

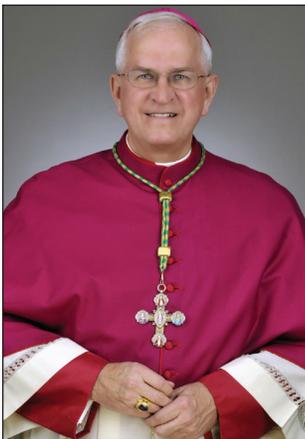
## Archbishop Kurtz on same-sex marriage ruling, and where the Church goes from here

*USCCB President calls on Catholics to speak kindly, but stand firm*

The recent decision by the Supreme Court to change the definition of marriage requires a response. I see the decision as a “tragic error” not because I want to demean any person but rather because of my concern for the common good and the good of all. Jesus, with great love, taught unambiguously that from the beginning marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman. The Church, seeking to witness to Christ in every age, welcomes all and treats every person with equal dignity. We agree with those who seek change in the definition of marriage in one thing: that every person has equal dignity. We disagree about the nature of marriage.

In a free society, we citizens do not impose our convictions on others but seek to invite.

The Court has declared that our civil laws will define marriage based on the consent and



Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz

love of any two unrelated adults. However, we understand that marriage is a natural institution with a meaning that precedes both state and religion. From the beginning, the sexual complementarity of men and women is the basis of a unique communion that expresses something of the image and likeness of God who is a Triune communion of Persons. We further believe that Christ raised marriage between a baptized woman and man to be a sacrament, an efficacious sign of and participation in the very mystery of Christ and the Church. The sacrament builds upon the natural reality of marriage — it does not erase it — and sexual difference is essential to both. Indeed, without this reciprocal relationship between the sexes, as Pope Francis has taught, we cannot understand “what it means to be a man and woman.”

The Church recognizes marriages and families as the foundation of the Church and society. The permanent, faithful, and fruitful bond of marriage is the normative and beautiful structure God designed for how individuals are brought together into relationships of life-giving love. Who we are is tied to who we are with others. This first comes through our families. It is through mothers and fathers and children that each person most powerfully “learns to receive love and to give love” as Pope Francis has taught. As with God’s other gifts, this design is for our good as individuals and as a society. The Church has recognized this beautiful calling as a means to grace and holiness and seeks to accompany couples, baptize their children and offer them the Eucharist and penance as sustaining gifts along the journey.

We have perhaps not done enough to teach the beauty of marriage and the purpose and inherent design of family life, but the Church is here to accompany couples as they make

the courageous choice to follow this life-giving vocation. We will pray with them and will advocate for them. It is a good time to recommit ourselves — all of us whether clergy or lay — to cherishing marriage and the children of each union as a joy, a place of love and a path to virtue and holiness. If you do not know the deep beauty of the Church's teachings on marriage and family life, I urge you to make a little time to read and ask questions. Many of the great saints have spoken about the family as the domestic church, the dignity of every person, the sacrament of marriage as a path to holiness, the complete gift of self, the blessedness of fruitful marriage and other topics worthy of contemplation and pursuit.

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However, in light of the Supreme Court's decision, we will face greater pressure now to mute our voices. As the dissenting justices recognized in their opinions, the freedom to run our ministries and participate in the public square while holding to the teachings of Jesus will likely be challenged. Laws and regulations will be altered to comply with the Court's decision, and those new legal requirements could threaten the life and work of the Church as well as other religious institutions and individuals of faith. So I ask you to take the long view and remember that this is not the first — and unlikely to be the last — time the Church has been led by her beliefs to be counter-cultural.

We must, in faithfulness and obedience, be firm, absolutely committed to what Christ has taught us; but let us also speak and act with love, attracting people to the beauty of God's design while keeping our hearts close to Christ in prayer. Our witness is needed in public and in private and gospel life is often not easy.

But as Pope Francis encourages us, “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”

Finally, how do we respond to the Supreme Court's decision declaring marriage to be something we know it cannot be? First, be a good witness. Treat everyone with respect and dignity. Love everyone just as Christ has loved you. Be a joyful witness to the truths Christ has revealed and the Church has taught. Second, together, let us speak this truth with love. Sometimes preaching the truth means speaking of sin, our own and that of society. But our faith is rooted in reconciliation; Christ constantly invites us out of the darkness and into the light of His merciful love. As Pope Francis reminds us, we are all sinners and every sinner deserves compassion. So, we will not abandon marriage and families and we also will not give up on witnessing to the truth and inviting others to join us. Third, live as you believe. Continue to shape your life according to these truths, and urge others, by both your words and your example, to do the same. Continue to advocate for society to recognize that the permanent, fruitful, faithful union of one man and one woman makes a unique contribution to the common good, and so deserves — once again — unique protection and support in law. This will, in the short term, create more room for social tolerance of this venerable view of marriage, and in the long term, make the day come sooner when, inevitably, this tragic decision will come undone.

*Archbishop Kurtz is president of U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.  
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