The "Gay" Marriage Controversy.
by Vic Berecz

All across our nation … north-south-east-west and even in the so-called *heartland* … we're hearing the acrimonious cries to "Save Our Families" and "Don't Condone Sin" and "Protect Our Children" coupled with stringent amendments to State Constitutions limiting who can marry. All over what is, to my mind, a fake issue. The definition of the word "marriage" is primarily a semantic matter. *Marriage*, like many words, has different shades of meaning depending upon the context. Let's examine the varying contexts for its use and try to understand why the homophobic world … and their oft times overzealous adversaries who are outspoken homophiles (if there is such a word) … have chosen to take a stand on this issue, which in reality doesn't even deserve this space in an obscure website.

The word "marriage" is used in three basic contexts: personal, religious, and legal. What these contexts have in common is the concept that marriage is two people uniting to form a partnership that becomes the centerpiece of a family. [Definition: *family*, the members of a household who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption.] Families – rather than random sexual encounters – very early became the preferred mechanism for living and for propagating our species. This was largely because families provided mutual support for meeting the rigors of life, plus the love and respect that enhance the joys and blunt the horrors of life for both partners and their dependents. This was true even in the era when "taking a wife" was done quite literally by kidnapping a woman from a neighboring clan and telling her: *welcome to my world*. Truth be told, there have always been a minority of families that did not help propagate the species for a variety of reasons … sometimes because these involved same-sex partnerships (whether sexual or not). But, even families without children benefited from the support aspect of the familial relationship, since these benefits usually accrued to all dependents, not just the young.

The personal, and most basic, context for marriage is people making the choice to become partners. Now fortunately, both parties usually have some say in that choice. Marriage, in this personal sense, has existed from time immemorial, without religious or legal considerations. Sometimes this was called *common-law marriage*, now it's called *living together in a committed relationship*. Two of the communities we organize ourselves into … religious and governmental … also traditionally have had an interest in family relationships. Historically this focused on the propagation aspect of family, primarily to extend the power of the community through numbers. So religion blessed marriage and government made laws to encourage it. But, times have changed. Religion and government (at least in the U.S.) are no longer intertwined, and population growth is no longer a goal of our government. Religions continue to bless marriages and thus encourage the formation of families among their believers. Government continues to encourage family formation through law (primarily tax incentives) because the value of families to a peaceful, law-abiding society is unquestioned. Family is important!

Today we live in a society that has evolved beyond the historical norms in many ways. We have separated the personal, religious and governmental aspects of marriage and family in the name of freedom. We have now fully accepted, and encourage, the old concept of *adoption* as a legitimate family-building mechanism. We have developed technologies, like *in vitro fertilization* and *surrogate motherhood*, that radically change the possibilities for family life. In other words, we've built a society where every family could, if they wish, participate in all the benefits of the family experience, including child-raising. In that sense, we are now able to provide freedom and the pursuit of happiness to all.

But, what are the arguments of the opponents to such freedom? "Homosexuality is sin." Believe that if you must … but remember that *sin* is a religious conviction, not a legal one. If your religious community (church or whatever) believes that … fine. It's your right not to bless homosexual partnerships in your church. "Children are subverted by homosexual parenting." Certainly fear of homosexuality (and likewise tolerance of it) can be taught. But, I personally don't believe homosexual tendencies are taught. Even if I'm wrong and they can be taught, so what? That takes us back to the *do unto others* thing … if you don't want others to mess with the way you raise your family, don't mess with their way! (Within reason, of course … see *Religious Freedom and Toleration*.) And finally, "Homosexual marriage is a slippery slope toward the abandonment of the traditional concept of family" … that's the "Save Our Families" folks who fear the next step will be large random groups declaring themselves married to each other. [Hmm … did we have that in the 60s?] Seriously though, even the 19th century polygamous Mormon community did not consider the husband and multiple wives to be a single family … rather each partnership and their children constituted a very traditional separate family in their minds. I believe that, if there is a slippery slope toward the demise of traditional family life, it's folks like Newt Gingrich and Larry King and their predilection for serial monogamy that have put us on it.

Marriage and *family* are just words. The words themselves are not important. What is important is what they stand for … the concept of family as a loving, caring partnership of two people living with and taking responsibility for their dependents. For those who choose to establish a family without the benefits of religious and/or governmental support, I wish them well. For those who wish to register their marriage with their governmental community to gain the benefits of certain laws, I wish them well. In both these cases, it makes sense that *any* two consenting adults should be permitted to make that choice … to me that's American freedom and equality! And, for those who choose to seek a religious blessing for their familial relationship … and it is within the rules established by their religious community … I also wish them well.   In any case, a loving, stable family partnership (*marriage*, if you choose to use that semantically-loaded word) is a good thing.

By the way, I personally believe that a man and a woman, faithfully using their synergistic attributes and taking full advantage of community and religious support, usually have the best shot at successful family life. Should one of those partners depart (whether due to death, divorce, abandonment, or whatever) that's unfortunate, but life and family goes on. I guess that's a very traditional and conservative view.   But, I know everyone can't be as lucky as I've been. That's why, I'm willing to tolerate and support non-traditional family arrangements … *marriages*, if you must. Remember, most Americans believe that *people who consider themselves a family are a family*!