

OUR COMMUNITY JOURNAL

# A Gay Marriage in a Catholic Church

WE NEEDED A MIRACLE, AND RECEIVED ONE . . .

**I GREW UP ROMAN CATHOLIC**, and many special moments from my life are intertwined with this religion. From a very young age I was ingrained with the teaching “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So, when the Church came out with its official stance on gay marriage—that they accept gay people into the community but don’t condone their acting on it or getting married—I was very confused. Did loving your neighbor as yourself only apply if you were straight?

I grappled deeply with this issue and eventually came to the decision to leave the Catholic Church. I found a non-denominational spiritual center in Los Angeles called Agape, meaning unconditional love. During each service there is a moment when our reverend asks anyone who is joining us for the first time to stand. We, as a congregation, then bless these people with statements like “We thank God for you, and we see who you truly are.” I will never forget one service and a woman who was sitting behind me. As I said the affirmations to her she teared up. After the service she hugged and thanked me because she, being gay, had never before felt fully accepted within a church community. At that moment I felt I was on the right spiritual path, but still, there were times I missed the traditions of my old religion.

A gay friend of mine also grew up Catholic but left the Church around the same time I did. His parents, like mine, are very traditional and have intertwined many special family functions with religion. So when it was time for my friend to get married he wanted to get married in the Church. Of course, this was impossible. Or was it?

The first thing he did was to find the place. Old Saint Hilary’s was a small, white church on a hill overlooking San Francisco. It just didn’t hold Catholic services anymore because the parish had moved to a different location. He booked it immediately. Now that he had found his church, he needed to find someone to marry him, and he wanted that



Old St. Hilary’s in Tiburon, California.

person to be Catholic. His first idea was to ask some nuns in the area. He thought maybe they would be sympathetic, because women aren’t allowed to be priests in the Catholic Church, so it seemed a similar injustice.

Around this time, I had breakfast with my dad and his friend, who happened to be a Catholic deacon. I excitedly told them about what my friend was trying to do, and how great I thought it was that, despite the odds, he was trying to bring God and his beliefs into his marriage ceremony. Where most people would turn against a religion that didn’t fully accept them, he was not only still loving it but actively pursuing it. I could tell by the deacon’s skepticism that this was going to be much harder for my friend than I thought.

But then a miracle happened.

My friend found a group called the White-Robed Monks of St. Benedict on a wedding planning site called The Knot. This is an independent Catholic jurisdiction that practices Catholic spirituality, the experience of love and compassion, over Catholic religion’s institutionalized rules and practices. They preach that Jesus never said *No* to anyone who came to him and had two main commandments:

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Love God, Love Neighbor. Therefore, they agree to marry anyone who comes to them regardless of whether they want to get married on a beach, or they have been divorced, or they are gay. That's how my friend found a real priest to marry him.

On September 9, 2018, my friend and his partner were married in church by a Franciscan priest with a full Catholic Mass. I still cry every time I think about it. This priest is my hero. Not only has he long been an advocate of human rights (at 18 he marched with colleagues of Martin Luther King Jr.), he has restored my faith in the future of my religion.

There are those who are skeptical of this event and point out that the marriage is not officially recognized by the institution of the Catholic Church. Still, it is a step forward. My friend's own mother had not believed a Catholic marriage ceremony could be possible for her son. Now, she participates in continued dialogue with the priest who married him. My aim is that this story will open continued dialogue across the country in demographics both old and young about what's next in our shared spiritual evolution. I really hope what's next is marriage equality.

—ALISSA BICA

**Alissa Bica** is a writer, actor, and sommelier whose mission is to use humor to bring about hope and change. She writes the blog *A Comedian's Guide to Enlightenment* and is a contributing writer for *Sugar Magazine*.

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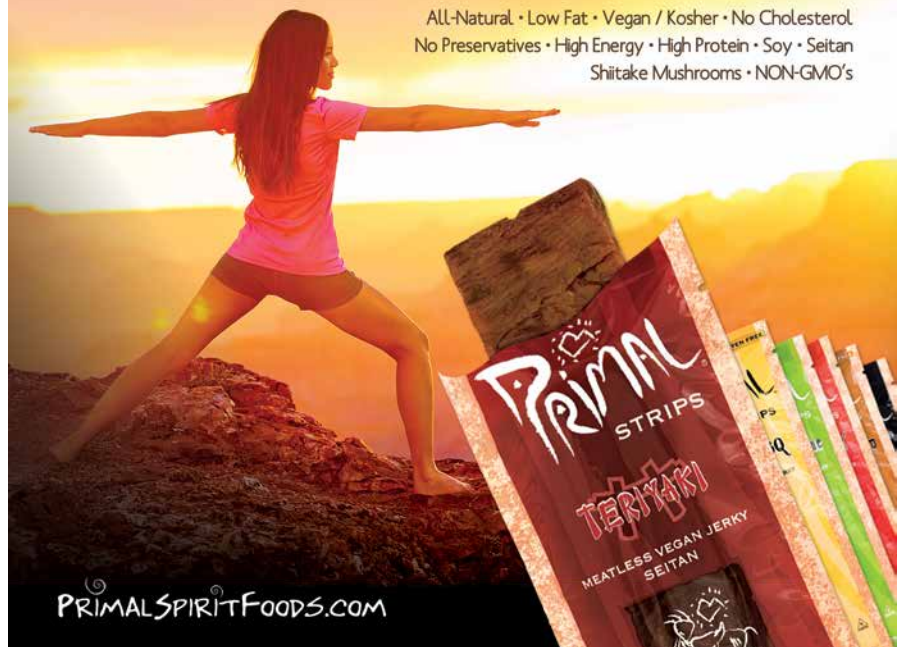
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