



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life

Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP (Chairman)
Bishop Peter Comensoli
Bishop Mark Edwards OMI
Bishop Michael Kennedy

28 August 2017

Your Graces, My Lords and Reverend Monsignors,

Weekly Communiqué to assist information-sharing for the Marriage Postal Survey

I am writing to provide you with an update about the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. With the assistance of Ben Smith, the ACBC Marriage Project Education Project Coordinator, I will be providing you with a weekly communiqué – usually each Tuesday – in the lead up and during the course of the survey period.

Marriage Plebiscite Working Party

As per my previous communications, I have formed a small plebiscite working party which has been tasked with assisting with the provision of updates and information sharing with the nominated diocesan marriage contact, Communications Directors and Life Offices. The working party will also provide practical ways to help promote the real meaning of marriage in our parishes and Catholic communities and the consequences that any change to the definition of marriage will have.

Resources

A web page on the ACBC web site has been established to provide some information on the Postal Survey: www.catholic.org.au/plebiscite. There are also a number of marriage resources at www.sydneycatholic.org/marriageinfo/. Further resources are currently being developed and will be available for distribution soon.

Pastoral Letters from Archbishops and Bishops

A number of you have already published pastoral letters on same-sex marriage in your diocese. A copy of each of these pastoral letters is attached to the email accompanying this letter. If you have issued a pastoral message on the plebiscite and would like for it to be shared please forward a copy to Ben Smith so we can send in future updates.

Edmund Rice Centre

You may have seen a publication from the Edmund Rice Centre entitled “Rights for LGBTI Australians: A Guide to the Marriage Equality Plebiscite” and the Centre’s campaign against what the Australian bishops (and indeed the Pope) have been teaching on this matter. I have spoken with the Provincial, Br Peter Clinch cfc who has agreed that the document will come down from the website.

As you will have seen there are a number of “prominent Catholics” who are being vocal in their support of same-sex marriage and in direct opposition to the Bishops. We should be switched on to the fact that there will be some, perhaps many, who will continue to use their positions and the media to pit themselves against the Church’s position on marriage in order to divide us and hijack the campaign.

High Court Challenge

The High Court Challenge to the Postal Survey is set down to be heard next Tuesday 5th September. You will most probably have seen media and legal speculation about how the challenge to the postal survey will go. The advice I have received is that this is a 50/50 proposition with a possible outcome of an injunction which, in the first instance, would most likely delay the delivery of ballot papers.

Coalition for Marriage

The Coalition for Marriage is the group leading the 'NO' case and the Catholic Church is one of the four partners. From Tuesday evening, you will begin to see television advertisements that will run over the coming week.

More than 3000 people have volunteered to assist in the campaign from right across Australia. They are currently conducting training sessions for volunteers ahead of a major door knocking and phone canvassing campaign. I would urge you to direct people to sign up to www.coalitionformarriage.com.au and to register as a volunteer. You can also sign up to receive daily emails with the latest news stories and campaign talking points.

Media Requests

If you receive **any** media requests, particularly ones from unfriendly publications, I would encourage your Communications Directors to get in touch with Monica Doumit at the Coalition for Marriage on 0417 102 103 or media@coalitionformarriage.com.au to discuss the request and to ensure you have the most up to date information.

Last week a number of requests from 'unfriendly' journalists and publications were received. Monica is able to track patterns in requests and so provide a unified response from the campaign.

Funding

The 'NO' campaign is seeking to raise \$20 million. Donations can be made online via the Coalition for Marriage website. If you know of any people in your networks who are in a position to make a significant contribution and who would like a further briefing about the campaign, I would be happy to help facilitate this. Please be in contact with me directly about this.

I hope you find this information of assistance for your ministry. If you have any feedback please contact Ben Smith on ben.smith@catholic.org.au.

Yours fraternally in Christ

A handwritten signature in green ink, reading "Anthony Fisher" with a cross at the beginning and a flourish at the end.

Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP
Archbishop of Sydney
Chair, Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life

Mr Ben Smith
Marriage Education Project Coordinator
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference