

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**

**Archiepiscopal Directive
On so-called “same-sex marriage”
October 29, 2015**

+

From the beginning of the creation God ‘made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. –Mark, 10:7-9

Prologue

The holy Church offers to her spiritual children the tender and sweet milk of the Gospel and the nourishing and substantive meat of spiritual guidance, encouragement, discipline, and reproof, so that Her children may flourish “in the fatherly adoption.” Ours is a Christian culture with all of the components of instruction and guidance, so that no one may depart from the ecclesiastical garden of delights without nourishment suitable for him.

The Economy of Salvation

Thanks be to our all-merciful God, the One who created the ages and founded the earth upon the seas and crowned all of His creatures with Man himself, to tend the garden of paradise and to raise creation to participate fully in the divine life which is unending and ever-new. Man fell from this ancestral glory due to his own vain pursuit of sensual pleasure and plunged himself headlong into death. This flight from the true life, inspired by empty pride, constitutes the chief force leading man to ruin. But God did not leave man to such a state; rather, He prepared the way in the Economy of salvation by sending the Law-giver, Moses, with the commandments, then the holy Prophets who applied that law and pointed to the Christ. Finally, in the last days, He sent His unique Son, the eternal LOGOS of the Father, “born of a woman, under the Law,” that He might fulfill the divine Economy and effect the redemption of fallen man. Jesus, the “Son of man” (*ben-Adam*), the Lord, the God-man (*theanthropos*), “became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Jesus Christ is the Way

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ not only showed us the way of life, but *He himself* is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” In Him do we find the fulfillment of created nature in the crowning of that nature given in the first six days of creation (Genesis chapter 1) with the transcending power of the New Man of the “eighth day”, of the Kingdom of God. In Christ, then, all that is natural according to creation is elevated and transfigured by the uncreated Light of the Master who was transfigured in glory on Tabor. In the words of the Apostle to the nations, St Paul, “all things that are reprov'd by the light are made manifest; for everything being made manifest is light.”

The Mission of the Church

The Church speaks in the name of the Lord both to her spiritual children and also prophetically to the world. When we speak to our children we speak not only pragmatically but on a higher level, as from the age to come, since we do not treat earthly things only, but heavenly. When, however, the Church speaks to the world, she calls for sobriety and reminds lost man of his conscience, so that mankind may not sink into self-forgetfulness and oblivion. The paschal message to the world is that “Light has come into the world,” the paschal light of the new day in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But when the world turns a deaf ear, the Church still reminds it of its own nature given by God in the beginning of creation.

The status of so-called “same-sex marriage” and the reason for this Directive

It is this “beginning” which is often forgotten these days. As manifest by the recent U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in a 5-4 split-decision (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 26 June, 2015), now well-known to all, a significant cap-stone was placed upon the rapid movement in our country toward a re-definition of marriage, which, of course, in the Church we consider to be unacceptable. To be precise, the Supreme Court’s decision does not make any new law. However, it rules as non-binding any law which limits the legal definition of marriage to that of an exclusive union of one man to one woman. In the light of these facts, we issue this Archbishopial Directive in order to underscore the natural definition of marriage as a word to our “parish”; namely, the region of North America, so that all people may be summoned back to God-given common sense. But we also offer comfort to our spiritual children, all the Orthodox faithful—of our own Archdiocese, as well as the entire pan-Orthodox faithful of our sister jurisdictions—in order to show the “more excellent way.”

Natural Creation and so-called “same-sex marriage”

Based, then, upon natural creation, even as our Lord Jesus Christ did as reported in the holy Gospels, cited at the heading of this Directive, the Church recognizes the word, “marriage,” as designating only one datum: the fleshly union of one man and one woman, “just as Adam and Eve in the beginning of the world” (*ancient betrothal, Service of Matrimony*) in an exclusive

way, allowing no others. It is this exclusive union of love which alone is fertile and thus the nursery of the human race until the end of time. Any other so-called “marriage,” including so-called “same-sex marriage,” is a forgery and death-dealing, sterile and doomed to frustration and the ruin of body and soul of its participants. Therefore, the Church cannot recognize or countenance any other definition of marriage by any human law, since any such “law” contrary to God’s own created ordinance cannot stand as law, but is and will be a dead letter. “There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death.” This, then, is the Church’s word to our North American people.

Marriage in the New Creation

Beyond this, in the Gospel, we see the meaning of marriage expressed in terms which elevate its primacy to the highest form of community. St Paul, in teaching his children, said that he had “betrothed (them) to one spouse, that (he) might present (them) a chaste virgin to Christ.” And, St John the Theologian closes his revelatory vision with these beautiful words which are the call for the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: “the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ Therefore, marriage for the Church is not defined by nature only, but rather is transfigured into the true marriage, the marriage of the *eschaton*, in the words of St Paul: “(marriage) is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.”

Specific Directives to Clergy and Laity

In the saving light of this holy doctrine, then, I set forth the following directives, in concert with my brother diocesan bishops, which must be adhered to by all of the sacred clergy and the faithful laity in every capacity within our Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

1. At this time, and until further directives are given, **no priest may refuse to sign a marriage license for a couple who are otherwise qualified and blessed by that priest to receive the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.** It is not yet clear that the act of signing a marriage license exposes the clergyman to litigation forcing him to act contrary to our stated purposes as a Church.
2. **No clergyman may solemnize the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony upon persons of the same sex.** In cases where the sex (male or female) of either of the prospective marriage partners is disputed, the priest must consult with his diocesan bishop and receive specific instructions for proceeding. In short, only one male and one female (both otherwise meeting the canonical requirements; namely, at least one of them being an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the Church, and the other being a recognized Christian according to the terms of baptism) may be married canonically.
3. **No clergyman may stand present in any so-called “same-sex marriage” ceremony, even as a non-participating guest, regardless of location. Nor may he attend a reception for such,** since his presence at this event or others like it, will appear to condone or even bless the event.
4. **Any couple which is eligible to receive the Mystery of Holy Matrimony in the Orthodox Church and who have availed themselves of a civil marriage (that is,**

solemnized by the secular state authority) and who express their desire for the Sacrament itself (“crowning”) must be carefully screened. The priest must secure a copy of their marriage license and/or certificate. This must be reviewed and a copy maintained within the parish marriage records. Only after the pastor is satisfied that all civil laws (in agreement with the Church’s doctrine) have been complied with may he then consider the couple for the great blessing of marriage crowning in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

5. **Any Orthodox Christian who chooses to undergo marriage solemnities of any kind outside of the Orthodox Church voluntarily separates himself (herself) from communion with the holy Orthodox Church.** Therefore, any such person is no longer in good standing with the Church and therefore may not receive holy Communion, nor serve as sponsor at baptism, nor hold any parish church office. This applies in all cases; first of all, of course, to such cases in which such a person enters into a false union of “same-sex marriage,” so-called, as well as a union with a person of the other sex, outside of the Church.
6. **If your parish has a policy of renting out any premises for public use, you may be at risk for litigation, due to the state of legal affairs which the Supreme Court ruling poses.** Therefore, this Archdiocese strongly recommends that the parish council consult with a local attorney, in concert with communications between the pastor and his diocesan bishop, regarding the regulation of this matter.
7. **Though all the clergy of this God-protected Archdiocese are directed to avoid any condoning or encouraging or supporting in word or action of so-called “same-sex marriage,” we remind our pastoral clergy that we all have a calling to reconcile all men to Christ.** Therefore, all persons who come to us must be treated with respect and dignity. Pastoral communications in personal contact with persons who profess to be homosexual must be positive and compassionate. Any of our spiritual children, the Orthodox faithful, who come to us as pastors to discuss their own personal struggle with homosexuality, must be treated with care as children needing the therapy of the Gospel. The pastoral relationship is basic for us, who are called to “seek out the lost sheep.”

In closing, I direct any specific question regarding the contents of this directive, or regarding this area as a whole, to be sent in writing to the diocesan bishop, along with a courtesy-copy to the Archdiocesan chancery in Englewood. Once I have viewed and digested all of your questions, concerns, and requests, I will take whatever actions may be deemed most pastoral and needful for our common good and salvation. I remain

Your father in Christ,



+JOSEPH
Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America