



SAME SEX MARRIAGE: WHY THE CHURCH CARES

ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

Marriage in our city

Earlier this year, the District of Columbia City Council pushed through legislation, later signed into law by the mayor, to recognize same sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions. This was done without an opportunity for voters to have a voice. In September, marriage supporters, seeking a voice for the people on this critical issue, filed a request for a ballot initiative that would affirm marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The Archdiocese of Washington has submitted a letter supporting this initiative with the District of Columbia Board of Elections and Ethics.

Without even waiting to let that process work through the system, some members of the City Council are moving ahead with yet more legislation, this time to redefine marriages performed within the District of Columbia itself. There is a reason cultures worldwide have had the same definition of marriage for thousands of years. Before rushing ahead, we all really need to carefully consider what marriage is, and why it exists.

Why is the Catholic Church involved in the same sex marriage issue?

The bottom line is because marriage matters. Marriage is a private relationship with public significance.

Despite what you might think from the media these days, marriage is about a lot more than two people who love each other. That is, of course, a very important part of marriage. After all, Christ did raise marriage to a sacrament – married love imitates Christ’s love for the Church. But, this love leads to the second important

reason why marriage is between a man and a woman: giving children a structure in which they are created and nurtured, benefiting from the unique gifts of both father

and mother.

The reality is men and women are not interchangeable. They complement each other physically, psychologically and emotionally. Each has distinctive gifts that they bring to a child’s upbringing. Marriage protects the rights of children to have - and benefit from - both a father and a mother.

In the Church we know the importance of this from our experience – we are on the front lines of preparing couples for marriage, supporting marriage enrichment, and providing education, foster care, health care and counseling for children and families. We know how much children benefit when they have both a father and mother, and we know the struggles of many families who don’t.

We all recognize this intuitively. For example, why do city and community leaders encourage mentoring

programs for boys without dads if dads don’t matter? Because they know, as each of us does, that fathers do matter even if a child has a wonderful

extended family. So do moms.

In fact, studies confirm what we know from our own lived experience: “...it is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the presence of two biological parents that seems to support children’s development.” (*Child Trends*, 2002) An article in *Time* magazine earlier this year stated, “Few things hamper a child as much as not having a father at home.” Men and women are equal, but research tells us that fathers and mothers do differ - on how they interact with their children and even on things like how they vote once they become parents. And, researchers tell us that children in an intact family with father and mother do better in the long run than those raised in other arrangements.

Civil governments have granted special recognition to marriage solely between a man and a woman because, as the Maryland bishops recently wrote in a

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pastoral letter, “marriage belongs by nature to the relationship between a man and a woman.” Marriage is a human institution that is based on natural law. Natural law is not only at the foundation of our faith teachings, but it also is the foundation of civil law. However one might want to change natural law, it is not possible.

The government has long recognized its responsibility for promoting the common good and thus ensuring that children have the right to both a father and a mother.

Why should our government redefine marriage?

There is no reason. Marriage has a very specific meaning, held throughout all time. It is the union of a man and woman open to creating and nurturing children, with their unique and complementary gifts. In fact, redefining marriage would mark the first time society would intentionally deprive a child of a right to a father and a mother. That is not something to be taken lightly or to be done because of the wishes of a small number of people.

Some individuals claim marriage needs to be redefined because of issues such as property rights or medical decision-making. The truth is those issues can be handled in other ways without redefining marriage.

Efforts to redefine marriage are not about property rights, but about forcing society to give public acceptance to same sex relationships and denying the uniqueness of men and women. Yet, their uniqueness is what makes marriage unique.

Isn't this about civil rights?

No. The Church has a long history of supporting civil rights, equality and respect for all people. Redefining marriage is not about civil rights. Civil marriage has all kinds of guidelines, such as age of consent or blood relationship. The gender of the participants is another. It is integral to a key purpose of marriage: the openness to create and nurture children, bringing to them the gifts of both a father and mother. By definition, marriage must be between a man and woman.

As the Church knows and research confirms, both men and women matter when it comes to raising the next generation. Civil governments have recognized marriages for centuries because of the importance of this structure for children.

This won't affect me...or will it?

You may not realize it now, but redefining marriage will affect you and your church. In the few jurisdictions that have redefined marriage (only five states have redefined marriage; at least 40 others specifically protect marriage through constitutional or legislative means.), and in other areas with varying laws on civil unions, religious liberty and conscience rights have not been protected even with “exemptions.”

In Massachusetts, the Catholic Church had to give up doing adoptions to avoid violating its moral beliefs. In New Jersey, a Methodist organization was held in violation of anti-discrimination laws for following its moral teachings and not allowing its property to be used for a same sex union. In Canada, a discrimination complaint was filed against a local Knights of Columbus after it declined to rent its reception hall to a gay couple.

What about separation of church and state?

Some have suggested the Church doesn't have a right to speak out on redefining marriage because of the “separation of church and state.” Every citizen has a right to speak on issues, including people of faith. The First Amendment guarantees free speech and freedom to live out one's faith.

As Catholics, we also are compelled to speak out. We work with children and families every day. And, as Pope Benedict XVI told the United States bishops during his visit to Washington, DC last year, “...you are called to participate in the exchange of ideas in the public square...In a context where free speech is valued, and where vigorous and honest debate is encouraged, yours is a respected voice that has much to offer to the discussion of the pressing social and moral questions of the day.” (April 16, 2008)

What now?

It is important for you to be informed. Learn more about marriage at www.MarriageMattersDC.org. And, feel comfortable sharing with elected officials and friends the truth: that marriage is, by definition, between a man and a woman.

