

Catholic Q&A on the Marriage Amendment

Prepared by Catholics for Marriage Equality – MN
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1. What is the ‘marriage amendment’?

The marriage amendment refers to the November 6, 2012, ballot initiative that will ask Minnesotans to vote on whether or not the state constitution should be amended so as to define marriage as “solely between one man and one woman.” The sponsors and supporters of this ballot initiative hope to use the constitution to permanently ban civil marriage rights for same-sex couples.

2. If the amendment is *passed*, how will it affect Minnesota law?

It will have no effect as Minnesota already bans civil marriage rights for same-sex couples. It will, however, make it virtually impossible for the courts to grant civil marriage rights to same-sex couples or for the state legislature to pass legislation in favor of such rights in the future.

3. If the amendment is *defeated*, how will it affect the Roman Catholic Church?

There would be no effect whatsoever. If the ‘marriage amendment’ is defeated in November, same-sex civil marriage will still be illegal in Minnesota. And if civil marriage rights were one day extended to same-sex couples, our nation’s separation of church and state would guarantee that churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, would always have the freedom to choose whom they marry.

4. Since the bishops are strongly urging a ‘yes’ vote, can a faithful Catholic vote ‘no’?

Yes, a faithful Catholic can vote ‘no.’ This is because our tradition teaches that conscience is the highest norm and that we are to follow our conscience even in opposition to official church authority. In 1968, Fr. Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) expressed the Church’s understanding of the primacy of conscience: “Above the pope as an expression of the binding claim of church authority stands one’s own conscience, which has to be obeyed first of all, if need be against the demands of church authority.”

Over ➤ ➤ ➤

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5. Why are the bishops telling Catholics to vote ‘yes’?

The bishops see the granting of civil marriage rights to same-sex couples as a threat to the meaning of marriage and the church’s religious liberty. In truth, however, in their support of the ‘marriage amendment,’ the bishops have made numerous unsubstantiated claims and provoked false fears. They warn, for instance, that if *civil* marriage rights are extended to same-sex couples, churches will be forced to perform *sacramental* marriage for a gay couple. This is untrue. (See response to Q. 3)

6. Why are many Catholics conflicted or committed to voting ‘no’?

The reasons are numerous. Many are torn between the urgings of the hierarchy to support the amendment and their wanting to support the gay people they know and, in many cases, lovingly accept. Many are unconvinced by the arguments of the bishops, recognizing instead that supporting legal recognition of adult, same-sex unions as marriages does not go against any church teaching. It is a prudential decision regarding what is best for the common good in a pluralistic society. For example, Catholic teaching opposes divorce, but this does not translate into an obligation to work for the repeal of secular divorce laws or prevention of their passage by a constitutional amendment banning civil divorce.

7. The bishops insist that same-sex marriage will harm children. Is this true?

Because the bishops are not calling for the large number of children already being raised by same-sex couples to be removed from their families, many Catholics question the integrity of the claim that children are in danger. Research has consistently shown that lesbian and gay parents do not differ from heterosexuals in their parenting skills, and that their children do not show any deficits compared to children raised by heterosexual parents. It is the quality of the parenting that predicts children’s psychological and social adjustment, not the parents’ sexual orientation or gender. It also concerns many Catholics that according same-sex couples inferior status relative to opposite-sex couples gives rise to ostracism, harassment, discrimination, and violence. For Catholics, such treatment is unacceptable. The bishops themselves teach that the “intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.”

8. Why use the word ‘marriage’ to describe same-sex unions?

In our society it is only the word ‘marriage’ that conveys the joy, connection, and deep commitment that is made between two people who love one another. In addition, civil marriage automatically provides the rights and responsibilities of 515 statutes in Minnesota law to opposite-sex but not to same-sex couples and families. This strikes many as hurtful and unfair.

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