

# Brooklyn church hosting same-sex marriage not in communion with Rome

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A same-sex wedding featured in secular media drew local Catholics' concern Jan. 1 because its venue, St. Michael the Archangel in Brooklyn, was described as a Catholic church.

Archdiocesan officials stated that the parish is not, and has never been, in communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

"They don't recognize the authority of our bishop, therefore they are not part of the Archdiocese of Baltimore," said Diane Barr, archdiocesan chancellor.

"Anybody can use the word 'Catholic,'" she said. "That's where the confusion comes."

St. Michael the Archangel calls itself an "independent Catholic church," signifying its separation from the Roman Catholic Church, including the authority of the pope and his bishops.

Roman Catholics cannot fulfill their Mass obligations by attending an independent Catholic church's liturgy, Barr said.

Formed in 2008, St. Michael is the central parish of the recently founded New Catholic Church of North America. The church permits women's ordination and same-sex marriage, which the Roman Catholic Church prohibits. Same-sex

marriages became legal in Maryland Jan. 1.

In 2010, the New Catholic Church of North America broke away from a movement of the Old Catholic Church, an independent Catholic Church whose members first parted with the Roman Catholic Church after the First Vatican Council in the 1870s because they rejected the doctrine of papal infallibility.

With its Dundalk-based mission parish Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Michael provides outreach ministries at several locations, including Genesis Health Care, Brooklyn Park; Ordnance Road Correctional Center, Annapolis; and FutureCare, Dundalk. St. Michael has about 25 parishioners.

The New Catholic Church's highest-ranking cleric, Archbishop Joseph F. Steward, said the church makes clear to members and those participating in its ministries that it is not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. It also usually describes itself as an independent Catholic church in its advertising, he said.

A Baltimore Sun advertisement noting its availability for same-sex marriage ceremonies and the Jan. 1 media attention were not intended to cause confusion, Archbishop Steward said.

St. Michael is one of several independent Catholic churches in the Baltimore area. Others include St. Sebastian Independent Catholic Church, East Baltimore; St. Angela Merici Old Catholic Church, Baltimore; St. Hilary's Chapel, Brooklyn; St. Charles of Brazil, Lansdowne; St. Michael Old Catholic Mission, Glen Burnie; and Living Water Catholic Community, Baltimore.

Independent Catholic churches have various histories and may be part of larger networks of independent churches.

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