

# Diocese of Manchester

## The Catholic Church in New Hampshire

### Understanding Catholic Teaching on Marriage

In its June 2015 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the United States Supreme redefined civil marriage as a constitutional right extending to two persons of the same sex. This bulletin is intended to answer questions you may have about the Supreme Court decision and Church teaching on marriage.

#### **WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE?**

Marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of life and love. Our faith does not consider marriage to be merely a personal commitment between two people who love one another or a matter of personal preference. The truth of marriage is revealed to us in Sacred Scripture. For example, in *Genesis*, God fashions both male and female in the divine image (see Gn 1:27). In the New Testament, Jesus, who elevates marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, taught his disciples, "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh'" (Mk 10:6-8).

#### **DOESN'T CHURCH TEACHING CONSTITUTE "DISCRIMINATION" AGAINST THOSE WITH SAME SEX ATTRACTION?**

No. The starting point for any discussion about the Catholic Church's position on same sex marriage is that every person is worthy of respect and has intrinsic dignity—a dignity that can never be taken away. But a union between two people of the same gender is not the same as a marriage between one man and one woman, and treating different things differently is not "unjust discrimination."

As Catholics, we believe that one man and one woman are essential to marriage because of their differences—the difference is the difference, and true union is only possible in and through their differences. We believe that there is no other form of relationship between persons that can be considered equivalent to a natural relationship between a man and a woman out of whose love it is possible for children to be born and reared by both a mother and a father. Even when a husband and wife do not conceive a child (for example, due to infertility or age), their sexual acts are still of the kind by which children naturally are conceived. In contrast, two persons of the same sex cannot unite in such a way that a child is conceived.

#### **DOESN'T THE CHURCH BELIEVE THAT THOSE WITH SAME SEX ATTRACTION HAVE A RIGHT TO HAPPINESS?**

Yes, of course. The Church firmly holds that all persons are loved by our compassionate God and deserve the respect and dignity that is inherently theirs as human beings. In disagreeing that marriage can be redefined to include persons of the same gender, we do not wish to undermine their pursuit of happiness but only to preserve and defend the gift of marriage as divinely revealed in Sacred Scripture and in natural law.



### **HOW HAS THE US SUPREME COURT DECISION AFFECTED CHURCH TEACHING ON MARRIAGE?**

The Supreme Court ruling has not affected Church teaching on marriage. We will continue to share our consistent witness to the truth about marriage in a manner that respects the dignity of every person, and we will continue to act to protect our ministries and deeply-held values as the national discussion on this issue unfolds.

### **ARE THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE WELCOME IN THE CHURCH?**

Absolutely! The Church welcomes everyone, regardless of whether they agree with all of the tenets of our faith or have consistently followed Church teaching. The Church will continue to remind us, however, that we are all called to follow the moral law and Church teaching, and the Church will continue to practice its faith accordingly. This means, for example, that the Church will continue to preach and hold that each of us is called to live a life of faithful chastity that views human sexuality in light of the Gospel. Faithful married life between one man and one woman, consecrated religious life, and celibacy are examples of commitments to a chaste life.

### **HOW WILL THE US SUPREME COURT DECISION AFFECT CHURCH MINISTRIES?**

The US Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* affirmed the freedom of religious organizations to continue to express and teach the truth of marriage. We hope and pray that the courts and civil governmental bodies continue to recognize that the Church has the right not only to speak about our faith in our churches, but also to express our beliefs in the public square and to be true to our Catholic identity by engaging in practices that are consistent with our beliefs.

### **WHAT CAN OR SHOULD WE DO AS A RESULT OF THIS DECISION?**

As Catholics, we have an obligation to continue to learn and grow in our faith so that we can share our faith. We should become better informed about Church teaching on marriage and its roots in the Gospel so that we can articulate and explain to others in a respectful manner what the Church teaches and why. In sharing our views, we do not seek to impose them on others, but we ask that others respect our right to express them and to become part of the national discussion on the issues. As citizens, we must also vote, and with civility and charity, we must make our voices heard in the political process to protect our ministries, our beliefs, and our values.

### **WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?**

Visit [www.catholicnh.org/marriageFAQ](http://www.catholicnh.org/marriageFAQ) for additional resources on marriage.

