

YES WE DO

How Ireland became the first
country to introduce same sex
marriage by popular vote

THE IRISH TIMES



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Foreword

Ireland's referendum to legalise same-sex marriage was the first of its kind in the world and the campaign to change the Constitution was unlike any the country had seen before. Just over two decades after homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland, all the political parties represented in parliament and much of civil society came together to back marriage equality. But the campaign was led by a small group of gay and lesbian activists and the most powerful arguments for change came in the form of personal testimonies of individual gay men and lesbians. And it was opposed by a vigorous No campaign which, despite being small and modestly funded, articulated a robust defence of the status quo.

The debate was, despite some bruising encounters and hurt feelings on both sides, moderate in its tone, with none of the viciousness that accompanied similar referendums elsewhere, such as California's Proposition 8 to ban same-sex marriage in 2008. Yes Equality, a coalition made up of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Marriage Equality and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL), was determined that the campaign should not descend into a succession of futile shouting matches between the opposing sides. Instead of demanding the equality which most gays and lesbians feel to be their right, the Yes campaign sought to persuade undecided or uncommitted voters through personal encounters with LGBT people and their families.

For its part, the No campaign avoided criticising homosexuality on moral grounds and many No advocates stressed that they regarded gay partnerships as equal in value to those of heterosexuals. Indeed, some of those who led opposition to the introduction of civil partnerships for gays and lesbians in 2010 were now enthusiastic in their praise of such unions. Instead of criticising homosexuality, the No campaign focused on issues such as a perceived link between marriage equality and surrogacy, and on an alleged threat to freedom of religion.

At the heart of the campaign was a contest between two competing visions of society - one more conservative and respectful of tradition, the other eager to embrace the societal changes that have come so fast in Ireland and to expand the sphere of personal freedom. There was a sharp generational divide too, with polls showing the youngest voters backing marriage equality by overwhelming margins, while those over 65 were the only demographic group with a majority opposed to it.

Perhaps the most effective voices for a Yes vote were those of gay men and lesbians telling their stories and explaining why marriage equality mattered to them. Two in particular, both published in *The Irish Times*, struck a powerful chord with the public - those of Una Mullally and Ursula Halligan. Mullally, an LGBT activist and *Irish Times* columnist, recalled how her recent cancer diagnosis at the age of 32 had brought into sharp relief the importance of being treated equally. She described how she hesitated and stammered as she told the nurse that her next of kin was her girlfriend Sarah, adding "I guess it's hard to accept yourself when your country doesn't"

Halligan, the popular political correspondent of TV3, wrote a heartbreaking account of a lifetime of keeping her sexuality secret, living in "a prison where I lived a half-life" from the age of 17 until today. "For me, there was no first kiss; no engagement party; no wedding. And up until a short time ago no hope of any of these things. Now, at the age of 54, in a (hopefully)

different Ireland, I wish I had broken out of my prison cell a long time ago. I feel a sense of loss and sadness for precious time spent wasted in fear and isolation," she wrote.

There were to be other emotionally charged moments before the polls closed, notably the scenes on referendum day itself, when thousands of young emigrants returned home to vote, some travelling through the night by bus and boat, others flying halfway across the world. Their stories were at once uplifting and deeply poignant, and surely served to inspire others to make a shorter journey to the polling booth to take part in this most extraordinary of referendums, one that saw much of the best of today's Ireland emerge from the wings to take centre stage.

Denis Staunton

26th May, 2015

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The Campaign

It's hard to accept yourself when your country doesn't

Una Mullally, April 25th, 2015

On Friday the 13th of March, 2015, I walked into St James's Hospital for a test. My stomach was acting weird and the doctor I had been referred to booked me in for a colonoscopy.

It's a routine procedure but my girlfriend Sarah insisted on coming with me and picking me up. We kissed each other goodbye as they called my name in the waiting room. When the nurse was taking my next of kin details and asked who was going to pick me up, I stuttered: "My girlfriend, my partner." I went red. I rattled off her phone number.

When the nurse left, I rolled my eyes at myself. Why, after all of these years, do I still have to act like that? Why stutter? As I undressed and got into the disposable hospital gown, I was angry and embarrassed.

Maybe a part of me thought the nurse would react in a certain way, which she didn't. Maybe it's just years of a stigma that reveals itself a teeny tiny bit every time you have to inadvertently come out to someone. Maybe I thought I would be judged. Anyway. I stuttered.

Earlier that month, I won Journalist of the Year at the GALAS LGBT Awards in the Shelbourne Hotel. My book on the movement for marriage equality in Ireland was also nominated. I go on the radio and television to talk about gay rights. Yet I still stuttered to a nurse when I said "girlfriend". What am I like? I guess it's hard to accept yourself when your country doesn't.

After the procedure, I woke up. Sarah was sitting by my bed. I was still groggy from the sedation, so my legs wobbled as we walked down the corridor. Sarah held my hand.

I was just starting to focus when the doctor told me they found a tumour. They didn't have the biopsies yet, but straight away knew it to be cancer. The entire room started to fade away. I felt the doctor gently clasping my forearm, the type of human contact that's shorthand for bereavement. It was five days after my 32nd birthday. I heard Sarah ask how big the tumour was. "By our standards it would be considered large," came the diplomatic reply.

Sarah held me as I walked out of the hospital in the midst of a panic attack. She stood there when I screamed at the sky in the carpark. She took notes when the surgeon explained that this was very serious and they needed to move straight away to see if it had spread to my liver and my lungs. A week after Friday the 13th, the longest week of my life, the surgeon sat down with Sarah and I, and told me it wasn't terminal. Sarah took more notes. I am lucky. The cancer I have is stage three. I am not going to die in the next few months.

This week is my third week of treatment. And the treatment is aggressive. I wear a chemotherapy pump that feeds an infusion through a line in my arm 24/7. I'm in hospital five days a week for radiation. I am at the beginning of a long road.

In a strange way, the referendum has been a good distraction. Every evening and weekend I can, I go canvassing with other volunteers. When radio stations ask me to go on and debate, I do. I try to ignore the hysterical noise of the No campaign. I try to smile. Truth will out.

The spirit of positivity among volunteers around the country would bring a tear to your eye, and it often has to mine. The sense of hope, camaraderie, good humour and solidarity that I've seen among those knocking on doors, putting up posters, fundraising in pubs and community centres, flyering outside matches, will stay with me forever. Most of us want an equal country but we have to get out there and vote for it. This is our time.

At every moment since I was diagnosed, Sarah has been by my side. And she will continue to be by my side as we beat this together. I used to think of myself as a private person but I can't be during a campaign where LGBT lives are being exposed, dissected, appraised and judged.

So here I am. Like any couple, myself and Sarah are not an abstract to be debated on RTÉ. We are real people. These are our real lives. Because when myself and Sarah stand next to our friends, with their boyfriends or girlfriends, or husbands or wives, we know that we are equal. And we are tired of being told that we are not. Our life together is self-evident. We are not lesser than.

In the last month, I've learned very quickly what perspective means. It's not a slogan or a soundbite. Like most people, I just want to get on with my life. But how can that life be a full one when I'm not equal, and when my relationship with my partner, as strong and loving and committed as it is, is not equal?

Right now, I can only imagine that life. After May 22nd, I want to live it.

Referendum led me to tell truth about myself

Ursula Halligan, May 16th, 2015

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”- Martin Luther King.

I was a good Catholic girl, growing up in 1970s Ireland where homosexuality was an evil perversion. It was never openly talked about but I knew it was the worst thing on the face of the earth.

So when I fell in love with a girl in my class in school, I was terrified. Rummaging around in the attic a few weeks ago, an old diary brought me right back to December 20th, 1977.

“These past few months must have been the darkest and gloomiest I have ever experienced in my entire life,” my 17-year-old self wrote.

“There have been times when I have even thought about death, of escaping from this world, of sleeping untouched by no-one forever. I have been so depressed, so sad and so confused. There seems to be no one I can turn to, not even God. I’ve poured out my emotions, my innermost thoughts to him and get no relief or so-called spiritual grace. At times I feel I am talking to nothing, that no God exists. I’ve never felt like this before, so empty, so meaningless, so utterly, utterly miserable.”

Because of my upbringing, I was revolted at the thought that I was in love with a member of my own sex. This contradiction within me nearly drove me crazy. These two strands of thought jostled within me pulling me in opposite directions.

Plagued with fear

I loved a girl and I knew that what wasn’t right; my mind was constantly plagued with the fear that I was a lesbian. I hated myself. I felt useless and worthless and very small and stupid. I had one option, and only one option. I would be “normal”, and that meant locking myself in the closet and throwing away the key.

I played the dating game. I feigned interest in men. I invented boyfriends. I listened silently to snide remarks about homosexuals. Tried to smile at mimicry of stereotypical gay behaviour.

In the 1970s, homophobia was rampant and uninhibited. Political correctness had yet to arrive. Homosexuals were faggots, queers, poofs, freaks, deviants, unclean, unnatural, mentally ill, second class and defective humans. They were society’s defects. Biological errors. They were other people. I couldn’t possibly be one of them.

Over the years I watched each of my siblings date, party, get engaged, get married and take for granted all the joys and privileges of their State-acknowledged relationship.

My coping strategy was to pour myself into my studies and later into my work. I didn’t socialise much because I had this horrible secret that must never come out. It was a strategy that worked

until I'd fall in love again with a woman and the whole emotional rollercoaster of bliss, pain, withdrawal and denial resumed. It was a pattern that would repeat itself over the years.

And never once did I openly express my feelings. I suppressed everything and buried myself in books or work. I was careful how I talked and behaved. Nothing was allowed slip. I never knew what it was like to live spontaneously, to go with the flow, to trust my instincts . . . I certainly couldn't trust my instincts.

Repressing my humanity

For years I told no one because I couldn't even tell myself. It was a place I didn't want to go. It was too scary; too shameful. I couldn't cope with it. I buried it.

Emotionally, I have been in a prison since the age of 17; a prison where I lived a half-life, repressing an essential part of my humanity, the expression of my deepest self; my instinct to love.

It's a part that heterosexual people take for granted, like breathing air. The world is custom-tailored for them. At every turn society assumes and confirms heterosexuality as the norm. This culminates in marriage when the happy couple is showered with an outpouring of overwhelming social approval.

For me, there was no first kiss; no engagement party; no wedding. And up until a short time ago no hope of any of these things. Now, at the age of 54, in a (hopefully) different Ireland, I wish I had broken out of my prison cell a long time ago. I feel a sense of loss and sadness for precious time spent wasted in fear and isolation.

Homophobia was so deeply embedded in my soul, I resisted facing the truth about myself, preferring to live in the safety of my prison. In the privacy of my head, I had become a roaring, self-loathing homophobe, resigned to going to my grave with my shameful secret. And I might well have done that if the referendum hadn't come along.

Now, I can't quite believe the pace of change that's sweeping across the globe in support of gay marriage. I never thought I'd see the day that a Government Minister would come out as gay and encounter almost nothing but praise for his bravery. But that day did come, and the work done down the decades by people like David Norris, Katharine Zappone, Ann-Louise Gilligan and Colm O'Gorman made me realise that possibilities existed that I'd never believed would ever exist.

I told a friend and the world didn't end. I told my mother, and the world didn't end.

Then I realised that I could leave the prison completely or stay in the social equivalent of an open prison. The second option would mean telling a handful of people but essentially go on as before, silently colluding with the prejudices that still find expression in casual social moments.

It's the easier of the two options, particularly for those close to me. Because those who love you can cope with you coming out, but they're wary of you "making an issue" of it.

Game-changer

The game-changer was the marriage equality referendum. It pointed me toward the first option: telling the truth to anyone who cares. And I knew if I was going to tell the truth, I had to tell the whole truth and reveal my backing for a Yes vote. For me, the two are intrinsically linked.

That means TV3 taking me off referendum coverage. The rules say they must, and when I told them my situation, they reorganised their coverage in half a day.

Twenty years ago or 30 years ago, it would have taken more courage than I had to tell the truth. Today, it's still difficult but it can be done with hope – hope that most people in modern Ireland embrace diversity and would understand that I'm trying to be helpful to other gay people leading small, frightened, incomplete lives. If my story helps even one 17-year-old school girl, struggling with her sexuality, it will have been worth it.

As a person of faith and a Catholic, I believe a Yes vote is the most Christian thing to do. I believe the glory of God is the human being fully alive and that this includes people who are gay.

If Ireland votes Yes, it will be about much more than marriage. It will end institutional homophobia. It will say to gay people that they belong, that it's safe to surface and live fully human, loving lives. If it's true that 10 per cent of any population are gay, then there could be 400,000 gay people out there; many of them still living in emotional prisons. Any of them could be your son, daughter, brother, sister, mother, father or best friend. Set them free. Allow them live full lives.

‘I encourage everyone to vote and to reflect carefully’

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, May 19th, 2015

I was initially reluctant to accept an invitation from *The Irish Times* to comment further on Friday’s marriage referendum. I do not wish the debate to be seen as predominantly a religious issue or just as a Church-State debate.

As a bishop I have strong views on marriage based on my religious convictions. I have, however, no wish to stuff my religious views down other people’s throats, but I also have a right to express my views in the reasoned language of social ethics. In airing my views in public debate, I do not expect to be listened to on the basis of dogmatic utterance, but on the reasonableness of my argument.

I write then primarily as a citizen of Ireland. I have no affiliation with any group of No campaigners. Some such groups will quote me, but I know how short-lived such affirmation can be. I have said that I intend to vote No, yet there are those of the ecclesiastical right-wing who accuse me of being in favour of a Yes vote, since I do not engage in direct condemnation of gay and lesbian men and women.

My position is that of Pope Francis, who, in the debates around same-sex marriage in Argentina, made it very clear that he was against legalising same-sex marriage, yet he was consistent in telling people not to make judgments on any individual. I know the manner with which the Irish Church treated gay and lesbian people in the past – and in some cases still today – and that fact cannot be overlooked.

Reasoned argument may not always appeal in a cultural climate where the quick answer is the one which can easily win the day. But reasoned argument is vital in society. Reasoned argument deserves reasoned response and not just soundbites.

Good parents

Reasoned argument requires that both sides are heard for what they are really saying. A reasoned No vote is not homophobic. A reasoned No vote does not deny that gay and lesbian people can be good parents, just as heterosexual people can be bad parents. Single parents deserve recognition and support as they are in fact among the most neglected and isolated men and women in our society. They have often been left to struggle on their own by successive governments – and by the Church – which failed to recognise the contribution that they bring to society.

There are many types of family in our society: some good, some worrying. All of this does not mean that we cannot and should not rationally discuss fundamental arguments on the nature of marriage and the family.

Marriage is about love, marriage is about commitment and marriage is about family. You cannot talk of family without talking about children. This does not mean that childless marriages are not marriages. Marriage cannot, however, be detached from the family. The family is much broader than just what I would like my marriage relationship to be.

Marriage is fundamentally an intergenerational reality. The bonds of intergenerational affection in Ireland are indeed remarkably strong. More importantly, the ongoing stability of society is linked with our intergenerational genetic makeup. Knowing our genetic make-up is important.

Marriage, family, children and society fundamentally form one reality and cannot be torn apart. There are few places where this reality is so self-evident as in Article 41 of our Constitution on “The Family”. Take time to read it in its entirety.

In a society where individual personal fulfilment can become so dominant, every other argument can be laid to the side and we can come to the conclusion that there are so many concrete manifestations of family that it is no longer even possible to speak of family.

Unique complementarity

Marriage is not simply about a wedding ceremony or about two people being in love with each other. For me the fundamental question in the debate on the marriage referendum is: why do humans exist as male and female? It is not an accident or a social construct. There is a unique complementarity between men and women, male and female, rooted in the very nature of our humanity. I believe that this complementarity belongs to the fundamental definition of marriage. The vast majority of states in Europe and worldwide interpret marriage in that sense.

Special relevance

The proposed text of the amendment on marriage purports to provide a gender-neutral definition of marriage. That text, however, would in fact, if accepted, stand alongside references in the Constitution which attribute special relevance to mothers and women. These references would remain with constitutional authority, leaving a Constitution which would be speaking out of two different sides of its mouth. That would hardly be marriage equality.

No one can predict today how a changed Constitution would be interpreted by the courts. Legal opinion can reflect on what may or may not be subject to interpretation. That is fair comment as long as the “may” and “might” and “could” remain. But some politicians have been moving from that careful and subtle legal speculation into direct fortune-telling about interpretation and then promising what legislation will be introduced after the referendum. Promises may be fulfilled or not fulfilled. What will happen, however, will be determined exclusively by the courts and we know from past experience that test cases can produce unexpected results.

I have never told people how to vote. I encourage everyone to vote and to reflect carefully. Reasoned argument on marriage and the family is vital for our society.

Legal loopholes may cast long shadow

Benedict Ó Floinn, May 16th, 2015

Statistically, August is the most popular month for marriages in Ireland. Many who will marry this August have already reserved accommodation and booked the band. The Government has not been as careful in its plans, however, and unless it moves quickly, legal loopholes may cast a lengthening shadow over many a “big day”.

If there is a Yes vote, the Bill to amend the Constitution will be signed into law by the President. At that moment, the new provisions will take effect, without the need for any further legislative step.

The Civil Registration Act, which currently regulates marriage ceremonies, will be out of kilter with any new constitutional provisions. For example, until it is amended, section 2(2)(e) will continue to provide that there is an impediment to a marriage “if both parties are of the same sex” and section 51(7) will provide for parties to make “a declaration . . . that they accept each other as husband and wife.”

Although inconsistent with an amended article 41, until it is amended the Act will require couples to make the declarations provided for. Will such declarations be valid? How is the chief registrar to carry out his functions pending the amendment of the Act?

The Government could have avoided these difficulties by drafting legislation to be enacted simultaneously with any amendment of the Constitution. Instead, it prepared draft heads of legislation (the Marriage Bill, 2015) which will need to be fleshed out, debated and then enacted.

All the while, couples will be married under the existing, unamended legislation.

If the Government moves very quickly, adverse effects may be kept to a minimum, but they will not be removed.

Indeed, the proposed amending legislation will itself give rise to other issues.

If its current wording of the amending legislation is kept, the Civil Registration Act will retain the declaration based on the words “husband and wife” but will add another based on the word “spouse” aimed at same-sex marriages.

At first glance, the introduction of two separate declarations (one that the parties “accept each other as husband and wife” the other that has them accept each other “as spouses”) seems to accommodate both opposite-sex and same-sex marriage ceremonies. However, such an approach is at odds with what an amended Constitution will provide. If amended, the Constitution will not contain two parallel institutions of marriage. There will be a single institution – one which will be gender-neutral (“without distinction as to sex”).

Retaining the declaration based on the concept of “husband and wife”, and using the neutral word “spouse” to provide for same-sex couples, seems oddly out of sync with the very norms

the referendum seeks to bring about. If phrases such as husband and wife are challenged, will they pass constitutional muster or will the Civil Registration Act require further amendment?

Interestingly, the Government also plans to leave the overall scheme of the Civil Registration Act intact. As a result, all ceremonies will have to be approved by the chief registrar and be “in no way inconsistent with” either of the two declarations which the Act will prescribe when amended.

Seventy per cent of marriages take place in religious ceremonies (Christian, Jewish or Muslim) most, if not all, of which explicitly and implicitly reject the concept of gender-neutral marriage. Such ceremonies risk being inconsistent with the gender-neutral declaration (“spouses of each other”) as well being at odds with the new constitutional norms.

In reverse, the same point could be made of same-sex weddings.

Will the chief registrar demand changes to ceremonies? What will happen if a solemniser refuses to make such changes? If the registrar were to approve ceremonies which reject the new characterisation of marriage, would such a ceremony be valid?

Instead of simply signing a register, would a distinct civil (and gender-neutral) ceremony be required? On a practical level, how would the 117 civil registrars cope if a high proportion of the 5,696 religious solemnisers were disqualified by the registrar?

There has been a marked reluctance to engage with legal issues thrown up by the proposed changes. This will not make them go away.

Questions regarding the constitutionality or legal effectiveness of ceremonies may arise not only in August but for many years to come – perhaps when parties are already having to confront separation, divorce or the painful process of providing for children.

Waiting until then for the questions to be answered may be a risk too far.

Yes vote in referendum would be good for Twitter and for Ireland

Stephen McIntyre, April 16th, 2015

Our workplace shows us a snapshot of society. It includes sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, boyfriends and girlfriends; all with their own stories.

These characters make up the hum of our working lives, animating each day with their individuality. We appreciate this diversity because it's the core of our work experience, not a supplement. Indeed, our business decisions are improved when we embrace contrasting perspectives.

In our colleagues' stories, the workplace reflects our society's conventions, both good and bad. For over a century, marginalised minorities across the world have been campaigning for equal treatment in their personal and professional lives.

Last month, 379 companies, including Twitter, added their names to an amicus brief submitted to the United States Supreme Court in support of marriage equality. Here in Twitter's European headquarters in Dublin, many of our employees – gay and straight, Irish and non-Irish – are involved in the movement for a Yes vote on May 22nd.

That this issue has attracted so much support in our office speaks not only to the culture of inclusion at Twitter but also to the larger business case for Yes.

As I see it, this case has three key elements. First, people perform better in the long run when they can be themselves. Second, talent is attracted to organisations which demonstrate an appreciation for diversity, inclusiveness and equality. Finally, Ireland's international reputation as a good place to do business will be enhanced by a Yes vote.

One of my roles as a leader is to create an environment in which people can do their best work. Individuals perform better when they feel respected and supported. For many lesbian and gay employees, coming out to colleagues is an important aspect of being themselves, although when and how to do so is their choice. The acceptance of marriage equality can only diminish the anxiety that may attach to coming out, improving the workplace for countless people.

When I first visited Silicon Valley I was stunned by what I saw. Job titles, offices and dress codes seemed to matter less than ideas and results. I found that culture very appealing and wanted to be part of it, so I spent the following decade working for US tech companies such as Google and Twitter.

No company is perfect and we in Twitter certainly have a lot more to do, but we would like to be known as a place that cherishes diversity and treats all of our employees equally. To attract and retain those employees, the country that hosts our office must offer an equally embracing culture.

Furthermore, to attract talent to our shores we must first have the right companies here. In 2013, *Forbes* ranked Ireland as the best country in the world for business. The IDA notes that we are ranked first for availability of skilled labour. These accolades have been hard-won over several decades during which our national reputation was transformed.

Once an inward-looking island nation, we've become a modern society with global vision. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is now a pillar of our national economic strategy. But in a hard-fought market for globally mobile FDI, we must be competitive on many fronts. When pitching Ireland to international business, the case is more easily made when we can point to a society that has open and inclusive values.

Where a company chooses to do business shapes the way it is perceived by employees and customers alike. Twitter is supporting a Yes vote because we want Ireland to be in the group of nations that has taken this step, those that champion equality of treatment and reject the repetition of a history best forgotten. We encourage other companies to do likewise.

For my own part, I was the youngest in a big family and as a teenager I discovered that one of my brothers, Brian, was gay. According to him, while our family was supportive, our country was much less so – Ireland in the 1980s was no place to be different.

As we move to the next generation, I want to believe that things have changed.

I am married with two young sons. If one of my boys turns out to be gay, I would love and support him without condition. I hope my country would do the same.

Referendum Commission's original role should be restored

Patricia McKenna, May 13th, 2015

First, I should declare that I am a Yes voter and have campaigned for the right to gay marriage for more than 25 years.

However, I do not dismiss all the issues raised by those on the No side as misleading, inaccurate or without legal base. Noel Whelan recently stated: "We always expected that the No campaign would go negative and go nasty at some stage." But to be fair, considering the homophobic charge being levied at those who are voting No, there is negativity and nastiness on both sides.

While I accept that there are always two sides to any debate, the surrogacy question is, in my opinion, being used unfairly in this campaign. Surrogacy does not relate specifically to gay couples. The concerns voiced by those on the Yes side regarding this issue demonstrate why there is a need for an independent neutral body that can provide voters with accurate and reliable information during the course of a referendum campaign.

Readers may think such a body already exists. However, this is not quite the case because the Referendum Commission had its original powers dramatically reduced by Dáil Éireann in 2001 and under its current remit is extremely limited in what it can do.

Principle of strict neutrality

If the commission was to try to clarify the surrogacy issue it would run a real risk of a successful legal challenge. In the (Pearse) Doherty challenge to the commission during the fiscal treaty referendum, the High Court established that the commission had a right to clarify issues during the course of a campaign, but this right was limited. The court made it clear that since the commission was publicly funded it could not deviate from the principle of strict neutrality, as this would breach the constitutional principle of equality in the referendum process established by the courts.

The court also held that the commission's statements must, by law, be fair and nonpartisan and that the courts had jurisdiction to review such statements if this statutory requirement to be fair and neutral was breached. It is regrettable that despite a number of important court rulings in recent years regarding the right to a fair referendum campaign, the State's referendum process still leaves a lot to be desired.

As the applicant in the seminal 1995 Supreme Court decision in *McKenna v An Taoiseach* I have a keen interest in this matter. In that case the court established a constitutional right to a fair referendum campaign and ruled that the use of public money by government to support one side in a referendum was unconstitutional.

Following this decision the then minister for the environment, Noel Dempsey, set up the Referendum Commission under the Referendum Act 1998 and gave the commission three principal functions: (a) to prepare and publicise a statement or statements informing citizens what the proposal to change the Constitution entailed; (b) to prepare and publicise a statement or statements setting out the arguments for and against the proposal, based on submissions

solicited from members of the public; (c) to foster and facilitate public debate and discussion on the proposal.

This was a truly democratic and progressive initiative by Mr Dempsey that reflected a clear understanding of the principle of equality and fairness in the referendum process.

However, in 2001, without any clear explanation or public debate, our politicians radically reduced the commission's role and removed its two key functions of providing the Yes and No arguments and of fostering debate. It's worth noting that Fine Gael and Labour both opposed this change.

If the commission was still allowed receive public submissions and prepare and publish statements setting out the arguments for and against, it could easily clarify the surrogacy issue without any fear of legal challenge.

The reality is that in the course of a referendum campaign groups and political parties on both sides can and do spin the argument whichever way they choose using all sorts of extraneous statements, claims and counterclaims which have little or nothing to do with the text of the referendum proposition.

Specialist body

Mr Justice Gerard Hogan pointed out in the Doherty case that it was against this background that the commission had been established: "It was considered desirable that a specialist body would be established which would seek impartially to ascertain the true facts (insofar as they could be ascertained) and to communicate general information to the public."

If the commission still had the responsibility for collecting and assessing all the arguments for and against a proposed constitutional amendment and presenting them in a fair and balanced way, it would reduce the problems posed by extravagant claims and would help voters make an informed decision.

Conflicting conclusions would be noticeable and where errors of fact exist they could be rectified.

In the Doherty case Mr Justice Hogan also pointed out that some proposed constitutional amendments might lead to unforeseen consequences and referred to the referendum to ratify the Belfast Agreement, as this led to a later referendum on citizenship. It is worth pointing out that this consequence was foreseen and highlighted at the time by the commission's Yes/No arguments and demonstrates the value of the Yes/No function.

The time for reinstating the commission's original role and actually expanding its remit is long overdue.

Voters have a right to impartial, fair and accurate facts that focus on the referendum proposition itself and how the Constitution is going to be affected, rather than on irrelevancies.

Australia, which has perhaps the world's longest established legislative rules on equality in referendums, requires by law that pamphlets containing the arguments for and against a constitutional amendment be delivered to every household well in advance of the vote.

Decriminalisation of homosexuality was just the beginning

Máire Geoghegan Quinn, May 14th, 2015

Someone once said that statistics are people – with the tears wiped off. When, in 1993 as minister for justice, I decided to decriminalise homosexuality, I did so because I met people, rather than statistics. Women with the tears unwiped. Mothers of gay sons, terrified that their children might fall foul of a law that characterised their sexuality as against the interests of the State.

The women I met changed my understanding of what it meant to be gay in Ireland at the time. The government made a decision that may not have been popular but which was certainly right.

I suspect many people, in my own and other political parties, felt at that time that they had done the right thing and that it would be enough. Just as American politicians, when they abolished separate schools for black children, separate eating places for black adults, felt that they had done the decent thing. And that that was the end of it. It wasn't the end of the civil rights issue in the United States any more than the decriminalisation of homosexuality was the end of the civil rights issues attached to being gay in Ireland.

Churchill's observation applies. It was not the end. It was not even the beginning of the end. It was, perhaps, the end of the beginning. Society evolves and with it the need to address how it expresses itself in its defining communications, the statements of how a nation understands itself and wishes to be understood.

Major civil rights issue

It is, therefore, naive to suggest that the marriage equality referendum relates to the last great civil rights issue. That will never be true as long as humanity develops and encounters new challenges. It is, however, very definitely a major civil rights issue, belonging in a continuum of insight and growth of which Ireland can be proud.

When I went into politics, the “liberation” of women was such an issue. It was tackled by the European Union and by Ireland, so that the legal position of women and the possibilities open to women underwent fundamental change.

Yet on any day when you go on news websites or open a newspaper, you can find references to inequities at board level in major companies, mentions of inequality between men and women when it comes to pay and outrage that we do not have anything approaching equal representation in the Oireachtas. The old question “What do women want?” is answered differently by different generations of women. Similarly, the situation of gay men and women in Ireland requires different measures at different times.

Civil partnership was a welcome measure, and some people today would say: “Isn't that enough? Gay people wanted it desperately. Why do they want to rush forward from that?”

The answer is simple. Equality is an absolute, not a parcelling out of progress by the powerful. To suggest that civil partnership is enough for gay people is to say: “Thus far and no further.”

It is to set limits and boundaries on one group in society – a minority – based on what may be comfortable for another group within society. That's not how equality works.

Equality means that if, as a society, we cherish the institution of marriage as essential, we cannot then exclude a substantial minority from that institution. Gay people are either equal or they're not. It is simply unequal to have a situation where a woman can be mother of the bride and mother of the groom for two of her three children but cannot take that role for her gay daughter or her gay son. It is simply unequal to say to the children of a couple who have loved each other – and their children – for years that they can be the family of a civil partnership, not of a marriage.

Because I was minister for justice when “the end of the beginning” happened with regard to gay people, gay people have stopped me on the street in the succeeding years to express satisfaction that they are free of the overshadowing legal threat of the past and to talk of where the arc of freedom meets the arc of equality. I believe that junction point happens, in this country, on May 22nd of this year. On that day, Ireland is invited to answer a question and express its real values.

Values manifest in behaviour

Values, individual or national, are to be found in behaviour, pure and simple. Not in aspirations. Or statements. Values are manifest in the way we interpret words such as “equality”. They are tangible in the way we behave around a concept such as marriage. Straight people in long marriages have quiet griefs and unspoken disappointments. But they exemplify hope over experience, generosity over selfishness, decency over display.

Beneath the question asked on the referendum form is another. Will we, as individuals and as a nation, be proud of ourselves, be proud of how we demonstrate our commitment to equality, be proud of our faiths and our comfort with diversity, after that date?

A daughter of a lesbian mother argues against same-sex marriage

Heather Barwick, April 24th, 2015

I was raised by my biological mother with the help of her same-sex partner. My mom and dad were married for only a short time and divorced when I was too young to remember. I spent most of my childhood with two mothers who cared for me and with whom I have many wonderful and sweet memories. I had one need, however, that they could never meet no matter how much they loved me: the need for a father. I ached for the father I knew I would never have. I often felt angry, sad, and confused about my father's absence and only later realised the damage it created. As I got older, I engaged in self-destructive behaviour and sought attention from boyfriends as a way to get the love and affirmation I longed for from my father but never received.

I love my mom deeply, fiercely and unconditionally. However, I oppose gay marriage because I recognise that every child has a right and need for a mother and father, whenever possible. I supported and advocated for gay marriage for many years. But then I had children and witnessed fatherhood in action for the very first time. It wasn't until I saw my children interacting with their father that I realised the full weight of what I'd lost.

It was then that I was confronted with the plain truth that mothers and fathers are irreplaceable and important to the complete wellbeing of children. It's not the presence of any two people but the presence of both a mom and a dad, the child's biological mother and father whenever possible, that best nurtures a child. Two mothers cannot make up for a missing father nor two fathers for a missing mother.

My feelings don't have anything to do with the fact that my mom is gay, and have everything to do with my missing father. While many children find themselves in broken or complicated homes where they experience the pain and loss of a parent, it would be reckless to institutionalise a family structure that will always deny a child either a mother or a father. Every child in a same-sex-headed household must come by way of divorce, abandonment, death (of one or both of their biological parents) or third party reproduction. No matter how it happens, same-sex-headed families are built on top of the profound loss of one (or both) of the child's biological parents. This is no small thing.

We should not point to the existence of broken homes and use it as justification to create more broken homes. As acceptance for same-sex marriage grows, we are seeing more planned and intentional same-sex parented families. Children are being created with the intent to deny them their mother or father. Third party reproduction is seen as a way to create more "pure" same-sex parented families without the "baggage" from divorce. This is still based on the false belief that as long as there are two parents, gender doesn't matter, and that a child can be separated from their other biological parent and thereby their roots, ancestry and heritage without consequence to that child. No matter how committed, loving and good the intentions are, there are differences inherent in same-sex parenting.

The primary purpose of marriage is to ensure that any child born from that union has a mother and father. I'm opposed to same-sex marriage because redefining marriage redefines parenthood. The Government should not encourage or promote a family structure in which

children are separated from their biological parents. The right to a mother and father is one of the most basic and foundational rights we have, and national policy ought to protect that right.

The benefits of children being raised by their married mother and father are great, and when the family is fragmented we see more instability in society. While some claim that gay marriage would help give stability to children who are already being raised by same-sex couples, the opposite is actually true. By institutionalising gay marriage the Government sends a message that men and women are not unique, that there is no difference between a mom and dad, that having both is unnecessary and a child has no right to be in a family with both of their parents.

Legalising gay marriage will devalue motherhood and fatherhood and hurt children. If my mom and her partner had married it would not have made my life any better. It would have simply added an exclamation point to the fact that I would never have a father.

A son with two mothers argues in favour of same sex marriage

Finn Murray, April 24th, 2015

My name is Finn Murray, a man with two mothers.

I sit here now, 30 years old and with two children of my own, after a recent trip to Disneyland Paris with them and my biological mother. A trip paid for by my mother's partner as a birthday present for myself, and 50th birthday present for my mother – a kind and wonderful gesture, that had all four of us excited – perhaps me most of all!

Now I'm sitting at home, wondering if my own childhood was any different to that of my own children, and I truly cannot help but think that it's all basically the same. I went on the same holidays as a child – sight-seeing, visiting water parks and spending time with my parents, like all the other kids I could see. I was taught the same values: to be kind, to be honest, not to fight and not to discriminate.

I grew up in Cork city from the age of eight. All of my school friends knew that my parents were two women and honestly, no-one really cared about that.

Was I ever picked on? Well yes, I was. I was picked on because I had an English accent, because I was a bit of a know-it-all, but never really because of my parents.

Some kids in my schools were bullied because they were ginger, or overweight, or for other silly reasons. A few kids in my class were raised by single mothers, single fathers or grandparents, among the many children raised by the "conventional" mother and father. Yet each child was the same and, while we can say that a child raised by an "unconventional" family may have a harder life, do we solve this problem by openly dismissing a child's parents as inferior? Of course not.

Occasionally, I am asked if my own childhood was impacted by not knowing my paternal father and, honestly, I cannot think of a single way. Maybe when puberty kicked in there were a few awkward conversations, but I had my older cousin, my grandfather and my uncles to approach for those questions. Frankly my parents were more than happy to speak about it, and it was usually very funny, as you can imagine.

Shaving was a doddle and not really a hard thing to learn, but I managed to solve that little problem by always keeping a beard because I look 12 years old without it.

I'm not going to make a bold claim that no child will ever be upset by not knowing one of their biological parents, because some will. What I will say is that the gender of our parents means very little. Thousands of people across Ireland have been raised in single-parent homes, by separated or divorced parents, or through adoption or surrogacy by heterosexual couples, and by LGBT parents and a variety of other situations. I can't help but feel this claim – that a child must have a mother and a father in order to be "normal" or "ideal" – is insulting to all parents in Ireland. A child's ideal home is a home where the child is cared for, raised to know right from wrong, educated, played with and most importantly, loved.

Some readers out there aren't happy with the upcoming referendum and the idea of marriage equality for some reasons, and that's okay.

Some believe this referendum is going to suddenly cause a tidal wave of children raised by gay men and women, when in fact, this is already happening in Ireland, and it's been going on for at least 30 years now! And we're just the same as you.

This referendum is purely about whether the State should recognise the legal right for two people, regardless of gender, to be recognised as a couple, with the same legal rights that my future wife and I will have.

We have a chance to do something truly wonderful – not just for grown men and women of the LGBT community in Ireland, but for our future children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Because many of them will be gay, and I don't want to look them in the eye when they ask why they can't get married and say, "Because you're different."

Remember real people when you vote in marriage referendum

Noel Whelan, May 15th, 2015

Over recent months many have shared their stories and exposed their lives so that we might appreciate how much the marriage equality referendum means. This day next week I ask you to remember some of them.

Remember Enda, a wedding band musician and father of four who told us how he held his 25-year-old daughter Rachel shaking and sobbing in his arms for two hours on the “harrowing” night she told him she was gay. She had kept it within for years and paid a price in anxiety and panic attacks. His greatest wish now is to play at her wedding.

Remember Patrick from Clonmel, who told Tipp FM about how in the first few years after he and his boyfriend moved into their estate, the back windscreen of their car had been smashed seven times. Thankfully “attitudes are turning”, he says. People are more tolerant now. Mind you, recently when they had to go to the emergency department he got “40 different looks” when he introduced himself as the patient’s partner.

Remember James who posted a YouTube clip about ringing his nana to have “the first proper conversation with her ever” about his sexual orientation. He was doing so because he wanted to ask her to vote Yes on May 22nd. “You don’t need to ask me that question,” she said, “I have been behind you 100 per cent from the day you came out. I have always been your number one fan because you are so brave.” James wept as she told him emphatically that she is voting Yes.

Complete love

Remember Tom, a backroom political operative who stepped out on to the front line as the proud father of a gay son. He wrote about how one day Finian, then in his teens, bolted from the house and ran for ages through neighbouring fields. When he came back, he sat silently in front of his parents for more than an hour before he could find the words to tell them he was gay. Finian’s biggest fear was that his dad’s spirituality would drive him to reject him. Tom’s response was one of complete love, his only concern “was about what life would be like” for his son. There was a lot of “hugging and holding” that night. As a man of faith, Tom has urged all Catholics to do the right thing and vote Yes.

Remember Anthony, who having seen a No poster saying, “A Mother’s Love is Irreplaceable” posted an emotional piece on Facebook about his own irreplaceable mother. Shortly after she was first diagnosed with a fatal illness she said to him out of the blue one day, “I hope that you aren’t gay. Your life would be so much easier if you weren’t.” He hadn’t the courage to answer her. He didn’t have to. Just before she died she told him, “I know. You be whatever you want to be and let nobody stand in your way.” If she was alive now, he says, she would be voting, probably even campaigning, for Yes.

Remember Colm, a Man Booker-nominated and bestselling author. He is one of the shrewdest observers of the nuances of Irish family life. He and his partner would love to be a married family in Ireland.

Remember Justin. Even though his mother once held the highest constitutional office in our Republic, he is a second-class citizen in our laws because he is denied constitutional equality.

Praying nightly

Remember Seán, a taxi driver who spent a trip I took in his cab this week telling me, what he has told very few. He is gay. He is in his 50s. He is in love. He is praying every night for the Yes side to win the marriage referendum.

Remember all of these names and those of the many other brave voices who have spoken out in this referendum campaign.

Keep them in your thoughts between now and polling day. They will have to endure the No side demonising gay parenting – and gay men in particular – in increasingly crude terms in a last desperate effort to deflect and defeat the momentum for equality.

Remember that those impacted by this referendum are real people whose real lives cannot be dismissed by false slogans. They are our brothers, sisters, daughters and sons, our family, our friends. They include some of our teachers, our shopkeepers, our nurses and our tradesmen. We meet them every day on our streets, in our work place, and everywhere we gather in our communities.

Remember they are the people with whom we share this country. They are of us. They and their families have a real and very human need to be recognised as equal.

Remember, they have real faces and real names. And then remember that you have the awesome power to give them real constitutional equality with a Yes vote next Friday.

The same-sex marriage referendum and the embrace of love

Colm Toibin, May 14th, 2015

In 1996, after I had published my novel *The Story of the Night*, which is in part an account of the love between two men, I received a private letter from one of the most powerful men in Ireland, someone who had served in government, and was then and later a figure of immense influence in public life. I had never met this man, and I was surprised by the tone of the letter that was personal but also engaged, almost urgent. He simply said that it had never occurred to him that two men could fall in love in the way straight people do, that a man could wait for phone calls and messages from the loved one who was also a man, or that the two men could begin to long for and enjoy each other's company and thus become happy in the warm glow of love. He had thought being gay was merely about sex, that it was a merely sexual orientation, that its embrace did not include what the novelist Kate O'Brien called "the embrace of love".

A few weeks later I met a prominent Irish feminist, someone had been at the forefront of the women's movement, and she too expressed surprise at the intensity of the relationship between the two men in the book. "They sound like straight people," she said. I told her that that was because they were like straight people, that they wanted intimacy and love, they wanted each other, they wanted ease in their domestic and family lives. They also wanted their relationship to be publicly recognised. They wanted to move out of the shadows and into the light.

I was concerned that these two educated, decent and liberal people could know so little about homosexuality. What I viewed as normal, they viewed as strange. What I viewed as an essential part of my life, they viewed as something they knew nothing about. It struck me that they must, along the way, have worked with gay people; they probably had neighbours who were gay, they may have even had family who were gay, but in Ireland until recently gay people had a way of living in the shadows, not declaring ourselves. We had a sort of secret city - bars and discos, bath houses, websites, places of assignation – and some of us had become skilled at moving between these places as though we were invisible. Invisibility became part of a survival mechanism.

The downside of that was that people simply did not know about us, and more importantly, did not know that our way of loving has precisely the same contours and textures as anyone else's, the same fears and intensities, the same needs and comforts. One of those needs includes the need for the same rituals and the same constitutional protection as other people have and enjoy.

Other communities who have been oppressed – Jewish people, say, or Catholics in Northern Ireland – have every opportunity to work out the implications of their oppression in their early lives. They hear the stories; they have the books around them. As gay people, on the other hand, we grow up alone; there is no history. There are no ballads about the wrongs of the gay past, the gay martyrs are mostly forgotten. It is as though, in Adrienne Rich's phrase, if you were gay, "you looked into the mirror and saw nothing". Thus the discovery of a history and a tradition and a sense of heritage must be done by each individual, as though alone, as part of the road to freedom, or at least knowledge.

This is maybe why this same-sex marriage referendum campaign, the one we are going through now, has been so liberating for gay people and for our friends and families. It has allowed us to set out publicly and communally who we are and how we wish to be treated in our country

in the future. It has allowed us to have a public debate with our entire nation about our need for recognition and equality. It has allowed us to speak openly about the terms of our love. The level of support has been heartening, encouraging, inspiring. After 2015, it is unlikely that there will be many people in Ireland who will not know about us, have a sense of how ordinary our desires are. Or see how normal and middle-of-the-road most of us are.

As of now, we have, it seems, no wish to question marriage as an institution, or undermine the centrality of the family under the Irish Constitution; instead we seek to embrace marriage and strengthen the idea of the family and our involvement in it. We seek to enhance the institution of marriage. We want to make the same vows as others do, for the same reasons. We want to live in the ease and with the protection which marriage offers. It is not hard to see how much happiness and relief this will bring to us and to our families; it is, however, hard also to see how this will adversely affect other people who already enjoy the benefits of marriage, the majority of whom will, we hope, be generous enough to want to allow us to share what they already have. What we want is strangely simple: we want to be included. Winning the right to marry on May 22nd will lift a great weight from us and those who wish us well; it will be a liberation for us, and a milestone in the history of increasing tolerance in Ireland.

In 1941 the Irish novelist Kate O'Brien published *The Land of Spices*, which is one of her best novels, and one of the greatest novel ever written about the religious life. Towards the end of the third chapter, the young Helen Archer, who will later become a Reverend Mother, comes home unexpectedly from school in Brussels and saw her father and another man "in the embrace of love".

This single image, the only reference to homosexuality in the book, is all the more explosive and dynamic because of that. For those four words "the embrace of love", the book was banned by the Irish Censorship Board.

They are the very words now that, in this campaign, animate us and nourish us. Because we are not talking about abstract rights, abstract discrimination. We are not even talking about sexuality. Rather, we are talking about love, about the embrace of love, about how our love equals the love of our fellow citizens who are heterosexual, and how right and necessary it seems to us, indeed how much of an imperative, that our love should be ritualised and copper-fastened and celebrated in marriage in the same way as everybody else's love. If there is someone who believes that our love is of a lesser order than theirs, how can they know this? Who have they asked?

Kate O'Brien, who was a great stylist, was also a writer with a keen, brittle mind and a sharp eye. A tremendous maker of phrases, she mixed irony and sympathy in equal measure. As we come up to voting day, it seems fitting to invoke her great old spirit. Helen's father and the man in *The Land of Spices* were not merely embracing, but they were "in the embrace of love". That is what the girl saw, and it was perhaps that idea which so disturbed the Censorship Board, the idea that there was someone not willing to caricature sexual relations between men, but rather offer them dignity and suggestiveness, and then bring in the word, the word that should dominate out thinking and our argument over the next week. The word is love, our love. That is what matters to us most now as equality comes close.

Ordinary citizens are being intimidated into voting ‘Yes’ to same-sex marriage

Vincent Twomey, May 1st, 2015

The marriage referendum is about changing marriage from a union of a man and a woman into the union of two adults regardless of gender who desire a lifelong commitment. Up to a few decades ago, the meaning of marriage as the union of two complementary sexes open to procreation has been unquestioned. In four weeks’ time, it will be voted on and a majority opinion will determine whether one of the most natural aspects of humanity is going to be changed to suit a certain interpretation of equality.

As a people, we generally tend to be gentle, humane and loving. It is to this national characteristic, nurtured by its underlying Christian ethos, that the current political and media establishment is appealing.

The ‘Yes’ campaign, led by the Government and urged on by the media, is appealing to our emotions. The presentation of equality for persons who are gay touches the heartstrings of all, but especially the older generation. In this writer’s opinion, this has had at least one positive result. It has helped to counter negative attitudes to same-sex people as persons of inherent dignity. Empathy is replacing what was at best nervous distance, at worse real homophobia. And that is good and welcome.

But there is an unpleasant undercurrent, that of intimidation. People who, in their heart of hearts, cannot equate same-sex unions with marriage fear being accused of homophobia. The few who dare to express their views in public have experienced an onslaught in social media. The most intimidated of all seem to be our elected representatives. It is incredible that the political parties have imposed the whip to get their members to support the “Yes” vote. All but one Senator submitted.

Is the Catholic hierarchy also intimidated? The bishops will be anxious not to turn the referendum into a Church-State issue or to cause more offence to those most affected. Some bishops and priests are addressing their faithful directly in church; that is their right and duty. But Church encompasses more than the hierarchy, namely the laity.

Irish people resent being bullied by either Church or State. Yet, ordinary citizens are being intimidated into voting “Yes”. For over a year, the campaign waged by the Government urged on by the media has been relentless. In the final weeks, reason may triumph over emotion. As they prepare to vote, people will ask, reasonably: what are we being asked to change? The simple answer is: human nature.

This referendum touches the very source of our humanity. Human rights are at the heart of the Constitution. Article 41 recognises the family, based on marriage, as the fundamental unit group in Society. As such it has rights which are intrinsic to it, which the State is obliged to recognise and protect. In other words, the family, which existed before either Church or State existed, not only has a real autonomy within society: it is the ultimate source of society. Past and future converge in the family. Through marriage, future generations come into being. A nation’s culture is passed on primarily through the family. Since the dawn of time, the union

of man and woman was simply assumed to be the origin of the family. This is what we are being asked to change.

This is not only Church teaching. It is in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, art. 16.3: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” That Declaration was drawn up against the background of two totalitarian regimes: Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union in particular, Marxist socialism tried to eliminate the family. This trend in Marxism — condemned by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 — was radicalised in Communist China in their “one family, one child” policy. The family has to be destroyed in order to exercise complete control over the people. The autonomy of the family is one of the bulwarks against every State’s innate tendency to become totalitarian, our own State included.

Though it is not primarily the State that is seeking to redefine marriage and thus the family, our Government is proposing that we introduce a profound contradiction into the heart of the Constitution. Instead of the Constitution’s recognition of the family as having “inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law”, the family based on marriage is being made subservient to the State. The notion of inalienable rights is often interpreted in legal circles as rights which one cannot oneself give up but they are in fact rights which are not given by the State; the State is under obligation to protect them. These non-negotiable rights are the measure of all positive law — legislative or constitutional — because they arise from our common human nature, created by God. This is recognised by Article 6 of the Irish Constitution, which states that “All powers of government, legislative, executive and judicial, derive, under God, from the people”. The moral demands of our common human nature are known through conscience, the voice of God in our heart of hearts, if we but listen to it.

Travellers and gay people have common cause against racism and homophobia

Rosaleen McDonagh, May 13th, 2015

There have always been lesbian and gay Travellers. Our community may have at times tried to suppress, oppress and deny this diversity. Family and faith are often considered the cornerstones of Traveller identity. As in all populations, families can demand unrealistic standards. As individuals, we all aspire to ascertain unconditional love from our family. When we cannot deliver in our attempt to be what they want us to be, there is an overwhelming sense of sadness and confusion on both sides.

Notions of sinfulness attached to lesbian or gay desires are, intrinsic within religious faith. Faith is private and should not be used by the collective to hide behind a shared thinking that attempts to dictate moral conduct. Faith may influence personal ethics but must not be a tool to denigrate free-thinking and choices.

Over the past 10 years, lesbian and gay Travellers have increasingly been supported by different versions of family. When you're a Traveller, family events such as weddings, christenings and funerals are huge moments of pride. Imagine not having important aspects of your life honoured and celebrated. Tradition has within it an expectation that we would live our lives like our ancestors. The language of culture can be used as a great way of expecting, controlling and monitoring people's behaviour, especially women's. Believing that cloning one generation after another would ensure the notion that Traveller ethnicity was and is protected from disruption or corruption is naive.

Our community didn't fall apart, nor was our ethnicity diluted, when women went to work, got educated or even fell in love with a partner of their own choosing. The approval for two women to marry should not be at the bequest of straight people's generosity. In the same light, our ethnic status as Travellers exists as a reality, not something afforded to us on a whim by liberal settled people.

There's a correlation of experience for those of us who know racism and those who know homophobia. Hatred, greed, bigotry and domination come from the same place, usually from the same mouths and minds. The dynamics of homophobia and racism are similar.

We, as Travellers, have shared that space of being despised, ignored, punished and disrespected. Internalised oppression can leave us believing that other groups, pushed to the edge of society, are favoured.

The perception among settled people of Travellers is negative and suggests that we are a homogeneous group. Ethnicity, however, does not equate to conformity. Cultural identity has the elasticity to stretch, shape and expand ideas regarding the "norms" of any community.

Society and all its apparatus still tell us we're wrong because we are Travellers. Similar to what happens with Traveller ethnicity, gay people get negative messages regarding their sexuality. Many settled gay people are isolated and vulnerable. Gay people are often rejected by their families, bullied by neighbours and have had to struggle to come to terms with who they are.

Putting your politics into practice often means you have to dig deep inside yourself to eradicate elements of homophobia or racism. Over a 20-year period, my gay settled friends have had to go through a vetting process in order for me to fully trust that they were not racist. More than likely, my gay settled friends were silently screening me for homophobia. Neither of us told the other what we were doing.

Awkward silences emerge, when casual discussions drifted into homophobia or racism. When our community was being publicly punished for the actions of a few, these friends were, however, the ones that were not silent, never using the word “but . . .”; sensing ridicule and violence were never far away.

In order for us to be recognised as a minority ethnic group, we are relying on gay people’s support. Settled gay people have supported gay Pavees, at times when we, as a community, disowned or denied our gay sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. On May 22nd, we can show our solidarity.

Where is the God of Love in the same-sex marriage debate?

Kathy Sheridan, May 20th, 2015

Isn't it a wonder that any physical damage so far has been limited to poster abuse and a little rogue egg-throwing? Day after day, unknowable numbers of gay people have carried on with their mundane lives, educating our children, protecting the vulnerable, filleting fish, delivering babies, stacking shelves, emptying bedpans, picking potatoes, all against the soundtrack of a war over their wish to be accepted as fully human. I salute you and your restraint.

The aching heart of this campaign has been the spectacle of such people sacrificing their privacy in debates and interviews, tearing open old scars and exposing their most intimate core to the public gaze.

Many times I have wondered what it must be like to watch a beloved child on screen, telling their stories and pleading for equality, only then to see them being told with calm, smiling certainty: "You look normal and can be useful, but the fact is, the God who created me in his 100-per-cent-heterosexual image wants you to know that He fouled up with you and all the other gays. You just don't get it. You can never have what we have."

Our purpose on earth

For many on the No side, religion has everything to do with it. There is no point in saying otherwise. It often seemed during this campaign that those who argued for reason over emotion had quite forgotten our purpose on Earth. How many will lie contentedly on their deathbed, thinking, "Well, God, I hope You remember that I'm the one who made sure that the gay couple and their foster-child in Co Offaly were never acknowledged as a family?"

So who is this God, represented all my life as a being obsessed with sexual matters? How does He square with the one I would like to know better – the one of "God is Love" repute? Would He approve the kind of reasoning that consigns up to 10 per cent of his human creation to a living purgatory, deprived of access to our most cherished institution, the symbol of lifelong, faithful union? Why would He do that? And where does He stand, I wonder, on surrogacy, biological connections and transparent bloodlines? For the "surrogacy" cluster bomb to work, we have to believe a) that no Church-married heterosexual has any truck with surrogacy – a blatant lie; and b) that every gay person in the universe aches to buy a baby from a catalogue, like shoes, and smash our pure bloodlines. What a pity there was no one to agitate about bloodlines when unknowable numbers of babies were being forcibly taken for adoption, often in His name, after their biological fathers had vanished like wraiths, neither traceable nor accountable.

It is entirely possible in this tiny country that people have unwittingly married close relatives or even siblings as a result. So perhaps a weary God may conclude that it's a little late to start agitating about bloodlines. And what would He make of David Quinn's revelation to BuzzFeed News about the No side's strategy? Basically, it's "Keep talking about the children". That was the "loud and clear" advice that came back to them from anti-marriage equality campaigners in every country. "Marriage is inherently bound up with the right to found a family," he told the reporter.

“. . . Obviously the only way two men or two women can found a family is by violating a child’s right to have a mother and a father.” So nothing there about God – but there is that neat Catch-22, one that has nothing to do with surrogacy.

“Founding” a family by say, adopting or fostering a child still won’t cut it if you’re a gay couple. I wonder what a loving God would say to that?

Or to Evana Boyle’s revelations to the Washington Post? Described as “an organiser” for Mothers and Fathers Matter (MFM), she told the Post that “her side is counting on a backlash to a new era in which homosexuality has become ‘normalised’.

Attempts to indoctrinate

“When even Catholic schools plan lessons around LGBT Awareness Week,” she said, she needs to be on guard against attempts to indoctrinate her own children. “The idea of having two dads, they just go ‘Eww, that’s not right’,” she said.

That version of reason, inculcated – as she indicated – in her children and rippling out to extended families and communities, holds that homosexuality is deviant and gay parents disgusting. This is the message designed to work its way through to, say, a teenage foster-child of same sex partners in Co Offaly. What would God say to that child and that decent little family? That MFM thinks they are disgusting and so does He?

I am heartsick at what we have witnessed in these past weeks. I believe my God is too.

Yes would affect child welfare laws

William Binchy, May 12th, 2015

The proposed amendment to our Constitution has been presented by the Government as simply a formula of 17 words designed to acknowledge the equality of all our citizens, gay and straight. It encourages the view that decent and humane people will vote Yes and only the bigoted or homophobic could contemplate opposing the measure. It says that the proposal has nothing to do with children and involves no change in the laws affecting their welfare.

As a lawyer requested by *The Irish Times* to write on this subject, I have to point out that these claims are not correct. The proposal involves definite changes in the laws affecting children's welfare.

At present, same-sex unions receive legal protection as civil partnerships. The proposal would bring same-sex unions designated marriages within the scope of articles 41 and 42 of the Constitution. If this happens, two major consequences necessarily follow, both affecting children's welfare.

First, all courts, as well as the Oireachtas, would be obliged to extend to gay unions the presumption that at present applies to heterosexual married couples: that, all other matters being equal, the welfare of children is best advanced by being reared in a home with a mother and father married to each other.

Tie hands of Oireachtas and courts

I have no expert competence on empirical issues as to the optimum welfare of children, and the Government has presented no evidence on the matter. It is likely it too has nothing decisive to offer on the question. But what it is doing is proposing a change in the Constitution that will tie the hands of the Oireachtas and the courts in the future, when such definitive evidence is forthcoming. It may be that such evidence, depending on its character, would be sufficiently potent to encourage the Oireachtas, in children's best interests, to contemplate legislation giving priority to heterosexual married couples, but the validity of such legislation would fall under a shadow of uncertainty if the proposal becomes part of our Constitution.

The second major consequence is in relation to assisted human reproduction and surrogacy. The proposal would have the effect of restricting legislative options on these matters where the Oireachtas, in the interests of the welfare of children, wishes to legislate in particular ways. Two gay men can not, by their own actions, produce a child. They can, however, engage in a surrogacy arrangement, involving a woman, in circumstances where the resulting child will not be reared by both his or her mother and father. We have yet to have a proper debate in Ireland about surrogacy. Several other countries in Europe, including France, Germany and Spain, concerned for the welfare of children and also of women, have introduced laws restricting surrogacy or banning it altogether in certain circumstances.

If the proposal on same-sex marriage goes through, there is a real possibility that our Constitution would prevent the Oireachtas from introducing certain laws of this kind. The syllogism that a court would confront is as follows: married couples have a right to procreate; married couples include two gay men, who can procreate only by means of a surrogate

arrangement; therefore, a law restricting or, a fortiori, banning such an arrangement would be unconstitutional as it would prevent the gay men from procreating by the only means open to them.

Some electors may support legislation permitting surrogacy in such circumstances; others may oppose it. The point of significance is that, directly contrary to the Government's assertion, the proposal to change the Constitution has a direct impact in radically restricting the range of legislative options open to the electorate. It gives preference to the choices of adults over the welfare of children.

It is necessary, finally, to consider the implications of the proposal on freedom of religion. We have in article 44 of our Constitution provisions that protect religious freedom. If the proposal is implemented, a new constitutional landscape will emerge. The new and specifically identified right to same-sex marriage will assert itself in potential opposition to religions that understand marriage as involving men and women.

Faith communities

The argument will be made that, while religions may perhaps continue to adhere to that ethos within their own faith communities, any engagement between religious denominations and the public or with the State system will have to respect fully this new constitutional right. In Ireland, faith communities do very valuable work in such areas as marriage guidance and child welfare. It is alarming that Fine Gael refused to give an assurance that State support for the Catholic family agency, Accord, will not be affected by the proposed constitutional change.

Other religious denominations with a similar understanding of marriage are equally affected by the proposed change. A litigant who challenged the constitutional entitlement of religious denominations to register marriages that exclude same-sex unions would have a reasonable prospect of success. More radically, there are implications for the State's role in prescribing the normative content of education in schools and for withdrawing or restricting funding if it considers that a school programme fails to give sufficient support to the normative premises of same-sex marriage.

Some people may welcome these changes. But no one can argue that they are not of considerable social and legal significance, impacting on the welfare of children. Yet the Government is still maintaining that the proposal does not affect children in any way. Voters may reflect in the coming days as to why the Government is being so reluctant to acknowledge frankly its true impact.

The more bishops say about marriage, the better for a Yes vote

Diarmaid Ferriter, March 14th, 2015

Towards the end of his long reign as Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, from 1940 to 1972, John Charles McQuaid became increasingly shrill in his interventions about those he regarded as undermining the teaching authority of the bishops. His final pastoral appeared in 1971 under the title *Contraception and Conscience: Three Statements* and ended with this declaration: “In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and to adhere to it with a religious assent of soul”.

That was a classic McQuaid command, but it was also his swansong; by then, he was losing the big battles and contraception was an issue that could not be contained according to his strictures; too many Catholics were making their own minds up.

The last decade of the McQuaid era was also interesting because it witnessed the arrival to Ireland of television. While McQuaid was very engaged with the communications revolution and its implications for religion – he made sure some of his priests were trained for television production and presenting – there was never any chance he would appear on television. He couldn’t tolerate the idea that he would have to spar with those he saw as ill equipped to debate religion, so he remained, in his own words, when refusing requests by journalists for interviews in the mid 1960s, “the ogre in his den”, a reminder that he also had a sense of humour.

Desmond Connell, appointed Catholic Archbishop of Dublin in 1988, like McQuaid, intensely disliked the idea of people he regarded as unqualified debating religion. In the 1960s he had also excoriated British theologian Leslie Dewart for daring to suggest that an understanding of God and dogma would have to be “drawn forth from contemporary experience”. As far as Connell was concerned, this was nonsense: truths central to his church’s teaching were eternal and unchanging.

No longer viable

His difficulty was that by the 1990s, as the scandals engulfing the church began to multiply, dismissing the idea of debate or response was no longer viable.

Connell’s reticence was in stark contrast to his successor, Dr Diarmuid Martin. As soon as he was appointed Catholic Archbishop of Dublin in 2004, Martin made a beeline for RTÉ and the microphone.

It would have been unimaginable for McQuaid or Connell to go on television to be surrounded by lay people they believed were not qualified to talk about what the church should and should not do.

Martin knew the church had to adapt – as a matter of urgency – whereas for Connell, the notion of the church adapting to a changed environment was anathema.

If Archbishop Martin looks so frequently harried these days it is because he now has to do three other things on top of regular media engagements: fashion a language that is more humble and empathetic because the church has lost so much credibility in recent decades, rhetorically slap

down his fellow bishops who use “insensitive and overly judgmental language” in debates on marriage and family, and finally, to speak of the supposedly “very clear” teachings of the church.

That is a lot to juggle, and as is often apparent, involves too many squares to circle, which is why the bishops are struggling with their communications on same-sex marriage.

Men of the cloth

For all the identification of Irishness with Catholicism historically, the reality is that there was often a distance between the men of cloth and the laity, and with good reason.

When it came to family and marriage they were unchanging theorists who knew little of the practicalities of what they pronounced on. Back in the 1990s, novelist John Banville described his mother’s relationship with religion in the 1950s; she was “one of the last breed of Irish Catholics who were more pagan than Christian. She treated priests with a mixture of deference and cloaked distaste; they were fine in their place, she said, but you wouldn’t want to have them in the house”.

She was hardly alone, and if that was true of the attitude to priests, you could multiply it tenfold when it came to bishops. It remains the case that some bishops in the crassness of their interventions to define the essence of marriage, parenting or sexuality are still capable of highlighting the disconnect between themselves and wider society, as demonstrated by the Bishop of Elphin, Kevin Doran maintaining that “people who have children are not necessarily parents” and “perhaps in some cases people are gay because of contexts”.

In relation to the coming marriage equality referendum, Bishop Doran said the bishops “wouldn’t see ourselves necessarily as mounting a political campaign”. Advocates of a Yes vote in that referendum, myself included, might see that as a pity, because the more the bishops have to say about marriage, the better for the Yes side.

Asking questions about funding for referendum campaign

Breda O'Brien, May 9th, 2015

Suppose I confessed that over the past number of years, the Iona Institute, of which I am an unpaid patron, has received millions of American dollars to advance a particular agenda.

Those dollars have allowed us to grow from a single-person organisation to a highly skilled, mobilised, fully professionalised lobbying machine employing seven full-time staff and numerous consultants.

Those staff and consultants operate “inside the machinery of government”, and people associated with Iona have ended up on key boards such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Authority.

It enabled us to change the agenda on a government working group in 2006 and persuaded it to make recommendations that were ruled out in the original remit of that group.

Suppose I admitted that between September and November 2009 alone, Iona met with more than 40 politicians, including three ministers one-to-one.

When I tell you that absolutely none of that is true of Iona because it has never received any American money and never had instant access to key politicians, but that instead I'm describing the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), eyes will glaze over and the salivating interest will disappear.

Groupthink has been exalted to an Irish sacrament. While journalists were targeting tiny bootstrap conservative organisations and accusing them of being American-funded, GLEN, the most successful lobby group in Irish history, was swimming in greenbacks.

Shedloads of money

This is a story for investigative journalists that doesn't even require much investigation. Try typing GLEN into the search box of the Atlantic Philanthropies website.

Read the Atlantic publication, *Civil Partnership and Ireland; From a Minority to a Majority*, to see the step by step strategy. Why bother to conceal it? There will be no outrage, no consequences.

GLEN did everything described in the first paragraphs of this article while registered as a charity with the Revenue Commissioners. GLEN Campaign for Marriage registered with the Standards in Public Office Commission in 2015 – will this affect its fundraising?

If Atlantic Philanthropies is beyond question, if shedloads of money used to advance agendas render you beyond scrutiny, we should just let the anniversary year of 2016 go by without comment, as an utterly failed Republic.

And what shedloads. According to *Atlantic*, GLEN received \$4,727,860 between 2005 and 2011.

Yes, four and three quarter million dollars. (Incidentally, GLEN explained to *The Irish Times* in 2013 that it gets only half its funding from Atlantic.)

Atlantic explains that in 2005, “GLEN was essentially a voluntary organisation with a single-funded post working on gay HIV strategies, which was funded by the HSE”. GLEN does not provide services. It focuses on policy and legislative change.

By the last report, *Catalysing LGBT Equality and Visibility in Ireland*, GLEN is described thus: “Their multi-year grant from Atlantic enabled them to ramp up their work into a full-time, highly professionalised lobbying machine. It works ‘inside’ the machinery of government where it uses a ‘principled pragmatist’ model in which it consolidates support, wins over the doubtful and pacifies those who are opposed.

“GLEN leaders believed that the most viable way to embed long-lasting social change was to legislate incrementally, waiting to advocate for civil marriage until the population was acculturated to the ordinariness of same-sex unions.”

It must be the most successful “acculturation” in Irish history.

Legal protections

The only acceptable narrative is that this is a benign grassroots movement, because if we admitted that it is instead a slick, elite movement of highly educated professionals funded from abroad we might have to admit we were skilfully manipulated. And that could not be true.

Atlantic credits itself with securing civil partnership in 2010, describing it as “some of the most far-reaching legal protections for gay and lesbian couples in the world”.

Civil partnership affords far greater rights than “US state-based civil marriage because the latter cannot include federal rights in critical areas such as immigration, tax and health benefits”.

Funny, I thought civil partnership was discriminatory and second class.

In 2009, GLEN had 348 media appearances – 179 broadcasts and the rest ranged from national newspapers to the *Law Society Gazette*. Almost one per day.

Let’s not forget Marriage Equality, whose name even ended up on the referendum ballot paper. They got a mere \$475,215 from Atlantic.

But it enabled them to set up a full-time office, to lobby and use “backroom” tactics like “hiring professional political advisers who were working with the government on other issues to report back on the government’s thinking on same-sex marriage”.

Oh, and the other part of Yes Equality, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)? From 2001 to 2010, it got \$7,727,700 and another \$3,829,693 in 2010 and 2013. Sure, ICCL didn’t spend all that on redefining marriage. Just some of it. Do tell, ICCL, exactly how much.

This is not Atlantic Philanthropies funding a hospital or school. This is foreign money being systematically invested to change public opinion, to deliver seamlessly a Yes in a referendum that has enormous consequences for family law for generations.

All the while soothing us by spinning it as just “seventeen little words”. Can American money buy an Irish referendum? Let’s wait and see.

Marriage was nothing to be proud of in 1983

Fintan O'Toole, May 20th, 2015

When I wed in 1983, I was thrilled to be with my wife but not really proud to be married. There were too many shameful things about Irish marriage.

As a man, I was, I hope, an equal partner to my wife. But as a husband, I was a sanctioned tyrant. For the first seven years of my marriage I had a legal right to rape my wife – marital rape was not outlawed in Ireland until 1990. For the first three years of my marriage, if I decided to leave my wife and move to England, she, though living in Ireland, was deemed to be legally domiciled in England. She had no say in the matter – as her husband's dependant, her legal status was a mere adjunct of mine. In the year I got married, 1983, there was an ongoing campaign to change the law to give each spouse an equal right to the family home and its contents. Alan Dukes, who was then minister for justice, promised such legislation in April 1983 but nothing happened until 1989. Until three years before I got married, my wife's income from her job would have been automatically treated under Irish tax law as my "extra" income. And of course, for the first 12 years of my marriage, that marriage was indissoluble. Whatever happened to our relationship, even if we were legally separated and lived apart for decades, neither of us could ever marry again.

Hallowed traditions

All of these things changed, and those changes profoundly altered the nature of the institution my wife and I had joined in 1983. It is worth remembering that the things that were changed were ancient, hallowed traditions, sanctioned by time and religion and social practice. My right to rape my wife was part of common law – it had long seemed perfectly obvious and "natural" that the question of consent to sex simply didn't arise in a marriage. (In many parts of the world, indeed, this still seems "natural".) The idea that a wife was not a legally or economically separate person but a mere adjunct to her husband had very deep roots. Within my lifetime, even minimal changes to this idea were bitterly opposed.

In 1965, for example, when Charles Haughey and Brian Lenihan introduced the Succession Act to give a widow the right to inherit at least a third of her husband's property, Fine Gael (including its liberal wing under Declan Costello) fought and voted against it. The Incorporated Law Society was strongly against the change. In 1986, Haughey, who was no stranger to political fights, said this was the toughest battle he'd ever been in.

The thing about all of these changes is that they had a vastly bigger impact on mainstream marriage than anything that might conceivably happen as a result of Friday's referendum on marriage equality. The nature of the marriage I entered into in 1983 was altered radically and retrospectively over the next 12 years. And altered, moreover, in a way that really did upend thousands of years of legal and religious traditions and that went against what many people still thought of as the natural order of things. In terms both of its legal definition and of its social meaning, the marriage I entered into in 1983 is scarcely recognisable from the one I'm (happily) still in now. By contrast, extending the right to marry to same-sex couples doesn't change my marriage at all in legal or constitutional terms. It just makes me happier to be married because it makes marriage a lovelier thing.

In my adult lifetime, contrary to the No campaign's image of an unchanging institution, Irish marriage has undergone revolutionary change. Almost all of those changes were opposed by conservatives as threats to marriage. The biggest change of all, divorce, was, we were told, an apocalyptic event. After the very narrow acceptance of divorce in the 1995 referendum, the Vatican described the outcome as having fatally undermined the family, which had lost "one of its foundation stones, namely the unity and indissolubility of marriage". This in turn threatened "the stability, the wellbeing and harmony of society". Conservative lawyers argued, in the same terms we've heard in recent weeks, that divorce would completely destroy the existing constitutional protection for the family. Funny that the same people now argue that the constitutional protection for the family remains intact after all – but that of course it will now be destroyed if marriage is extended to same-sex couples.

Change has not destroyed marriage

Irish marriage has already changed in far more fundamental ways than is now being proposed. And those changes haven't destroyed it. They've purified it by rooting it, not in systematic discrimination against women, but in the love between equal people. They have transformed marriage from an instrument of domination, oppression and inequality to a free partnership of people who want to share their lives and to live in a republic that recognises the dignity of their choice. We have almost completed that wonderful, joyous transformation. There is just one more step to be taken, before we can all celebrate marriage for the civilised, life-affirming institution it can and will be.

Why are faith groups so concerned about civil legislation?

Patrick Comerford, May 7th, 2015

The referendum on same-sex marriage has led to a number of religious groups and individuals calling for a conscience clause. One petition, drafted by Galway Quaker Richard Kimball, has been signed by a diverse group, from the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland and the Irish Council of Imams, to individual evangelical churches and individuals.

A similar intervention has come with “A Cross-Denominational Response”. The 50 signatories calling for a “No” vote include the Roman Catholic Bishop of Elphin, the Most Rev Kevin Doran, the Church of Ireland Bishop of Kilmore, the Right Rev Ferran Glenfield, and others who claim that “freedom of conscience will be challenged by a ‘Yes’ vote”.

On the other hand, the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, Dr Paul Colton, supports a “Yes” vote. Yet in a BBC interview last year [May 2014], he explained: “I also recognise the Church of Ireland’s definition of marriage is for itself and I adhere to that discipline.”

In February, the Church of Ireland urged its members to vote according to their consciences. The Methodist Church supports the traditional view of marriage as being between a man and woman, and the Presbyterian Church is also advocating a “No” vote. But is there “one traditional view of marriage”? And why are faith groups so exercised by civil legislation?

To take the Church of Ireland, as an example, an individual’s conscience is formed by Scripture, and informed by tradition and reason, the three foundational principles of Anglican theology.

The General Synod voted in 2012 that “marriage is in its purpose a union permanent . . . for better or worse, till death do them part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side.” It goes on to affirm: “The Church of Ireland recognises for itself and of itself, no other understanding of marriage than that provided for in the totality of Canon 31.”

Canon law and the decisions of the General Synod are binding on the bishops and clergy of the Church of Ireland, as Bishop Colton accepts. But is the tradition frozen in time? Or can it be in a process of developing? This question is raised by Bishop Michael Burrows of Cashel. In an interview with the *Church of Ireland Gazette* (April 24th, 2015), he says the 2012 resolution is “open to difference of interpretation” and that the church’s understanding of “the essential nature of marriage is capable of development, and indeed has already significantly developed over the years”.

Jewish teaching

There is no one common, unchanging theological understanding of marriage shared by all faith traditions. Jewish teaching traditionally accepts a liberal approach to divorce, yet often applies severe sanctions to those who marry outside Judaism. The Muslim understanding of marriage, at least in the past, has tolerated polygamy.

Adam and Eve is often treated as providing the biblical standard of marriage. But the Bible offers many different models of marriage, including marriages with and without children.

Abraham had a wife and a consort; his grandson Jacob had two wives and two consorts; David had many wives, although their number is unknown; King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines; and, of course, St Joseph and the Virgin Mary had a marriage that does not conform to today's expectations of parenting and having children. In the Gospels, the only ground for a divorce is porneia or sexual immorality (Matthew 5: 32). Christ's teaching challenged the easy-going divorce customs of his day. Later, St Paul added one other legitimate reason for divorce – the wilful desertion of a Christian by a non-Christian spouse (see I Corinthians 7: 15).

Over the centuries, Christians have altered their views about marriage and divorce, often in the wake of legal and legislative decisions. For example, the Emperors Constantine and Theodosius restricted the grounds for divorce to grave cause, but Justinian relaxed this in the 6th century. Even in the Middle Ages, church marriages were often a privilege of the property-owning classes while “common law marriage” was the accepted norm for the rest.

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, and many Anglicans too, hold that marriage is a sacrament. Christ regularly speaks about marriage and the wedding banquet as an image of the Kingdom of God, and many see sacramental marriage as a covenantal relationship that reflects Christ's relationship with the Church. The Second Vatican Council shifted thinking about marriage from a juridical view to a more “personalist” approach, shifting the focus on the objective duties, rights and ends of marriage to an emphasis on the intimate, interpersonal love of the spouses.

A similar development came about in the Anglican tradition, and new marriage services shift from the emphasis on having children, ordering society and preventing sin to the priorities of comfort, help, delight, tenderness and joy, with children as a blessing rather than a purpose.

It can be argued that marriage is part of the natural order or conforming to natural law. But there is no one, accepted definition of what is natural or what is not natural, and no one accepted code of natural law. When appeal is made to reason, one person's reasonable approach becomes another person's prejudice.

Most defensive

Paradoxically, many who do not define marriage as a sacrament can be among the most defensive about its sacred character, its indissolubility and in restricting it to one man and one woman capable of having children.

Bishop Burrows suggests in his interview that those with difficulties with the referendum proposals “have perhaps failed to consider sufficiently the nature of Anglican moral theology over several centuries” and “with the way in which Anglicans have reflected on relational ethics over the centuries”.

However, the move in recent years towards accepting same-gender marriages, particularly in the US and Canada, has caused deep division within the Anglican Communion. It has led to demands for an Anglican Covenant, although this too has been frustrated by voting in diocesan synods in the Church of England.

In the past, Bishop Harold Miller of Down and Dromore has said in a book on liturgy: “The Church of Ireland has always recognised the total validity of civil marriage ceremonies, as marriage is essentially an ordering of civil society . . .” But even if the faith traditions left civil

society to legislate on marriage, they would still be left with divisions and the dilemma about the limits of conscientious dissent and assent.

Colm O’Gorman argues in favour of same-sex marriage

Colm O’Gorman, May 22nd, 2015

It’s been a long road and a difficult journey, but then nothing worthwhile was ever easy. Of course we are not there yet. It is 22 years since Ireland decriminalised homosexuality, and 15 years since the Equal Status Act prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Years of campaigning, courageous testimony, support from families, allies and our communities helped achieve these important breakthroughs. On Friday, in polling booths across the country, Ireland gets to decide whether or not its LGBTI citizens should be afforded full constitutional equality and allowed equal access to civil marriage.

I cannot remember a constitutional proposal which was so straightforward. It is rather beautiful in its simplicity: “Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex”. Yet in its simplicity, it powerfully asserts a founding principle of our Republic; that all citizens should be guaranteed equal rights and equal opportunities, and that our Republic should cherish all the children of the nation equally.

You could be forgiven for believing that this referendum is not really about marriage or even about equality. As is the pattern with Irish referendums, tangential and emotive issues have been forced into the debate in an effort to derail it and confuse the electorate. We have been told that this referendum is about surrogacy, that if we enshrine the right of same-sex couples to marry, we are enshrining a right for them to “beget children”. This assertion has been fully debunked by the Referendum Commission which has shown considerable patience in repeating on many occasions that the referendum is not about surrogacy, and not about adoption.

Marriage matters. Bunreacht na hÉireann makes it clear that the constitutional family, is “the natural and primary fundamental unit group of society” and “indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State”. I agree wholeheartedly with that view of marriage and of the family. My family, and more to the point, my relationship with the man I love, challenges me every day to be the best that I can be. My relationship with Paul over these past 16 years, through all its many highs and its occasional lows, has demanded of me an integrity and a commitment to constantly challenge myself and grow as a person that no other relationship ever has. I am a better person for loving him. I am a better man for it, and together we are better members of our family, our community and of our society. Our family has the same potential to be indispensable to the welfare of the nation and the State as the families of those vocal on the No side. One is no better than any other, and all deserve equal regard and full equality before the law.

In Irish constitutional law the family is a married couple with, or without, children. Marriage is how society shows its support for the committed, intimate relationships we form with the person we love. It is more than a legal construct, and more than some sort of state incentive scheme to promote the procreation of children. Of course marriage is of vital importance to children. It binds together the families within which they live and are loved, providing security, legal protection and support. But civil marriage does not require that every couple who marries must procreate, or adopt, or foster, or even have children at all. And though most married couples do, many do not. Equally, many couples with children choose not to marry. The ability or indeed the willingness to procreate has never been a requirement for civil marriage. So why

has the No side attempted to make it the barrier to ending discrimination against same-sex couples in our civil marriage laws?

Many predicted that this referendum campaign would be bitter and vitriolic, and yes, it has had its occasional darker moments. But they have been few and far between. For me, it has been full of moments and conversations that I never imagined I would experience.

Everywhere I have gone I have met people who have been energised and impassioned by this referendum in a way I have never seen before – queues of people outside Garda stations and council offices, lining up to make sure they can vote. Public meetings with standing room only, where people came to express their views and have their questions answered. At a time when politics has little currency, it is an exercise in a kind of passionate democracy that is a powerful signal of how things could be. Of a society which can passionately and respectfully debate an issue that only a few years earlier would have divisive and fractious.

It has been a joyous experience. I feel, perhaps for the first time in my life, like I could be a fully equal citizen. I have felt this way because of the people I have met, people I do not know, who have told me that I am one of them. That I have the same dreams and aspirations, the same capacity for love and goodness, the same contribution to make to my community and my society as they do. And that is no small thing.

Please use your vote today. If you fail to do so, you will have failed to answer a question which may well shape the future of our society. Because in truth, a Yes today isn't just a Yes to allow me and others like me to marry the person we love. It is a Yes to a Republic of equals, to an Ireland that does not merely tolerate difference, but one which sees the common humanity and decency beyond everyday differences. It is a chance to make history.

It's a David and Goliath struggle for the soul of Ireland

Paddy Monaghan, May 16th, 2015

In the current climate it takes real courage to say you don't agree with same-sex marriage. In Wexford, and elsewhere, many No posters have been taken down. One respondent to my opinion piece on March 11th stated: "Your values are totally immoral, offensive . . . Shame on you all!"

Such intolerance by some on the Yes side is no wonder when the media and political establishment are campaigning for a Yes vote as if it was a fundamental human right. It is a David and Goliath struggle for the soul of Ireland.

Many on the No side are being intimidated through social media. The Evangelical Response to the Same-Sex Referendum was signed by 100 leaders. Many other priests, Protestant ministers and Pentecostal pastors were happy with the statement but wouldn't sign for fear of backlash.

What is wrong with our democracy when our Taoiseach states that Christian schools "will be expected to teach children that people in this country . . . will have the right to get married irrespective of their sexual orientation"?

Genderless marriage

Is he saying genderless marriage would then be the exclusive vision of marriage and family taught in primary schools, even against the values of parents and the ethos of individual schools?

If the family is constitutionally redefined, it will become impossible to have textbooks promoting the unique value of a mother and a father in any family. Any attempts to teach the traditional structure will become taboo. Church schools will be at particular risk.

Isn't the logical outcome of his comments a withdrawal of State funding from all Christian schools that continue to uphold the Christian position on marriage, and the prosecution of teachers and members of school boards for "discrimination" if they speak about the distinctive value of mothers and fathers?

Freedom of conscience will be challenged by a Yes vote. Service providers will be acting illegally if they decline services for same-sex weddings. Three UK adoption agencies shut down because they were not prepared to provide adoption services to same-sex couples.

Redefining marriage is being sold to us by the media and political establishment as a permissive measure, but we believe it will quickly become coercive. Since same-sex marriage legislation was introduced in the UK, many people have been punished for expressing their sincere beliefs about marriage.

Twenty-two cases have been documented by the UK Coalition for Marriage (See c4m.org.uk). These include a teacher demoted, a chaplain to police and a magistrate sacked. This will happen in Ireland, if there is a Yes vote.

Wrongly accused

Here already Beulah Printers, Drogheda, and Ashers Bakery, Belfast, have experienced the consequences of following their conscience on same-sex marriage. They were accused wrongly of discrimination against gay people, since they have gay customers and have provided a good service to them over the years.

However they refused the use of their business services to support same-sex marriage. Like us, they believe God is not anti-gay but loves all people; but they believe, as do all Christian churches, that marriage is exclusively, by God-given ordinance, between one man and one woman.

It was very courageous of GAA footballer Ger Brennan to come out on the No side. “I know I’ll be targeted for it and labelled,” he said, “but I’m sick of the accusations being flung around that if you vote No you are homophobic.”

We salute the courage of 34 Church of Ireland ministers who, in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, challenged the two liberal Yes vote Church of Ireland bishops, declaring: “Despite the vows and promises made at their ordination . . . to uphold the Church’s teaching” these two bishops “are now themselves teaching error and we call on them to repent of this and to teach what the Church has taught about marriage according to Scripture”.

Our Government has been dishonest in not pointing out the consequences of a Yes vote for education and freedom of conscience. Is this anything to do with the substantial US money funding the Yes campaign? Atlantic Philanthropies has been open about the \$16 million it provided to the Yes side.

May the silent majority not be deceived into naively voting Yes. May they come out and vote No. The shepherd David did slay the giant Goliath, with God’s help.

Why I changed my mind from No to Yes

Derek J Byrne, May 10th, 2015

Last October in *The Irish Times* I put forward my views on why I think marriage, as it currently stands, is not a good fit for gay people's lifestyles. However, after much debate and without shifting from my original views, I am urging people to vote Yes in the coming marriage equality referendum. My reason for doing this is pragmatic, for while I still don't believe that this referendum will bring about equality for the gay population or indeed, the population as a whole, a No vote will send a cataclysmic message to gay and other minority groups in Ireland.

As a gay man and campaigner for gay rights I believe equality involves representing many views and reflecting the fact that not everyone will agree on certain issues.

During the marriage equality campaign I believe the gay establishment and some of its more prominent leaders have failed to recognise the diversity within the gay community on the marriage issue and the debates within the gay community have not been inclusive of these different views.

However, having said that, I now believe it is time to focus on the task at hand, put my personal views on marriage aside and stand in solidarity with the gay population on an issue which is clearly of vital importance to us.

Let us not be naive about this, a Yes vote in the upcoming referendum on marriage equality will redefine the institution of marriage in Ireland within our Constitution and in law. This could be a welcome development for an institution which clearly is not workable for many in Ireland. The fact that 36.5 per cent of births were registered outside marriage in 2013 shows a sizeable lack of faith in the institution already.

It is no secret that I believe we could have done all of this without a referendum. The idea that some sections of society will have the right to decide whether or not I have the same rights of access to an imperfect, paternalistic and heterosexual social construct is a concept I happen to abhor, but for me it is now an issue of realpolitik.

Accepting this reality is what has led me to decide to vote Yes in the marriage equality referendum even though I have to grit my teeth every time I say the phrase "marriage equality".

I'm not going to discuss the children issue – it should never have been part of this debate in the first place.

Marriage is simply about two people who love each other coming together with shared aspirations for a future life and whether those two people are of a different gender or the same gender that love and those aspirations are equally valid and deserve equal validation.

If the country does not vote for the changes to the referendum on marriage on May 22nd then my fear is that the struggle for much needed social change in Ireland will be pushed back a quarter of a century.

Worse still, a very clear message will be sent to every young gay boy and girl in Ireland that despite what we say, we do not really believe that what you feel is real.

I'm not talking equality here I'm talking love, pure unadulterated, passionate love. We all feel it, we all crave it and we all have the right to express it. Therefore, I am asking that those who may still yet be undecided or even those who are against the concept of marriage equality to take a leap of faith. Have the sophistication to vote for something you may not agree with but could make the world a better place for someone else. Find it in your heart to be selfless for the gay child or grandchild you may have one day. Would you really want to have to look them in the eye and tell them that the reason their love is not valued is because you voted No?

Ireland has some of the world's toughest referendum campaign restrictions

Jane Suiter, April 15th, 2015

The law of unintended consequences will play an important role in the current referendum debate.

Despite our brightest minds having created a legal framework on how referendum campaigns should be conducted and covered by the media, political actions will always have unanticipated outcomes.

Increasing numbers of referendums globally have been met with legal restrictions couched in terms of the benefits of regulated equality versus maximal democratic freedoms.

In Ireland, thanks largely to Supreme Court decisions and Broadcast Authority of Ireland (BAI) regulations, we tend heavily towards regulated equality. Research on campaign regulations conducted by Theresa Reidy of UCC and myself, found that Ireland has some of the most substantial campaign participation restrictions globally.

Many of us agree with the principles. Who can argue with fairness, objectivity and impartiality? After all, with something as important as our Constitution, we need substantial safeguards.

But referendums suffer from three serious flaws. They are, by definition, an aid to majority rule and give little succour to minority rights. They are susceptible to soundbite and adversarial politics and hence oversimplification. They risk being about something other than what is on the ballot, such as punishing incumbent political parties.

Relevant legal judgments include Coughlan, which ensures both sides in a referendum debate receive 50 per cent of broadcast time overall, and McKenna, which ensures the government cannot spend public money on any one side.

These are restrictions based on sound democratic principles and are worth having even though at the upper end of the scale globally. However, they do not guard against the problems inherent in campaigns.

For that, the BAI produces guidelines relevant for our broadcasters. They emphasise equality and fairness and that debate should not be purely adversarial, although the latter is difficult to achieve in practice.

We need vigorous campaigns, based on facts that offer voters sufficient knowledge and motivation to both vote and decide how to vote. But these are not the kind of campaigns that we often get where false information, claim/counter-claim and hyperbole predominate.

Decisions

We know from academic research that Irish voters in referendums tend to make their decisions on the basis of shortcuts, by paying attention to the media and ultimately on what they think they know. All are, of course, interlinked. The big question is: who are you going to trust? In

a world where we are time poor we tend to outsource our decisions to those we trust, perhaps a family member or friend, but often an expert or an institution such as the church or a trade union.

We know that few trust politicians, and only a few more the media, so the potential impact from campaigning groups here can be significant. Already, we can see opposing sides trying to tap into this, on the one hand in the information being disseminated at some church gates and, on the other, the TCD student union campaign to “phone your granny”. These campaigns are unregulated both in terms of how much material they put out and whether they have any basis in fact or, simply appeal to the emotions.

In terms of the broadcast media, the Coughlan judgment is crucial. In some referendums on areas of little dispute, this can mean that broadcasters have to rely on a very small pool of panellists arguing for one side which, in itself, may dampen the amount of time they choose to spend on an issue. However, importantly, the judgment does not specify the content of each side’s arguments.

As my DCU colleague Roderic O’Gorman argues, it does not mean that broadcasters cannot challenge blatant inaccuracies from either side.

Yet, at times, they appear overly reluctant to challenge campaigners on the substance of debate, and hence, misinformation can be propagated which is not in the democratic or public interest, and in effect undermines the normative reason behind the regulations. Given free reign, campaigners may well try to focus debate on irrelevant but emotive issues.

The widely expected Supreme Court decision on the Jordan appeal to the children’s rights referendum should help in this regard as it is expected to enshrine the necessity of putting children’s rights first in the Constitution, eliminating one canard. It and the McCrystal decision also guarantee that all Government monies will be channelled through the Referendum Commission.

Engagement

The other issue with a relative lack of engagement is that it tends to diminish turnout, which is inimical to the democratic norms that increased regulation is assumed to bring.

If people do not engage with the topic they are unlikely to vote. And if they do vote, but are confused, they are more likely to have a bias towards the status quo.

In other words, if the status quo is not too problematic, even if it is less than ideal, why risk a change to an uncertain future? This tendency incentivises campaigners on the side of the status quo to attempt to confuse matters and confound the issue. To muddy the waters, if you will.

Three useful things broadcasters and journalists could do in the coming weeks are: to face down blatant untruths or scaremongering; to highlight any attempts to make this a vote about something else; and to encourage people to get out and vote. All of which is in keeping with both the spirit and the letter of referendum regulation.

Why I'm flying home from New York to vote Yes

James Kelly, May 20th, 2015

When I lived in New York four years ago I was lucky enough to have been in Manhattan the day marriage equality was passed. The outpouring of pure happiness and love that day will stay with me forever, as a community of people once reviled by society could confidently and openly declare their love as equal to any heterosexual couple's.

It was a momentous day for New York, the culmination of years of hard work fighting for acceptance. Ireland is now facing this same decision, and I have flown home to help ensure Ireland can experience this same day of love and acceptance this weekend.

I left Dublin late last year with only great regret, that I would miss the same-sex marriage referendum campaign. Having given hours upon hours of my life to the 'Marriage Equality' organisation over the years, I would be missing the most crucial time. But the career opportunity on offer in New York was a once-in-a-lifetime chance that I needed to take.

As the referendum came to dominate public discourse at home this year, I was in some ways relieved to not be at the coalface of a campaign where the private lives of people have been put on display. For a group that has been for so long marginalised by society, 2015 has been a draining time for LGBTQ people, as they have been forced to step into the spotlight and bare their souls for public scrutiny.

The amazing outpouring of support from fellow recent emigrants for marriage equality is incredibly heartening, and incredibly frustrating. About 250,000 Irish people have left Ireland since 2008, 70 per cent of them in their 20s. If these young emigrants are anything like those who stayed behind, the vast majority support marriage equality (about nine in ten 18-35-year-olds are in favour, according to a recent poll).

Now they find themselves disenfranchised in the most important vote in our living memory because they can't afford to come home, or they are outside the 18-month voting eligibility period.

The work done by the likes of the We're Coming Back and Get the Boat to Vote campaigns has highlighted the inequality of denying Irish living abroad their say in how the future of Ireland will look.

This referendum doesn't affect people in the abstract; for many people like me, our future in Ireland is dependent on how Ireland votes on Friday. I don't want to live in a country where I am considered less than equal and less of a person than my friends and siblings, in the eyes of the law, and the eyes of the public.

But we are the lucky ones, the ones who can decide to live abroad. The crushing disappointment of a potential No may be mitigated slightly for me upon my return to New York, as I don't need to live each day in a country where I'm not accepted. The damage a No result will inflict on LGBTQ people - especially children and teens - still living in Ireland is unfathomable.

I am proud to be returning home to the country I love for this vote. There was never any option in my mind but to return for it, and I am blessed I could make the sacrifices to get back, when I know so many others who would love to but cannot.

This referendum is about more than just two loving same-sex partners being allowed to marry. It is about defining for our generation, and generations to come, an Ireland where we accept and cherish all of our children. That is why I am coming home to vote - to be a part of the moment, like I was in New York four years ago.

When I get off the ferry on May 22nd, I hope I can feel I belong

Juan Carlos Cordovez-Mantilla, May 19th, 2015

Thoughts about migrations, home, and belonging have been part of my life for a long time in one way or another. But this year, a coincidence in scheduling has forced me to take account of my past, assess the present, and dream about the future. On May 22nd, Ireland will hold its referendum on civil marriage equality and I am returning “home”.

I was born and raised in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The sunset-orange-tinted memories of growing up in South America are still present somewhere in my memory, but so are the remnants of the chronic anxiety I felt from expending so much energy hiding my sexual orientation and feeling that I didn't belong.

When I moved to the US to attend university in Washington, DC, body, identity, and gender politics were at their peak and I partook. I protested with my fellow art students when a conservative senator censored an art exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's work in the city's oldest and most respected museum. I marched with women to defend their rights to their own bodies, and I marched for the equal rights of lesbians and gays.

But the political battles were easier to face than internal ones. I was still convinced that the US wasn't home, and that I would have to return to Ecuador, marry a woman, and continue living with my anxiety.

Then my father was diagnosed with cancer and died within a year. That year I turned 21. Nothing gives you better perspective about what's important than a parent dying before you've had the time to make him proud. But at least my anxiety started lifting.

During my late 20s and 30s I fumbled through love affairs. I will never forget a generous German friend who insisted in convincing me that yes, I could have a long-term, committed relationship with another man. He never mentioned “marriage”, since at that time, the idea of marriage for gays and lesbians was as unthinkable as an African American president in the White House. So I remained unconvinced for many years.

That is, until one day in 2005 a handsome young Irish diplomat, whom I had been seeing for three years (a record for me at the time), asked me to move with him to Ireland. Fast-forward to five years later, when a judge at the Four Courts witnessed my swearing-in ceremony and I became Irish. The next day (in another scheduling coincidence) he and I signed a register that made us civil partners, and the month after that we moved to Paris, where we have lived for the past four years. This May also marks our 13th year as a couple, by far my greatest achievement.

Marriage is the milestone at which parents truly give away their children to their future lives as adults and I will always regret not knowing if I could have made my father proud through my commitment to my partner. But I like to imagine I would have. When I was a child I asked him at a moment that I felt particularly favoured, “who do you love more, my older brother or me?” His predictable and very unsatisfying reply was “I love you both equally”. I know he would have been proud to see my brother's beautiful family. Would mine stand the test of equal love?

Of course most (sensible) parents would answer that question the same way. So if there is still any parent out there who is unsure how to vote in the referendum, the question I pose to you is simple, "which of your children do you love the most?" Because to love all your children equally is to give them a place at the table and making them feel like they belong.

Like in my life, I have been circuitous to arrive here, where I confess that each day I feel a little more Irish. We can leave behind the argument about what it means to be Irish and who has the right to call himself Irish for another day. For now, let me bask in the dream that when I get off the ferry on May 22nd, I will arrive in a country where I can feel I belong, a country that I now call home.

‘I needed to leave Ireland to come out as a gay man’

David Hoctor, May 5th, 2015

Last weekend I told my parents that I’m gay. I came out at 27. They were shocked, had no idea. I honestly only found out myself this past year.

I’m writing this from New York, from my apartment in Hell’s Kitchen. This is my sixth week here. I moved over for my career, and because I fell in love with the city when I was here on a J1, but also because I needed to leave Ireland to come out.

I spent most of last year backpacking around Latin America. Prior to that I had been working in advertising in Dublin. I saved some money, packed a bag and off I went.

They say travelling broadens the mind, that it’s good for the soul. I tried to experience everything I could and be as open-minded as possible. I befriended people totally different to me, practiced yoga, learned to surf, trekked up volcanoes and sailed down the Amazon River. It was an amazing year.

I knew I was going travelling to find out something about myself. But I didn’t intend to hook up with guys. Maybe I was in denial but, up to then, I lived a “straight” life. I would see a guy and maybe think that he was good looking, but regarded that as normal heterosexual behavior.

I spent some time learning Spanish in a city called Quetzaltenango (‘Xela’) in Guatemala. It’s illegal there to serve alcohol after 1am, so underground parties were regularly held so that people could keep drinking and dancing until sunrise. These parties were great fun, always a mix of locals and backpackers. Many of these parties happened to be in a gay bar.

One night as I was leaving a local guy followed me home. We chatted and when we got to my apartment he asked if he could come in. Without even thinking I said yes. And so, in that moment, my world changed forever.

Even after this experience I didn’t think I was gay. I reverted back to “straight” me, travelling with the same people along the Gringo Trail, hooking up with girls.

When I made it to Argentina I decided I needed to do something drastic. I left the group I was travelling with in Buenos Aires and checked into a gay hostel I found online. I remember being terrified when I rang the buzzer. What am I doing? This isn’t me. What would my friends think? What would my parents think? What if the gay people here don’t like me? What if I’m too “straight”?

It was quite an overtly sexual hostel - gay art on the walls, shared showers, a jacuzzi. It was really the first time I had been around gay people. I had known gay people in Dublin, but never had any gay friends. I only know one gay person from my hometown, Tullamore.

I spent a week in that hostel, and made good friends. I was honest and told them I wasn’t out, that I was confused. Everybody understood. They had all been there. When I was leaving my new friends wanted to add me on Facebook, but I told them I couldn’t accept their requests. I

wasn't out at home and couldn't risk it. Once again, they understood. I felt like I was one foot tall.

I'm a pretty regular guy - I drink pints with my friends, love sport, love music. I had a long-term girlfriend before I went travelling. I loved her and on some level always will. I hope she won't be hurt reading this. She's an amazing person and deserves nothing but happiness.

When I returned from my trip I moved back in with my parents. It was the first time I'd lived at home since I left for college at 18. I was there for five frustrating and confusing months before I left for New York. I felt I couldn't talk to anyone until I drunkenly opened up and told my best friend on the way home from our local one night. He was fantastic. I'll never forget how much he helped.

I then felt ready to talk to other people. I told my sister and the rest of my friends. Everyone was very supportive. The reaction was no reaction, which says it all really. But I still feel there is a stigma attached to being gay in Ireland.

Coincidentally I moved back home, confused and vulnerable, just as the same-sex marriage referendum debate was heating up. I was hyper-sensitive to it; reading articles and the comments underneath, many of which upset me. I just don't understand how anyone could have a problem with love and happiness between two people.

This week I went on my first gay date in New York. I met the guy on Grindr, a gay dating mobile app. Among the sea of sexually aggressive men looking for a quick hook-up, I found someone who seemed similar to me. I was nervous at first but we had a great time. For a few hours I forgot about everything going on in my life and just felt happy. There's nothing wrong with me. There's nothing wrong with him. We're just two people trying to live our lives.

I love my country. I wear my nationality as a badge of pride whenever I go anywhere. Around the globe people are happy to meet me - they smile when they hear where I'm from, because Ireland is known as the land of a thousand welcomes. I hope that after the referendum, I'll feel welcome there too.

Following the same-sex marriage debate online from Texas makes me homesick

John Holden, May 1st, 2015

I came out when I was 22. Luckily, it was to a loving family who celebrate diversity. That doesn't necessarily make it any easier, though, as others in my position can testify. Deciding to come out of the closet isn't just about telling others you're gay. The real battle for many young LGBT people takes place within themselves.

My decision to move to Texas, a place where the marriage-equality debate is far more polarised and the No side have plenty of power, support and resources, was not an easy one, either. Love has brought me here – my husband is Texan – but couldn't my heart have picked a safer place, like San Francisco or New Hampshire?

Many here say that Texas might be the last state in the US to fully legalise gay marriage. For some locals this prospect is deeply humiliating. Knowing that rivals such as Arkansas and Oklahoma are already moving faster does not sit well with everyone.

I'm currently in Austin, sometimes referred to as the blueberry in the tomato soup – the Texan capital is a small, Democrat-voting oasis of liberalism and tolerance in a Republican state. What people here think doesn't necessarily correspond with the state's position on social issues as a whole. Last month, for example, a Texas Republican house representative pushed through an amendment to move \$3 million originally earmarked for HIV and STD prevention programmes into paying for abstinence education instead.

So why did we come here? My husband, Mackenzy, and I had lived in Dublin for almost five years. As an unsuccessful musician and actor couple, we both had designs on another city to get rejected by. After our civil partnership in Dublin, in 2012, we married in New York the following year. Mackenzy always wanted eventually to move home. I did my best to keep his aspirations on my longest finger. But then his mom, Kimberly, was diagnosed with cancer. Her son and son-in-law were her only close family. We were moving to Texas.

She lived in San Angelo, a small city, dominated by oil and gas companies, about 300km west of Austin. With one income and no health insurance, money was tight. So four of us – Kimberly, a lodger, Mackenzy and I – shared a two-bedroom house in a part of Texas that wouldn't necessarily be top of the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association's list of destinations. To avoid any discrimination (as well as avoiding having the same conversations about sexuality over and over) we said I was a cousin, helping to look after his mom.

This was not an easy time for any of us. The same idea kept rattling around in my head: if opponents of gay marriage could see how difficult our lives can be – which is to say just like everyone else's – they might be more sympathetic. Sure, there may be occasional banana daiquiris and questionable house music, but there are also sick mothers-in-law, worries about money, and social insecurities. It reminded me of a banner I saw at a woman holding at a marriage-equality rally in Dublin: "I want gay people to be as miserable as I make my husband."

Mackenzey's mom passed away in February. With only ourselves and an aunt to offer support, her death was painfully uneventful. It made us a stronger couple, however. Neither of us could have made it through the ordeal without the support of the other.

In spite of (or due to) all the drama, I haven't really felt homesick. Until now. Following the healthy same-sex marriage debate at home online, and seeing the good vibes being spread by the Yes Equality campaign, have brought more than one tear to my eye.

Anti-marriage-equality lobbyists here argue that every other jurisdiction that has legalised same-sex marriage has done so by forcing it on people, either judicially or legislatively. As Ireland is the only country to put this issue to a public vote, the referendum on May 22nd has global significance.

Many Texans still consider Ireland to be very conservative and completely dominated by the Catholic Church. In anticipation of a Yes vote, I'm happy to let them continue thinking that, however misguided a perception it is. Changing the Irish Constitution will send a message demonstrating how even so called "conservatives" and religious people can still respect real equality above all else.

Besides, if you do vote No I'm never coming back.

Emigrants don't have a vote, but we do have a voice

Quentin Fottrell, May 11th, 2015

When I moved to New York four years ago, I was convinced the US would have marriage equality before Ireland. How fast things can change. If Ireland votes Yes to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples on May 22nd, it could beat the US by a month. In June, the Supreme Court will either uphold or strike down bans prohibiting same-sex marriage in nearly a dozen US states. Americans must wait passively for that decision. Irish citizens have the choice to go out and vote.

Not all Irish citizens, however.

Emigrants are not eligible to vote, which leaves the tens of thousands of Irish abroad who left since 2008 in a kind of political purgatory. There is the illusion of closeness: we can watch the referendum debates on RTE Player and become immersed in the sometimes toxic Twitter wars. We can FaceTime or email our friends and family, urging them to register and to make their vote count. We can talk to our American friends, many of whom are not even aware that Ireland is about to make such an historic decision.

May 22nd is also an auspicious date in the US. It is the birthday of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay politician to hold public office in California who was shot dead by a disgruntled former city employee in 1978. It's also the date of Edie Windsor and Thea Spyer's wedding in Canada in 2007. Windsor won her Supreme Court case to have her marriage recognised in the US in 2013, which overturned the Defense of Marriage Act, giving federal benefits to same-sex couples. This seems like a day that could once again go down in history.

But as the referendum grew closer, I became concerned about the result, and felt increasingly powerless. I wrote stories here in New York about how marriage equality strengthens the fabric of society. It gives dignity and legal protection to same-sex families, and says to young gay people, you have a voice, you are important too. Psychological research shows that children do better with parents in a stable and committed relationship. Same-sex marriage did not reduce the value of marriage for heterosexual couples in US states or the Netherlands.

But it wasn't enough. We watched how some people from the No side formed new organisations with little more than a radio interview and a press release. I emailed Aisling Reidy, a senior legal advisor at Human Rights Watch: "What can we do?" Aisling emailed me a photograph of Irish people in Sydney, Australia holding up signage asking people back home to #UseYourVote. Other cities did the same. It was deliciously simple. We too would organise a photo, but to ask people to vote Yes and in front of a New York landmark. But which one?

The Statue of Liberty seemed like an obvious choice, but when I got off the subway at Battery Park there was it was, our landmark: the Freedom Tower, shimmering in the late evening sun. I set up a Facebook Event and 60 people showed up, including Sinead Andrews, the public partnership manager at Unicef, Brendan Fay, who helped start the "St Pat's Day for All" parade in Queens, novelist Belinda McKeon, cystic fibrosis campaigner Orla Tinsley, three-year-old Sadie Grant with her father Ciarán, artist Corban Walker and filmmaker Niall McKay.

My father used to say the only thing that started on time in Ireland was mass, and I was concerned that people would show up late, or wouldn't show. I need not have worried. People actually arrived early. There were hugs and the sense that we were on the right side of history.

We knew social media was critical to raise awareness: Simon McDonnell, a research director for New York State, created and managed a Twitter account, @yesequality_NYC, to share the photos; Niall McKay and Marissa Aroy showed up with a video camera; and my Icelandic friend Snorri Sturluson agreed to photograph the event.

There were some comical moments too when assigning letters to people and arranging their order: "Where's the P in proud? You're the H in history!" This was our way to show our appreciation to those who fought so hard in this campaign, and for so long. We are thousands of miles away, but we stand together.

This feels like the end of a journey. We don't have a vote, but we do have a voice, and it took me years to find mine. When I was 14, I wrote the words "I am gay" in the condensation on my windowpane. I stared at it for a few moments, my heart beating out of my chest, before quickly scrubbing it out. On Thursday, we held up letters spelling "Make Us Proud, Make History #VoteYesForEquality". This time, I wanted everyone to see our words. Another Irish expat Fred Hanna, a helicopter pilot, even took a photograph of us all from the sky.

Emigrants on why it is so important young people still in Ireland vote

Jensen Byrne, Aoife Byrne, May 17th, 2015

Jensen Byrne: 'I feel anxious and disenfranchised as I do what I can to encourage those at home to vote'

I believe in voting, and practice my belief diligently. I take the steps to educate myself about issues and candidates that I am not familiar with, and I try to make the best decision I can when I am handed my ballot paper.

It isn't always easy. I have found myself many times, post work or college, on dark, wet, winter evenings with my polling card and passport in hand struggling to find the energy to take the 20-minute detour from my bus stop to the polling booth, often to vote on an issue with little direct relevance to my life. I have fought apathy and exhaustion, recognising that I would be tired again, energetic again on other days, but that today was polling day and a week from now that exhaustion would mean little in hindsight, and I will have voted.

I will have cast the vote won for me by the struggles of past generations who could not cast votes themselves. I will have cast it in recognition and respect for those currently denied their vote globally by issues such as mobility, accessibility, citizenship and age.

I reached the age of suffrage almost ten years ago and since then I have only missed one polling day, because I was out of the country for work reasons. I wasn't particularly interested in the issue but I regretted not being able to cast my vote.

I'm in a similar position this week, but this time I am not just interested in the issue, but invested in it. The marriage equality referendum affects me personally, as a member of the LGBTQ community and I sincerely want my voice to be heard. And I feel helpless. I feel anxious and disenfranchised as I do what I can to encourage those at home to register, to speak to their families and to do what I cannot do and cast their vote.

But I cannot shake this feeling of powerlessness. I am terrified by the number of my friends and acquaintances from my age demographic, the demographic least inclined to vote anyway, who are also abroad whose voices will not be heard either in the upcoming referendum.

So many others like me who I am certain would vote Yes have been removed from our country's democratic process as we pursue job opportunities abroad that we cannot find at home. There are also numerous Irish citizens abroad who want to cast their No vote, and they are equally stripped of their voting rights.

Many of us only intend to stay overseas for a short time, and plan to return to Ireland eventually having served our time in necessary exile. For now, we can only follow the debates online, feeling voiceless but hoping those still at home will use their vote and create a country we will be proud to return to.

I hope that soon, Irish citizens abroad will be able to vote in their home country on issues that directly affect them, their families and their friends.

Aoife Byrne: 'I'm travelling home from the UK to vote Yes'

On May 22nd I will travel home from the UK to vote Yes in the same-sex marriage referendum. But I will do so in the knowledge that many people just like me are not in that same position.

Ireland's provisions for overseas voters are among the most restrictive in Europe. Postal votes are only available in the most exceptional of circumstances. As a young person living in the UK, I am among the 250,000 Irish citizens who have emigrated since 2008. I am among the 70 per cent of those who are in their 20s. And I want to come back.

In a survey published on May 1st, 90 per cent of young Irish voters aged between 18 and 35 said they would vote Yes for equal marriage on May 22nd. But only 55 per cent said they would exercise their right to vote - a worryingly significant number of people who could make or break a Yes outcome. This is, of course, exacerbated by the considerable loss of young Irish voters to emigration.

From the UK, following coverage of the referendum has been both heartening and tense. News coverage outside Ireland has somewhat pessimistically worried about how Ireland will look to the rest of the world if the country says No.

Recent debates surrounding the possible introduction of voting rights for Irish emigrants are, of course, most welcome. But any such legislation will not be implemented in time for the same-sex marriage referendum. So many of us feel disenfranchised, and anxious over the outcome.

It has been reassuring to see many vote-eligible Irish emigrants (those who have left within the last 18 months, and plan to return to Ireland to live) who support equal rights pledge to come home to vote Yes.

Ultimately, I see myself living in Ireland. The people most important to me in the world are Irish. I want to be near my family to take care of them in their old age. Many of my emigrant Irish friends feel the same. All we ask is that Ireland will give us a say in shaping for the better the country to which we will later return.

Rónán Mullen argues against same-sex marriage

Ronan Mullen, May 22nd, 2015

One image coming from the tragic earthquake in Nepal had particular significance for our marriage referendum debate. A photo showed Israeli gay couples carrying their babies after they had been airlifted to safety. In Israel, the law restricts surrogacy to male-female parents. So a commercial surrogacy provider brings impoverished Indian women over to Nepal to carry the babies for Israeli gay couples. The human eggs are harvested from women in South Africa and elsewhere. None of these babies will ever know their mothers.

Can we make sure that any surrogacy in Ireland will be restricted to male-female couples, if the Government acts on its intention to legalise surrogacy? Sadly, the Government's statement of intent in this area shows no interest in ensuring that such children have a mother and father in their lives. And significantly, the view of the Referendum Commission is that, among other things, a law restricting surrogacy to father-mother couples would be "not impossible, but difficult to imagine" in the event of a Yes vote. That's because same-sex married couples will have the same constitutional right to found a family as heterosexual married couples. And, perhaps partly due to the influence of American funding, it would be difficult to find a children's rights charity who would tell a court that it is preferable for a child to have a mother and father. Bizarre, but sadly too true.

A Yes vote affects adoption also. Up to recently, general eligibility to apply to adopt was confined to married couples or a single relative of the child. Single people, including gay people, could adopt in particular circumstances. While the best interests of a child are generally best served by having a mother and father, the Government recently abolished any special preference for married couples or unmarried male-female couples. There was very little consultation about this change. Here again, a Yes vote would hobble the ability of the Dáil and Seanad to insist on a preference for mothers and fathers, because of a certain notion of equality on which same-sex married couples could rely.

So much has been made of the term "equality" in this referendum debate, but where is the equality for children in all this change? The basic need of a father and mother is to be denied to some with the full authority of the State and the backing of the Constitution.

A No vote is the only way to send the Government back to the drawing board. To insist on a better balance between legal recognition for same-sex couples and the rights of children to have a father and mother in their lives whenever humanly possible. As things stand, Civil Partnership fully recognises same-sex relationships and gives social welfare, pension and tax-free inheritance rights, similar to married couples, to gay people. It may be that certain things could be improved – for example more certainty about next-of-kin rights for same sex couples.

In any event, a No vote won't undermine any existing rights, and it should not be seen as a rejection of gay people. It will, however, force the Government to reconsider in what circumstances a child can be brought into the world using a donated sperm, or a donated egg and surrogate mother. Since a donor sperm or egg means that a child loses one of his or her genetic parents, we should at least be ensuring that such children get to have a mother and father in their lives. Only a No vote allows this.

The controversy over Asher's bakery presents another possible consequence of a Yes vote. Say a teacher wants to explain to children that, with love and respect for everyone, it is good for children to be brought up by fathers and mothers. The social science data says this is true – “two biological parents, in a low-conflict marriage” generally leads to the best outcomes for children. Would such a school, or teacher, be in breach of the anti-discrimination legislation? How might such a case be considered in the light of the new status of same-sex marriage as the “natural, primary and fundamental unit group of society”? Won't all this have a chilling effect on teachers and schools?

Senator Feargal Quinn and myself tabled amendments to the Referendum Bill to guarantee the preference for fathers and mothers in adoption and assisted reproduction matters, in the context of same-sex marriage. We also sought amendments that would ensure that our constitutional protections for freedom of belief and conscience would be unaffected. The Government was not interested. Its strategy has been to play up the emotion and to dismiss rational concerns. The very use of the term “marriage equality” on the ballot paper is designed to make voters think they are anti-equality if they're leaning towards a No.

But this is not a referendum on how we feel about gay people. It's about whether marriage should remain that institution we've always had to unite children with their biological fathers and mothers.

In 2010, respect for gay people and their relationships led to Civil Partnership. Now, it's the turn of children. Concern for their right to a mother and father, whenever that's possible, means we should vote No.

No rational basis to deny gay couples right to marry

Ivana Bacik, February 27th, 2015

The key issue in the forthcoming referendum is equality – equal rights to marry for gay and straight couples. Significant progress has been made in Ireland towards equality for gay people, after a very late start. Homosexuality was decriminalised 22 years ago. Since then, laws have been passed prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sexuality, recognising civil partnerships and making provision for the rights of children within gay families through the Children and Family Relationships Bill.

However, equality in marriage remains a critical civil liberties issue for this generation, not just in Ireland but internationally. Around the world, the movement for marriage equality has been gaining momentum in recent years. Since same-sex marriage was first legalised in the Netherlands in 2001, it has been recognised in 18 countries worldwide – including most of western Europe – and the majority of US states. In a few months' time, the US supreme court will rule on the issue, following more than 60 judgments across American courts which have already recognised the right to marry for gay couples.

Things have moved on since October 2006, when I appeared as one of the legal team for Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan in their courageous case seeking recognition of their Canadian marriage. Civil partnership had not yet been legalised here, while in the US, only a small number of states recognised gay marriage. The case failed because the High Court ruled in December 2006 that the traditional definition of marriage was confined to opposite-sex couples.

Even then, this decision lacked logic. Given legal developments since then, it appears even more illogical. An argument that marriage must be confined to heterosexual couples because it “was ever so” amounts to circular reasoning. The truth is that the definition or meaning of marriage is not fixed in any society; it has changed and evolved over time.

Legal tradition

No doubt Éamon de Valera and the drafters of the Irish Constitution in 1937 only thought of opposite-sex couples when speaking of “marriage”. But at that time, many other legal doctrines were seen as essential to civil marriage, which have since been abolished. In the US, for example, inter-racial marriage was banned until the 1967 Supreme Court decision in the landmark case of *Loving v Virginia*. In Ireland, legal tradition dictated that a woman upon marriage became the property of her husband; until 1990, a married man was regarded as legally incapable of raping his wife. Until the passage of the divorce referendum in 1995, it was not possible legally to end a civil marriage.

Our traditional conceptions of marriage have changed substantially over the years, and tradition alone cannot form a rational basis for a law. It is not justifiable to deny gay couples the right to marry, just because few societies recognised same-sex marriage until relatively recently, so that marriage was generally thought of as something only engaged in by opposite-sex couples. After all, until relatively recently, homosexuality was considered by many to be a psychiatric disorder from which people could be “cured”. Happily, this view is now confined to history.

There is no rational basis for the denial of the right to marry for gay couples. The State does not generally interfere in people's choices as to whom they marry. There is no prohibition, for example, on a black woman marrying a white man – because we recognise that differences between people based on ethnicity have nothing to do with their ability to make the long-term commitments to each other that lie at the core of marriage. The fact that two individuals who wish to marry each other happen to be members of the same sex, similarly, should not be relevant to the value we place on their long-term mutually committed relationship.

Parenting ability

In reality, the ability of an opposite-sex couple to procreate is the only ground of distinction between gay and straight couples that has been made in the referendum debate. But the ability to procreate is not a key ingredient of marriage. Nobody argues that an opposite-sex marriage is invalid because the two partners are physically incapable of having children. Nor does the State require that a heterosexual couple prove their parenting ability before they marry – convicted child abusers are not banned from marrying.

It would be profoundly illogical and unjust and would fly in the face the empirical evidence and the lived reality of many families in Ireland today to argue that same-sex couples should be denied the right to marry because of a prejudiced view that they are not suited to rearing children.

We all share a common understanding that an adult person has the right to marry another adult person they love. There is no logical basis for limiting the right to marry the person of one's choice to the right to marry only a person of one's choice of the opposite sex. The only way to justify limiting the right to marry is where the choice of partner might involve potential harm – the State for instance prohibits siblings from marrying each other. But nobody has argued that any harm is caused to anyone because an adult is allowed to marry the person they love, who happens to be of the same sex.

The institution of marriage has persisted through changed times because as human beings, gay and straight, we all seek the same things that marriage represents: love, companionship, intimacy, mutual trust and responsibility. That is why it is time to take the final step in the journey towards equality with our gay sisters and brothers, towards recognition of our shared humanity. Let's take that step together by voting Yes to the marriage equality referendum.

Opinion: Vote No to block deconstruction of marriage

Professor Ray Kinsella, May 5th, 2015

Common sense is usually a sound guide to whether or not a proposal makes sense. The ideology driving the Government's proposal for same-sex marriage contradicts common sense. It is based on a proposition that gender does not matter. But if we take the time to look around, observe and listen, it clearly matters.

It asserts that men and women are interchangeable. But they are not. Every person reading this is generated by a man and a woman. Every woman carrying a child experiences the most subtle and profound biological and emotional changes. That's reality. They know their child before he or she is born.

A father can't say any of this but, instead, brings a different set of emotions and impulses to the birth and rearing of children. Common sense.

The referendum on same sex marriage has been impelled through the Oireachtas, much the same as austerity, with no reflective discussion and no dissent permitted.

The consequences, set out with admirable clarity by Bruce Arnold in *Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution* (brucearnold.ie), are far-reaching. These consequences have been not engaged with by mainstream political parties.

This referendum is not about "equality" which, properly understood, also celebrates differences. It's about deconstructing marriage as a faithful and lifelong union of a man and a woman.

There is an intrinsic value in all loving relationships. But they are not all equivalent. The terms "marriage" and "family" – "mothers" and "fathers" – have very specific meanings in our lives, laws and Constitution, and for excellent reasons.

The Child and Family Relationship Act, together with the referendum on same-sex marriage – they are really one and the same – effectively extends these terms to very different relationships among consenting adults.

But they are not the same, still less so in the extent to which they vindicate the needs and the rights of children.

The full force of Government power and influence is lined up against a No vote. Large numbers of people across the country who are opposed to the Government's agenda – or who have deep reservations – are completely unrepresented by the mainstream politics.

There is a virulent intolerance of a counterview.

This ideologically-driven "groupthink" is deeply unhealthy for any representative democracy. Members of the gay community, such as Keith Mills, who is on our advisory board, who point to the Civil Partnership Act 2010, and oppose same-sex marriage, are especially in the firing line.

Dr Joanna Rose spoke in the Oireachtas last year about the existential crisis of identity she experienced from being donor conceived. She asked: “Who am I? Who are my siblings?” It was deeply moving.

Just a handful of legislators turned up.

In January 2014 Elizabeth Howard, who was donor- conceived, wrote a searingly honest piece in the *Guardian* about her sense of betrayal at not knowing her father. She was in Dublin last week along with Heather Barwick, a former activist for same-sex marriage and who was raised by a same sex-couple.

In a recent article she wrote: “Same-sex marriage and parenting withholds either a mother or a father from a child while telling him or her that it doesn’t matter. That it’s all the same. But it’s not. A lot of us . . . are hurting . . . It’s only now, as I watch my children loving and being loved by their father each day, that I can see the beauty and the wisdom in traditional marriage and parenting.”

These are the views of young women, mothers too. They have been at the sharp end of this ideology. Theirs is a voice with which the Coalition does not want to engage.

The position of a wide range of Christian faith groups, including Catholics, is very clear in opposing an amendment to the Constitution which redefines marriage and effectively places the union of two men, or two women, on a par with the marriage relationship between a husband and wife, open to the procreation of children.

In a wonderful book, *Celebrating Life*, the Chief Rabbi Emeritus of the UK, Dr Jonathan Sacks, writes about the myths behind same sex marriage, including the notion that “all sorts of families – dual parent or single parent, stable or fractured, lasting or temporary, male- female or single sex – are the same in their effects upon a child. No future generation will understand how we convinced ourselves that we really believed these things.”

May is a very beautiful month – the month of Mary, mother of God, who “pondered these things in her heart”. We could have no better example before casting our vote later this month.

The Aftermath

Vote a beacon of hope for those facing oppression

Denis Staunton, May 25th, 2015

Ireland's vote in favour of same-sex marriage is a milestone in the global struggle for equality for gays and lesbians that has seen dramatic progress in many western countries while others slide backwards into further repression.

Homosexual activity remains illegal in almost 80 countries and in many, including Uganda, Nigeria, Russia and Egypt, the situation for gays and lesbians has worsened. Our Yes vote can serve as a beacon of hope not just for LGBT people on the brink of achieving equality but for those millions throughout the world who continue to face persecution, oppression and violence.

Marriage equality, which was a marginal, almost eccentric demand only two decades ago, is now a reality in 20 countries and in many sub-national regions, including 37 of the 50 states of the United States.

It is an entirely 21st century phenomenon, with the Netherlands becoming the first country in the world to allow gays to marry in 2001. It is also essentially a conservative one, which was initially resisted by radical gay rights campaigners who saw marriage as a repressive, patriarchal institution.

Tragic

The Aids crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s brought into sharp, tragic relief the consequences of the lack of legal recognition of gay partnerships as men were denied access to their dying partners in hospitals, were evicted from the homes they shared when loved ones died and had no inheritance rights. The initial response came in the form of domestic partnerships.

It was the gay conservative writer Andrew Sullivan who first put gay marriage on the agenda in the US in 1989 with a groundbreaking essay in the *New Republic* called "Here Comes the Groom". He argued that marriage would help to "humanise and traditionalise" gays by strengthening their relationships and providing emotional and economic security.

As in Ireland, what brought marriage equality into the mainstream in the US was the growing number of gays and lesbians coming out to friends and family. Greater visibility not only made gays and lesbians appear less exotic, it gave more straight people a stake in the debate as they backed equal rights for friends or family members.

Some 60 per cent of Americans now approve of same-sex marriage and the US supreme court will next month rule on *Obergefell v Hodges*, a set of four challenges to state bans on gay marriage. It is expected to rule that the bans are unconstitutional, a move that would effectively legalise same-sex marriage throughout the US.

Until 2010, when the states of Maine, Maryland, Minnesota and Washington approved same-sex marriage in referendums, the conventional wisdom in the US was that the issue could not win popular approval at the ballot box.

Progress

Most progress on the issue in the US has come through the courts, with referendums more often called to introduce bans on same-sex marriage than to lift them.

But the courts are not deaf to public opinion and the head of the European Court of Human Rights suggested in 2012 that the court could reconsider its view that same-sex marriage is not a human right if enough countries introduced it. The European Parliament last March passed a resolution recognising such a right, although just 10 European Union member-states, including Ireland, have marriage equality, with two more – Slovenia and Finland– set to join them within months.

Ireland has shown marriage equality can win popular support and Friday's vote will encourage legislators and activists elsewhere in Europe to be bolder. The lessons of Ireland's campaign will be useful elsewhere, just as the successful campaigns in the US in 2012 helped to guide Ireland's campaigners.

Perhaps the central lesson is that it is less effective to simply demand rights than to persuade through personal testimony. It was stories such as those of Ursula Halligan, Pat Carey and Una Mullally that cut through the noise and appealed to the better nature of undecided voters. And straight allies such as Mary McAleese and Noel Whelan were eloquent in making the case that marriage was so important to them that they wanted to allow equal access to it.

Kenny hails referendum vote as ‘pioneering’

Fiach Kelly, May 25th 2015

Voters passed the same-sex marriage referendum by 62 per cent to 38 per cent, with all but one of the State’s 43 constituencies voting Yes. At just more than 60 per cent, the turnout was higher than usual referendums, but still below the average number of votes cast at a general election. The final result saw 1,201,607 votes to allow same-sex marriage, with 734,300 against, giving the Yes side victory with a margin of 62.07 per cent to 37.93 per cent.

Only Roscommon-South Leitrim voted No, by a margin of 51 per cent to 49 per cent, while the highest Yes vote was in Dublin South East, 75 per cent to 25 per cent. The lowest Yes vote in the capital was Dublin North East, at 67 per cent-33 per cent.

Even areas which Yes campaigners feared might vote No voted in favour, although some by very narrow margins. Both Donegal constituencies voted Yes, although the margin in Donegal South West was just 0.05 per cent, or 33 votes. The final Yes tally in the constituency was 15,907 to 15,874 for No. Cavan-Monaghan was also tight, with 51 per cent for and 49 per cent against.

Out of a national electorate of 3,222,681, the total poll was 1,949,725 with 13,818 spoiled votes. The highest turnout was in Wicklow with 69 per cent, with Yes winning 62 per cent to 32 in the constituency. However, many individual polling stations saw turnouts of above 70 per cent.

Welcoming the results at a press conference in Dublin Castle following the official declaration, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said the strong Yes vote sent a “sound of pioneering leadership” from Ireland to the rest of the world.

Mr Kenny said the signal sent out on gay rights from Ireland – the first country to introduce same-sex marriage by way of popular vote – would be “heard loudly across the living world”. He said many gay people and their families waited on the results “almost like a vigil at the end of a long journey”.

“That Yes is heard loudly across the living world as a sound of pioneering leadership from our people, and hopefully it will also be a sound across the generations of gay men and women born, as we say, before our time who took their secrets when they moved on.”

Mr Kenny asked the thousands of young people who voted for the first time to maintain their interest in the political sphere “because your country needs that participation in our democratic process”.

Tánaiste Joan Burton said Ireland, known as a nation of storytellers, has “told quite some story” with its Yes vote, which she described as a “magical, moving moment”.

“Our people have spoken powerfully and profoundly. Together, we’ve chosen to make progress. We’ve chosen to create a more compassionate and egalitarian Constitution. We’ve said Yes to equality and Yes to love.” She said she was “immensely proud” of the role Labour “played in securing this referendum and helping to win it”.

Republic wakes to world of calm acceptance

Kathy Sheridan, May 25th 2015

Exhausted, elated, tearful, hungover, incredulous, grateful, flat broke. And, transcending it all, a radiant calm. Yesterday, Ireland woke up to a morning lacking the drama of double rainbows, breathless Twitter threads or heart-stopping catharsis. Instead, delicate brushstrokes of blue in the Irish sky seemed to reflect a world bathed in softer hues.

Etain Kidney was in her local SuperValu, in a state of “calm, blissful domesticity”. On Saturday at lunchtime the 31-year-old DIT lecturer had uncorked the bottle of Moët kept since her 30th birthday and toasted Ireland with her partner, Michelle, and friends.

Twenty-four hours later she was approaching the shopping with extreme care because the campaign has left her and a lot of gay people a tad low in disposable income. “We gave everything to Yes Equality. All the money we raised didn’t fall from the sky. That’s the really big part of this – this is about the people, so many people who gave so much,” she said, in the perkier tones ever heard from a woman forced to choose between bargain-priced apples and oranges.

As always in these reflective moments, the conversation shifted briefly to the bad days, to when she and Michelle signed up to civil partnership for practical reasons although they didn’t believe in it; to the ordinary-looking middle-aged man in a suit who jabbed his finger in her face and called her a “c***” during a canvass.

Then a swift shift to joyful memories, to their pledge of lifelong commitment at their Spanish “wedding”, to the woman in the bakery who gave them her sought-after doughnuts in a low moment, to her uncontrollably trembling hands as she put the X in the Yes box in the polling station.

A “positive visualisation” technique she employed in the depths of the campaign was to imagine the Sunday paper headlines proclaiming a Yes. Now here she was in SuperValu having just that moment, drinking in the exhilarating rainbow of front pages. “They’re exactly what I had been visualising.”

Like everyone else, she shies away from cliché when asked how it feels, but the same word crops up over and over: calm. “As a Liverpool supporter, it’s a strange feeling to wake up on the good side. You become cynical, you learn to manage your expectations, but now my uppermost feeling is calmness. I feel a weight has been lifted. I feel more confident, more Irish – and I don’t feel like a gay person anymore.”

That shaky X in the box, knowing it could – and would – have an immediate impact on their lives, has also left her feeling more politically engaged and empowered. To her surprise, she found herself applauding politicians at Dublin Castle on Saturday.

As did Vivian Cummins (56), back in Athy, Co Kildare, at the home he shares with his husband, Erney Breytenbach, and Jason, their 15-year-old foster son. There would be no big celebrations, just that “nice, inner, woozy feeling”, said the architect.

“I have always been proud to be gay and Irish. This morning being Irish triumphs. We are waking up in a new Ireland, the sun is shining and the sky hasn’t fallen in on our little rainbow nation. Ireland has said ‘Goodbye Catholic guilt, hello Celtic grá.’”

He had slept for 10 hours, the longest in two months. “I feel I’ve been holding my breath for all that time and now I can breathe again. There’s also the relief of knowing that I don’t have to canvass or feel guilty for not doing so.

“And the relief of not having to check myself that I’m wearing my Tá badge. I’ve had to wear my sexuality on my sleeve for two months, having to knock on strangers’ doors, discussing your most private, intimate thoughts and when it got stuck on surrogacy or things like that, all you had left was to beg – ‘Please. For me.’ It’s time to put it back in the closet. Let it be just one little part of me and not my defining characteristic.”

The overwhelming feeling now is of relief and gratitude. “For us, the huge thing about the Yes vote was to be able to give Jason a hug and look him straight in the eye after the result was announced that Ireland had affirmed that our little family unit is okay.

“For 10 years we’ve tried to raise and love that child since he came to us at aged five,” he says with his voice breaking.

“To see that dismissed in a poster caption [‘Two men can never replace a mother’s love’] made me feel physically ill. We’ve never sought to replace a mother’s love but, boy, can we replicate it.”

Last week, Vivian got a taste of a future Ireland when a hospital consultant referred to Erney as his “husband”. “That consultant could have had no idea what that meant to me. It was a sign of things to come.”

His gratitude extends to all of Ireland. “I’m delighted there was no urban-rural, young-old, male-female divide on the doorsteps and that was reflected in the results. That kindness, generosity and sheer compassion; I may never be able to thank all the people enough.

“Never again can it be said that no country has opted for same-sex marriage by popular vote. The impact of this will be colossal.”

And he heads back to a mundane, contented family Sunday, in which a Junior Cert looms.

The day after began with an accountancy lecture for Ronan McBride (30), a trainee accountant from Maynooth – one of the rare ones who woke up with an entirely clear head, having resisted the flowing prosecco to focus on his exams.

But he too is full of surprise and gratitude, especially towards people he “might have written off as anti-, people that I went to school with and didn’t keep in contact with, but who you saw posting on social media and places and now realise they’re on your side.” There’s no getting away from that word “acceptance”.

“Today, the result feels like more of a personal comfort, it gives a nice sense of quiet confidence,” he says. “And now that we’re over the frivolous and the fabulous – everyone is

entitled to the party – we remember the friends in their 40s and 50s who grew up in a different Ireland and for whom this is a *really* great day. For me, that’s an emotional thought.”

And for all of them, he says laughing, there is now the opportunity to grow “unhappily old with someone, just like everyone else”.

Although he has always voted, he sees how the process of canvassing, campaigning and the scent of the power to make a difference “might have awakened something in me that I didn’t realise lay within me”.

In Portlaoise, Catholic priest Fr Paddy Byrne was preparing his Sabbath sermon: “We have no reason to fear but embrace this new life and hope. God is love.”

Same-sex marriage may be legal by September

Stephen Collins, Marie O'Halloran, Ruadhán Mac Cormaic, May 25th, 2015

Work will begin this week to give effect to the referendum decision to amend the Constitution with the first same-sex marriages likely to take place as early as September.

Tánaiste Joan Burton said legislation would be brought before the Seanad and Dáil as early as possible, with the aim of getting it passed before the summer recess.

“That would mean that we would be in a position to have same-sex marriage celebrations, civil ceremonies by, probably, September,” she told reporters at the Africa Day celebrations in the Phoenix Park.

The Constitution will be formally amended in the coming days when President Michael D Higgins signs the Marriage Equality Bill into law, and a new sentence will be added to article 41 stating: “Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex.”

The amendment was approved by more than 1.2 million people, or 62 per cent of voters, with a 60.5 per cent turnout. Roscommon-South Leitrim was the only constituency to reject the amendment. The proposal to reduce presidential candidates’ age was defeated.

The approved amendment means same-sex marriages will have the same status under the Constitution as a marriage between a man and a woman.

To give effect to the amendment, the Oireachtas will enact the Marriage Bill 2015, which will state in law the principle that being of the same sex is no longer an impediment to marriage. It will also make clear that religious solemnisers will not be obliged to solemnise the marriage of a same-sex couple, and that the same prohibited degrees of relationship will apply to same-sex marriages.

Receiving the Tipperary International Peace Award last night, the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said: “The result sends an important message to the world, all people are entitled to enjoy their human rights and human dignity, no matter who they are or whom they love.”

Ireland has left ‘tolerance’ far behind

Fintan O’Toole, May 25th, 2015

The overwhelming victory for the Yes side in the marriage equality referendum is not as good as it looks.

It’s much better.

It looks extraordinary – little Ireland becoming the first country in the world to support same sex marriage by direct popular vote. But actually it’s about the ordinary. Ireland has redefined what it means to be an ordinary human being.

We’ve made it clear to the world that there is a new normal — that “ordinary” is a big, capacious word that embraces and rejoices in the natural diversity of humanity. LGBT people are now a fully acknowledged part of the wonderful ordinariness of Irish life.

It looks like a victory for tolerance. But it’s actually an end to mere toleration.

Tolerance is what “we” extend, in our gracious goodness, to “them”. It’s about saying “You do your own thing over there and we won’t bother you so long as you don’t bother us”.

The resounding Yes is a statement that Ireland has left tolerance far behind. It’s saying that there’s no “them” anymore. LGBT people are us — our sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, neighbours and friends. We were given the chance to say that. We were asked to replace tolerance with the equality of citizenship. And we took it in both arms and hugged it close.

It looks like a victory for articulacy. This was indeed a superb civic campaign. And it was marked by the riveting eloquence of so many people, of Una Mullally and Colm O’Gorman, of Mary McAleese and Noel Whelan, of Ursula Halligan and Colm Toibin, of Averil Power and Aodhan O Riordan and of so many others who spoke their hearts and their minds on the airwaves and the doorsteps. The Yes side did not rise to provocations and insults, it rose above them. Many people sacrificed their privacy and exposed their most intimate selves to the possibility of public rejection. Their courage and dignity made the difference.

Even so, this is not a victory for articulate statement. Deep down, it’s a victory for halting, fretful speech. How? Because what actually changed Ireland over the last two decades is hundreds of thousands of painful, stammered conversations that began with the dreaded words “I have something to tell you...” It’s all those moments of coming out around kitchen tables, tentative words punctuated by sobs and sighs, by cold silences and fearful hesitations. Those awkward, unhappy, often unfinished conversations are where the truths articulated so eloquently in the campaign were first uttered. And it was through them that gay men and lesbians became Us, our children, our families.

It looks like a victory for Liberal Ireland over Conservative Ireland. But it’s much more significant than that.

It's the end of that whole, sterile, useless, unproductive division. There is no longer a Liberal Ireland and a Conservative Ireland. The cleavage between rural and urban, tradition and modernity that has shaped so many of the debates of the last four decades has been repaired. This is a truly national moment — as joyful in Bundoran as it is Ballymun, in Castlerea as it is in Cobh.

Instead of Liberal Ireland and Conservative Ireland we have a decent, democratic Ireland.

It looks like LGBT people finally coming out of the closet. But actually it's more than that: it's Ireland coming out to itself. We had a furtive, anxious hidden self of optimism and decency, a self long clouded by hypocrisy and abstraction and held in check by fear. On Friday, this Ireland stopped being afraid of itself. The No campaign was all about fear — the fear that change could have only one vehicle (the handcart) and one destination (hell). And this time, it didn't work. Paranoia and pessimism lost out big time to the confident, hopeful, self-belief that Irish people have hidden from themselves for too long.

It looks like a victory for global cosmopolitanism. But actually it's a victory for intimacy.

It was intimacy that made Ireland such a horrible place for gay and lesbian people, for all those whose difference would be marked and spied on and gossiped about. But intimacy is a tide that is just as powerful when it turns the other way. Once LGBT people did begin to come out, they became known. Irish people like what they know. They like the idea of “home”.

On Friday, the wonderful spectacle of people coming back to vote, embodied for all of us that sense of home as place where the heart is — the strong, beating heart of human connection.

Finally, it looks like a defeat for religious conservatives. But nobody has been defeated. Nobody has been diminished. Irish people comprehensively rejected the notion that our republic is a zero sum game, that what is given to one must be taken from another. Everybody gains from equality — even those who didn't think they wanted it. Over time, those who are in a minority on this issue will come to appreciate the value of living in a pluralist democracy in which minorities are respected.

By pushing forward on what only recently seemed a marginal issue, the LGBT community has given all of Irish democracy one of its greatest days. It has given our battered republic a new sense of engagement, a new confidence, an expanded sense of possibility.

It has shown all of us that the unthinkable is perfectly attainable.

We now have to figure out how to rise to that daunting and exhilarating challenge.

‘The quiet Yes kept its counsel. They spoke when it mattered’

Miriam Lord, May 25th, 2015

So here was that appalling vista blossoming before us. And you know what? The view was wonderful.

In the end, two-thirds of Irish voters found it an easy jump from live and let live to love and let love. The scenes in and around Dublin Castle on Saturday were irresistible. For those still feeling conflicted about voting Yes, they will have witnessed the unadorned joy of people whose world they changed for the better and known then that they did the right thing.

It was the true stories that did it and they were all there: the friends and lovers and loving families, gay, straight and everything in between. The sun shone. It felt like the happiest place on earth.

Senator Katherine Zappone proposed on live TV. “Today in this new Ireland, Ann Louise Gilligan, will you marry me?” As the crowd cheered, Ann Louise accepted with a kiss.

“I said yes to Katherine 12 years ago at our marriage in Canada. Now we are bringing the yes back home to Ireland, our country. “Yes. Yes. Yes!”

It was such a special day the crowd in the castle courtyard lost the run of itself entirely and began cheering politicians to the rafters. Drag queen Panti Bliss tottered across the cobbles to deafening acclaim.

Extraordinary journey

Earlier in the afternoon, former president Mary McAleese told jubilant campaigners from Yes Equality that they had taken the people on an extraordinary journey. “You moved Ireland. You shifted the tectonic plates. You can feel them moving.”

In the morning at the RDS, as the boxes for Dublin city were opened, anxiety levels began to soar. Tallymen and -women took up their positions at the rails. The cross-party effort was augmented by volunteers from the Yes campaign. They were the ones whose hands were trembling as they marked Yes and No votes on tally sheets. But it didn’t take long to work out that the amendment would be carried. The only question was the size of the margin.

Kate Brady (26) from Booterstown watched the bundles piling up on the trestle table. A UN development aid worker, she came from Maputo in Mozambique to cast her vote.

“Many people put a lot of money into their weddings, so I thought I’d put my money into this. The way I saw it, if it doesn’t pass I’ll never forgive myself for not voting and if it does, I want to be here.”

The first politician to arrive was former Labour leader Eamon Gilmore. As the man most responsible for driving the referendum forward politically, he was given a hero’s welcome.

“Democracy is not a passive activity,” he said, praising young people in particular for mobilising on the issue.

Across generations

Yet, as the results came in, it emerged that the nation voted across the generations and the urban-rural divide. There had been a lot of noise made about the silent No voters. But in reality, the quiet Yes had been keeping its counsel. They spoke out when it mattered.

Labour TD John Lyons, one of the handful of openly gay politicians in Leinster House, had to come up with a new word to describe how exhausted and exhilarated he felt. “I’m emotional-less at this stage,” he said. We’d hate to see him when he’s emotional.

There were cheers for those campaigners who worked for years to bring the moment about. In the media scrum around Gráinne Healy, Brian Sheehan and Moninne Griffith, a young male voice stuck a serious note: “Moninne’s hair looks faaabulous, though.”

The vote took place on the feast of St Rita, patron saint of impossible causes. She can mark this one down as a win.

The party was in full swing by midday. Staff using electronic clickers processed people in and out Dublin Castle’s gates. As the afternoon progressed, it suddenly became apparent why the world is experiencing a prosecco shortage. Hawkers wandered through the crowds on Dame Street shouting, “Rainbow hats, flags and headbands!” – the process of “normalisation” already well under way. Welcome to the new normal.

On the cobbles there were dogs and babies in rainbow-striped babygros, modest picnics and impromptu parties, banners, balloons, feather boas and bubbles. Miriam O’Callaghan (treated as royalty) was doing her thing on the stage. Miss Panti rocked up with a pink flower in one hand and a mojito in the other.

Senator David Norris sat for a breather in the press room next to Senator Jim Walsh, who had opposed civil partnership and same-sex marriage. They chatted. Every so often, Norris spotted somebody he recognised. “Coo-eee!” he waved, with a big bold face on him.

Brian O’Driscoll and Amy Huberman wandered around the crowd for a while, babies in tow. Unlike other celebrities, they didn’t seek out the media. The babies had the faces kissed off them.

Environment minister Alan Kelly was wearing a blue-and-gold tie given to him by a colleague in Fáilte Ireland.

Damian O’Brien from Clonakilty died in 2009. A gay man, his body was found in the Grand Canal. “He told me to wear this tie on a special occasion. I can think of no better time to wear it for him.”

Gerry Adams appeared on stage, interposing himself between Panti and Katherine Zappone as they were waving to the crowd. “He’s doing well,” joked a reveller, “meeting a prince and a queen in the one week.”

The Minister for Public Expenditure looked on. “Let’s see Sinn Féin deal with same-sex marriage in the North now,” said Brendan Howlin, before declaring: “I’ll be drunk soon.”

Frances Fitzgerald was in shocking pink. By the end of the evening, she had to take off her shoes because her feet were killing her.

The Fianna Fáil leader was speaking in riddles. “I’ve Spanish blood in me,” he told *The Irish Times*.”

“Come again?”

“De Valera, like,” he said, his voice going all Cork. (It seems there is a Spanish connection in his family tree.)

And all the while on the big screen, the counties were, slowly, one by one, turning green. Except for Roscommon-South Leitrim, but that emigration county still managed to put up a sizeable Yes vote.

Back on the streets, we met Jack Stenson and Stefaan Verbruggen from Galway, who came home from London to vote. Both 27 now, they met at the university film club and became engaged on their eighth anniversary.

“I made a short movie of my proposal and hired out the cinema in London where we had our first date. Stefaan thought the film was going to be shite because there was nobody else there. We’re getting married next July on our 10th anniversary. The deposit is already paid.”

Can we see the engagement rings?

“We didn’t get any. We’re not into mengagement rings.”

And still the counties turned green. There was a huge roar when both Donegal constituencies declared. Finnian Curran rushed over and embraced his tearful dad. Donegal man Tom Curran, general secretary of Fine Gael, spoke movingly during the campaign about being a devout Catholic and “a proud, proud father to a gay son”.

Leo Varadkar walked in and was greeted like a movie star. He looked mortified and delighted. We feared the only way he might be able to leave the castle confines at the end of the evening would be in the back of a van with a blanket over him. Everyone was hugging.

Colm O’Gorman hugged Una Mullally who hugged David Norris who hugged Averil Power who hugged Katherine Zappone who hugged Simon Coveney who hugged Jerry Buttimer.

Italia ’90

“It’s like Italia ’90,” said former Fianna Fáil politician Pat Carey, who came out recently at the age of 67

It was coming close to the declaration. Inevitably, the crowd started to sing. “All you need is love . . .” But there was no sign of three Cork constituencies turning green, so they changed the words and sang, “All we need is Cork . . .”

Norris appeared at the front of the stage “Speech!” cried the crowd. He duly obliged. For a man of his age, he has a great set of lungs. Ireland “a small, independent republic,” he said, was sending a message to the world. “Liberté, égalité, fraternité,” he bellowed and the crowd went wild.

Finally, after the obligatory Fields of Athenry (in harmony), returning officer Ríona Ní Fhlanghaile appeared with a “Hello everybody”.

They all knew what was coming, but they watched the screen intently, hands up to mouths, willing her to say the words, to make it real and not some stupid dream. She did, and the place erupted in a blur of kissing and weeping. Babies were waved, along with arms and flags, wigs, prosecco, high hopes and a life-sized cut out of Mrs Brown.

And then, out of nowhere, the crowd began to sing the national anthem. Some held up handwritten signs: “Thank you.” They sang, heartfelt, right to the end, proud to be Irish, flying little tricolours next to their rainbows.

Children’s rights campaigner Fergus Finlay wiped away a tear. “Well, that’s unmanned me, I’m afraid,” he croaked.

“Yesterday, we stood up and today we were counted,” said Gráinne Healy.

As the Taoiseach and Tánaiste held a final press conference, music from many parties drifted across the castle garden. Dame Street, George’s Street and Parliament Street en fete. Ireland’s people voted to stand up for their gay and lesbian equals so they can live in our shelter and no longer in our shadow, declared Enda.

Joan Burton echoed his words on “a magical, moving moment, when the world’s beating heart is in Ireland”.

Oh dear. We were warned. What have we done?

Your world will change when you come out as the person you are

Una Mullally, May 25th, 2015

My girlfriend, Sarah, tells a story about a lesbian night in Dublin in the 1990s. She had just established the gay society in DIT with her friend Barry, making them the only two members. Lesbian nightlife was thin on the ground, and as far as she was concerned there were just a handful of gay women her age out in Dublin. One women's club night was on a Saturday once a month, upstairs in JJ Smyth's on Aungier Street. Entry was £1.50 for the unwaged.

'Blanket on the Ground'

There was carpet on the floor and cigarette butts in the ashtrays and bad music and warm beer. But one of the popular songs always perplexed Sarah. When the opening chords of Billie Jo Spears's *Blanket on the Ground* were played by the DJ there would be a rush to the dance floor. Sarah just didn't get it. Then one night, the lyrics clicked with her:

"Remember back when love first found us/
We'd go slipping out of town/
And we'd love beneath the moonlight/
On a blanket on the ground/
I'll get the blanket from the bedroom/
And we'll go walking once again/
To that spot down by the river/
Where our sweet love first began/
Just because we are married/
Don't mean we can't slip around/
So let's walk out by the moonlight/
And lay the blanket on the ground."

As the women sang the lyrics at the top of their voices, the penny dropped. These women were married. "Just because we are married/ Don't mean we can't slip around." This night was an escape from their husbands. For a couple of nights a year they would slip out into JJ Smyth's and be who they were, before returning to the married, heterosexual closet in which they were hiding. Sarah often wonders: where did those women go?

While gay men have borne the brunt of physical and legislative homophobia in Ireland, due to an adversity and obsession homophobes have with male sexual acts, the suffering of lesbians was much more insidious. They were made invisible. Women's sexuality has always been locked away in Ireland, like covering the good furniture with plastic sheeting, so there has always been something slightly more subcultural about female gayness here. It was perhaps easier to hide, but then the prospect of hiding forever became very real.

The act of coming out

I'm sure over the next few years there will be countless insightful theses and international studies and analysis projects done on why Ireland passed marriage equality. We could be here all day talking about campaign strategies and seismic social shifts. But there is one very simple building block to all of this, and that is the act of coming out. It is visibility that changes attitudes. You cannot hate what you know.

When people talk about there being "more" gays and lesbians around in Ireland these days, there are not, there are the same number of gay people, it's just that now they are able to come out and not be instantly shamed or beaten or arrested or driven out of the country, as is the case in so many nations around the world. This referendum was really won by any Irish person who

ever came out, and the person who they came out to accepting them, and giving them the space to live truthfully.

I think over the past few months the LGBT community of Ireland has given the nation a lot to think about when it comes to how to hold yourself; with strength, with dignity, with pride, with resolve, with solidarity and with purpose. But straight people can also learn a lot from the act of coming out, which is not just about self-examination but is also about living a true life. Plenty of people spend their lives doing things they don't want to do. Plenty of people spend their lives being who they don't want to be. Coming out is one of the things that exposes us: I am what I am, and that's that. Deal with it.

When thousands of people were crying and hugging at Dublin Castle on Saturday, myself among them, I couldn't help but think of all of those who lived secret lives, those who never even had the courage to live secret lives at all and hid forever, and how so much of their potential in society was lost. They never got to know the joy of holding their partner's hand in the street. They were denied the experience of being protected by the Constitution. They never knew what it would feel like for people to stand up for you. Their love was never going to be public. They hid. And hiding eats away at you.

Whatever about being gay, maybe you're hiding inside an unhappy relationship. Maybe you're hiding your real ambition in a job that isn't satisfying you. Well, look at your gay brothers and sisters and think how they've had it. And then come out as your true self. It won't be as hard as you think. Honour those who never had the privilege of living how they yearned to. Watch how your world shifts when you're finally in control of it.

‘It’s not easy being a Yes Roscommon voter’

Patsy McGarry, May 24th, 2015

It’s not easy being a Yes Rossie in these post-referendum days, where but to think is to be full of sorrow and to be in a place where primrose and blue is worn with less pride.

Even cheering on the beloved county against London on Sunday seemed less spontaneous, the victory not quite as sweet.

Roscommon was always different, one of its many attractions.

It is the only county in Ireland never to have returned the same set of politicians to Dáil Éireann since the State was founded in 1922.

With East Galway, it looks like being the only constituency, which will return two Independent TDs out of its three Dáil seats to Leinster House at the next general election. They being Denis Naughten and Michael Fitzmaurice.

Roscommon was the first county to elect a Sinn Féin MP.

That happened in February, 1917 with the election of Count Plunkett, father of Joseph Mary Plunkett who was executed nine months earlier in May 1916, being one of the leaders of the Easter Rising.

Famously in 1987 it saw to it that Seán Doherty was the first TD declared elected in the general election of that year, a response to a perceived scorn of the Dublin 4 set.

As famously it withdrew its vote from him in the general election of 1989 when he stood for the Dáil and the European Parliament.

He failed to be elected to either.

In Roscommon, they will defend you when you’re down but, just as quickly, you’ll be cut down to size if they think you’re getting too big for your boots.

But its vote last Friday was contrary in a different way. It was disappointing.

There are explanations. Roscommon is the most rural county in Ireland.

Its biggest town is Roscommon town, which has a population of just over 5,000.

It is also a county with one of the more unusual population structures in Ireland. There is a large dependent population, of under 18s and over 65s, with a disproportionately low number of people in the intervening 18 to 65 group.

Further, it has proportionately one of the highest third-level “take-ups” of any county in Ireland in the post 18 age category.

Inevitably, these young people are unable to get relevant jobs in their home county when they qualify so they end up working elsewhere in Ireland or abroad.

It is a county that also has been riven by emigration for generations, pulling many more from its vital working life adults category.

This has been even more the case over recent years, when whole swathes of the county have lost their 20-somethings.

An example is from my own family. A nephew and his girlfriend returned from Australia last year and got married at Christmas.

Among their guests at the wedding were approximately 30 young people from Ballaghaderreen and surrounds.

That's the case with just one small town (population 2,000) in the county.

Replicate it many times over and you have some idea why Roscommon-South Leitrim was the only one of 43 constituencies to vote No last Friday.

Another factor is that most of Co Roscommon is in the Catholic diocese of Elphin and the Church of Ireland of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh.

The Bishops of those two dioceses, Catholic Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran and Church of Ireland Bishop of Kilmore Ferran Glenfield, were among the clergy most publicly opposed to a Yes vote in the referendum.

Considering all of these factors it is remarkable that 17,615 people in Roscommon South Leitrim voted Yes last Friday, just 1,029 short of those who voted No.

It is testimony to the tolerance, decency, and generosity of people in the county and 17,615 reasons to be proud where Yes Rossies are concerned. Of which I am one

Remarkable journey from criminal to equal citizen

David Norris, May 25th, 2015

What a wonderful extraordinary day Saturday was! This is a time for joy and non-triumphalist celebration. I have been privileged in my life to follow a remarkable trajectory from being defined into criminality, challenging the criminal law, losing in the High Court and Supreme Courts, finally winning out by a margin of one vote in Europe, seeing the criminal law changed and then starting to build on this basis for human and civil rights for gay people.

Fifty years ago my first boyfriend said to me outside a Wimpy Bar on Burgh Quay: "I love you David but I can't marry you." I still remember that all these years later.

Go forward 10 years when, after a debate on decriminalisation, the late Mona Bean O'Cribben remarked vehemently to me: "This isn't just about decriminalisation. You have a homosexual agenda. You won't be satisfied until you have homosexual marriage." I turned to her and said: "What a wonderful idea, thank you very much madam, have you got any other suggestions?"

Having got rid of the criminal law we started the process of building on human and civil rights for gay people. One of the things I took under consideration was the question of marriage. At that time 20 years ago, I felt that the word marriage would be a red rag to a bull in conservative Catholic Ireland. So I deconstructed marriage to see what the tangible practical benefits flowing from that institution were and, having done so, reassembled them in a package which I called domestic or civil partnership.

In 2003/2004, I introduced the first Civil Partnership Bill in the Seanad. It was a good forthright debate but after agreement the Bill was left without vote on the order paper.

This led to the political parties taking up the challenge and creating their own civil partnership legislation. The legislation that was produced was an advance but a stumbling and faulty one. The language was insulting. Heterosexual couples, married or not, were described as having a family home, gay people were only allowed a shared home. You can share a home with a dog or a parrot. That's why I described it as a "dog licence".

Children in limbo

Even more importantly, children were completely omitted from the Bill. In fact, gay people for a number of years had been able to put themselves forward to adopt and a number did adopt children. The legal relationship was only with the adopted parent and if that parent died the child was left bereft of any legal connection with the other nurturing spouse. I considered this an absolute violation of the rights of children. I make no apology whatever for registering this fact and continuing to press on Government the absolute necessity of dealing with the children who were left in limbo by the legislation. This is the prerogative and obligation for an independent parliamentarian. I note, by the way, with amusement how some of the leading figures in the No campaign who are members of the Seanad, and who quite viciously opposed civil partnership legislation and attempted to frustrate its passage through filibuster, are now saying that civil partnership is wonderful.

The Yes side in my opinion behaved with great dignity throughout but were a little inclined to be deferential to the No side. The No side on the other hand were not the slightest bit reticent in trashing or ignoring the views of acknowledged experts. It was said by the No side that there were already existing equality provisions in the Constitution. As indeed there are. But these protocols were fully in place when I sued the Government to remove the criminal sanction against gay people. Nevertheless, the High Court and Supreme Courts found that there was nothing in these provisions to invalidate the sending to jail for periods from 10 years to life imprisonment of gay men. So much for the protections of the equality provisions. That is why it was so utterly necessary to put a protection for gay people for the first time into the Constitution and recognise their rights.

Some of the churches claimed that their rights would be infringed. But this is civil marriage not religious marriage. Nobody contemplates trying to compel churches like the Catholic Church to marry gay couples. Whether they ever do or not is their decision and theirs alone. But taking into account that they routinely bless agricultural instruments, domestic pets and bombs, I personally don't think it would kill them to give a blessing to two people who love each other. And as for the domestic pets, as I have said in the past, how do they know they weren't blessing lesbian goldfish? It is impossible to know. I did, however, get the occasional laugh, as for example when the perfect family illustrated in a No poster contacted the media to say they were in fact Yes supporters.

Emancipation

Then what about those people who said that their marriages would be diminished? I very much doubt if married couples all over the country woke up yesterday, looked at each other and said: "Oh darling, I feel so much less married to you today." I never believed in this parsimonious, dog-in-the-manger approach. I am with Daniel O'Connell, the great apostle of Catholic emancipation. When some mean-minded members of the Protestant ascendancy suggested that giving freedom and dignity to their Catholic fellow citizens would diminish their own position, O'Connell replied that freedom and dignity were not finite resources. Paradoxically, by giving them to other people you actually increased the general sum total of these virtues and of the public welfare.

It is all over now, as the Rolling Stones used to sing, and I forgive and forget the No campaigners. But I am immensely grateful to my heterosexual fellow citizens who went out of their way to vote Yes. Without them we could not have won. I will always be grateful, having been voted by a majority of the citizens of the Irish Republic to be at last a free and equal member of society.

Exhausting, draining and life changing: the Yes campaign

Noel Whelan, May 25th, 2015

In Yes campaign headquarters we took to calling them Bráinne. Such was the symmetry between Brian Sheehan and Gráinne Healy, the co-directors of Yes Equality that their names began to merge. Together they were the axis around which this extraordinary campaign revolved.

The Yes Equality story is one of how the two pillar organisations for gay and lesbian rights, with some input from a handful of political and media specialists, built the most extensive and effective civic society campaign ever seen in Irish politics.

The nerve centre of Yes Equality was a medium sized room on the first floor of temporary offices in Clarendon Street in Dublin's city centre. More than 30 operatives, mostly volunteers, were crammed into this room.

At its centre, sharing a desk, Brian and Gráinne tick-tacked intuitively, led softly, and confidently made the hundreds of big and small decisions necessary to build and steer a large, complex, purpose-built, temporary political machine.

Across from them sat a team which drafted, designed and then co-ordinated the distribution of almost three million items of literature. Behind them sat a team which grew and nurtured 60 local Yes Equality groups into an impressive ground force. Just over from them another team planned and implemented a 29-day YesBus tour which visited 80 towns on an 11,000 kilometre trek across Ireland.

A couple of young dynamos ran an impressive social media campaign. The same team created 150 separate graphics, 50 featuring quotes from well-known figures calling for a yes vote. In addition, two crowd-funding appeals raised almost €160,000 in online donations. A small crew also focused on extensive outreach to businesses and employers.

Other enterprising staffers ran the Yes Equality merchandise operation. Through its online store and a pop-up shop in St Stephen's Green they sold 6,500 T-Shirts, 2,300 tote bags and 800 hi-vis jackets and shifted half a million soon-to-be iconic Tá or Yes badges. This was the campaign that made political wearables trendy in Ireland.

In the same room a busy communications team managed a detailed calendar of innovative media events, generated a steady stream of press releases, monitored all broadcast coverage and placed opinion pieces in national and regional press. They also channelled the substantial research and rebuttal operation put in place by Lawyers for Yes and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties.

All of this activity was backed up by strong creative from the design agency Language and later from Havas Advertising and by a steady flow of campaign videos, many from an in-house videographer who volunteered full-time for the last three weeks.

Brian and Gráinne's willingness to seek out and adopt advice from a wider circle proved crucial. They learnt from previous referenda in Ireland and from previous losses for marriage

equality propositions in the United State. They orientated Yes Equality to focus on the “million in the middle”. They also mobilised the gay and lesbian community and their families and friends to intense activity.

Early decisions about tone were key to Yes Equality’s success. In late March we settled on the theme of “I’m Voting Yes, Ask Me Why” an open conversational approach designed to persuade and reassure voters.

This tone shaped events all over the country which, instead of the usual podiums and platform parties, involved local people, gay and straight, taking a microphone and telling why a Yes vote mattered to them personally. It was politics as never done before.

The campaign on the doorsteps was also one of conversations. Gay men and lesbian woman stood in front of voters together with friends and families and a flood of volunteers. Such was the organisational capacity that on the last Saturday high street canvasses were launched simultaneously at 70 different locations nationwide.

The key task for the Yes campaign was to avoid being provoked into public displays of anger. Instead Yes Equality sought to create a space where the public could see and hear the anguish caused by discrimination and the repression of sexual orientation.

In the atmosphere created by this tone, extraordinary things began to happen. The campaign became one of storytelling. Gay men and lesbian women told of their lives and parents spoke out publicly in support of their gay and lesbian children.

Maintaining this calm and respectful tone required rigid campaign discipline in the face of increasingly nasty messaging from the No side.

There was no complacency in this effort. The campaign days started at 8.30am with Brian and Gráinne chairing a roll-call at which each staff members updated colleagues on their work over the previous 24 hours.

Every Tuesday morning a political advisory group met as a sounding board for campaign strategy. Each Tuesday lunchtime the principals from GLEN, Marriage Equality and ICCL met as a supervisory committee. Every Wednesday at midday the general secretaries of the main political parties met at Yes Equality HQ. Each Wednesday evening leaders of partner organisations running their own campaigns for Yes did the same.

Every Sunday we met all the canvass leaders across Dublin and we had regular conference calls with canvass leaders nationwide.

Each evening at 5pm there was an hour-long communications co-ordination meeting. The campaign day ended with a late night four-way conference call between Brian, Gráinne, campaign communication adviser Cathy Madden, and myself to focus on big media outings and overall strategy.

This level of coordination meant that very little happened in the campaign that was not planned or expected.

The only real surprise was the timing and extent of the Catholic church's intervention. The bishops came in earlier and more stridently than we had originally anticipated. Our only unscheduled conference call was at 6.30pm on Saturday 3rd May after RTÉ reported details of a pastoral letter from Archbishop Eamon Martin to be read at churches that weekend.

We toyed with the idea of a head-on confrontation with the hierarchy for its failure to distinguish between civil and religious marriage. That would certainly have mobilised our base. We opted instead however to express disappointment at the tenor of the bishop's interventions while spotlighting statements from dozens of high profile priests about why they were voting Yes.

We worried when the bishops took to the pulpits and airwaves again on the following two Sundays and when Archbishop Diarmuid Martin toggled out as lead striker on the No Side for the last days of the campaign. Ultimately however our assessment that the bishops would have little impact on middle ground voters proved correct.

Last weekend, after two weeks without polling data, four polls came together. They presented no surprises. Detailed canvass returns the previous week showed Yes at about two to one over No. Each of the newspaper polls confirmed this. The intensive phase of, at times noisy, media debates had, as we expected, little impact on most voters.

Yes Equality's focus for the last week was on a massive Get Out the Vote Operation implemented on a scale never previously seen in an Irish referendum. It all paid off.

Like all campaigns this one was physically exhausting but, like no other, it was emotionally draining. There was just so much at stake; the outcome mattered to the lives of so many.

We learnt much about the potential of a new positive style of campaigning which can engage the young. Irish politics has been altered by this campaign in ways yet to be determined. Everyone active in Yes Equality has also been changed by his or her involvement – I know I was.