



Pastoral letter on the same-sex marriage postal survey

Dear sisters and brothers,

As I write to you, the national debate on same-sex civil marriage is in full swing. It is an issue that many feel passionate about and hence, it has potential to polarise the community. I appeal to all Catholics in the Diocese of Parramatta to conduct this dialogue with a deep sense of respect for all concerned, and for the opinion and decision that each person is free to make.

It is important to remember from the very outset that the postal survey is about whether or not Australians want the legal definition of civil marriage changed to include same-sex couples. It is not a referendum on sacramental marriage as understood by the Catholic Church.

Many years ago, divorce was legalised in Australia; but this change did not alter the law of the Church. Therefore, whatever the outcome of the survey or the eventual legislation by the government, the Church will continue to hold that marriage is a natural institution established by God to be a permanent union between one man and one woman, directed both to mutual companionship and to the formation of a family in which children are born and nurtured.

For many Catholics, the issue of same-sex marriage is not simply theoretical but deeply personal. These may be same-sex attracted people themselves or that may be the case with their relatives and friends. In such cases, they are torn between their love for the Church and their love for their same-sex attracted child, grandchild, sibling, cousin, friend or neighbour.

As your bishop, I wish to reiterate the commitment I made at my installation: "I am committed to make the church in Parramatta the house for all peoples, a church where there is less an experience of exclusion but more an encounter of radical love, inclusiveness and solidarity." As a community of disciples, we seek to accommodate, accompany and care for one another irrespective of sexual orientation, marital status and situation.

I invite all Catholics in our Diocese to exercise our responsibility as citizens to engage in this community discernment. It should not be a matter of a simple answer Yes or No to the postal survey. It should be an opportunity for us to witness to our deep commitment to the ideal of Christian marriage. But it should also be an opportunity for us to listen to what the Spirit is saying through the signs of the times.

Throughout much of history, our gay and lesbian (or LGBTI) brothers and sisters have often not been treated with respect, sensitivity and compassion. Regrettably, the Church has not always been a place where they have felt welcomed, accepted and loved. Thus, regardless of the outcome of the survey, we must commit ourselves to the task of reaching out to our LGBTI brothers and sisters, affirming their dignity and accompanying them on our common journey towards the fullness of life and love in God.

Let us pray, discern and act with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Catholics, in keeping with the tradition of the Church, are asked to exercise their consciences, ensuring that they are informed as they come to exercise their democratic rights in the coming postal survey.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv
Bishop of Parramatta**

*Given at Parramatta on 13 September A.D. 2017,
Memorial of St John Chrysostom*

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