

# Same-sex marriage still debatable: clergy

BY CHRIS TRABER  
Staff Writer

So, the same-sex marriage debate is over, right?

Tuesday's 158 to 133 vote in the House of Commons approved Bill C-38, making same-sex marriage legal nationwide and guaranteeing the rights of religious institutions to decide their own marriage policies.

Case closed, right?

Some clergy, such as Father Michael Machcek of St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Markham, are concerned another legal battle is looming.

"There is a fear that there will be civil litigation because people may feel their rights are being violated (by being denied a church ceremony)," he said.

"The government could punish us by taking away our status as a registered charity. But that's just number 84 on our list of concerns."

PRIDE York Region chairperson Kevin McBean sees the same possibility.

"Because of all the challenges and because it's an exclusionary practice, (civil litigation) wouldn't surprise me. It would be a logical next step.

There's specific language around the performing of the ceremony. External to that, denying access to a church or parish hall for the reception could be discriminatory based on sexual orientation, said Mr. McBean, whose non-profit organization educates and advocates on behalf of the gay and lesbian community.

"Personally, it is an issue, but the right to marriage is more important," he said.

"If that's their belief, it's their right to hold that belief. What's key is not to have one human right cancel out another."

Jaffari Islamic Centre Imam Syed Rizvi is confident the new law will not impact his congregation.

"The Islamic faith does not allow, accept or recognize same-sex marriage," Imam Rizvi said.

"I don't think there's any likelihood of any member of the Muslim community approaching me. I have not been asked, nor would I perform a marriage between people of the same sex if I were asked. The bill, as I understand it, gives all faiths that option."

"The Qur'an denounces homosexuality. We, as a Muslim community, have issues with changing the definition of marriage."

Bridle Trail Baptist Church won't be offering same-sex marriages either, Rev. Timothy Ngo said. "No same-sex marriages, based on our beliefs and Bible teachings. On that we stand firm," he said.

Rev. Ngo, whose congregation is largely Chinese-Canadian, said he has counselled individuals on the issue but has not been asked to preside over a same-sex marriage.

"If I were approached, I would say no," he said.

"If they were Christians, I would suggest they go to the Bible. Besides, our Chinese culture is founded on strong, traditional family concepts."

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