



PASTORAL LETTER
Love and the Question of Same-Sex Marriage

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Bishop of Broken Bay
20 September 2017

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

As promised, and now that the postal survey forms have been sent out, I write to you again during the current national debate concerning the legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

I am mindful that this period of intense public scrutiny has been exceptionally challenging, with many of our family and friends personally caught up in the debate. Clearly, there is a strong aspiration among large sections of our nation that the current for change might capture the minds and hearts of a majority. As a fellow Christian committed to seeing our world through the prism of faith, and as your Bishop committed to shining the light of Christ into our lives, I offer this second brief reflection for your prayerful consideration.

We all seek love. Our humanity draws us towards the many expressions of love that fulfil us as individuals, as couples, as family, friends, neighbours, and as communities. Our desire for love in its many variations is a great gift, and something that underpins the common good. After all, love is a living memory whose presence in our lives carries us forward. No community or institution will endure if it cannot find a way of carrying forward, through memory, what it has learnt from experience.

It was Jesus of Nazareth who described for us the kind of love that marriage needed to carry it forward from one generation to the next, up to our present day.

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female', and said '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. (Mt 19)

We recognise from Jesus' teaching characteristics that reveal marriage to be a distinctive and unique expression of love, unlike any other loving relationship. These characteristics are: mutuality; complementarity; exclusivity; stability; procreativity. Different religious and cultural traditions have arranged these elements in varying ways, but these are the common elements that have made 'marriage,' marriage.

Much of this same understanding is captured in the current, entirely secular, definition of marriage in Australia: "*Marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.*" (Marriage Amendment Act 2004) In other words, whether religious or secular, now or in the past, marriage has carried forward the collective memory of its foundational aspects, for the good of society.

There are many relationships of love that resemble this settled understanding, but they are not called marriage. For example, we might respect the way in which loving de-facto couples share in many of the elements of a marriage, and we rightly seek the protections in law for these unions, but society does not call them marriages (and neither do most de-facto couples).

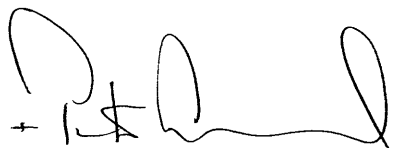
The same can be said of same-sex unions: they can be close to an image of marriage, but without the complementarity of the sexes and the natural possibility of procreation, a same-sex couple's mutually loving, exclusively given, stably-established union does not equate with the collective memory we share about the characteristics of a marital union.

Love demands to be acknowledged and honoured – from those exercising it, and from those considering it – because it reflects something of the love of God. Our human efforts in love are also always in need of humble perfecting in God’s image. But love is not just one kind of thing; it is not sameness. To bring diverse signs of love under the convenience of a single concept and word risks confusion and loss.

Genuine love is indeed good, but love is not all the same thing; difference and variety matter, and this difference needs to be acknowledged so that all may flourish. One of the key tasks we have – for our common good, and for the good of our shared future – is to find ways of carrying forward the multi-dimensional nature of love without losing the distinctiveness of married love, with its unique combination of mutuality, complementarity, exclusivity, stability and procreativity.

As I conclude this letter, friends, I would like to place all of us under the care of Our Blessed Mother, who knew personally the gift of married love. I encourage you to remember how the gift of marriage has been carried forward to us, and to learn again the heritage of love handed on to us. I believe that we will all benefit from placing our personal views into the arms of Mary, who holds us all in her loving embrace.

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter A. Comensoli', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Bishop of Broken Bay