



Diocese of Armidale

Ph: (02) 6772 4971
Fax: (02) 5701 5140
Email: chancery@armidale.catholic.org.au

Catholic Chancery Office
3/131 Barney Street
PO Box 93
Armidale NSW 2350

A letter to the people of the Diocese of Armidale on the Marriage Postal Survey

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Catholic teachings on marriage and on homosexuality are quite well known, at least in general if not in detail:

That marriage is the covenant by which a man and a woman establish a partnership for the whole of life for their mutual well-being and for the purpose of founding a family; and for baptised Christians marriage is given particular dignity as a Sacrament by Jesus, that is, a means of grace in the life of the couple.¹

That homosexual persons must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity; that every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided; but homosexual *actions* cannot be approved because they do not proceed from a genuine sexual complementarity. The Church also teaches that with prayer, God's grace, and the support of friends, homosexuals can and should approach Christian perfection.²

The postal survey on marriage now asks our nation this important question: "Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?" My own love and respect for my homosexual friends does not prevent me from voting "no" to this question.

In fact, I say: *Yes, I love marriage and want this foundational institution of every human society to remain as it currently is, anchored in the truth and reality of our biological and human condition* **AND** I say: *Yes, I love my homosexual friends, I am aware that life brings you extra difficulties, I want to help and support you to be truly happy and to grow in Christian perfection.*

My approach to this question is very similar to the approach of Pope Francis. His impressive calls for homosexuals to be given due respect and dignity are widely known, as is his simple affirmation "Who am I to judge?" Perhaps less widely reported are his equally robust calls regarding marriage, such as "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family."³

The essential reason why governments in every nation and every age make laws about marriage is not because "love is love" - it's not to "recognise" the love or commitment that two people have for each other. It is to help create the most stable conditions possible for a man and a woman to raise their family. When speaking of children in a marriage Pope Francis says that "every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father."⁴ He explains that this right is not just concerned with "the love of father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one's life and the solid foundation of the family."⁵

I do not want to contribute to hysteria in the middle of the current postal survey campaign. But I have to be frank with you that I am very concerned about the consequences that will come if the definition of marriage is changed.

In western countries similar to Australia, who have changed the definition of marriage, the legal bullying, harassment, and penalties suffered by many individuals, businesses and schools for resisting the Rainbow LGBTQI agenda is frightening. There is every reason to believe the same would happen in our own country. I base this on the intimidation that supporters of traditional marriage are already experiencing.

Additionally, there is a complete lack of any protections for freedoms of expression, religion, and conscience in the proposal being put to the Australian people. It's not just a question of ministers of religion not having to perform same-sex weddings. It even extends to parents' rights about what is taught to their children in schools.

I believe it is naïve to trust the politicians and the Yes campaign who are telling us that what has happened in other western democracies won't happen here. As expressed by the former Prime Minister John Howard "It is completely disingenuous to assert that a change of this magnitude to a fundamental social institution does not have consequences."

I have today voted "no" in the plebiscite and I urge you to do likewise. Doing so does not make me nor you a bigot or a homophobe. Nobody should be forced between supporting marriage and supporting their homosexual family and friends.

Supporting marriage which is founded on the complementarity of a man and a woman may not be fashionable but it's right. Having an unfashionable view does not mean that we must remain silent. I agree with Pope Francis who says: "as Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable."⁶

Please join me in praying for our nation, pray that we will grow in our understanding of the true meaning and importance of marriage and that we will work cooperatively to ensure our nation upholds God's plan for marriage and families.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Kennedy', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale
15th September, 2017

Footnotes:

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1601
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2357-2359
3. *Amoris Laetitia* 251
4. *Amoris Laetitia* 172
5. *Amoris Laetitia* 172
6. *Amoris Laetitia* 35