

Pastoral Letter - Same-Sex Marriage



PASTORAL LETTER Same-Sex Marriage

The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you will all be aware recent political developments have meant that the issue of same-sex marriage is once again in the forefront of people's minds.

In this short Pastoral Letter, I want to offer some general reflections on the Catholic Church's teachings about, and approach to, this important question. You may remember that I have already written to you about this before – in 2015. However, as you take steps to ensure that you are enrolled to vote, as I sincerely hope you will, in the postal plebiscite which may soon take place, and as you consider how you intend to vote, it seems opportune for me to address this matter again. And if necessary, I will follow this up with a more detailed discussion on the implications of this matter in a further letter.

My intention in putting pen to paper at this time is to clarify for you all, as best I can, the reasons for the Church's teaching and to encourage you to reflect deeply on this issue, which is of such concern to so many people. This is my responsibility as your Archbishop. I hope you will receive and read this letter, and others which may follow, in the spirit in which they are written.

At the outset, I wish to state quite clearly that the Catholic Church, through its official teaching, cannot support proposals for the changing of the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. In affirming this long-standing position, it is important to remember that it is based on our convictions about the beauty and dignity of marriage understood as the union of a man and a woman for life, and as the best way to provide for the upbringing of children. Furthermore, it is a position based on the principle that in making decisions about such an important matter, both the desires and needs of the individuals concerned, and the stability and well-being of our society as a whole, must be given careful consideration.

The Church's teachings are grounded in our religious convictions, and especially in our belief in a personal God who is the creator and sustainer of all life, and whose creative design is written into the nature of creation itself and especially into the nature of humanity. That our convictions are based on these foundational beliefs should not be a surprise to anyone: we are a religious organisation. Nor should the religious foundations of our convictions disqualify us from engagement in the public discussion on these important matters. Belief in God is no less worthy a way to approach these questions than is the denial of the existence of God, or the belief that the "God-question" is irrelevant. There are many ways of understanding life and many ways of forming views about what will ultimately lead to greater human flourishing and what, on the contrary, will hinder this flourishing. The Catholic community, no less than any other in our society, has a right to **propose** its views about what will best serve the interests of our society as a whole. The Catholic community, along with every other community, has no right to **impose** our views on others.

Put simply, the Catholic tradition takes the view that our society is best served by retaining the traditional understanding of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, voluntarily entered

into for life, which provides the basis for the creation of a family in which, wherever possible, children can be raised in a loving and stable environment by their own mother and father. We acknowledge that not everyone shares this view, but it is a position that until recently has been widely held by most societies, including those which have foundations in the Judeo-Christian heritage. This view presumes that marriage is about more than the mutual love between two people: it is also about the creation of a family.

In proposing this view, the Church is setting forth an ideal which it knows is not always realised in practice. Many couples are unable to have children, many marriages fail and the children of the marriage are raised in single-parent families, many people enter into new unions in which the children are raised by a parent other than their own, and many children, for a variety of reasons, are raised in situations which fall outside the traditional family structure. In many, and perhaps most, of these situations, the children are raised by people who love them and make great sacrifices for them. We should be very grateful to such generous and loving people. But the fact that the ideal is often not realised in practice does not make the ideal any less worth striving for. It is only traditional marriage which can provide the context in which the full realisation of this ideal is possible.

None of this suggests that there should be any unjust discrimination against same-sex couples. Nor does it suggest that legal protections and government benefits should be denied to same-sex couples. Many of us have family and friends in same-sex relationships: we love and respect them and want to see them treated with dignity.

It does suggest, however, that the Government has a role to play in the regulating of marriage in our society primarily because marriage is linked to the creation of a family. It is the importance of the family unit in society which justifies the government's role. Questions of personal relationships outside this area should not be subject to government regulation in the way that is being proposed.

There are many views on this complex issue. The way in which it is discussed, and the basis on which decisions are made, will be a measure of the maturity of our society. It is unworthy to suggest that those who argue against the proposed redefinition of marriage are homophobic or in some way lacking in intellectual depth. It is unfair to suggest that they are trying to force their views on others. It is cruel to claim that such people are devoid of love, compassion or understanding for those in same-sex relationships.

From our point of view as Catholics we seek, as both Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI have expressed it, to **propose** and not to **impose**. We offer the Church's view as an important contribution to the discussion. We do so respectfully but with genuine concern that the well-being of our society, and of our families in particular, is in play. Let us, as the Catholic community of Perth, pray that the wisdom of God's Holy Spirit will be us as we exercise our right to vote in the postal plebiscite. Let us pray too for those who must ultimately make these decisions. May they be decisions which will lead to a deeper flourishing of our society, our families and our children.

+Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB

Archbishop of Perth