



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

June 2, 2020

The Honorable _____
Jacksonville City Council
117 West Duval Street, Suite 425
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Dear Councilman _____,

In striking down the Jacksonville Human Rights Ordinance (HRO), the Florida District Court of Appeals has presented the Jacksonville City Council with an opportunity to reexamine its 2017 decision more fully. As residents, whose concerns represent those of a large cross section of Jacksonville, we prefer that; rather than merely addressing the concerns of the court and quickly reintroducing this ordinance, the Jacksonville City Council consider more carefully the complex issues, competing scientific study and confusing language of *“sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.”* A more comprehensively researched understanding and broader discussion would result in greater public confidence. In the spirit of consultation, the concerns of all the people of Jacksonville ought to be heard, but even more importantly, reasoned truth must be the foundation for the formulation of any law or public policy decision in a civil society.

The proposed changes to the City of Jacksonville’s HRO, particularly as they relate to *“sexual orientation, gender identity or expression,”* puts forth a view not unlike that of Dr. Deanna Adkins, of Duke University’s Center for Child and Adolescent Gender Care, who stated that from her perspective: *“It is counter to medical science to use chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, or secondary sex characteristics to override gender identity for purposes of classifying someone as male or female.”* This particular understanding of the human person stands in stark contrast to the long-held and firmly-supported scientific and philosophical understanding of the human person, as held by the Catholic faith and people of other faith traditions. We see the human person as created, body and soul by God, and we are not an insignificant number, nor are we insufficiently informed.

Clearly, as Catholic-Christians, we believe that God is the creator of all life, and that in creating human persons God made both man and woman, distinct yet equal in their God-given dignity. God, who is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful. God who is both ‘love and ‘truth’ itself. He is the source of all truths related to both *faith* and *reason*

in science and medicine. Because truth cannot contradict truth, faith and reason can never really be at odds. The scientific, philosophical and faith revealed information that undergirds this clear and immutable understanding, provides for all of us the most solid of foundations from which to understand human nature and therefore the civil laws which ought to govern our behavior and without contravening divine and natural law.

God, who is “Love” and who has created all that is, out of love, would see in the spirit of the HRO amendment a goodness that strives to recognize the human dignity of His creation and gives value to every person. Regardless of physical or psychological distinctions, both faith and reason are in agreement on the virtuous fact that we are all human beings deserving of safe homes and employment.

It cannot be denied, however, that the God of “truth” would find faith and reason at odds over the flawed reasoning which so far seems to have uniquely guided the HRO amendment language and which seeks to normalize, what has heretofore been clearly understood as a dysphoric notion, that gender can be “fluid” and is merely a personal decision detached from scientific reality. Even transgender activists and apologists can’t agree whether gender identity is fluid or immutable. Having separated truth from reality and positing all truth as private and personal (vis-à-vis the human person), there is created an unhinged personal truth which suffers from increasing degrees of internal inconsistency and contradiction. As well, it must be recognized that gender is not merely or randomly “assigned at birth” —it is assigned by God and manifested in biologically recognizable ways which identify a person as either male or female. Neither medical change nor public policy can alter the truth of what God intended.

For the foregoing reasons, we strongly urge the City Council, in seeking to protect the freedoms and welfare of some, based solely on the advocacy and ideology of one particularly influential group, not to discriminate against religious freedoms enshrined in the US Constitution. We affirm your efforts to create appropriate enforcement exceptions as exists in the former HRO. Exceptions must protect the livelihood of faithful families, nonprofits, professionals, and private business owners who hold strong beliefs regarding the true nature of the human person. Our public policy makers must earnestly endeavor to seek the “common good” on behalf of all Duval’s citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Felipe J. Estévez".

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine