

March 22, 2012

STATEMENT OF THE EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLY OF OCEANIA

FOR THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL
AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS, CANBERRA

Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Orthodox Christian position on marriage requires an adequate understanding of how the term 'marriage' is understood not only in our faith community, but also its broader societal implications.

Marriage is regarded above all as a **sacrament** that has been instituted by God who created man and woman in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27-31). There is a strong biblical basis for this view, and the position of the Orthodox Church worldwide (not only in Australia) can never depart from the teaching of Holy Scripture. The union between a man and a woman in the Sacrament of Marriage reflects the union between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Those who freely choose to enter into marriage, enter into a conjugal union which ideally leads to procreation. Whilst not every marriage is blessed with the birth of children, every such monogamous union exists to form of a man and a woman a new reality of 'one flesh' (Mark 10:6-8).

The implications of such within society are:

- Marriage is a unique relationship between one man and one woman wherein the human person is made complete through gender complementarity;
- Marriage is the very foundation of a family, which in turn is the foundation of society itself;
- Confusing the institution of marriage with same-sex unions will have serious consequences for religious freedom and implications for freedom of conscience; and
- Children should be afforded every opportunity to start life, grow and develop with both their biological parents, i.e. their mother and father.

Our purpose is **not** that government legislation should become a 'tool' to impose Christian ethics upon fellow citizens who do not share our beliefs. This of course would not be legitimate, given that we respect the free will of all. Rather, our concern is that the very institution of marriage, which has a Christian tradition of two entire millennia, should remain as it is, and not be confused with the political debate concerning the legal status of same-sex unions.

Prayerfully,

[Redacted signature]

His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos (Ecumenical Patriarchate – Australia)

[Redacted signature]

His Eminence Metropolitan Paul (Antiochian Patriarchate)

[Redacted signature]

His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion (Russian Orthodox Church)

[Redacted signature]

His Grace Bishop Irinej (Serbian Church)

His Grace Bishop Mihail (Romanian Church)

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted signature]

His Grace Bishop Ezekiel (Assistant Bishop)

His Grace Bishop Seraphim (Assistant Bishop)

[Redacted signature]

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His Grace Bishop Nikandros (Assistant Bishop)

His Grace Bishop Iakovos (Assistant Bishop)