



# 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

7 November 2017

Your Graces, My Lords and Reverend Monsignors,

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

#### **Strategy for the protection of religious freedom in the event of a “Yes” majority**

In terms of possible legislation, WA Liberal Senator Dean Smith released the Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Bill 2017 in August. The Labor Party has indicated it would support this bill, but has not ruled out amendments. The Prime Minister has not ruled out supporting this bill.

This bill is problematic as it provides no real protection for the great majority of religious believers outside the context of a wedding ceremony who are neither marriage celebrants (religious or secular) nor church employees. The bill provides no protection that will ensure that the Church’s mission outside the context of a wedding ceremony is not curtailed. This lack of protection also applies to the work of our agencies.

A *briefing paper* highlighting the deficiencies of this bill in terms of its potential impact on the Church and its legal weaknesses in terms of Australian and international law is attached to the email accompanying this letter.

It is important for you and your senior staff to engage with your local Federal politicians to ensure they understand the need to strengthen protection for religious freedom. Senators will be sitting in Canberra next week from 13 November and both houses of parliament will be sitting from November 27 to December 7.

#### **Announcement of Survey Results on November 15**

The result of the Marriage Law Postal Survey will be released at 10am AESDT on the ABS website on Wednesday November 15. At 10:15am, the ABS will release the results of the Survey by Federal Electoral Division (FED), State/ Territory and Nationally. The ABS will also release the participation rate for the Survey by age and sex for each FED, State/Territory and the overall National figure.

#### **Suggested Prayers of Intercession for after the release of the Survey results**

The following prayers of intercession have been prepared for suggested use in your parishes for the weekend of 18-19 November 2017:

##### *1. In the event of a “Yes” majority*

For our nation’s civil leaders, the members of the Australian Parliament. That following the National Marriage Postal Survey they will enact laws which respect the rights and freedoms of speech, conscience, and religion of all in our land. We pray to the Lord.

For our nation Australia. That any hurt or division caused during the National Marriage Postal Survey will be healed and that we will respect the rights and freedoms of speech, conscience, and religion of all in our land. We pray to the Lord.

##### *2. In the event of a “No” majority*

For our nation’s civil leaders, the members of the Australian Parliament. That following the National Marriage Postal Survey they will respect and promote God’s loving plan for men, women, and children by preserving marriage as the foundational institution of society. We pray to the Lord.

For our nation Australia. That any hurt or division caused during the National Marriage Postal Survey will be healed and that we will respect God's loving plan for men, women, and children by preserving marriage as the foundational institution of society. We pray to the Lord.

**Managing community expectations in the lead up to and after the release of the Survey results**

The Marriage Law Postal Survey results will be released next Wednesday, 15 November. Please consider ways in which you can accompany your communities during this period as we move towards the release of the survey's results and the aftermath of their release.

Yours fraternally in Christ



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



Mr Ben Smith  
Marriage Education Project Coordinator  
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