



Diocese of Armidale

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Re: Postal Plebiscite on “same sex marriage”

As you will be aware, the nation is now preparing for a non-compulsory postal vote on whether marriage should be redefined to allow same-sex ‘marriages’. Ballot papers will be mailed out from 12 September and need to be returned by 7 November 2017.

At this stage, we have not seen a question, but we expect it will be a very simple one (e.g. Do you support changing the definition of marriage to allow people of the same-sex to marry?)

The Government has indicated that if the vote is resolved in the affirmative, a Bill will be presented to the Parliament before the end of the year to change the *Marriage Act*. The contents of a Bill are at this stage unknown so people will be voting somewhat ‘blind’. Whether the Bill will adequately satisfy the concerns about Freedom of Religion that were raised by many people during the Senate Select Committee inquiry held earlier this year remains doubtful. So far, none of the proposed bills seeking to change the definition of marriage has provided acceptable levels of protection for schools, Church agencies and non-clerics (which represent the vast majority of believers).

The Catholic Church is represented in the *Coalition for Marriage* that is leading the Pro-Marriage campaign. This coalition now represents around 100 different pro-marriage groups with representatives from all faiths and many ethnic and other communities. Please visit their website. This is where you can register to volunteer, donate, and find out the latest information about the vote.
<http://www.coalitionformarriage.com.au/>

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference also has a website <https://www.catholic.org.au/plebiscite> providing further information, consequences, links and resources.

If you believe that the traditional definition of marriage has served society, families and children well, and should continue to be protected under the law, but feel as though your voice has not been heard, now is the time to have your say on the ballot paper. If you believe in your right to state and live your belief in traditional marriage without being legally penalised for doing so, then consider the consequences if same-sex marriage becomes law. These are important matters so I will certainly be voting “no”.

This will be a very important vote for our Church and for the nation. Please ensure that you are enrolled to vote with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), and that if you recently moved you have updated your address with the AEC. These changes are due by 24 August 2017, and can be made online at <http://www.aec.gov.au/enrol/>.

I urge you to pray for the future of marriage in Australia and that the Holy Spirit will guide all Australians in the vote ahead.

May God bless you,

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale
17th August, 2017