#### **Press Release**

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#### Religion and the Same-sex Debate

by Reginald W. Bibby

Discussions about responses to the Canadian government moving toward legalizing gay unions invariably involve religion. Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics are portrayed as leading the opposition to same-sex marriage. But, apart from the position of their leaders, how in fact do Canadians of various religious persuasions feel about the issue?

A national survey of family aspirations conducted by sociologist Reginald Bibby for the Vanier Institute of the Family reveals some important findings concerning religion and same-sex marriage. The Future Families Project has found that only 26% of Canadians who attend religious services at least one a month approve of gay marriage, well below the approval figure of 58% among those who attend services less than once a month.

Those differences are further evident when one compares Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants who are actively involved in their groups with individuals who are less involved. About 25% of Catholics who attend services monthly or more approve of gay marriages, 55% their versus of counterparts who attend less often. These patterns hold both for Catholics in Quebec and Catholics in the rest of the country. Only 6% of active evangelicals - also commonly referred to as Conservative Protestants – agree that gays and lesbians should be allowed

# Table 1. ATTITUDES TOWARD SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BY SERVICE ATTENDANCE

% Indicating agreeing that "Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry"

	Total	Attend Monthly or More	Attend Less Than Monthly
Nationally	46%	26	58
RCs: Quebec Mainline Protestants RCs: Outside Quebec Conservative Protestants	46 43 37 12	28 44 23 6	56 43 55 35
Buddhists Jews Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs	78 64 22	* * *	* * *
No Religion	78	*	*

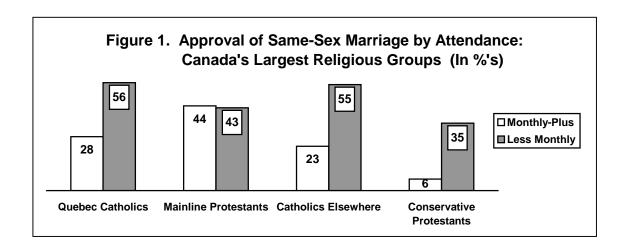
\*Sample sizes for Other Faith Groups small and do not permit breakdowns by attendance; totals included for heuristic value. Very few people in the "No Religion" category attend services monthly or more.

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, The Future Families Project, Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

to marry, compared to 35% who are less active.

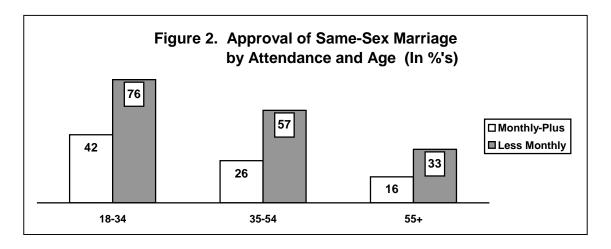
Mainline Protestants – people identifying with the United, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches – represent an interesting and important exception to the pattern of involvement being associated with lower levels of acceptance of same-sex marriage. In the Mainline case, no significant difference exists between those who are actively involved and those who are: in both instances, some 45% of Mainliners say they approve of gay marriage.

While the sample sizes for Other Faith groups do not permit definitive generalizations, the survey findings do suggest some important variations exists. Buddhists and Jews are considerably more likely than people identifying with other groups to sanction same-sex marriage, while Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs rival Conservative Protestants in being opposed to such unions. As would be expected, Canadians who say they have "No Religion" are more likely than people who claim religious ties to give the green light to gay marriage.



Age is an extremely important factor to keep in mind. On the one hand, the inclination of people who are actively involved in religious groups to disapprove of same-sex marriage persists across all age groups. Among 18-to-34-year-olds, for example, 42% of those who attend services monthly or more approve of gay marriage, versus 76% of those who attend less often.

However, very significantly, younger active participants are considerably more likely than older regular attenders to approve of same-sex marriages. While approval stands at only 16% for monthly-plus attenders who are 55 and over, it rises to 26% among 35-to-54-year-olds and to 42% among actively involved adults who are under the age of 35. The differences are found in all major religious groups, including evangelicals — where the 2% approval level among monthly-plus attenders over 35 jumps to 18% among adults who are under 35. Generational changes in attitudes clearly have been taking place, both outside and inside the country's religious groups.



As would be expected, these patterns in attitudes toward same-sex marriage are also evident when one looks at attitudes toward homosexuality more generally. Only about one in three Canadians say they both approve and accept of homosexual relations. However, approximately another one-third indicate that they accept homosexuality, even if they do not approve of it. This distinction between approval and acceptance appears to be extremely important. Large numbers of Canadians personally do not believe that homosexuality is appropriate, but they nonetheless are willing to accept it.

Differences are pronounced between people who are actively involved in religious groups and others: 74% of those who attend services less than once a month indicate their acceptance of homosexuality, compared to 43% of those who are more active. The latter appear to be led by Mainline Protestants. Still, it perhaps is noteworthy that, even among evangelicals, 17% say they disapprove but accept homosexuality – double the 8% who indicate both approval and acceptance.

Here again, Buddhists and Jews give evidence of being more inclined than people in any religious group to express approval and/or acceptance – in sharp contrast to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs who, together, express just about as much opposition to homosexuality as evangelicals. Once more, the highest level of acceptance of homosexuality is found among Canadians who indicate they have no religion.

# Table 2. ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY BY RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE AND IDENTIFICATION

"What is your view of sexual relations between two people of the same sex?"

	Approve & Accept	Disapprove But Accept	Disapprove & Not Accept	Totals
Nationally	33%	29	38	100
Monthly-Plus	17	26	57	100
Less than Monthly	43	31	26	100
RCs: Quebec	30	39	31	100
Mainline Protestants	27	35	38	100
RCs: Outside Quebec	24	27	49	100
Conservative Protestants	8	17	75	100
Buddhists*	72	11	17	100
Jews*	44	52	4	100
Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs*	22	6	72	100
None	66	23	11	100

<sup>\*</sup>Sample sizes for other faith groups small; included for heuristic value.

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, The Future Families Project, Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

Similar attitudinal patterns are evident when other issues pertaining to gays and lesbians are examined – the right to adopt children, being good parents, and being entitled to receive the same benefits as other Canadians.

	% Agreeing	% Agreeing			
	Adopting Children	Do a Good Job of Raising children	Entitled to Same Benefits		
Nationally	48%	61	57		
Monthly-Plus Less than Monthly	30 60	44 70	34 62		
RCs: Quebec Mainline Protestants RCs: Outside Quebec Conservative Protestants	47 47 39 14	61 61 53 25	55 52 40 18		
Buddhists* Jews* Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs*	81 71 29	88 96 29	84 91 27		
None	79	85	77		

\*Sample sizes for other faith groups small; included for heuristic value.

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, The Future Families Project, Vanier Institute of the Family, 2004.

#### **Concluding Note**

These findings should serve to remind people who are trying to understand religion's role in the same-sex debate that considerable variation exists among people who value faith and participate in the country's religious groups.

While, the overall pattern is for active involvement to be associated with a higher level of opposition to same-sex marriage and negative views of homosexuality more generally, Mainline Protestants and people who are nominally involved in their groups tend to be exceptions to that rule. What's more, among Catholics and even among Conservative Protestants, there are pockets of people – active and less active – who break with their groups in asserting pro-gay views. There also are very striking differences by age.

What may be of particular importance in all of this is to listen to Canadians when they differentiate between those things of which they approve, versus those things that they are willing to accept. To ask for one's attitudes about same-sex marriage is quite different from asking a person if he or she is willing to accept the idea of gays who wish to marry being allowed to do so.

Our survey findings make it clear that Canadians who live in a culture that has championed diversity and interpersonal respect have acceptance levels that readily exceed their approval levels. That distinction is worth watching as the same-sex marriage debate unfolds.

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