

# Same-sex unions 'penalize' traditional marriage, pope says

VATICAN CITY - Same-sex unions "penalize" traditional couples and distort the true nature of the family, Pope Benedict XVI said.

The many crises that families face are "caused by the rapid social and cultural changes" in society, the pope said Jan. 14 in a speech to officials from the city and province of Rome and the Lazio region of Italy.

Passing legislation or adopting policies that recognize "forms of unions, which distort the essence and purpose of the family end up penalizing those who, with much effort, commit themselves to living a life whose bonds are marked by stable intimacy, have juridical guarantees and are recognized publicly, he said.

While same-sex unions or gay marriage is not recognized in Italy, a number of city and regional governments, including Rome's Lazio region, have introduced registries for same-sex couples that are largely symbolic and have no legal consequences.

Pope Benedict also called on the government officials to help support married women who wish to pursue a career and build a family.

Too often, he said, women "are forced to wait" to have children.

"For this reason, it's necessary to concretely support motherhood, including guaranteeing professional women the possibility of balancing family and work. Too often, in fact, women are put in the position of having to choose between the two," he said.

He said local governments should promote and support maternity rights, including public or privately run child-care centers, to help make it so "a child is not seen as a problem but as a gift and a great joy."