



## *Speaking the truth in love*

*Eph 4:15*

### CURRENT CHALLENGES

Dear friends

This is a time of challenge for our Church. Whether it's debates over school funding or religious liberty or the sacraments of Confession and Matrimony, there's more than a bit of anti-Christian feeling in the air. We recognize, with shame, that we've brought some of this upon ourselves as a Church. There's understandable anger about abusive behaviour by some pastors and failures of leadership in addressing these matters.

Even though we're dealing with these things much better now, feelings are still raw and some think we are no longer credible or trustworthy.

Certainly, we must be humble and repentant with respect to past failures and compassionate towards those with present anger. But we should also be clear-sighted about the battles for the soul of our culture in the areas of faith, life and love.

#### **1. Faith – and the Seal of Confession**

Some people think the civil law should no longer privilege what Catholics and Orthodox Christians confess to God through their priest in the Sacrament of Confession.

Until now Australia has recognised the freedom of people to practice their faith unimpeded. Many people came to this country precisely to enjoy that freedom. I believe we should continue to give people that space.

Child sexual abuse is a terrible crime. So I fully support the efforts of the Royal Commission and others to do things that really will protect children. But that doesn't require undermining the Sacrament of Confession. The fact is that perpetrators almost never confess this crime as, sadly, they don't accept how evil their deeds are. If trust in Confession were diminished, they'd be even less likely to be pressed to face up to this, turn themselves in, and take appropriate action to cease offending.

I believe the spiritual encounter between a penitent and God must remain inviolable and that Catholic priests and penitents should not be threatened with a criminal offence for practising their religion. And with you I thank our priests for persevering in generously offering opportunities for this precious sacrament and always protecting your confidences.

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Archbishop of Sydney

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## **2. Life – and protection of the dying**

Discussion has begun in NSW about whether doctors should be allowed to kill patients who ask to be killed.

No one likes to see people suffer, especially those we love. But the fact is that death, like life, is rarely free from all pain and grief. If relieving suffering and respecting autonomy is what we are about, we would surely be ensuring that everyone in our state had access to the best pain relief and support. But as recent reports have revealed, we are still a long way from providing quality palliative care to all.

We already have high rates of youth suicide and elder abuse in our community. The last thing our society needs is for another group of people to be told – through our laws and medical practices – that their lives are worthless, that they would be better off dead, or perhaps most distressing of all, that we would be better off if they were dead.

The ‘quick fix’ of the lethal dose is not an answer. It will in fact make suffering people suffer more and vulnerable people even more vulnerable.

I urge you to consider signing the petition calling on our New South Wales parliamentarians to protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

## **3. Love – for real marriage and for same-sex attracted people**

Australians will soon be asked to decide whether to change the definition of marriage.

We might like to think it won’t affect us, but it will.

Should same-sex-attracted people be able to marry, as some want? Or should marriage remain a special covenant between people of opposite sex who, by doing what husbands and wives do, usually end up with a family – hopefully one that sticks together for those kids over the long haul?

There are arguments to be made both ways. Most of us know and love someone who is same-sex attracted and we want only the best for them. But we also love real marriages and we know that living out God’s plan for marriage and family is already tough enough today, without further confusing people about what marriage is. We need a sound marital culture to form people as good husbands and wives, loving mothers and fathers.

We shouldn’t be pressed to choose between loving homosexual people and loving real marriage. Christians rightly care about both. Keeping the debate civil, indeed loving, will be important.

Most people who believe in traditional marriage are not bigots. Nor are most of them clerics. Saying ministers of religion will be exempt is no consolation to the 99% of believers who are not ministers of religion.

If the law is changed, will Catholic parishes, schools, hospitals and welfare agencies still be free to employ lay people who profess our values? Will they still be free to teach what the Church teaches about marriage and family? And how about people in business or the workplace: will they be dragged before tribunals or otherwise bullied into accepting the gender ideology of our age?

These are challenging times for the Church. They are times that require us to show courage and compassion in equal measure. But if we really care about others, we must stand up for faith, life and love at this crucial time.

So pray, discern, act. God bless you always.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "+ Anthony Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning and a flourish at the end.

Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP, DD BA LIB BTheol DPhil  
Archbishop of Sydney

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