



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 Senate Bill 149**

A bill to uphold religious freedoms afforded to adoption agencies and child placement services

February 14, 2017

Through its many outreach ministries, the Church fulfills Christ's call to respond to the needs of the vulnerable and youth. Outreach ministries that lift up the poor in spirit, care for the afflicted, feed the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, and provide a voice for the meek were erected and have been maintained in response to our baptismal call and in aspiration of holiness.¹ While works of the Roman Catholic Church are guided by Her teaching, outreach ministries are of course offered to Catholics and non-Catholics alike and therefore contribute to the common good of all South Dakotans.

Two of the many important outreach ministries are adoption services provided through Catholic Family Services in the Diocese of Sioux Falls and Catholic Social Services in the Diocese of Rapid City. Over 1,200 children have been placed in loving homes through Catholic Family Services and 600 children have been placed through Catholic Social Services in the Diocese of Rapid City. As a result, these children have been generously welcomed by families who have assumed the responsibility of caring for, raising, and educating them.

SB 149 would help assure the legal protections of religious freedom so that our faith-based adoption and child placement service providers might continue their important works in accord with their missions. SB 149 would also preserve the diversity in child placement that exists today and ensure that the well-being of children remains the first and foremost concern when being placed with families.

Solidifying the state's long-standing recognition of the lasting impact faith-based child placement agencies have on the common good will ensure there remains adequate adoption service providers in our state. By doing so, more families can be invited to receive children in need of adoption and more children will find a safe and loving home while allowing us to continue providing this important ministry in accord with our deeply-held Catholic beliefs.

A most critical consideration is that this legislation does not prohibit adoption to any classification of persons. It merely places into law what the state has practiced for decades, namely that adoption agencies such as ours who are competent and licensed be allowed to decide in consultation with families which is the best adoptive family to receive a child in accord with their mission. We encourage the Legislature's passage of SB 149.

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¹ – Matthew 5: 3-12