

Marriage Equality:
A Pastoral Letter
to the Communion of Conciliar Catholic Churches
and to All Gospel-Minded People of Good Will

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision about same-sex marriage is really a statement about the meaning of family. Family is beyond sexual relations, or the act of child-bearing, because it is a spiritual concept. Family means belonging. Spouses belong to each other by the exchange of vows. Children belong to a family. Family is the place of home – where we are cherished and loved, “for better or for worse; for richer or for poorer; in sickness and in health.”

The Hebrew and Christian scriptures tell of different kinds of families. While they are different in make-up, they all share the same devotion of love. An excellent example comes from the Book of Ruth. In this story, Ruth is a young woman who marries the son of Naomi. But Naomi’s son soon dies, and Ruth is left a childless widow. Yet Ruth pledges her life to Naomi, saying, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.” (Ruth 1: 16-18) Subsequently, Ruth marries another man, and has a son. Yet, Naomi is given the baby to hold as his grandmother. She is honored as the matriarch of the family – though the baby is not her grandson by birth. This wonderful story is a deep teaching about family – about belonging.

Jesus’ own family shows this diversity of make-up. He was born of the Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Joseph is celebrated as Jesus’ father – though he is not Jesus’ birth father. In our Catholic tradition, we hold this Holy Family in reverence, as the model for all families.

Families are blended, traditional, made up of two fathers or two mothers, or headed by a single parent. God’s own wisdom calls us to support and nurture every family – and to strengthen those in need.

In the 16th century, the Church persecuted those who said that the earth is not the center of the universe, but has now corrected its mistaken understanding of physics and the scriptures. It was slow to condemn the evil of slavery, or the subjugation of native peoples. Now it is called to re-examine its own prejudice against the LGBT community – often based upon stereotypes. The Church has yet to fully engage with both science and society on the

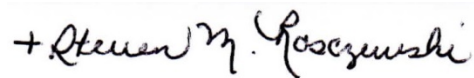
meaning of sexuality. Modern science tells us that people are disposed early in their development to a same-sex or opposite-sex attraction and life-style. Healthy sexual relationships exist between same-sex or opposite-sex partners. This is our experience in the Communion of Conciliar Catholic Churches, and it should be pondered by all Church leaders, as they teach the message of Jesus Christ in different circumstance – a message of peace, reconciliation and unconditional love.

As bishops, we exercise our teaching office in calling the larger Church to witness the devotion of same-sex couples as loving spouses, and devoted parents. We also call married couples of all persuasions to the love, faithfulness and mutual support which Christ teaches to all his followers. He gave his life so completely to the Church – his followers – that they are called “the Body of Christ.” He lives in them. So to, spouses are called to be “two in one flesh.” This traditional understanding of married love is just as relevant to same-sex couples, who are called by Christ to live in him, and see his presence in each other. Spouses belong to each other, and together they belong to Christ. This is our Christian faith.

In Christ Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Martin de Porres Griffin".

Most Rev. Martin de Porres Griffin,
Diocese of California

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Steven M. Roszczewski".

Most Rev. Steven M. Roszczewski,
Diocese of Florida

Given on this 29th day of June 2015, A.D.
Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul