



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES  
39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX  
[www.catholicchurch.org.uk](http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk)

Catherine Utley



21 November 2018

Dear Catherine

Thank you for your letter to HE Cardinal Nichols of 7 November regarding the extension of civil partnerships to platonic, blood-related partners. I have been asked to reply as this issue falls within my area of work for the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

As you know, this issue arose when the Civil Partnership Act was being debated by Parliament back in 2004. An amendment to extend civil partnership eligibility to blood relatives who had lived together for a minimum period was carried by the House of Lords but was later removed by the Commons. More recently, following a ruling by the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister announced her intention to consult on either extending civil partnerships to heterosexual couples or to abolish them altogether. As you point out, there are also two Private Members' Bills currently before Parliament.

There are two points which might guide our approach to this issue. Firstly, for us it is a matter of principle to promote and protect marriage as a great social good. Marriage is not just any relationship between human beings it is, along with the family, the foundation block of society. Secondly, there is clearly a lacuna in the current law which means that siblings living together for a prolonged time are denied the sharing of tax allowances, pension rights, inheritance tax benefits and so forth which are available to others. This is clearly unjustly discriminatory, and the situation ought to be remedied.

Private Members' Bills provide welcome opportunities for debate in Parliament but are clearly not a reliable way of improving the law. Two things ought to now happen which could provide a way forward. The Government ought to bring forward its proposals for consultation on the reform of civil partnerships which the Prime Minister announced almost two months ago. The Government also ought to recognise the unfair situation in which siblings who live together over a prolonged period are currently placed, and then set out how it intends to remedy that.

I hope that this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Gregory Pope  
Assistant General Secretary