

Can I attend my colleague's same-sex wedding?

by Fr. Thomas V. Berg, PhD

DEAR FATHER,

One of my co-workers is about to enter a same-sex “marriage.” I interact with him often during the course of the workday, and both he and his partner are very nice men. Pretty much everyone in our office has been taking him out to lunch to celebrate, and I am invited to go as well. My conscience tells me not to go to lunch, but how do I refuse joining the crowd—especially when it could cause tension with people I spend the majority of my days with? Also, a card will be circulated throughout the office for people to sign wishing them good luck and happiness. There is a collection being taken up for them as well. What do I do? —CATHOLIC COLLEAGUE

Our starting point in answering your question is not easily accepted these days, even by many persons who identify themselves as believing Christians: the reality that neither sacred Scripture nor the consistent teaching of the Church throughout the centuries condone sexual acts between persons of the same sex.

Sadly this issue is not infrequently the cause of genuine discrimination and acts of emotional or even physical violence against people with same-sex attraction on the one hand and, on the other, virulent and relentless attacks by the same-sex attraction community on anyone who publicly opposes them on the marriage issue, casting them as hate-filled homophobes. Both extremes are unconscionable.

That one can have moral objections to same-sex “marriage” does not make one a “homophobe.” This has been argued time

and time again in the media, even by openly professed persons of same-sex attraction such as journalist Brandon Ambrosino, who wrote in *The Atlantic* last December:

[Since] my gayness is not the most fundamental aspect of my identity as Brandon, then it seems to me that someone could ideologically disapprove of my sexual expression while simultaneously loving and affirming my larger identity.

So the “respect, compassion, and sensitivity” which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes (CCC, 2358) as the proper Catholic attitude toward persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not at odds with the moral requirement to refrain from condoning, directly or indirectly, sexual acts between persons of the same sex. Understanding this, you should

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be confident that your desire to be affirming of your co-worker as a person is not at odds with your disagreement about the choices he makes in terms of sexual activity.

Being aware, however, of the moral requirement just mentioned, you are correctly concerned about whether going out to lunch, chipping in to buy a gift, or signing a card to congratulate this same-sex couple could be interpreted as condoning the sexual acts they engage in, or condoning a conception of marriage that Catholics could never reasonably condone.


My advice would be the following: Do not contribute to or participate in anything (lunch, wedding gift, card) that is overtly congratulatory to the couple—or would at least be interpreted by others as condoning what you cannot condone morally. If your interactions with your same-sex attraction co-worker on a daily basis amount to little more than office business, and your abstaining from the congratulatory gestures will not result in unpleasantries or tensions between you and him, then I would not give this matter further consideration.

If you suspect otherwise, or if you actually enjoy some degree of friendship with him, you probably have some alternatives that will allow you to remain faithful to your own moral principles and yet salvage and sustain a positive relationship with your co-worker. For example, some time after the wedding ceremony, perhaps on the occasion of a birthday, you might consider sending him a card. If it has become known in the office that you abstained from any congratulatory

gestures, and if this has been tolerated without anyone recriminating you in private or public, you could thank your co-worker for being accepting of you as you stand by your principles, while also taking the occasion to affirm the many things you like about him.

Additionally—and this goes without saying—be as inclusive as you can of your co-worker in meetings, discussion, and events. Give him credit and praise where it is due. To the extent possible, foster a genuine friendship with him.

In reality, you have a wonderful opportunity here to contribute to the building up and edification of civil society by becoming and being a genuine friend of someone with whom you have profound disagreements on moral issues—even very personal ones. Such friendships are not only possible; they are vital to sustaining any semblance of principled and genuinely tolerant democratic life.

If your attempts to remain *both* friendly to your co-worker *and* faithful to your moral principles are met with animosity from him or others, you will still be doing a great good to all those immediately involved, especially if you strive to bear the unpleasantness with grace. You will also experience the consolation of having remained faithful to your conscience, which is itself an incalculable contribution to the good of society, humanity, and the Mystical Body of Christ. 



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