

29 August 2017



A Pastoral Letter on Marriage

My Dear Brothers and Sisters

Australians will participate in a postal survey on the redefinition of marriage beginning in September 2017.

I thought it was worth reflecting on how our Diocesan Vision to be *a church for Tasmania, making disciples of Jesus*, informs how we should think about this.

Following Jesus on Marriage

As disciples of Jesus we are called to obedience to all that Jesus taught. For Christians marriage has always meant a commitment of one man to one woman voluntarily entered into for life. The words of Jesus are clear:

Mark 10:6-9 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Our prayer books set out the purpose of marriage: the procreation of children; a remedy against sin and fornication; and mutual support, help and comfort. As Christians, we recognise that marriage points beyond itself to represent Christ's union with his church. That is, a man's sacrificial love for his wife mirrors Christ's sacrifice for his church, and the wife's love for her husband mirrors the church's devotion for Christ (See Ephesians 5: 21-33). This analogy makes sense only if there is the diversity of gender within marriage.

This understanding of marriage has also been the building block of societies for millennia. We want to be obedient to Christ's teaching and to believe that this is still the best model for human flourishing. Most of us believe that traditional marriage is good for society and especially for children and so want to advocate for it with others. I acknowledge that not all of you will agree with me, but I encourage you to go back to scriptures and examine them for yourself.

As Christians we want to treat all people with love and respect. We shun actions and words that demean and marginalise; we reject discrimination, and especially grieve the way people who identify as homosexual have been treated in our society and churches. For this reason, I am committed to full equality for homosexual people under the law, which is already the case in Australia.

If you identify as a homosexual person and are reading or hearing this letter, I want you to know that you are loved, both by God and your Christian community. We are committed to

ANGLICAN DIOCESE
OF TASMANIA

THE RIGHT REVEREND
DR RICHARD CONDIE
BISHOP OF TASMANIA

walking with you in discipleship, and I encourage you to have a conversation with your Rector.

Following Jesus in Society

As we seek to be a church for Tasmania, making disciples of Jesus, we want to unashamedly commend to others following Jesus and his teaching as the basis for human flourishing, and make sure that we keep our eye on calling people to follow him, as the most important thing we can do.

So while we want to commend a Christian view of traditional marriage, we need to be careful how we go about this. We ought not to advocate for Christian morals on their own, but do it in the context of all Jesus' teaching. Living God's way is a response of faith, not a prerequisite for faith. We do not live in a Christian country, and a Christian worldview is in the minority, and so our job is to concentrate on bearing witness to Jesus as our first priority.

How we speak about Jesus and marriage is as important as what we say about it. Like many of you, I have people very close to me who identify as homosexual. I want them to feel the welcome of the Gospel, and the call to respond to Christ, and so I must be gentle and respectful as I speak about what I believe. We must never coerce people into our point of view, but always respond with love and kindness.

I know that many of you will be very troubled if the definition of marriage is changed. In other places around the world, where this has happened, there have been serious consequences for freedom of speech and conscience. It has also opened the way for other challenges to the understanding of marriage.

However we must remember that Jesus is the Lord of all. We must not respond with fear but rather, because of the security we have in Christ, respond in love which casts out fear. We respond to threats real or perceived by following the example of Christ and turning the other cheek. The kingdom of God, including people living in obedience to Christ as their king, is not built through political means including legislation, but by the preaching of the Gospel.

Responding to the Postal Survey

We live in a democracy, and we are being asked for our views on marriage in this postal survey. I would like to encourage you to express your view as your conscience directs. It is responsible citizenship to do so. Voting to keep the current definition of marriage is not in itself hateful or homophobic.

Please be assured of my prayers, as you process all of this, and respond in the postal survey.

With warm wishes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard".

The Right Reverend Dr Richard Condie
Bishop of Tasmania