

Catholic News Agency CNA

EWTN

Vote to legalize gay marriage poses uncertain future for Ireland

By Ann Schneible

As Ireland goes to the polls to vote on whether to legalize same-sex marriage, one Church official warns that the new law could bring yet-unforeseen consequences for future generations. “The importance of the vote today cannot be underestimated,” said Msgr. John Kennedy, an official of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a May 22 email to CNA. If passed, the Dublin-native said the referendum “would signal a significant alteration in how marriage is understood, appreciated at a societal level and taught to future generations.”

More than 3.2 million people throughout the Republic of Ireland are eligible to vote in Friday’s national referendum on whether the constitution should be changed to allow same-sex couples to legally marry. While 18 countries have already legalized same-sex marriage, Ireland would become the first to adopt the law through popular vote, so long as the referendum passes.

“If passed it would mark a sea-change that would, I imagine, be irreversible and have significant consequences,” Msgr. Kennedy said. “Not all of these consequences might be appreciated in the present moment but will have to be confronted in the future.” He observed that while political parties and public figures have vocalized support for the “Yes” campaign for same-sex marriage, many others, particularly private individuals, “have preferred to remain silent on how they might cast their vote.”

Coming from a country with a long history of fidelity to the Catholic Church, shaken only in recent decades by scandals among the clergy and religious, the May 22 referendum is significant. The proposed amendment to the constitution to allow for same-sex marriage was introduced in January by the Fine Gael-Labour Government. The proposal must be voted on in a referendum before it can become law.

Friday’s referendum comes 22 years after Ireland decriminalized homosexual acts. In 2010, the

country enacted the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act, which allowed same-sex couples to enter into civil unions. Despite the consequences such a law could have on future generations, Msgr. Kennedy is confident that the Church's message will withstand the challenges. "The Church lives within the structures of society," he said, "and will continue to show respect for the individual choices persons might make."

Regardless of the outcome of the referendum, he continued: "The noble and beautiful teaching on sacramental union of a man and woman as taught by Christ the Lord and as designed by God at creation, will remain at the heart of the message that it brings to the world. While society continues to change, the beauty and permanence of Christ's teachings will perhaps shine all the more brightly."

Polls throughout the Republic of Ireland were opened from 7am to 10pm local time on May 22. The results will be announced on Saturday.

IRISH CATHOLIC

COMMENT & ANALYSIS

Don't be afraid to vote 'no' in the marriage referendum

by Michael Kelly

May 21, 2015

This referendum is not about same-sex relationships or about equality, but about the family

Tomorrow citizens of the Republic are faced with a crucial decision: whether or not to radically change the constitutional definition of marriage. It is a decision upon which everyone should reflect deeply.

Bunreacht na hÉireann – the Constitution of Ireland – is a solemn compact between the people since our State is a creation of the citizens.

The Constitution doesn't belong to the Government, or the political parties or the Church, or the clamouring voices in the media. It belongs to the people.

This is not a referendum on how much we love our fellow citizens who are gay. Despite what we are led to believe this referendum is also not about same-sex relationships or about equality, but about the family.

Civil partnerships have already been introduced which give same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples in terms of inheritance rights, next-of-kin status, employment and tax related benefits.

This is a vote about the very nature of marriage itself and the importance society places on the role of mothers and fathers in bringing up children.

There have been loud voices calling for a 'yes' vote: all political parties, almost all the media, the Garda Representative Association, foreign companies based in Ireland and a range of celebrities.

Celebs

Inevitably, some will be swayed by what celebs and tech giants have to say about the meaning of marriage. More thoughtful voters, however, will weigh up the particular arguments for and against same-sex marriage rather than vote in a particular way because someone has told them to.

I'll be voting 'no' tomorrow. It's not because I'm part of an "architecture of homophobia" to quote former president Mary McAleese, it's because, like Pope Francis, I passionately believe in the uniqueness of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.

The debate about same-sex marriage, at its heart, is a debate about how highly we value mums and dads and whether we think the complementarity of men and women, especially as mothers and fathers, should be embodied in a special and distinct social institution.

People often ask "what harm would it do if we allow two men or two women to marry one another?"

But the harm is in the outright denial by proponents of same-sex marriage that there is any added value in children having a loving mother and father.

In the name of 'tolerance' and 'equality' Irish people are being asked to abandon the notion that motherhood and fatherhood are complementary roles of special value to children and society. Same-sex marriage supporters don't only want to make marriage gender neutral. They want to make parenthood gender neutral.

They want us to agree that marriage should be for any two people who love each other, regardless of gender, and that having two loving parents is just the same as having a loving mother and father.

These two demands are inseparable. You can't have one without the other and they amount to an outright denial of sexual complementarity.

While same-sex marriage proponents can hardly deny that there are two sexes, they emphatically deny that they are complementary in any significant way, least of all from the point of view of children.

Discrimination

Supporters of same-sex marriage insist that they are discriminated against because they can't marry. But is it really discrimination to maintain a social institution which recognises that the two sexes are distinct and different and complementary, and have another legal structure for other kinds of relationships?

We are being told that we must introduce this because lots of other countries have. In fact only one quarter of European countries have done so and none by a popular vote. Indeed, it has been defeated whenever it has been put to the people.

Tomorrow's question is a simple one: do we believe that there are real and complementary differences between men and women and mothers and fathers, and if so, do they really believe it is unjust discrimination to have a special social institution which embodies these differences?

Each citizen should pause for thought and be wary of the same rush to group-think that saw an overheated property market – cheered on by journalists, economists and politicians – bring the country to its knees. In a culture where everyone thinks alike, few people think at all.
