



Bishop's letter to the churches of the North West

Dear friends,

In a few weeks time we will be asked to take part in a postal vote about same-sex marriage. This vote will ask if we support a change to the definition of marriage that would allow same-sex couples to officially marry. Though we have been aware of this issue for a number of years there has been little opportunity to appreciate the fundamental impact to our society this change would bring. What is at stake here isn't just a change in the marriage law, but one that will embrace the structure of our society. It will have a significant effect on Christians, ultimately undermining both religious freedom and freedom of conscience. (All proposed legislation to date appears insufficient to safeguard people working in church-run institutions such as schools, hospitals and universities. Nor is it clear whether church-based organisations will be free to employ staff who share their church's teachings and ethos.)

When other countries have redefined marriage the following consequences have been observed:

- teachers have lost their jobs for refusing to teach students about same-sex marriage;
- magistrates removed from the bench for expressing a belief that children do best with a mother and father;
- social workers forced to resign because they refused to place children with same-sex couples;
- doctors threatened with removal of their medical licences if they question gender transition.
- a push for 'transgender rights' which seeks to remove any recognition of differences between males and females, that is, a move to enforce gender as being fluid and not fixed, but rather, is a decision each individual is free to make.

As Christians we know God created marriage in the beginning as the exclusive and life-long union of a man and a woman. This is God's plan and will be beneficial, not just for God's people, but for all of humanity. Thus God's plan for marriage is the best framework for society and for the procreation of children with a mother and a father. We also read how Jesus reinforces God's plan for marriage in Matthew 19.

Voting NO to a change in the definition of marriage affirms God's plan as the best way for our society and the nurture of children. The postal vote is voluntary so we need to make sure we vote No to changing God's definition of marriage. This vote is in effect a referendum on religious freedom and freedom of speech. As citizens, we are entitled to express our views on social issues

– it is not a matter of imposing our views on others, but rather expressing what we believe is for the good of all Australians. Please join with me in praying for God's mercy on our nation.

Yours in Christ, Bishop Gary Nelson