

ISN'T IT UNJUST DISCRIMINATION TO DENY MARRIAGE TO HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS?

On the contrary, granting legal status to same-sex unions would be an injustice, because it would be based on a falsehood. Since marriage and same-sex unions are essentially different realities, it would be wrong to ignore this difference and pretend that it doesn't exist.

To deny legal status to same-sex unions is not to deny the dignity of homosexual persons. It is simply to bear witness to the truth of what marriage is and is not. The Church insists that even as we oppose homosexual acts as gravely immoral, we must defend the dignity of homosexual persons and invite them to seek wholeness in Christ through a life of chaste love for others.

There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law.

— Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, no. 4

HOW SHOULD CATHOLICS RESPOND TO THE CURRENT DEBATE ABOUT SAME-SEX UNIONS?

Catholics have a moral obligation to bear witness to the truth about marriage. Faith must not be separated from actions in either private or public life. We must educate ourselves about what the Church teaches and then act on our beliefs accordingly.

In prayer, we should ask God to strengthen married couples with His grace to carry out their vocation faithfully and with joy. In private conversations, we should stand charitably but firmly for the truth as revealed in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. In public, by voice and by vote, we should do all we can to ensure that our nation's laws reflect the realities of the divine law expressed in nature. In particular, we must oppose any attempt to legalize same-sex unions as the equivalent of marriage.

Above all, married couples themselves have an irreplaceable role in promoting and defending marriage in our society. When they practice sacrificial, faithful, life-giving love, they teach their children — and all of us — the truth about marriage as God designed it to be.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, nos. 369-373, 1601-1666, and 2331-2400

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*

Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (on the family)

Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), nos. 47-52

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*

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Inventory No. P163

Nihil Obstat: Rev. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: ✠ John M. D'Arcy, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend
March 12, 2009

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US \$14.95

**SHOULD SAME-SEX COUPLES BE ENTITLED TO SOME OF THE SAME LEGAL BENEFITS AS MARRIED COUPLES?**

Since the health of society depends on the health of the family — which is founded on marriage — the state acts reasonably when it provides married couples rights and benefits not extended to others. This special status is not a matter of unjust discrimination; after all, the government has an obligation to promote the welfare of the family for the sake of the common good.

At the same time, many of the benefits sought by homosexual couples can already be secured without being married. Individuals can legally agree to own property jointly and to designate anyone they choose as beneficiary of a will. They can also legally appoint someone to exercise for them the power of attorney or medical power of attorney if the need should arise.



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SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK

“Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’? So they are no longer two but one.”

— Matthew 19:4-6

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Public demands for legal recognition of same-sex “marriage” have recently grown louder and more insistent. Debates about the matter have intensified, dividing legislative bodies, courts, communities, and even families. Where does the Catholic Church stand on the issue, and why?

WHAT EXACTLY IS MARRIAGE?

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage, as God has instituted it, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong covenant — the permanent union of one man and one woman joined through a mutual giving of themselves. In marriage, a husband and wife commit themselves totally, not only to each other but also to the responsibility of bringing children into the world and caring for them.



This understanding of marriage is found in Scripture, which begins with God’s creation of man and woman in His own image (see Genesis 1:27). “It is not good,” the Creator says, “that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). So God gives man and woman to each other in marriage, in which they become “one flesh,” and He invites them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 2:24; 1:28). Jesus later confirms this truth in His teaching on divorce (see Matthew 19:3-9).

Because God has created us out of love, He also calls us to love. It is our fundamental vocation as creatures made in His likeness. The mutual love of man and woman in marriage becomes in this way a sacred image of God’s love for His people, of Christ’s love for us (see Ephesians 5:25-33). Scripture, in fact, ends with a vision of the “marriage of the Lamb” (see Revelation 19:7-9), when God the Son and His Church will be fully united in everlasting love.

As a symbol of this love, the valid marriage of baptized Christians is a sacrament — a saving reality that brings God’s grace into our lives and helps to make us holy. Sacramental marriage points the world to Christ’s own faithful, creative, sacrificial love.

ISN’T MARRIAGE JUST A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION?

No. The vocation to marriage and parenthood is stamped into the very nature of humanity. Though man and woman are equal, they are different from each other. This difference, which includes their sexuality, is complementary, because man and woman are made for each other. Their complementary natures draw them together into a union, loving and life-giving, that carries the potential of procreation.

Because these truths about the nature of marriage and its dignity are present in the natural order itself, they can be understood through the use of human reason. Though some cultures do not recognize these realities as clearly as others do, some sense of the greatness and fundamental importance of marriage can be found in every culture, even those that are largely secular.

Marriage is a basic human and social institution. Though it is regulated by civil laws and church laws, it did not originate from either the church or state, but from God. Therefore, neither church nor state can alter the basic meaning and structure of marriage. Marriage, whose nature and purposes are established by God, can only be the union of a man and a woman and must remain such in law.

— United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions



ISN'T THE GOVERNMENT FREE TO DEFINE MARRIAGE ANY WAY IT CHOOSES?

Marriage is the oldest human institution. It existed long before any human government that today attempts to redefine it. Despite the many variations marriage has undergone through the centuries in a range of cultures, it displays certain common and permanent characteristics.

Such characteristics are not arbitrary. They reflect the reality that God endowed marriage with a specific nature to be governed by particular laws. Because these natural laws are in harmony with marriage’s very essence, safeguarding them helps to secure the well-being of the family and, in turn, society as a whole.

Marriage, then, is not a merely human institution. Human governments may find it necessary to regulate it in certain ways, but it is not theirs to define or redefine. It remains, by God’s design, a permanent union between one man and one woman. Governments that issue laws contrary to this reality only create legal conditions that lead to moral and social confusion and chaos.

WHY ARE SAME-SEX UNIONS NOT EQUIVALENT TO MARRIAGE?

As part of God’s plan “from the beginning,” the expression of sexual love serves the purposes of both procreation and the bond of union between man and woman, as husband and wife. Marriage — as a permanent, exclusive, mutual commitment — is the necessary context for such sexual expression.

Human sexuality is naturally structured to make man and woman complementary partners in transmitting life. This sexual complementarity can only be expressed by the union of male and female. It is the unique difference between partners that makes possible the conjugal bond at the heart of marriage.

Same-sex union, then, is contrary to the very nature of marriage. It is not based on the natural, complementary difference between male and female. And it cannot by nature bring children into the world. A true conjugal union cannot be entered into by two persons of the same sex.

Thus, a same-sex relationship can never be equivalent to a marriage.

IF TWO PEOPLE WANT TO BE MARRIED, WHY SHOULD IT MATTER TO THE REST OF US WHETHER THE LAW RECOGNIZES THEIR UNION?

Marriage is a private relationship, but it has public consequences. In every age and culture, the family is founded on marriage, and society is founded on the family.

Why is this so? First, marriage provides the best environment for rearing children: a stable, loving relationship between mother and father. Second, marriage offers society an essential pattern for

male-female relationships. It models interdependence and lifelong commitment between men and women to seek the good of each other, their families, and others.

Consequently, human governments are right to recognize and foster the marriage relationship through law, because marriage makes a unique and crucial contribution to the common good. But any attempt to redefine marriage, making other relationships its equivalent, only devalues marriage and weakens it. Such an attempt denies the need for complementarity between marriage partners, and for the conjugal bond that makes possible the transmission of life.

Public laws shape a culture’s ideals, thoughts, and behaviors. They have considerable power to determine what a society finds morally acceptable. Inevitably, legal status for same-sex unions would function as an official stamp of public approval on homosexual behavior.

All those . . . who exercise influence over communities and social groups should work efficiently for the welfare of marriage and the family. Public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect, and promote their authentic nature, to shield public morality, and to favor the prosperity of home life.

— Second Vatican Council

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 52

