

Pastoral Letter on the True Meaning of Marriage from the Catholic Bishops of Victoria

30 March 2012

Dear Brothers & Sisters

We Australians live in a democracy which rightly places great value on human rights and protecting others from unjust discrimination.

We Catholics also believe deeply that God loves human beings very much. He especially loves those who are wounded and suffering. God loves each of us so much despite the fact that we are all sinners, make mistakes and often do not live up to our responsibilities.

The Church takes seriously that we must live the Gospel itself to be a credible witness to others. Deeply aware of Christ's mission of compassion and justice - the Church cannot ignore the responsibility to speak the truth in love. Sometimes reminding people about the truth of the human person is one such task for all of us.

Some now seek to alter the very nature of the human person through legislation. Our Australian society is now at a critical turning point where truth is at stake.

We speak of current debates about the nature of marriage in our public life. Often it seems as if this matter is simply about human rights and the removal of discrimination. But in addition to 'human rights' there are also 'human responsibilities'.

We are all blessed by God with the gift of our sexuality. The design itself comes from the Creator of Life. We all have a responsibility to follow that design.

The Church firmly believes that marriage is founded on the wonderful fact of sexual difference and its potential for new life. Without this there would be no human beings and no future. Bringing new human life into the world is founded on the loving union in difference of male and female. Children are best nurtured by a mother and father.

As one theologian has put it eloquently: "The God of love can be present in every true love. But 'gay marriage' is impossible because it attempts to cut loose marriage from its grounding in our biological life. If we do that, we deny our humanity."

This will be a 'hard saying' for some. It in no way implies that the Church accepts discrimination against other's human rights. Nor does it mean we fail to understand the complex nature of human sexual identity and desire.

It implies no lack of respect for people who identify as 'gay' and 'lesbian'. As Cardinal Francis George of Chicago recently pointed out: '... we all have friends or family members who are gay and lesbian... these are people we know and love and are part of our families.'

However as fellow citizens our concern is for the future of our whole society. We ask you to seriously reflect and pray about the ramifications for current and future generations, of legislation which completely redefines marriage.

A grave mistake will be made if such legislation is enacted. The Government cannot redefine the natural institution of marriage, a union between a man and a woman. The Government can regulate marriage, but this natural institution existed long before there were any governments. It cannot be changed at will.

The argument that same sex marriage *supports* marriage is wrong. The natural institution will not only be changed, it will be re-defined absolutely. It will become something different. Such a re-definition will undermine rather than support marriage.

Catholics, as responsible citizens of the Commonwealth of Australia, have a duty to remind their political representatives that much is at stake for the common good in this debate. We urge you to exercise that right and make direct representation to your Members of Parliament.

We encourage you to respond to the on-line survey set up by the Federal Government at their website: www.aph.gov.au/marriage. The closing date for responses is Friday, 20 April 2012. The survey contains three statements with which you can agree or disagree. It then asks if you support the proposed changes to the two separate Bills, to which you answer yes or no. If you choose you can similarly answer these few questions in less than one minute. The survey also provides space (maximum of 250 words) for you to explain your views. Some points that you might like to consider including are set out at www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=14

Our Australian society will flourish only if the true meaning of marriage is preserved for future generations.

With every blessing.

Most Reverend Denis Hart DD
Archbishop of Melbourne

Most Reverend Peter Connors DD
Bishop of Ballarat

Most Reverend Christopher Prowse DD
Bishop of Sale

Most Reverend Leslie Tomlinson DD
Bishop of Sandhurst

Most Reverend Peter Elliott DD
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Most Reverend Vincent Long DD
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne