

Queen Elizabeth Gives 'Royal Assent' to Same-Sex Marriage Bill

England and Wales became the 16th and 17th countries in the world to recognize gay marriage after Queen Elizabeth II gave "royal assent" to a **same-sex marriage** bill.

Under the new law, gay men and women will be able to join together in civil ceremonies or in church services—although no religious denomination will be forced to carry out such services.

Cheers, laughter and clapping broke out in the House of Commons when Speaker John Bercow announced the bill had been approved.

The bill's passage saw many angry exchanges. It had the full support of Prime Minister David Cameron, despite the consternation of many in his own Conservative Party. The leaders of two other main parties, the Liberal Democrats and New Labour, also backed it. But some political commentators predict Cameron's gay-friendly attitudes will cost him at the next election in 2015.

The Roman Catholic Church fought the bill and the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales swiftly issued a statement of its displeasure:

"With this new legislation, marriage has now become an institution in which openness to children, and with it the responsibility on fathers and mothers to remain together to care for children born into their family unit, are no longer central. That is why we were opposed to this legislation on principle."

The Church of England does not allow same-sex marriages.

But to the delight—and relief—of most people in the United Kingdom, the bill was passed by landslide votes in both houses of Parliament.

Separate legislation has been presented to the Scottish government to make **same-sex marriage** legal. Debates are expected to begin in Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, in October or November.

Prior to the new law, England and Wales allowed civil unions for gays but human rights activists said that wasn't good enough because it created the image that gays were somehow inferior to heterosexuals.