

## Testimony of Bishop Michael F. McAuliffe

Bishop Michael McAuliffe testified for the *Equal Rights Amendment* in the Missouri legislature at Jefferson City, MO on January 15, 1980. Used with permission.

My name is Michael F. McAuliffe. I am the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Jefferson City and serve as the Chairman of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the status of women in society and in the Church, but testify here only as an individual.

I come to lend my support to the ratification of the *Equal Rights Amendment* to the Constitution of the United States. I do so because of my firm belief in the equality and fundamental rights of each and every person. I believe with my Church and the stated views of many other Churches and religious bodies that "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent." (Vatican Council II – *Gaudium et Spes*, #29.

It would seem that most people would agree to the equality of men and women; what some doubt is whether women would really attain that equality under the ERA, at least as presently worded, or they fear that women will not really gain what they are seeking through this constitutional amendment. I feel that it is very necessary for us to secure passage of the ERA, so that all of us can feel secure in our own hearts that women are not second-class citizens. It's even more important for women themselves to know this and be free to live as people who are fully endowed with the rights and privileges of citizens.

One very difficult problem to which I would like to address myself is that of abortion. It is absolutely essential to separate this issue from the ERA itself. ERA touches only those concerns or rights which both men and women share, and since men cannot bear children, ERA does not concern abortion. The ERA is clearly meant to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex. A study of legislative history indicates that if the ERA passes, laws would have to be based on the attributes of an individual, and not simply on the attribute of sex. Thus laws based on physical characteristics unique to one sex would be permissible. Laws concerning abortion could not discriminate on the basis of sex since only women can have abortions.

I wish to further state that in connection with this aspect, I believe passage of ERA will not affect the passage of another Amendment to the Constitution which proposes to protect the lives of unborn children, i.e., the *Human Life Amendment*.

As for its effects on family life, I am convinced that ERA will not threaten its stability. Since the family is the basic unit of society, to pose a threat to it would be to go against everything that we hold dear and sacred. Full equality of the spouses prepares for the fullest personal development of each and should lead to greater personal fulfillment and satisfaction. "Equality of rights for women is fully compatible with marriage and the family," and this state stands only to gain as we fully accept women for what they are.

I believe that women must be given due recognition for the gifts and talents that they possess as humans. Too often it seems their personalities are submerged in the general roles they are supposed to play. If we could just recognize them for what they are, there would be much less suffering and anxiety in the world.

The ERA will not force mothers out of the home to assume a partial burden of supporting the family. The law is not intended to affect that very special area, the personal relationship between husband and wife. Husbands and wives decide such questions among themselves. If a wife is forced to choose work outside the home, then it is because she and her husband think it necessary or because economic conditions demand it.

With respect to its effects on children, we do know children need loving and constant care; it is very vital to their health and security. We also recognize that this is best provided by the care of their mother in the home. As the Second Vatican Council noted; "The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account."

I do hope that this Resolution will be passed by this Committee because of the great good that will come to the women of this country. If we consider all the effects that this amendment will have, by far it advances the cause of women and recognizes them for what they are. In the sight of God we are equal. Hopefully by our actions we will accept this principle.

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