NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Same-sex marriage decision from National Cathedral spotlights denominational differences

Pat Perriello | Jan. 11, 2013 NCR Today

How can two traditions once deemed so similar diverge so completely? The National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., has announced [1] it will now be the site of future gay marriages.

I'm sure no one believes there is any danger of authorized gay marriages occurring in any Roman Catholic church in the foreseeable future. In fact, our church saw fit to work against the recently passed legislation in Maryland and condemn the very idea of same-sex relationships. Our leaders continue to oppose the legislation and seek to overturn it.

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this action at the National Cathedral. This cathedral in many ways represents the center of our national life. Presidents and their families, foreign dignitaries, and other notables have married, been buried, and worshipped there. Special national prayer services occur there frequently. I know some Roman Catholics fail to recognize that the entire world does not always center on them, but one cannot discount the prominence of the National Cathedral in the life of our country.

I know when we were kids growing up, we always said the Episcopalians were the closest to the Catholics. Yet now it seems that the church hierarchy wants to throw its lot in with fundamentalist Christians whose views differ dramatically from Catholicism in every area except abortion and homosexuality.

Meanwhile, we have the Episcopal church welcoming same-sex couples to their famous National Cathedral to receive the blessing of their church on their lives and on their love. Although the Anglican Communion, of which U.S. Episcopalians are a part, has many challenges, it seems to understand that even in religion, a big-tent approach where all are welcome has much to offer.

It seems that our church has determined that religion is all about abortion and sex. I don't see very much about those issues in the Gospels, but our leadership has determined that not much of anything else matters. Even when Benedict XVI speaks about the problems of unregulated capitalism, he has to add a few comments about the destruction to society that will be wrought by same-sex marriages.

Let me suggest a few other issues that might be worthy of the church's attention. Maybe we should look at concerns such as poverty, injustice, oppression, abuse of power and the failure to respect the worth, value and dignity of every other individual. I believe some of these are what might be considered Gospel values and can be found addressed in the beatitudes. The Gospel calls us to learn to love our fellow man, *all* of our fellow men and women. It isn't easy, and it represents the real challenge of Christianity. Just maybe those at the National Cathedral who are throwing their doors open to validate the love of two people for each other are trying to nudge all of us, including our own hierarchy, to remember the core message of the Gospel.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2016 - 01:00*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/same-sex-marriage-decision-national-cathedral-spotlights-denominational-differences

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[1] http://www.religionnews.com/2013/01/09/national-cathedral-to-marry-gay-couples/