

Letter from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor to Tony Blair and members of the Cabinet, 22 January 2007

Dear Prime Minister and Members of the Cabinet,

It has always been the wish of the Catholic Church in this country to work with the Government for the common good of its people. We believe we do this in matters of social care, education and in many other ways. Catholic teaching urges us to do this, and we do it gladly in a spirit of cooperation.

We would, however, have a serious difficulty with the proposed regulations on discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services if they required our adoption agencies to consider homosexual couples as potential adoptive parents.

The Catholic Church utterly condemns all forms of unjust discrimination, violence, harassment or abuse directed against people who are homosexual. Indeed the Church teaches that they must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. We, therefore, recognise many elements of recent legislation – including much in the Northern Ireland Regulations – that takes steps to ensure that no such discrimination takes place.

What, then, is the problem? It is that to oblige our agencies in law to consider adoption applications from homosexual couples as potential adoptive parents would require them to act against the principles of Catholic teaching. We require our agencies to recruit and approve appropriate married and single people to meet the needs of children in local authority care for whom adoption has been identified as being in their best interest. We place significant emphasis on marriage, as it is from the personal union of a man and a woman that new life is born and it is within the loving context of such a relationship that a child can be welcomed and nurtured. Marital love involves an essential complementarity of male and female. We recognise that some children,

particularly those who have suffered abuse and neglect, may well benefit from placement with a single adoptive parent.

However, Catholic teaching about the foundations of family life, a teaching shared not only by other Christian Churches but also other faiths, means that Catholic adoption agencies would not be able to recruit and consider homosexual couples as potential adoptive parents.

We believe it would be unreasonable, unnecessary and unjust discrimination against Catholics for the Government to insist that if they wish to continue to work with local authorities, Catholic adoption agencies must act against the teaching of the Church and their own consciences by being obliged in law to provide such a service.

Catholic adoption agencies have readily accepted their responsibility to provide an informative, sympathetic and helpful service to all those who enquire about adoption, whether or not they meet the agency's criteria for acceptance for assessment. Catholic adoption agencies welcome adoptive applicants from any or no religious background. Homosexual couples are referred to other agencies where their adoption application may be considered. This "signposting" responsibility is taken very seriously by all Catholic adoption agencies.

This is an appeal for "fair play", particularly for those many children, Catholic or not, who continue to benefit from the widely recognised, professional and committed adoption services provided through our Catholic adoption agencies. Giving protection to the rights of Catholic adoption agencies to act with integrity will preserve an excellent and highly valued adoption service, representing 32 per cent of the voluntary adoption sector, with an outstanding record of finding stable and loving homes for some of the most disadvantaged children in society – including children who have been abused, physically, sexually and emotionally;

children with disability and limited life expectancy; and large sibling groups who need a family where they can grow up together. Catholic adoption agencies continue to excel in their commitment and acknowledged success in securing and sustaining adoptive families for such children whilst maintaining the lowest rates of adoption disruption in the UK.

Our agencies receive fees from local authorities directly linked to their adoption work. In addition they are supported generally by the Catholic church community. Catholics contribute generously both by offering themselves as potential adoptive parents and through the financial contributions they make. They do this because they believe the Catholic Church should contribute to the common good in this way. It is this voluntary contribution that ensures additional support services of a very high standard being sustained for children and families, often over many years, by the Catholic voluntary adoption sector.

Our agencies have an excellent track record, which is well documented by the Commission for Social Care in their Regulatory Inspection Programme. It would be an unnecessary tragedy if legislation forced the closure of these adoption services, thereby significantly reducing the potential resources of adoptive families for the approximately 4,000 children currently waiting for adoption placements.

This outcome is wholly avoidable. We urge you to ensure that the regulations shortly to be laid before Parliament enable our agencies to continue their work with local authorities for the common good. There is nothing to lose, and children waiting for an adoptive family have much to gain, by our continuing successful collaboration.

Yours sincerely,

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor
Archbishop of Westminster

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Organ Scholarship

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Closing date: 14th February Interviewing date: 16th February

MEMORIAL MASS

Memorial Mass

Sister Elizabeth Lord SUSC
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Application deadline: 23 March 2007. Tel: 202 541 5219; email: korba@wtu.edu; website: www.wtu.edu

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