

Regarding Marriage Canon XXI and Same-Sex Marriages: An insider viewpoint

Dear Commission of the Marriage Canon:

Peace to you this day.

My name is Sandi Wiseheart; I am currently married (civil/Christian ceremony in California, United States) to Melody Wiseheart, a transgender woman (i.e., a person born biologically male, but with female hormones present in their brain at birth). We have been married ten and a half years this November, ten years of joy and struggle, laughter and tears, love and blessing. We are extremely grateful to God for giving us each other, and for the marriage which helps both of us to grow to be the persons we are – though now “as in a glass, darkly”, one day to be fully face-to-face before God.

I am writing to tell you about our marriage in the hopes that it might provide a glimpse into a long-term gay union, a marriage which we feel is a true grace from God. It is said that marriage is a ritual of sealing a relationship, in front of the entire community, a relationship *already* mature in faith and love, now acknowledged as being an invitation by a loving God to a deeper grace, a holy love. My wife and I believe that God’s invitation to relationship, and the grace of living towards a deeper, more holy love, are both present before the marriage vows are taken. A private relationship, through the marriage rituals, becomes acknowledged and made holy during the marriage ceremony, becoming a relationship now responsible to, and supported by, the community at large.

It is also our strong belief that love knows no gender, that God would not deny holy grace to someone based solely on distribution of body parts. For one thing, science now informs us that gender is not actually binary, that God has wondrously made gender a spectrum of human physical and mental expression, based on varying hormone levels in the brain and developmental aspects of the body. Thus, we acknowledge that Love is more than human distinctions based on humanity’s limited knowledge of gender and sexuality. God’s ways are not our ways; nor are God’s thoughts our thoughts. We believe God is calling His children to greater maturity in handling the mysteries of relationship: to rise above human distinctions, human perceptions, human divisions between people based on their hormonal body chemistry, and to show an openness to the signs of God’s ways...signs which are usually those of Love, Joy, Service, Fruitfulness, Community, and Faith. Look for these, and you will find the hands of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Creator God at work.

Given these convictions, and given my personal experience of deep grace in my marriage to Melody, I’m writing to ask that the already existing sacramental nature of same-sex marriages be formally recognized by the Anglican Church, so that any couple who feels called to the grace of a God-gifted marriage may have their vocation recognized and respected, and that they be allowed to receive this beautiful and critically important sacrament in the church where they worship each Sunday.

We currently live as a lesbian couple in Bolton, but a special sort of lesbian couple: one which has grown from a relationship between a man and a woman, into the different, but no less grace-filled, rhythms of being a marriage of two wives. This experience has given us a unique vantage point from which to explore the marriage vows, the role that God plays in our marriage, the difference gender and sexuality makes in a sacramental union. We feel very lucky to have seen marriage from both a heterosexual and a homosexual viewpoint. This gives us the freedom, and the responsibility on behalf of our community, to ask the big questions: Is it important to us that we have a sacramental marriage in our chosen Christian community? How about our marriage being legal in the civil world? What has changed since we became Wife and Wife, leaving behind the days of being Husband and Wife? Do we feel our bond is less holy, less grace-filled now? And all the other possible permutations we can come up with.

Despite being denied the sacrament, both Melody and I have deeply felt the power and grace of God in our married lives; we firmly believe that our marriage is nonetheless sacramental and grace-filled in nature. We believe firmly that our marriage is not just a blessing, not just a piece of paper, but a Holy Gift, a Christ-filled sacrament, a visible sign of an inward grace. This gift is truly a sharing in the work of co-creation which our God invites us into; a gift of relationship that is not just for ourselves, but is intended to enable us to participate more fully in service of God's creation.

The grace of our marriage is an echo of the coming Kingdom; a harbinger of the Grace to come. We feel our marriage is sacramental because God is a partner in our union, enabling us to comfort and sustain one another, to serve Christ's people, and to form a loving environment for children—in our case, adopted children, children who need parents and a home and who might not otherwise live in the arms of people who love them.

As for living in a heterosexual marriage (considered sacramental by the Catholic Church, in which tradition we were married) versus living in a lesbian marriage: We no longer take our marriage for granted, knowing that in some U.S. states, it could be declared invalid, sinful, and against God's will. In some states, the minute one crosses the border, same-sex marriages are declared invalid and all spousal rights are revoked. The very thought of someone trying to "take away" that which God has given us is abhorrent, to say the least.

And honestly: We don't feel that the nature of our marriage and our love has changed just because Melody became a woman. If anything, we feel our marriage is MORE "real" now than it was back when Melody had to "pretend" to be a man and wear neckties to work. ☺

In transitioning to womanhood, Melody is becoming dramatically more "herself", so much more connected to herself, to others, to me, and to God. In sharing that transition, and becoming a woman married to another woman, I am finding new depths to my own journey, and a richer understanding of the mysteries of love, gender, and what it means to be human, as well as a child of a Creative and Loving God. (I have written more about

Melody's transition and our marriage in one of my blogs: [Loving Melody: Stories from Her Wife.](#))

We believe that God is bringing light and love and life into the world through the grace of our marriage, a marriage recognized and respected by our parish church family as well as those around us. We are grateful for the love and support shown to us by the good people of Christ Church Bolton; our parish priest, Rev Riscylla Shaw, has said we are a gift to that congregation, showing the work of God in unusual and unexpected ways; we are thankful for her compassion and support.

The love between Melody and I is more than we could ever have asked for. Our marriage is a source of more love and joy than we ever could have imagined, bringing us closer to ourselves, our community, and our God.

In closing, I humbly ask that you allow same-sex marriage partners to become full members of the sacramental life of the Church, so that we, alongside the rest of God's people, may glorify God with all our hearts, and all our minds, and all our bodies, and all our souls.

May God bless your discussions with wisdom; please know how grateful Melody and I are for the invitation to speak up.

Blessings,
Sandi and Melody Wiseheart

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