

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

10 March 2012

RE: Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

Dear Committee Members.

I am a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia however the views that I express here are my own and not representative of any official view of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

**I write to voice my strong support for the Marriage Equality Bill that is presently before the parliament.**

Although there are many people in our church who would oppose marriage equality I, through my ministry and broad public contact am aware that there are also many people in our church who would give their wholehearted support to such a change. I would say that this is particularly true for the younger people in our church.

It is my firm belief that the primary reason for the existence of the Christian Church on earth and in Australia is to speak the message God's love, justice and reconciliation as shown in the words and actions Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke up for the poor, the afflicted, the oppressed and the marginalized. Many Christian people that I am in contact with would, like Christ, demand justice for the marginalized and oppressed LGBT community in Australia.

It is unjust that same sex couples cannot receive the same social acceptance and broad community celebration and support of their relationship that is only afforded, in our society by the institution of marriage.

Churches and social researchers and commentators declare the social and familial benefits afforded to couples who are in the life long, loving and committed relationship defined by marriage. There are fewer health problems. fewer incidence of smoking, drinking and other drug taking and behaviors that are risky to health. There are obvious financial benefits to the shared resources and the community benefits from the very stability of that relationship and the long term care that they give each other. It is unjust that these benefits should be identified and then denied to people simply because of their sexual orientation.

It is unjust that the children of same sex couples are not automatically afforded their right to a family life that is underpinned by the life long loving and committed relationship defined by marriage.

While there is much research to validate that children certainly benefit from belonging in families that are strong, stable and supportive, there is no credible evidence to suggest that those relationships must be represented by a biological mother and father. There is no evidence to suggest, for instance that adoptive children are detrimented by their family

arrangement or that the many existing adults in our society who have been raised by same sex parents have been detrimented in any way what so ever. It is unjust to prevent these same sex couples from marrying simply because of unsubstantiated theories which are , I believe, based on nothing but fear.

Jesus spoke of love and acceptance and communities based on attitudes of grace and generosity of spirit. The only time he heard a “hard” word was against religious authorities who sort to impose their harsh legalistic agenda on the community. I am aware that many Christian people, even many from my own church, would still declare homosexuality a sin and therefore harmful to the life and soul of people who enter into homosexual relationships. I disagree with them but accede to them their right to there firmly held and sincere religious conviction. However, their view are precisely THAT...a religious conviction, a matter of faith.

I do not believe that the theology of many of our Christian denominations in Australia would, if they were honest, support the view that churches have the right to use a legislative framework to enforce their religious convictions on the wider community. Yet that is what those who oppose the marriage equality act are trying to do. There views are a matter of faith. the marriage amendment act is a matter of state and it is, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, incumbent upon the state to act with justice and equity to ALL of its citizens.

There is some talk within the Christian community that this amendment will somehow force the churches to undertake same sex marriages. I believe the wording makes it clear that this cannot happen. Even if the wording were not there, all Ministers of Religion in Australia know that they are already free to decide to either marry or not marry couples according to the restrictions and requirements of their various faiths. I believe the argument to be nothing more than scare mongering and are a nonsense.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Sincerely Yours

Pastor Neil Hart.