

## Facts & Responses to Marriage Equality Voluntary Postal Plebiscite/Survey

*Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry* is a coalition of LGBTI affirming Catholic groups and pastoral organizers who have joined together to support LGBTI Catholics, their families, friends and colleagues.

The Interagency promotes the values and principles of the gospel and Catholic social teaching.

**When Australian Catholics consider the voluntary postal plebiscite on changes to the Marriage Act in Australia, we ask that they consider the following:**

- i) Please make sure you respond to the plebiscite or survey by enrolling (by 24<sup>th</sup> August) and posting your vote promptly (by 27<sup>th</sup> October).
- ii) Vote with an informed conscience that takes into account the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination from the Catholic catechism.
- iii) The vote is about civil marriage under civil law for all Australians, not the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church which cannot be challenged by any change in civil marriage, just as Catholics believe in the case of civil divorce.
- iv) The changes to the Marriage Act suggested do not affect freedom of religion or religious expression.
- v) To reflect on what social justice means in the context of the appalling history of violence and abuse against LGBTI persons both in the church and in civic society.
- vi) Proposals to change the Marriage Act by both major parties have included exemption from current anti-discrimination law for religious bodies. Catholics therefore need not fear their beliefs will be compromised by changes to the civil Marriage Act.
- vii) Consider the human rights of LGBTI people to have equal access to society's civil institutions including civil marriage.
- viii) To consider as Catholic Christians how you can protect and support LGBTI persons and their loved ones from discrimination, prejudice, harm and abuse.

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*Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry* is deeply concerned for the spiritual, and the general wellbeing of LGBTI Catholics, their families, friends and colleagues during the months leading up to the vote.

We are acutely aware that suggestions that LGBTI people are in some way campaigning against the rights of other Australians is both deeply hurtful and victimizes the already marginalised. Because of this, some LGBTI Catholics feel disheartened. They are disappointed and confused that some of their spiritual leaders seem not to realise the pain they cause by their language.

The *Association of Catholic Priests* (ACP) before the Irish referendum vote on Marriage Equality required by the Irish Constitution (but not in the case of Australia) states:

“Sexual orientation does not debar anyone from God’s love. If as priests we are speaking on this matter, we need to remember that the use of intemperate language can cause deep hurt among gay people and their families, as well as doing further damage to an already ailing church. The ACP asserts the particular responsibility that devolves on priests to measure their words carefully, and not to direct their parishioners to vote Yes or No.”<sup>1</sup>

Many have expressed shock and distress over the disturbing collaboration by some church leaders with the Coalition for Marriage whose position implies LGBTI people are to blame for demanding their civil rights. For many this has been very difficult and has caused harm.

As is always the case, harm experienced by LGBTI people is also reflected in their families, friends, colleagues and allies. *Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry* expresses solidarity with those who support their LGBTI loved ones. We abhor all forms of violence and abuse directed at any persons.

We condemn the continual dehumanization, prejudice and discrimination directed against LGBTI Catholics and their loved ones.

We pray that the weeks leading up to the survey will be a time when respect and listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit will reign over rhetoric and ideology that can damage the human spirit in each person.

Yours faithfully,

Co-Convenors of *Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry*.  
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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2015/03/marriage-equality-referendum-acp-statement/>