

Catholic officials in Hungary denounce gay marriage

OXFORD, England - Catholic Church officials in Hungary have denounced the government's decision to extend marriage rights to unmarried and same-sex couples.

"To equate such relationships with marriages undermines society's health and endangers children," said Csongor Szerdahelyi, spokesman for the Budapest-based Hungarian bishops' conference. "We don't discriminate against homosexuals in the church, but nor do we agree with politicians who say such liberal changes are inevitable, and who try to influence opinion by claiming this way of living is normal in the West."

Hungary's parliament Dec. 17 approved a law that allows unmarried and same-sex couples to register as legal partnerships. Under the law, which will take effect in January 2009, registered gay or unmarried partners will gain the rights of inheritance and joint taxation, but not the right to adopt children.

In a statement, the Hungarian bishops' conference expressed disappointment that the law equated same-sex couples with "real families."

Szerdahelyi told Catholic News Service Dec. 19 that church opposition had helped persuade some lawmakers to earlier oppose a more liberal draft.

He added that the church believed the new measure violated natural law, as well as the Hungarian Constitution, which recognizes only heterosexual partnerships as being "of service to society."

"Even with this law on the statute books, the church will continue abiding by what's written in its catechism - that marriage is a partnership between man and woman, which is open to reproduction," he said.