



Speaking the truth in love

Eph 4:15

15 September 2017

Dear Principals, Teachers and Support Staff

In the coming weeks you will have the opportunity to participate in the postal survey on marriage, and to consider whether marriage should be redefined in Australian law so that individuals of the same sex can marry. We realise that you will all be reflecting on this question and respect your right to do so. However, given the significance of this issue and its implications for you, our Church and our Catholic schools, we thought we should write to you directly.

Amidst all the high emotions of the current debate, there's a risk that people may lose sight of what marriage actually is. Put simply, love and mutual respect always matter but not all loves are marriages. Our Christian understanding of marriage is that it is between a man and a woman, that it is life-long, and that it is open to children. This truth is revealed in the Bible and the Catholic tradition. It has been forcefully restated by Pope Francis, who thinks redefining marriage would be "a step backwards for humanity". As he points out, this understanding of marriage is by no means just the view of Catholics or Christians: until very recently people of all religions and none, and of every major civilization, culture and legal system we know of, thought the same about this "natural institution".

Some people argue that we should distinguish between marriage as defined in civil law and marriage as understood by the Church. Of course, the traditional understanding of marriage has always informed and been protected by the civil law in Australia, as is still the case in the vast majority of countries around the world. But for many people, whatever the law calls a marriage will be all that marriage is. Therefore, redefining marriage will not only undermine the traditional understanding even amongst Christians of husband, wife and children, but also have ramifications for everyone in our community.

We already know how hard it is to sustain marriages and marriage-based families in a culture that is so often unsupportive, let alone in one that is even more confused about what marriage is. Overseas experience suggests that once marriage is redefined in this way, it compromises many of our freedoms, especially our freedoms of speech, religion and association. In those places, schools and school-teachers have found themselves having to teach views that are contrary to their religious faith and parents no longer have any say in what their children are taught in relation to the family, human sexuality and personal identity. These ideas are forced upon all teachers and families; it is faith-based schools that have the most to lose.

It is important to realise that no protections of our freedoms have been proposed so far by those who are pressing us to vote Yes. We are being asked to vote blind, without seeing what changes will be made to the law and what rights, if any, will be guaranteed.

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We've all heard the arguments for redefining marriage: "Love is love, after all... All love is equal... Anything else is discriminatory." But much of this public 'debate' has been very one-sided, with well-known politicians, corporates, media and sporting organisations supporting the Yes campaign, and the voices of ordinary Australians being drowned out along the way. Sadly, there has been a campaign to label all those who support traditional marriage as 'bigots' and 'homophobes', so as to silence all opposition.

So let us say very clearly no to bigotry. Most of us know and love someone who is same-sex attracted and we want only the best for them. But we also love marriage as traditionally understood and want to maintain what is special about this relationship. We are being pressured to choose one or the other. But we are determined to keep respecting both. Saying 'no' to same-sex marriage doesn't mean that you love anyone any less.

We are aware that many Australians have strongly held views about the marriage debate, while others are yet to make a decision. In forming your opinion on this issue, we would urge people to be respectful of others and consider all the consequences of changing an institution that has been the foundation of our society.

As leaders within the Catholic community, we encourage you to reflect upon the core question - 'What is Marriage really about?' - and on the likely significant consequences of redefining marriage for faith-based schools and believers in traditional marriage. This vote and any subsequent law will affect us all. We will be voting NO and encourage you to do the same. God give us all compassion, wisdom and courage.

Yours sincerely in Christ



Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP
Archbishop of Sydney



Dr Dan White
Executive Director
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For further information about the postal survey, marriage and the consequences of redefining marriage you can visit:

<http://sydneycatholic.org/marriageinfo/>

<https://www.coalitionformarriage.com.au/>