

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Federal Election will take place on Saturday, 2 July 2016. It is important that we all cast our vote in accordance with our conscience. A Catholic conscience is always informed by a profound respect for the dignity of the human person, from conception until natural death, and for the common good of the community.

Values we cherish are at stake in this election, including our religious freedom, the meaning of marriage, our treatment of those fleeing war and persecution, the right of parents to educate their children in a way which respects their religious and moral beliefs,

and the responsibility to respect the dignity and innocence of children in their school environment. Clearly, this is not an exhaustive list of considerations. But I believe these matters are of vital importance because they enable us – and all our fellow Australians – to live, work, raise our children, serve our communities and contribute to our nation in a way that is consistent with our deepest beliefs.

This election will be particularly decisive for the meaning of marriage. Understood as the mutual love of a man and a woman, open to the gift of children, marriage helps to form and support our society. Where marriages are strong, children grow up with the love of both their father and their mother; they are able to know who they are and where they have come from. Where marital culture is weak or people are confused about the very meaning of marriage, families are less likely to be formed or to stick together. If the legal definition of marriage is changed then both our families and our nation will suffer.

Our Archdiocesan Life, Marriage and Family Centre, in conjunction with the Justice and Peace Office, have prepared the following guide to the position of the major parties on the important issues I have listed above.

Let us pray for our leaders, for all those men and women called to public service, and for our fellow citizens as they approach the coming elections, that they may recognise and defend those Christian values which have given us the freedoms and the social capital that we cherish today.

(Most Rev) Anthony Fisher OP

Archbishop of Sydney

A Special Note re the Australian Senate

Persons elected to the Australian Senate (Upper House) play an important and influential role and often exercise the balance of power. Parties which strongly defend the dignity of the human person in relation to life, marriage, family and religious freedom include the **Christian Democratic Party (CDP), Democratic Labour Party (DLP) and the Family First Party (FFP).**

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“Nobody may be forced to act against his convictions, nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience in religious matters, in private or public.”
(Second Vatican Council, Dignitatis Humanae, 2, 1)

MARRIAGE

“A union of a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life” *(Marriage Act 1961).*

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

A program which introduces children and teens to the concept of “gender fluidity” and includes activities such as role-playing being in a sexually active same-sex relationship.

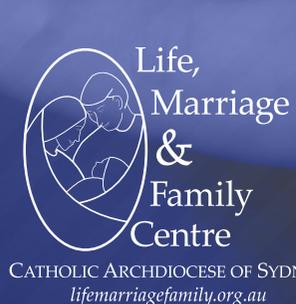
IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

“A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter.”¹⁹
(Pope Francis)

1 - Sky News, Australian Agenda, March 6, 2016. **2** - “Religious freedom fundamentally important – Attorney General George Brandis”, Catholic Communications, August 14, 2014. **3** - ALP National Election Platform, 196. **4** - Michael Safi, “Why Knot? A spirited panel discussion on marriage equality – as it happened”, The Guardian, March 31, 2016. **5** - David Crowe & Sid Maher, “Federal election 2016: Bill Shorten backs religious safeguards”, The Australian, May 25, 2016. **6** - Paul Karp, “Greens promise to end religious exemptions to Sex Discrimination Act”, The Guardian, May 17, 2016. **7** - Paul Karp, “Greens promise to end religious exemptions to Sex Discrimination Act”, The Guardian, May 17, 2016. **8** - Andrew Tillett, “Ditch gay marriage plebiscite: Shorten”, The West Australian, February 1, 2016. **9** - Andrew Tillett, “Ditch gay marriage plebiscite: Shorten”, The West Australian, February 1, 2016. **10** - <http://greens.org.au/marriage-equality>. **11** - “Press Conference on Safe Schools Resources” **12** - “Statement on Safe Schools Coalition” **13** - Joe Kelly, “Safe Schools program: Shorten commits to funding, position on exemptions unclear”, The Australian, May 18, 2016. **14** - Joe Kelly, “Safe Schools program: Shorten commits to funding, position on exemptions unclear”, The Australian, May 18, 2016. **15** - http://janet-rice.greensmps.org.au/sites/default/files/20160517_lgbti_rights.pdf. **16** - Paul Karp, “Greens promise to end religious exemptions to Sex Discrimination Act”, The Guardian, May 17, 2016. **17** - <http://greens.org.au/refugees>. **18** - <http://greens.org.au/refugees>. **19** - Pope Francis, message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014.

CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY
FEDERAL ELECTION GUIDE 2016

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Coalition has indicated that they will support legal protections for clergy should the nation vote for same-sex marriage. To date, the Coalition has not confirmed whether it will support protections for small business owners and workers who conscientiously decline to provide services for a same-sex wedding.¹

The Coalition support retaining the existing laws on religious exemptions which enable Catholic schools, hospitals and other institutions to employ persons who share Catholic values. Attorney-General George Brandis has stated that *“The right of people who practice or profess a particular religious faith to live their lives and to conduct their institutions in accordance with the precepts of their religious faith is integral to religious freedom and religious freedom is a fundamentally important value.”*²

MARRIAGE

The Coalition has promised to hold a national plebiscite *“as soon as possible”* following the election to allow all Australians to have their say regarding the legal re-definition of marriage to include same-sex couples.

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The Coalition has announced that funding of the Safe Schools program will not continue after 2017.¹¹

The Education Minister has also endorsed the findings of the Loudon review that the program is inappropriate for primary schools and has removed links to sexually explicit online materials provided by the Safe Schools Coalition Australia (SSCA). Teachers must be advised that some role-playing activities may be unsuitable for children.¹²

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

The Coalition has committed to maintaining their current polices, including offshore processing, mandatory detention, and turning around unauthorised boat arrivals.

They have also promised to increase humanitarian intake from 13,700 to 18,750 in 2018/19.

So far Australia has admitted very few of the 12,000 persecuted Syrians and Iraqis the Coalition had promised to receive.

Labor



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Labor has called for a national review of religious exemptions.³ During a recent panel discussion, Mr Shorten said that should a Coalition government introduce protections for small business owners, allowing them to decline to provide services for a same-sex wedding, Labor would repeal them.⁴

Some have questioned whether Labor will retain religious exemptions which enable Catholic schools, hospitals and other institutions to employ people who will support the Church’s teachings, but Mr Shorten has promised to leave the protections in place and has said *“We are not interested in telling religious organisations how to run their faith-based organisations.”*⁵

MARRIAGE

If elected, Labor will cancel the proposed marriage plebiscite. Labor has promised to legislate for same-sex marriage by parliamentary vote within 100 days.⁸

Mr Shorten has said that *“95 per cent”* of Labor MPs will vote for same-sex marriage and, with votes in favour from some Coalition MPs, the Greens and crossbenchers, a Bill is certain to pass.⁹

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Mr Shorten has confirmed Labor’s support for the Safe Schools program and that Labor will continue to fund the program beyond 2017.¹³

To date, Mr Shorten has not clarified whether or not he will keep the restrictions made to the program by the Coalition government, including the restriction of the program to secondary schools only.¹⁴ He has also to date not stated a position on whether the program will be made compulsory for non-government schools.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

Labor has promised to maintain a policy of offshore processing and mandatory detention, turning around unauthorised boat arrivals, and to implement independent oversight of Australian-funded processing facilities.

Labor has promised to increase humanitarian intake from 13,700 to 27,000 by 2025.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Greens are opposed to making any provision for religious or conscientious objections to same-sex marriage.

They have promised to remove all religious protections (“exemptions”) from anti-discrimination laws and to force Catholic schools and other religious institutions to employ people who are opposed to Catholic teachings and ethos.⁶

Greens Senator Robert Simms has stated that *“We shouldn’t be giving religious organisations a get-out-of-gaol-free card and the right to discriminate.”*⁷

MARRIAGE

The Greens are opposed to the planned marriage plebiscite. They have sponsored multiple bills to legislate for same-sex marriage and support the legal re-definition of marriage to include same-sex couples.¹⁰

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The Greens have promised to retain and quadruple funding of the Safe Schools program. Senator Janet Rice has stated that *“The Greens will not only protect the Safe Schools program, we will expand its funding from \$2 million annually, to \$8 million annually.”*¹⁵

Participation in the Safe Schools program will be compulsory for all primary and secondary school students, including those at Catholic schools, and parental consent will no longer be required before teaching explicit material.¹⁶

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

The Greens have stated that they will end offshore processing, closing all offshore detention centres. They have also promised to introduce a 30 day time limit for people held in on-shore immigration detention.¹⁷

The Greens have pledged to raise the humanitarian intake from 13,700 to 50,000 annually.¹⁸