



22nd March, 2012

Chairman,
Senate Committee for Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010

Dear Chairman,

I write with some alarm at the proposed change to the definition of Marriage in Subsection 5(1) of the proposed Act.

The reason given in the Bill for the change is to:

1. (a) to remove from the *Marriage Act 1961* discrimination against people on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity; and
2. (b) to recognise that freedom of sexual orientation and gender identity are fundamental human rights; and
3. (c) to promote acceptance and the celebration of diversity.

Our society is built upon the foundation of marriage for the nurture of children. One of the reasons for marriage is the raising of children in a secure and stable family unit. Historically that unit has been composed of a male and a female - a father and a mother for the child. Countless studies of the development of children have shown that the role of a father and of a mother are fundamental for the proper development and growth of children. Both a male and a female are vital for the healthy development of a child. This legislation aims to affirm that a family of same-sex parents is identical to a family of opposite sex parents - this clearly cannot be the case. A same-sex couple cannot provide the distinctives which a father and a mother provide.

The reason for the Bill being presented is that it will remove discrimination against people on the basis of their sex. There is no discrimination because a loving relationship between 2 people does not form a marriage. Even before a couple marries, they presumably "love one another". But they are not yet "married". Marriage involves a commitment to a monogamous relationship between a male and a female until death. This is a particular relationship. It is this relationship which forms our historical

foundation as a society. Of every society. We cannot simply change the meaning of words and pretend that everything is now ok. In my marriage I have a 'wife'; my wife has a 'husband' - what would a same-sex couple call one another? 'Lover'? - ok, very good. But they could not use the terms, husband and wife. Yet a marriage is exactly that: it includes a husband and a wife.

This does not rule out same-sex relationships - there are many forms of relationship and they are important in our society. There is nothing stopping a same-sex couple making a commitment to one another. However, this relationship is not a 'marriage' because the couple cannot bring children into the world themselves. The involvement of a member of the opposite sex is still necessary (even if fertilization of a suitable ova occurs outside the body).

At present our society is trying to remove gender differences but these differences stand at the very basis of who we are. A man is not a woman. Neither is a woman a man. There are real differences yet both ought to be accorded the same rights and privileges. That said they are not identical but different: a father has a particular role and a mother has a particular role in the growth and development of a family. This does not mean one is better than the other, just different. The differences are good. The differences develop even from the early stages of foetal development - as brain pathways are set.

Same-sex relationships do not accord the same opportunity for a child (who also has rights!) to be brought up in the context of a family comprising a father and a mother. Research has shown that children grow up best in a relationship with a father and a mother.

The Bill is presented to Parliament to recognise that freedom of sexual orientation and gender identity are fundamental human rights. I was under that impression that freedom of sexual orientation was already affirmed by Parliament. What more can the Bill do in this regard? However, if the Bill is used to so change the definition of marriage, then I would most certainly feel that my human right had been compromised. The right I have as a person born into a family with a mother and a father. The Bill is tearing up that identity which for me is very real and important. It is a deep sadness when married couples divorce and families are torn apart. Yet this is all too common in our society. Professionals working with children know how marred they are by such relationship conflict. Yes, there is confusion among children about which parent they should attach to; or how they can deal with the bitterness and pain they've felt through the breakup.

The context of marriage for growing a family is too valuable to break down the meaning of marriage to include same sex relationships. This is not a move forward, but it is a deconstruction of one of the basic building blocks of society. Such a step will not bring relief but further pain, confusion of identity and belonging for children.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Blake
Senior Minister