

2nd April 2012.

The Senate Committee on Bills to revise the definition of Marriage
Australian Parliament House
Canberra.

Dear Members of Committee,

I am writing as the Session Clerk of St. John's Presbyterian Church, Bendigo, to inform you that the Session has endorsed the following statement on this subject agreed to by the Presbytery of which our congregation is a constituent:

LETTER TO MHRs and SENATORS:

Dear Federal Member/Senator,

The Presbytery of North Western Victoria is a church council which represents the Presbyterian congregations in the NW of the State between Bendigo and Mildura. At its meeting on 5th August the Presbytery resolved to write to MHRs in our general area and to all Victorian Senators on the issue of same-sex marriage. We trust that you will give due consideration to our views corporately as a Church and individually as electors in the community.

In the first instance we are conscious that the churches speak with a divided voice and we wish you to consider why this is so. Most religions are defined by an authoritative body of writings embodying their founder's teachings, in our case Jesus Christ, and the Jewish Scriptures which he endorsed. Many Churches have sought to accommodate their teachings to the secular humanism of our 'post-modern' era and so have departed from their true origins, but in so doing have been singularly unsuccessful in impressing the present generation. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments nowhere affirm homosexuality, and Jesus clearly supported the views of his Jewish contemporaries who proscribed it. That was almost a unique position in the ancient world where homosexuality activity was widespread and extended far beyond those whom today we would regard as having an exclusive same sex attraction. We would also point out that this was the universal view of all the churches till the late 20th Century, and we do not accept that to maintain this view is necessarily homophobic.

While there are primary religious reasons why we believe that the current definition of marriage should remain, we recognize that these are no longer given priority by many in our society. We therefore wish you to give due consideration to the general philosophical and sociological arguments for maintaining the *status quo*. The most obvious is the simple fact that already our Federal Parliament has passed extensive amendments to legislation to give homosexuals just about everything they want, barring the right to 'marry', that is, to be given formal recognition equivalent to heterosexual marriage. Additionally, some states permit same-sex couples to adopt children, others (including Victoria) permit only fostering. Statistically it can be shown that less than a quarter of G/L relationships are stable enough for the couples to seek civil registration, and less than half of these would seek formal 'marriage', less than two in every thousand of the population. The intense pressure from the

Gay lobby, supported by the Greens, for the redefinition of marriage, seems to us to be a bit of ‘chip on the shoulder’.

Universally in the vastly varied cultures of the world marriage is seen as the appropriate context, first, for sexual intimacy, and second, and consequently, for procreation and for the nurture of children. Marriage as it now exists is not just about adult choices, the romantic selection of a sex partner, but where possible, about maintaining the biological bond between parent and child in the best possible environment for the welfare of the child,(4) conceived in love and reared in security. To redefine marriage is to weaken it, and to make it a matter merely of adult choice and to detach it from heterosexual union where children are likely to be born and their welfare is a paramount consideration. It is this latter concern which is a vital one for the State, especially at a time when the increasing number of dysfunctional families places an intolerable burden on our welfare services, and this has ultimately to be covered by the taxpayer.

The strongest secular argument against redefinition is that a necessary corollary is G/L parenting, (already permissible in some States), either by adoption, fostering or surrogacy. This is to put the so-called rights of adults above the undoubted rights of the child. Though of necessity a child may have to be in the care of a couple where neither or only one is the biological parent, there are compelling reasons why as far as possible a child should be raised by both a father and a mother, whether biological parents or not. For societal(6) and for psychological reasons it is obvious that the way in which a father bonds with his child, whether natural or adopted, is different from that of a mother, and it is generally recognized that children reared by single mothers are disadvantaged by the lack of a male role-model. There is abundant sociological evidence that children reared in ‘normal’ homes fare better on a whole range of indicators, educational, developmental, behavioural and emotional.

Added to this is the relative instability of homosexual unions which, statistically, even when registered, rarely last more than 10 years. Surely the State has a responsibility to ensure that children who are adopted or fostered are not exposed to the hazard of such unpredictability – something that it cannot do if it proceeds with redefinition.

We recognize that sexual *mores* have changed vastly since the 60s, and that many couples now live in *de facto* relationships (even more likely to break up than marriages), but the fact that many of these decide to marry before they have children, or soon afterwards, surely indicates a widespread recognition in our society that marriage as an exclusive and permanent relationship is something that provides, at its best, the ideal environment for the nurturing of children. The influence of the Media may have confused popular opinion on these issues, but in view of these considerations we believe that all our politicians have a conscientious responsibility to act, not merely to placate the Gay lobby representing only a small minority within their own community, but rather for the good of society in general, and in particular for those children, among the most vulnerable in our society, who cannot be nurtured by their natural parents and who could be disadvantaged if in the care of G/L couples.

Therefore we urge you in these matters to examine your conscience and to act accordingly, even if it means voting against the policy of your party. Please acknowledge that we do this in all sincerity and with genuine social concern, and not only because of our particular stance in terms of religious belief.

On behalf of the Presbytery of North Western Victoria, and the congregations within the Presbytery.

Yours sincerely,

Anton Zirngast,

Clerk of Presbytery.