



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

21 November 2017

Your Graces, My Lords and Reverend Monsignors,

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

Statements following the announcement of the Same-Sex Marriage Postal Survey

Attached is the ACBC media release following the announcement of the result of the postal survey last week. A number of Bishops have also issued letters and statements. These are attached for your reference.

Comments by Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten on religious freedom during the Postal Survey

The following videos highlight the commitments to religious freedom protection made by Malcolm Turnbull during the Marriage Postal Survey. In the [first video](#), the Prime Minister says that “*Religious freedom is fundamental and it will be protected in any bill that emerges from this parliament.*” In the [second video](#), the Prime Minister stated that: “*I just want to reassure Australians that as strongly as I believe in the right of same-sex couples to marry, even more strongly, if you like, do I believe in religious freedom.*”

On the same day, the Opposition Leader argued that “*I am a supporter of marriage equality, but I also have been raised to be a person of faith. I can give this guarantee to the Australian people: I and Labor will not support legislation which impinges upon religious freedom in this country.*”

Update on the protection of religious freedom amendments for Marriage Law change

There is a considerable amount of debate occurring about the level of religious freedom protection to be included in any legislation enabling same-sex marriage. At one end of the spectrum, Labor, the Greens and some members of the Coalition are arguing for the Smith Bill. At the other end of the spectrum, conservatives are arguing for extensive amendments to the Smith Bill. However there are some within the Government who are pushing to postpone any debate on religious freedom until 2018. This eventuality risks taking religious freedom permanently off the agenda as the citizenship crisis threatens to intensify at the beginning of 2018 and consume the focus of Federal Parliament.

We encourage you and your senior staff to engage with your local Federal politicians to ensure they understand the need to strengthen protection for religious freedom in legislation before Christmas. Senators will be sitting in Canberra from November 27 to December 7. The House of Representatives will now be only sitting from December 4 to December 7. The last sitting day for both houses of Parliament may be extended after December 7 to allow for the passing of any legislation enabling same-sex marriage.

Information Brief on the need for religious freedom protection for parishes and agencies

An information brief has been prepared by Jeremy Stuparich providing some information on the issue of religious freedom and the need for people to contact their local Federal MPs to encourage urgent action on this issue. This information brief will be attached to the email accompanying this letter. This brief could be used in combination with the Draft Bulletin notice.

Draft Bulletin Notice encouraging people to write to their local MPs on the issue of religious freedom

In the next few weeks, Federal Parliament will be debating legislation to legalise same-sex marriage. It is important that this legislation includes extensive protection for religious freedom as promised by both Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten during the Marriage Survey. Please write to your local Federal politicians to ensure they understand the need to strengthen protection for religious freedom in legislation before Christmas. An information brief on the issue is available at <https://www.catholic.org.au/plebiscite>

Handling requests for the use of Churches for Same-sex weddings

A number of Archdioceses and Dioceses have been receiving requests to book Churches for same-sex wedding ceremonies. This trend will require the development of appropriate pastoral responses to these requests.

No Communique next Tuesday – 28 November

As the ACBC Plenary is being held next week there will be no Communique issued next Tuesday.

Yours fraternally in Christ



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