

From the Beginning of Creation

Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishops of New Zealand to young New Zealanders

Dear Kiwis of Generation Y

As the people who entered adulthood in this millennium you are being wooed by politicians and advertisers. Your choices will help shape our nation. One such choice is the present legislation about amending the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. The lobby that promoted and achieved the Civil Unions bill now say that this does not go far enough.

We would like you to consider carefully the wider implications of this major social change.

Why should you care?

Marriage is a fundamental structure in our society. Every one of us was born into a family, each of us has parents. The legal status of married couples is a long-established recognition by society of how important the family unit is, most especially to the children who grow up in that family. How marriage is defined affects us all; changing that definition will have many consequences, including with respect to adoption and throughout the education system. Some consequences will be unexpected and unintended. This is no small matter, nor quibbling about words; this is an attempt to re-engineer the status and structure of family life in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Why oppose?

When Jesus was discussing marriage with his disciples he observed

“From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mark 10:6-9)

The reality, as Jesus observed, is that male and female pair with each other. Males and females are different and complementary, each has a significant role to play in the nurturing of children. We come from one family and we set out to make another one. Marriage is not merely a human construction, it is the legal recognition of something natural. Civil law reflects and protects human nature. Society promotes and affirms the married state for the sake of the couple and for the sake of their children. The Church considers marriage to be the first blessing from the Creator and celebrates it as a sacrament. Christians did not invent marriage; it has been part of every human society throughout history. Legislators did not invent marriage; when the laws were written they were taking account of a pre-existing reality. We address this letter to you, rather than only to church members, because of the universality of marriage.

Marriage promotes love and generates life. Love, friendship, and commitment exist in many forms, but only the bond between one man and one woman, intending to live together and hoping to have and raise children, is dignified with the name and legal status of “marriage”. The couple vow to love and honour each other and New Zealand law and custom have responded by recognising that commitment and honouring it with a unique recognition.

Is this simply a question of equal rights?

Marriage is never a universal human right. Not all persons can or should be married. While the immediate focus of the current proposal is whether a marriage must involve a man and a woman, the argument for change applies far more widely. Claiming “freedom of preference” and a universal “right to marry” would call monogamy itself into question. This denies the right to the truth about what marriage is, and about what the Church teaches on sexuality and marriage.

For the sake of married couples, their children and society as a whole, we ask you to oppose any change to the legal definition of marriage.