



Diocese of Port Pirie

Chancery

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Pastoral Letter to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

Concerning Same-Sex Unions

Dear Sisters & Brothers in the Lord

As the postal vote approaches, the subject becomes a personal issue for many people. Many of us have friends or siblings who are gay or have a dear son or daughter or relative who identifies that way and feels strongly that they should have a right to marry. It must be recognised that in so many cases there is a real bond and union of hearts between committed gay couples

A Christian Sacramental marriage naturally includes but goes well beyond being simply a union of hearts. We believe marriage between a man and a woman, open to life, is ordained by God and has been since the dawn of time. With the coming of Christ it was transformed, raised to being a Sacrament, Holy Matrimony, a lifelong commitment to be blessed with children, a vehicle and channel of holiness for the couple. "I will love you and honour you all the days of my life".

This is not the full understanding of marriage for so many in today's Australia where three quarters marry in a civil ceremony. The Marriage Act makes no mention of God or Christ or Sacrament or children and the official vow does not include the word "love" (but it could be added privately).

Non-Sacramental marriage is different to Catholic marriage. If one takes out the "man" and "woman" it is not a marriage, even by analogy, as Pope Francis says. It is a Civil Union. We can recognise such unions as loving and committed, but they are not Holy Matrimony.

While respecting the right of others to disagree, there are some major concerns flowing from the proposed changes to the Marriage Act. We will be altering a fundamental institution in society that will have consequences we do not yet recognise. Same-sex marriage has been an agenda item in only very recent times; traditional marriage is thousands of years old, present in all societies and cultures. Are we at peace with the new social forces bringing about this desire to change?

Next, the issue of religious freedom for those who disagree is creating some anxiety. Will we be free to teach and practise what we believe about marriage and sexuality?

For profound consideration, is the situation of a deliberately chosen circumstance (not one occasioned by separation or death) of a fatherless or motherless family the best for the rearing of children?

We have no right to impose our religious views on what may now be the majority of our fellow citizens who do not accept or embrace our Sacramental view of Holy Matrimony. We must continue to exercise our right to speak our views publically as free citizens, but we should not adopt any means that creates disrespect for others. It was the method of Christ to propose, not to impose.

We pray for ourselves that when we vote, whichever way, it will be a thought-out decision made with integrity and good conscience and charity.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ', written in a cursive style.

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

14th September 2017
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