



Diocese of Ogdensburg

Office of the Bishop

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DIOCESAN POLICY REGARDING NYS MARRIAGE EQUALITY ACT AND RELATED PASTORAL ISSUES

The State Legislature recently enacted a law recognizing same sex unions as legal “marriages” within New York State. The law became effective on July 24, 2011. The Diocese of Ogdensburg provides the following policy regarding our sacramental and pastoral practices and the use of our facilities in light of this recent legislation, thus supporting the teaching of the Church about the reality of marriage.

It is the policy of this Diocese that:

- No member of the clergy (priest or deacon), or any person while acting as an employee of the Church, may participate in these solemnizations or celebrations which are contrary to our faith and morals.
- No person while serving as an employee or a representative of the Church is to directly or indirectly provide services, accommodations or goods for such events, or support them in any way.
- No Catholic facility or property, including a church, mission, oratory, chapel, meeting hall, or Catholic educational, health or charitable institution, or any place dedicated or consecrated for Catholic worship or as sacred space is to be used for such a solemnization or celebration.
- No items dedicated, consecrated or blessed for use in Catholic worship, including but not limited to any items utilized for the Eucharist such as Missals, Ritual books, hymnals, lectionaries, sacred vessels, sacramentals, altars, ambos, and vestments, should be used for the solemnization or celebration of a same sex union.
- No Church property or facilities are to be used to host receptions for these ceremonies.

Pastoral and Sacramental Guidelines

Given the objectively immoral nature of the relationship that is created, a person’s decision to enter into a same-sex relationship will in some instances affect the person’s participation in the Sacraments or in Church activities.

Holy Communion

As in all cases involving one’s state of grace, persons in such same-sex unions should not present themselves for Holy Communion (*cf. Canon 916*), and are not to be admitted to Holy Communion (*cf. Canon 915*). Pastors who are aware of such situations should address the persons privately to call them to conversion and to advise them not to present themselves for Holy Communion until they have been restored to communion with the Church through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In danger of death, a person living publicly in a same-sex union may be given Holy Communion in the form of Viaticum (*cf. Canon 921*).

Baptism and Confirmation

A child who is living with a Catholic “parent” or “parents” in a same-sex union may be baptized if there is a well-founded hope that he or she will be brought up in the Catholic faith. The pastor should use due discretion in determining the appropriateness of the public celebration of the baptism.

A child living with persons living publicly in a same-sex union, who is otherwise qualified and properly disposed, may be admitted to the Sacrament of Confirmation.

A person living publicly in a same-sex union may not serve as a sponsor for the Sacraments of Baptism or Confirmation (*cf. Canon 874*).

A person who is living publicly in a same-sex union may not be admitted to the RCIA process or receive the Sacrament of Confirmation unless he/she has withdrawn from the objectively immoral relationship.

Participation in Liturgical Ministries

Persons who are publicly living in a same-sex relationship may not serve in a public liturgical ministry, for instance as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion or as a Reader. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has stated: "The lay Christian faithful called to give assistance at liturgical celebrations should be well instructed and must be those whose Christian life, morals and fidelity to the Church's Magisterium recommend them... No one should be selected whose designation could cause consternation for the faithful." (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 46)

Education Issues

Children living with persons in a same-sex union may not be denied admission to Catholic schools or religious education programs on those grounds alone. However, the parents should be advised that the curriculum requires that all children will be instructed in the Church's teaching about marriage and sexuality.

It remains the consistent teaching of the Church that a marriage can exist only between a man and a woman. In spite of the recent redefinition of marriage by the State, we must be clear and direct about our Church teaching. We are especially aware of the need for our pastoral ministry to be respectful, compassionate, and sensitive to all of our sisters and brothers as we respond to this tragic civil legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley, DD, JCL
Bishop of Ogdensburg

Given at Ogdensburg
6 October 2011