

## **MORAL AND PASTORAL RESPONSES TO SAME-SEX UNIONS**

Understanding same-sex unions in the context of morality requires an understanding of what the Catholic Church teaches concerning homosexuality in order to provide pastoral advice. The Church distinguishes between sexual orientation and sexual acts. In regards to sexual orientation, persons do not choose this as a condition of their lives and it is therefore not a question of morality. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states: *Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained.* (p. 566). All persons are created in the image and the likeness of God (Gn. 1:26-27) and as such each one possesses something of divine goodness. The CCC also states that homosexual acts are wrong because they violate God's purpose for human sexual activity. (p. 566). Although homosexual acts are gravely sinful and unnatural, objectively and intrinsically disordered according to natural law, the personal dignity of each human being, regardless of his or her sexual orientation, is their natural and civil right, which flows from that dignity. Acts contrary to natural law does not make the person contrary to natural law. The CCC further states: *The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.* (p. 566). For example, persons with homosexual tendencies may not be denied food, clothing, housing, medical care, protection from violence, or jobs in the public sector.

Whenever homosexuality is mentioned in the Bible, it is condemned (Gn. 19:1-29, 1 Cor. 6: 9-10, Rm 1:18, 22-28, and 1 Tim 1:9-10). However, God's grace is the sun that rises on the good and the bad, and the rain that falls on the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45). In other words, God does not discriminate against others and neither should we. Instead, the Church offers pastoral guidance to all. In 1986 the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith promulgated a pastoral letter to the world's bishops that was entitled "The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons." Priest-confessors and counselors are to offer mercy since all persons are in need of love, friendship, and even intimacy, although not necessarily of a genitally sexual nature. In her wisdom, the Church chooses love as the greatest commandment: Love of God and of neighbor. We are all called to inform our consciences according to the Sacred Scriptures and our Sacred Tradition and then to act according to a well-formed conscience.

Deep-seated homosexual tendencies of one person in a marriage are an impediment to a valid Sacrament between a man and a woman. Same-sex unions that have status of marriage under civil law are not the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Church. Some pastoral applications of the Church's teachings regarding same-sex unions: Neither a priest nor deacon may officiate at such a ceremony. When lay persons choose to be in attendance at same-sex unions, they too ought not to be official witnesses by their participation in the service itself since to do so could be misconstrued as condoning this action as a sacrament. Parents may choose to be in attendance at such a union of their children, but not participate. The total absence by parents may sever their relationship with their children in a permanent way, contrary to the law of God's Love. A helpful document from the Catholic Bishops of the United States (September 10, 1997) is entitled "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers." All our children are children of the God who loves us unconditionally and we are called to love each other as Christ has loved us.