

Fr Kevin Bates SM, pastor of Holy Name of Mary parish, Hunters Hill, writes in the parish bulletin of Sep 09-10, 2017 ...



With the likely up-coming vote on the issue of same-sex unions, people have been asking for some reflection on the matter.

You would know that media coverage is increasingly strong and sometimes stridently in favour of a “yes” vote, and frequently lampoons any other point of view as being “bigoted”, “out of touch”, “irrelevant.”

The Fairfax media were caught out last week misquoting Melbourne’s Archbishop Hart, causing something of a storm in some quarters. Since the misquote was de-bunked by the Archbishop, no retraction has seemed to appear so far. Watch this space for more of the same from various media such as GetUp and their ilk!

The stridency and self-righteousness involved in much of the publicity around this issue makes it difficult for people to engage in a more thoughtful manner. Points of view are ridiculed rather than engaged with and conversation is killed off.

It is clear that there are good sincere people, people of faith who hold diverse opinions on this matter.

I offer the following in the hope that it may promote respectful conversation and lead to careful voting if you decide to participate.

Last week, we printed for you, Archbishop Fisher’s letter in which he outlines Pope Francis’ view on same-sex unions. It is clear that the Church’s position on the sacramental nature of marriage remains firm and our current practice will continue.

At the same time, we are learning to understand more deeply that we each have a fundamental need to love and to be loved, regardless of our sexual orientation. The fundamental longing to give oneself in committed love to another person is very deep in us and is not determined by our sexual orientation.

Some believe that legalising same-sex unions will provide gay couples with the same rights as heterosexual people before the law. Others claim that they have access to these rights already.

Any change to the law will indeed be a civil and not a religious matter, though it has moral implications that concern the spiritual well-being of people regardless of religion.

With any change in civil law care must be taken to protect religious freedoms. Many are concerned that these freedoms will be eroded by such changes.

Some people are comfortable enough with the thought of legalising same-sex unions but are hesitant as to whether they should be referred to as marriages, preferring the definition of marriage to stay the same as it is both in civil and in church law.

Again, others are clearly in support of or clearly in opposition to any change in the law with firm opinions well established.

It is not at all helpful if we take a position, simply being carried along by the weight of perceived public opinion or the weight of our particular cultural group’s dictates. Nor is it helpful if we adopt a position that is based in fear, anger or hurt rather than love.

The strong voices of one or other side of the argument could well lead others to hide their views for fear of any ridicule they might encounter. Once again nothing will be gained by such bullying or such silence.

A couple of directions are clear however:

We will continue to uphold the sanctity of marriage as the cornerstone of our society and offer all the support we can to married women and men as they work out their lives as married couples.

We will also uphold the dignity of each person in whatever circumstance and acknowledge each one’s need for loving committed relationship, as we learn to understand, encourage and accompany each other.

In a certain sense, this conversation is just beginning. It’s one we’ve not had before. We can’t kill it off by remaining in the past. Nor can we dismiss it by tearing headlong into the future without taking heed of the lessons of our tradition. Let’s pray for one another as we engage honestly, bravely and carefully and seek to discern God’s loving purposes for us all.

Father Kevin