



Catholics and the Freedom to Marry

Fair-minded Catholics are strongly supportive of the freedom to marry, despite positions taken by Church hierarchy.

- » “Catholic voters are leading American voters toward support for same-sex marriage,” according to Peter A. Brown of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. Faithful Catholics have consistently been among the most supportive of the freedom to marry. In fact, 75% of Catholics believe “you can disagree with the Church hierarchy on same-sex marriage and still be a good Catholic,” according to a 2012 survey by Public Religion Research Institute. And 62% of Latino Catholics support allowing same-sex couples to marry. *(See reverse for more polling data.)*
- » How the Catholic Church handles the sacrament of marriage is rightfully within the bishops’ purview, however ending the exclusion of same-sex couples from civil marriage is a matter of promoting fairness and freedom. The Catholic faith has called us to fully commit to each other — laws in nine states and the District of Columbia now provide couples with recognition of their lifetime commitment.
- » Many Catholics who support marriage for same-sex couples are guided by the Church’s tradition as a leader in social justice issues. When reflecting on this issue, many Catholics find that support for the freedom to marry is consistent with their beliefs that we are all created in God’s image; that God is the ultimate judge, not us; and that the greatest commitment is love.
- » While Catholic bishops often hold certain positions, Catholic faithful have a diversity of opinions, including strong stances in support of same-sex couples. They in turn want their money and resources to aid their church, dioceses and the most needy, not anti-gay campaigns that fuel division and violate the Golden Rule.
- » Many people, including Catholics, are starting to recognize it should be up to each faith to decide for itself whether it chooses to recognize marriage of same-sex couples, without being imposed on by the government. Marriage is the best way to preserve not just personal freedom in America, but also religious freedom. We call upon more people of faith to stand up both for the American values of fairness and freedom and to respect the boundaries between church and state.
- » Since 2000, more than a dozen nations have legalized same-sex marriage either nationwide or in certain jurisdictions – including nations like Spain, Argentina, and Mexico, where the Catholic Church has a strong presence.

“As a Catholic, I have been called to exercise my conscience. We can look with our heart and our eyes and see our family and friends who are gay or lesbian and we know that they are good people, that they are God’s children, too.”

Polling

- >> 62% of Catholics said they were in favor of legalizing marriage for same-sex couples. Catholics approved of same-sex marriage at a higher rate than Americans as a whole, among whom 53% approved (New York Times/ CBS news poll, March 2013). A Quinnipiac Polling Institute poll conducted February 27-March 4, 2013 showed 63% of Hispanic voters support same-sex marriage.
- >> A majority (54%) of Catholics favor allowing gay and lesbian people to marry, including majorities of both white Catholics (54%) and Hispanic Catholics (57%). There is a 30-point gap between younger and older American Catholics on the issue of same-sex marriage. Nearly 7-in-10 (68%) younger Catholics (age 18-39) favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry, compared to only 37% of Catholic seniors (age 65 and older). Opposition to same-sex marriage seems to be confined to America's oldest Catholics: even a solid majority (60 percent) of Catholics under the age of 60 favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry. (PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey, October 2012)
- >> NBC/ Wall Street Journal found that Catholic voters support the freedom to marry by more than a 2 to 1 margin (59% to 29%). And 50% of frequent church-attending Catholic voters favor the freedom to marry (with 35% opposed). The PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey also showed that 59% of Catholics favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally, compared to support among 52% of Americans overall. (March 2012)

In a comprehensive review of research into Catholic attitudes on gay and lesbian issues in March, 2011, Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found:

- >> Catholics are more supportive of legal recognitions of same-sex relationships than members of any other Christian tradition and Americans overall. Nearly three-quarters of Catholics favor either allowing gay and lesbian people to marry (43%) or allowing them to form civil unions (31%). Only 22% of Catholics say there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship.
- >> When same-sex marriage is defined explicitly as a civil marriage, support is dramatically higher among Catholics. If marriage for gay couples is defined as a civil marriage "like you get at city hall," Catholic support for allowing gay couples to marry increases by 28 points, from 43% to 71%. A similar pattern exists in the general population, but the Catholic increase is more pronounced.
- >> Beyond the issue of same-sex marriage, Catholic support for rights for gays and lesbian people is strong and slightly higher than the general public. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Catholics favor laws that would protect gay and lesbian people against discrimination in the workplace; 63% of Catholics favor allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly in the military; and 6-in-10 (60%) Catholics favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children.
- >> 75% of Catholics believe "you can disagree with the Church hierarchy on same-sex marriage and still be a good Catholic." Compared to other religious groups, Catholics are significantly more likely to give their church poor marks for how it is handling the issue of homosexuality. Less than 4-in-10 (39%) Catholics give their own church top marks (a grade of either an A or a B) on its handling of the issue of homosexuality.