



The Most Reverend Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City



The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls

Statement from the Roman Catholic Bishops of South Dakota Regarding Proposed Legislation on Accommodation Based Upon Gender

January 25, 2016

Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle

We the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in South Dakota support **House Bill 1008** because it protects the rights and respects the innate dignity of all persons in our schools.

We begin by making clear that God's love is present to every person including those who manifest themselves as transgender and those who advocate for them. All persons, and in a special way young persons are to be treated with compassion and sensitivity and receive the support they need for personal development. The Dioceses of Rapid City and Sioux Falls are prepared to reach out to any individual who seeks our counseling and other ministries.

As we care for and about those adolescents who are struggling with gender identification (gender disphoria as it is referred to by professionals), we also must care about and for all adolescents who experience the uncertainty and change inherent in this formative stage of life. Their privacy, safety and rights, including religious rights, must be respected and protected.

The teaching of the Catholic Church is clear: one's gender, male or female, is determined by God and not a matter of personal choice. Our identity as either male or female is integral to who we are as human persons. Our masculinity and femininity are not limitations to be overcome. Rather, they are gifts to be lived and shared. Each gender has its equal, complementary dignity and importance in human relationships established by God.

Pope Francis recently noted that "the complementarity of man and woman, the pinnacle of divine creation, is being questioned by the so-called gender ideology, in the name of a more free and just society. The differences between man and woman are not for opposition or subordination, but for communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God¹"

The issue this legislation addresses is not simply a policy about access to facilities but strikes at the heart of who we are as human persons and the reality that policies teach.

Stipulating that access to facilities based on the gender of birth protects all students and preserves our religious liberty and upholds our protected freedom of conscience. If special provision is needed for individuals, that can be accommodated as the legislation encourages. Exemption for religious schools is not sufficient because accommodation policies apply to all Catholic students, whether enrolled in parochial or public schools. Additionally, as we remain mindful that litigation can come from every side of any issue, threat of litigation ought not to drive policy decision-making but rather what is best for the common good.

We encourage the passage of **HB 1008** to protect the rights and dignity of all of our young.

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¹ – *Ad Limina* address to the Bishops of Puerto Rico, Pope Francis, June 8, 2015