

To Whom it May Concern

I am writing to express my deep concern about the proposed changes to the definition of marriage within Australia. I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which teaches that we are obligated to love and respect all people regardless of race, creed or sexual orientation etc. We also believe that marriage between a man and a woman is divinely instituted and must be preserved. The thoughts that are expressed here outline my strongly held convictions and beliefs and have been extracted from a statement from the church outlining our views on marriage. A small amount of the content is US-centric but it translates directly to the situation in Australia. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to consider seriously the implications of changing the definition of marriage to include people of the same gender, as outlined here.

The Divine Institution of Marriage

Marriage is sacred, ordained of God from before the foundation of the world. After creating Adam and Eve, the Lord God pronounced them husband and wife, of which Adam said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Jesus Christ cited Adam’s declaration when he affirmed the divine origins of the marriage covenant: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.”

In 1995, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” declared the following unchanging truths regarding marriage:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children . . . The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.

The Proclamation also teaches, “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.” The account in Genesis of Adam and Eve being created and placed on earth emphasizes the creation of two distinct genders: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Marriage between a man and a woman is central to the plan of salvation. The sacred nature of marriage is closely linked to the power of procreation. Only a man and a woman together have the natural biological capacity to conceive children. This power of procreation – to create life and bring God’s spirit children into the world – is sacred and precious. Misuse of this power undermines the institution of the family and thereby weakens the social fabric. Strong families serve as the fundamental institution for transmitting to future generations the moral strengths, traditions, and values that sustain civilization. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.”

Marriage is not primarily a contract between individuals to ratify their affections and provide for mutual obligations. Rather, marriage and family are vital instruments for rearing children and

teaching them to become responsible adults. While governments did not invent marriage, throughout the ages governments of all types have recognized and affirmed marriage as an essential institution in preserving social stability and perpetuating life itself. Hence, regardless of whether marriages were performed as a religious rite or a civil ceremony, married couples in almost every culture have been granted special benefits aimed primarily at sustaining their relationship and promoting the environment in which children are reared. A husband and a wife do not receive these benefits to elevate them above any other two people who may share a residence or social tie, but rather in order to preserve, protect, and defend the all-important institutions of marriage and family.

It is true that some couples who marry will not have children, either by choice or because of infertility, but the special status of marriage is nonetheless closely linked to the inherent powers and responsibilities of procreation, and to the inherent differences between the genders. Co-habitation under any guise or title is not a sufficient reason for defining new forms of marriage.

High rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births have resulted in an exceptionally large number of single parents in society. Many of these single parents have raised exemplary children; nevertheless, extensive studies have shown that in general a husband and wife united in a loving, committed marriage provide the optimal environment for children to be protected, nurtured, and raised. This is not only because of the substantial personal resources that two parents can bring to bear on raising a child, but because of the differing strengths that a father and a mother, by virtue of their gender, bring to the task. As the prominent sociologist David Popenoe has said:

The burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to childrearing is unique and irreplaceable.

Popenoe explained that:

. . . The complementarity of male and female parenting styles is striking and of enormous importance to a child's overall development. It is sometimes said that fathers express more concern for the child's longer-term development, while mothers focus on the child's immediate well-being (which, of course, in its own way has everything to do with a child's long-term well-being). What is clear is that children have dual needs that must be met: one for independence and the other for relatedness, one for challenge and the other for support.

Social historian David Blankenhorn makes a similar argument in his book *Fatherless America*. In an ideal society, every child would be raised by both a father and a mother.

Challenges to Marriage and Family

Our modern era has seen traditional marriage and family – defined as a husband and wife with children in an intact marriage – come increasingly under assault. Sexual morality has declined and infidelity has increased. At the same time, entertainment standards continue to plummet, and pornography has become a scourge afflicting and addicting many victims. Gender differences increasingly are dismissed as trivial, irrelevant, or transient, thus undermining God's purpose in creating both men and women.

In recent years both here and other countries, a movement has emerged to promote same-sex marriage as an inherent or constitutional right. This is not a small step, but a radical change: instead of society tolerating or accepting private, consensual sexual behavior between adults, advocates of same-sex marriage seek its official endorsement and recognition.

This trend constitutes a serious threat to marriage and family. The institution of marriage will be weakened, resulting in negative consequences for both adults and children.

Tolerance, Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Freedom

Those who favor homosexual marriage contend that “tolerance” demands that they be given the same right to marry as heterosexual couples. The Savior taught a much higher concept, that of love. “Love thy neighbor,” He admonished. Jesus loved the sinner even while decrying the sin, as evidenced in the case of the woman taken in adultery: treating her kindly, but exhorting her to “sin no more.” Tolerance as a gospel principle means love and forgiveness of one another, not “tolerating” transgression.

In today’s secular world, the idea of tolerance has come to mean something entirely different. Instead of love, it has come to mean *condone* – acceptance of wrongful behavior as the price of friendship. Jesus taught that we love and care for one another without condoning transgression. But today’s politically palatable definition insists that unless one accepts the sin he does not tolerate the sinner.

As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has explained,

Tolerance obviously requires a non-contentious manner of relating toward one another’s differences. But tolerance does not require abandoning one’s standards or one’s opinions on political or public policy choices. Tolerance is a way of reacting to diversity, not a command to insulate it from examination.

The Church does not condone abusive treatment of others and encourages its members to treat all people with respect. However, speaking out against practices with which the Church disagrees on moral grounds – including same-sex marriage – does not constitute abuse or the frequently misused term “hate speech.” We can express genuine love and friendship for the homosexual family member or friend without accepting the practice of homosexuality or any re-definition of marriage.

Legalizing same-sex marriage will affect a wide spectrum of government activities and policies. Once a state government declares that same-sex unions are a civil right, those governments almost certainly will enforce a wide variety of other policies intended to ensure that there is no discrimination against same-sex couples. This may well place “church and state on a collision course.”

The prospect of same-sex marriage has already spawned legal collisions with the rights of free speech and of action based on religious beliefs. For example, advocates and government officials in certain states already are challenging the long-held right of religious adoption agencies to follow their religious beliefs and only place children in homes with both a mother and a father. As a result, Catholic Charities in Boston has stopped offering adoption services.

Other advocates of same-sex marriage are suggesting that tax exemptions and benefits be withdrawn from any religious organization that does not embrace same-sex unions. Public accommodation laws are already being used as leverage in an attempt to force religious organizations to allow marriage celebrations or receptions in religious facilities that are otherwise open to the public. Accrediting organizations in some instances are asserting pressure on religious schools and universities to provide married housing for same-sex couples. Student religious organizations are being told by some universities that they may lose their campus recognition and benefits if they exclude same-sex couples from club membership.

Many of these examples have already become the legal reality in several nations of the European Union, and the European Parliament has recommended that laws guaranteeing and protecting the rights of same-sex couples be made uniform across the EU. Thus, if same-sex marriage becomes a recognized civil right, there will be substantial conflicts with religious freedom. And in some important areas, religious freedom may be diminished.

How Would Same-Sex Marriage Affect Society?

Possible restrictions on religious freedom are not the only societal implications of legalizing same-sex marriage. Perhaps the most common argument that proponents of same-sex marriage make is that it is essentially harmless and will not affect the institution of traditional heterosexual marriage in any way. “It won’t affect you, so why should you care?” is the common refrain. While it may be true that allowing single-sex unions will not immediately and directly affect all existing marriages, the real question is how it will affect society as a whole *over time*, including the rising generation and future generations. The experience of the few European countries that already have legalized same-sex marriage suggests that any dilution of the traditional definition of marriage will further erode the already weakened stability of marriages and family generally. Adopting same-sex marriage compromises the traditional concept of marriage, with harmful consequences for society.

Aside from the very serious consequence of undermining and diluting the sacred nature of marriage between a man and a woman, there are many practical implications in the sphere of public policy that will be of deep concern to parents and society as a whole. These are critical to understanding the seriousness of the overall issue of same-sex marriage.

When a man and a woman marry with the intention of forming a new family, their success in that endeavor depends on their willingness to renounce the single-minded pursuit of self-fulfillment and to sacrifice their time and means to the nurturing and rearing of their children. Marriage is fundamentally an unselfish act: legally protected because only a male and female together can create new life, and because the rearing of children requires a life-long commitment, which marriage is intended to provide. Societal recognition of same-sex marriage cannot be justified simply on the grounds that it provides self-fulfillment to its partners, for it is not the purpose of government to provide legal protection to every possible way in which individuals may pursue fulfillment. By definition, all same-sex unions are infertile, and two individuals of the same gender, whatever their affections, can never form a marriage devoted to raising their own mutual offspring.

It is true that some same-sex couples will obtain guardianship over children –through prior heterosexual relationships, through adoption in the states where this is permitted, or by artificial insemination. Despite that, the all-important question of public policy must be: what

environment is best for the child and for the rising generation? Traditional marriage provides a solid and well-established social identity to children. It increases the likelihood that they will be able to form a clear gender identity, with sexuality closely linked to both love and procreation. By contrast, the legalization of same-sex marriage likely will erode the social identity, gender development, and moral character of children. Is it really wise for society to pursue such a radical experiment without taking into account its long-term consequences for children?

As just one example of how children will be adversely affected, the establishment of same-sex marriage as a civil right will inevitably require mandatory changes in school curricula. When the state says that same-sex unions are equivalent to heterosexual marriages, the curriculum of public schools will have to support this claim. Beginning with elementary school, children will be taught that marriage can be defined as a relation between any two adults and that consensual sexual relations are morally neutral. Classroom instruction on sex education in secondary schools can be expected to equate homosexual intimacy with heterosexual relations. These developments will create serious clashes between the agenda of the secular school system and the right of parents to teach their children traditional standards of morality.

Finally, throughout history the family has served as an essential bulwark of individual liberty. The walls of a home provide a defense against detrimental social influences and the sometimes overreaching powers of government. In the absence of abuse or neglect, government does not have the right to intervene in the rearing and moral education of children in the home. Strong families are thus vital for political freedom. But when governments presume to redefine the nature of marriage, issuing regulations to ensure public acceptance of non-traditional unions, they have moved a step closer to intervening in the sacred sphere of domestic life. The consequences of crossing this line are many and unpredictable, but likely would include an increase in the power and reach of the state toward whatever ends it seeks to pursue.

The Sanctity of Marriage

Strong, stable families, headed by a father and mother, are the anchor of civilized society. When marriage is undermined by gender confusion and by distortions of its God-given meaning, the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identity as a man or a woman. Some will find it more difficult to engage in wholesome courtships, form stable marriages, and raise yet another generation imbued with moral strength and purpose.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has chosen to become involved, along with many other churches, organizations, and individuals, in defending the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman because it is a compelling moral issue of profound importance to our religion and to the future of our society.

The final line in the Proclamation on the Family is an admonition to the world from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve: “We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.” This is the course charted by Church leaders, and it is the only course of safety for the Church and for the nation.

Thank you for considering my views.

Gunnella Murphy