity.

Perhaps an oversimplification but nonetheless wise axiom: “we must love the sinner but hate the sin.”

We cannot deny the truth about the human person, what we know to be true from God and from the teachings of the Catholic Church. Sexual difference is not an accident from God or a flaw, it is a gift that helps us grow close to each other and close to God. What God has created is good, true, and beautiful. “God created man in his own image; in the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them (Gen 1:27 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1>)).”

A person’s discomfort with his or her sex, or the desire to be identified as the other sex, is a complicated reality that needs to be addressed with sensitivity and truth. Each person deserves to be heard and treated with respect; it is our responsibility to respond to their concerns with compassion, mercy, and honesty.

Children especially are harmed when they are told that they can “change” their sex, further, when they are given hormones that will affect their development and possibly render them infertile as adults. Parents deserve better guidance on these important decisions, and we urge medical institutions to honor the basic medical principle of “first, do no harm.”

Gender ideology harms individuals and societies by sowing confusion and self-doubt.

For these reasons, the state has a compelling interest in maintaining policies that uphold the scientific fact of human biology and supporting the social institutions and norms that surround it. For example, laws that seek to elevate sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes undermine this basic fact of our human biology. Rather than protect against unjust discrimination, these policies enshrine a false understanding of the human person into our legal structures.

Just last week, the Lincoln City Council passed a broad revision of its city ordinances related to equal opportunity. In these revisions, they added sexual orientation and gender identity as legally protected classes. Changing the city code here in the city of Lincoln to reflect a false notion of human dignity is a bad policy. This will not lead to greater human flourishing and happiness in society.

While the City Council passed this ordinance, we still have an important opportunity to let our voices be heard and halt this policy. The Nebraska Family Alliance (<https://nebraskafamilyalliance.org/let-us-vote/>) has filed a referendum petition opposing the city ordinance. If enough signatures are gathered (4,137 signatures), it will stop the ordinance from being enacted. The City Council can then either repeal the ordinance or let the voters decide whether it should go into legal effect. I encourage all of us who are eligible to sign the petition.