



## MARRIAGE:

### One Man and One Woman in a Covenant of Love and Life

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Church upholds the goodness and beauty of the marriage of a man and woman embraced in a lifelong covenant of mutual love. In the Church it is lived under the grace of a Sacrament. This union, ordained by God, is blessed by the Creator with the promise to support the couple to realise their own happiness and through their love to receive the gift of children.

Many people are confused about marriage. Is Australian law – which recognises marriage as a union of a man and a woman – unjust? Are we as Catholics being discriminatory and un-Christian to homosexual persons if we believe marriage can only be between a man and a woman? To answer these questions, we need to reflect on what marriage is and where it has come from.

Marriage is a natural institution. As Jesus taught, a man and a woman leave their parents and join themselves to each other and “become one flesh” (Mt 19:6, cf Gen 2:24). This was the plan of God from the beginning. God created man and woman for each other; equal but different. Men and women complement each other physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. The strength and fruitfulness of marriage flows from this natural complementarity.

Marriage is more than having one's love for another legally recognised. It has been protected and supported by the law because governments have recognised its contribution to the good of the society. The family based on strong, happy marriages plays a unique role in generating children and providing the best environment in which children can be nurtured and educated. It helps to ensure the future and wellbeing of society.

In marriage the sexual love of a couple reaches its fulfilment when it is also open to life. This is only possible between a man and a woman. Children are conceived and born through an act of intimate love. This helps them know who they are and where they came from. They know that they have a father and mother whose commitment to each other has brought them into being.

Unjust discrimination is always wrong, but marriage as it is currently understood does not discriminate against same-sex couples. The relationship between a man and woman cannot be the same as between two men or two women. A same-sex relationship may involve physical intimacy, but because this physical relationship is contrary to God's plan for sexuality, it cannot receive the gift of a child. Only the love and intimacy of a man and woman in marriage makes one flesh, and it is the intimacy of a man and a woman that creates new life. Marriage is so different that it is actually unjust to treat it as the same as any other sexual relationship.



The right to marry is affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), but it is a special kind of right which only a man and a woman can fulfil through each other. A same-sex couple is not being denied a right to something which they cannot fulfil.

Jesus calls us all to live our sexuality chastely, including married people. Homosexual people are loved members of our families and parish communities, and along with other unmarried people are invited to grow in the freedom that arises from not being controlled by our sexual desires. Many homosexual persons strive courageously to live chaste and generous lives based on strong friendships. Their faithful witness is a gift to the Church. It is also a gift to a society which says sexuality is simply about pleasure and self-fulfilment.

Men and women who are homosexual and those in same-sex relationships must be treated with compassion, respect and sensitivity. However it does not respect or serve anyone to deny them the right to the truth about what marriage is, and about what the Church teaches on sexuality and marriage.

To have children a same-sex couple must involve a third party. The child is not biologically linked to both members of the couple, and misses out on the distinctive and equally important emotional, psychological and spiritual contribution of both a father and a mother. A same-sex couple, however loving, cannot give this to children. While sadly there are many circumstances where a child does not have the benefit of both a father and mother, to deliberately remove this possibility is unjust to the child.

Marriages and families sometimes break down. This is always a great sorrow and not what was hoped for. Single parents work heroically to raise their children without the help of a spouse, but most still have the deep hope that their children will form happy and lasting marriages, blessed with children.

Legislating for same-sex marriage will change the meaning of marriage for everyone and radically reshape the cultural and social structures of our country. Instead of removing discrimination and injustice, it will cause them.

Catholics could be placed in a position of vulnerability because our belief in marriage will be at odds with any such law. There may be pressure to compel us to recognise same sex marriage in our schools, charitable, welfare, aged care and adoption services. This we cannot do. We reassert our right to live, teach and publicly express the age-old Judeo-Christian belief about marriage.

In some overseas places that have changed or are changing the definition of marriage, individuals, schools and churches have already been subject to legal action or investigation because of their belief in marriage as a union of life and love between a man and a woman. This imposition violates the separation of church and state. The rights of parents and children are affected when schools have to teach that other sexual relationships are the same as marriage and have to be taught equally. Qualified people have been deemed unfit for public office or even to practise in their professions because they hold a personal belief that marriage is between a man and a woman. Any opposition to same-sex marriage is treated as homophobia and bigotry, aiming to shut down public debate. These distortions must be resisted in the name of truth.

Marriage is an institution between a man and a woman, uniquely designed by God, as a source for their own happiness and as the means for the generation and formation of children. The Catholic Church defends the right of every human being to be treated justly. No one, including those in our families and communities who are homosexual, should be subject to unjust discrimination or unequal treatment. At the same time, preserving the meaning of marriage and celebrating its beauty and dignity is the best means possible for recognising and respecting the love-giving and life-giving dimensions of our humanity; the best long-term protection for parents and children. The Catholic community upholds marriage and supports and defends those who are committed to this life-giving and ancient foundation of society.



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