



Diocese of Port Pirie

Chancery

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

Concerning the Plebiscite Result on Same-Sex Marriage

Dear Sisters & Brothers

After all the hype, we now know that the Yes vote for the same-sex marriage was endorsed by 61.6% of the twelve million Australians who voted, and the No vote is endorsed by 38.4%, which remains a figure of several million people.

The result was not unexpected. The debate has been turned from being about “marriage” to being about “equality”. The Yes vote was argued in terms of discrimination but little was said on the true nature of marriage, apart from statements such that a love between a couple is all that matters.

The debate took place in an ever-increasing secular Australia, where almost three quarters of marriage are now performed by civil celebrants. On the Yes side there were corporations like Qantas and the banks, celebrities and clerics of different backgrounds, politicians of all colours, the airwaves and the media. It was not unusual for someone to feel intimidated if they had a No opinion, and a No voter was certainly in a minority on presentations such as Q&A.

It is interesting to note that the high proportion of the Yes vote was in the major cities of Melbourne and Sydney. In the electorate of Grey, which covers most of our diocese, traditional values seem to remain strong as the Yes vote was only 53%! It is encouraging to note that orthodox family values are still strong in the bush.

Nevertheless, as a democracy we must now be open to the likelihood that civil marriages will be available to people of the same-sex, and we respect that outcome.

The vote does not affect the understanding of marriage held by Catholic people, as a union between a man and woman, open to life. The Catholic understanding of marriage is reinforced by rich theology spanning well over a thousand years, and reaching back to the words of Jesus Himself, that a man will cling to his wife and the two will become one flesh. Saint Paul uses marriage as the best analogy he can employ to describe the quality of union between Christ and the Church. There can be no theology of a gay marriage, and a spirituality of it would be limited. In our view marriage remains a holy event, and is a sacred Sacrament.

The issue for us is whether there will be laws to protect our freedom to teach our conviction about marriage, and the freedom still to say in our Catholic schools that a true marriage is between a man and a woman, open to life.

There should be no rancour or divisiveness, and the dignity of people of same-sex attraction must not be assailed.

We wait for the Government to legislate that those millions of us who remain in favour of traditional marriage are free to speak, teach and act on this belief.

Yours in Christ

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

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

15th November 2017
17/296