



Archdiocese of the United States

The Old Catholic Church in the United States
(Old Catholic Confederation)

15 JANUARY 2016 | CLARIFICATION CONCERNING CIVIL SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

1) The “Statement of Diversity” published by the Synod of Bishops of the Old Catholic Confederation welcoming "all men and women regardless of sexual orientation or identity, as the children of God, called to full Sacramental participation and equal rights in the Church" was published in order to show its love and compassion for all human beings and to affirm its position against discrimination of any kind. However, the Old Catholic Churches of the Old Catholic Confederation are required to faithfully observe canon law, sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition; thus, this statement must be read within the context of ecclesial and theological identity of the Old Catholic Church.

2) The Synod of Bishops of the Old Catholic Confederation recognizes the natural and civil rights of all human beings; therefore, the OCC recognizes the lawfulness of civil marriage between same-sex couples, in those nations where it is lawful.

3) Needless to say, as Old Catholic Christians, we are rooted in the ancient Church, faithful to the orthodox, catholic, Apostolic, Christian faith, sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition; and thus, we believe that our Synod of Bishops does not have the authority to change the ancient canons of the Church. Indeed, no national or regional Synod of Bishops has such authority, which belongs only to an Ecumenical Council.

4) Thus, while the Synod of Bishops recognizes the lawfulness of civil marriages between same-sex couples, it must be understood that the Church reserves the Rite of Holy Matrimony to a man and a woman, in accordance with sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, as manifest in the teachings of the Fathers of the Church and the ancient canons of the universal Church.

5) Nevertheless, the Synod of Bishops regards the question of whether or not a blessing may be bestowed upon a same-sex couple in a civil marriage as a "pastoral decision" by the local pastor in consultation with his parish vestry, under the following conditions:

- a) At least one individual must be Old Catholic and a registered (tithing) member of a canonical Old Catholic parish.
- b) The couple must worship in a canonical Old Catholic parish for at least six months.
- c) The couple must be properly interviewed by the parish priest, who is responsible for gathering the required sacramental documents (e.g. baptismal, confirmation certificates, etc.) and inquiring about any previous marriages. The parish priest is also required to meet with the couple to discuss their faith, spiritual journey, their life in Christ and their commitment to the Church and living a sacramental life in addition to discussing the importance of love, forgiveness, penance and chastity within the Christian life.
- d) After consultation with the Vestry, if a local parish priest makes the decision to bless the civil marriage of a same-sex couple, the blessing may only be given in a non-liturgical context so that it is not confused with a wedding service or the Rite of Holy Matrimony, since this is a blessing and not a service, granted as a pastoral decision.