

A Pastoral Letter to all CRC Congregations

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Christian greetings,

I'm writing on behalf of the leadership of our CRC denominational family in relation to the postal survey that you will be receiving in a few days.

This is an important time for our country and while I feel strongly about this issue, I am not panicky or fearful. I am confident that the Church of Jesus Christ will continue on mission as we offer the hope of the Gospel to all people.

I would like to unpack the big picture biblical and spiritual reasons why it is important to uphold and support traditional marriage and why we believe this is good for the flourishing of not only Christians, but the whole of society. We maintain that marriage has been a social good for thousands of years and has stood the test of time.

As a Christ follower, my conviction is that marriage is to be only between one man and one woman for life and in spite of its imperfections, heterosexual marriage is the healthiest place to raise children of the next generation.

We as a denominational family have a carefully crafted statement on marriage in our foundational Charter and our Australian Constitution.

It states, "The CRC Churches International Australia understands that the Biblical model of marriage is a life-long, monogamous legally-performed marriage between a man and a woman, in which there is constant love, continual care, mutual respect, Godly order, submission and sexual intimacy. In such a context children may be born and raised in an atmosphere of loving care, Godly training and discipline. In our local churches, subject to issues of care and safety within our congregations, we aim to be inclusive, accepting and welcoming of all people without necessarily affirming certain behaviours.

However the standard of Biblical holiness needs to apply to official church members and leaders. Therefore, any sexual relationship outside of marriage between a man and a woman, such as adultery, de facto relationships, homosexual practice, or any other form of sexual conduct prohibited by Scripture is deemed unacceptable for CRC ministry leaders. Those persons who continue in, or promote as acceptable Christian behaviour such practices, will be disqualified from being an official local church member, ministry leader or eldership board member, and from holding a credential within CRC Churches International Australia."

We believe this without being unkind or in any way hateful towards people who have committed adultery, or are in defacto relationships, or engage in homosexual activity. They are all loved by God and Jesus died on the Cross to save them as well as ourselves.

We must remember that we are all made in God's image but we have also all fallen short of God's ideal (Romans 3:23). The truth is, all of us are broken to some extent in the area of our sexuality, and for all of us, this is an area where we need to follow and trust Christ. We as a movement hold to the biblical teaching that God's ideal is for sexual activity to be between a man and a woman in a lifelong committed married relationship. This has been the teaching of the Church since Jesus and the Apostles.

As complex and broken human beings, we all struggle with weaknesses and temptations. People within our CRC churches and broader society who are attracted to people of the same-sex are no different. The call for all of us is to follow Christ in the midst of our struggles, and to pursue his radical call for our lives.

There is a great book titled "Is God anti-Gay?" by celibate Anglican Minister, Sam Allberry, who struggles with same-sex attraction and is living a biblically mandated Christian lifestyle. The website <http://www.livingout.org/> is also an excellent website that Sam contributes to.

I want to remind you of several key biblical passages that are relevant to this important discussion. In **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**, Paul tells us that thieves, adulterers, idolaters, drunkards, extortionists and slanderers are equally condemned along with immoral heterosexuals and immoral homosexuals. We also strongly affirm that all sin can and will be forgiven through an active personal faith in Jesus.

Paul says in verse eleven of 1 Corinthians 6 that all the sins he lists can be cleansed by Jesus. The woman who was about to be killed for adultery was rescued and forgiven by Jesus. She left her life of sin transformed by the love and mercy of Jesus (John 8:1-11).

The Apostle John explains this process of repentance and faith beautifully when he writes, *"⁸If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. ^{2:1}My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* **1 John 1:8—2:2** (NIV)

So to answer the question, "Why am I and the CRC against same-sex marriage?" It's simply because Jesus told us to stick with God's created pattern that marriage is to be a loving union only between a man and a woman for life.

Jesus' words are clear. He says in **Matthew 19:4-6** (NIV), *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' (Jesus accepts the authority of the Genesis record), and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?" (Jesus then adds to the Genesis statement reinforcing heterosexual marriage by saying) So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

This issue of gay marriage is one of several moral and ethical matters that are popular in our present culture, but run counter to Scripture and to what Jesus explicitly taught. This is why, as Biblically-grounded and submitted Christ-followers, we simply have no alternative but to obey Him.

Jesus' positions can be difficult to understand, hard to follow, incredibly inconvenient and even unpopular. However, if we really believe that as God's Son, He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), we must align ourselves to Him and His authoritative words in all matters that have to do with our beliefs and practices.

This is the essence of Christian discipleship and we will never move from this as a CRC denominational family.

To help you, I'm attaching two articles that you may want to pass on to people who want some well reasoned, biblically based, Christ-Centred, and people loving answers of why we need to stick to the traditional view of marriage.

One is an edit of a message I shared a couple of years ago on a pastoral response to homosexuality and our ministry approach to people with same sex attraction. The other is a theological statement entitled "The Nashville Declaration" that a group of scholars and church leaders have recently framed. Both are imperfect attempts to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and to present Jesus as both the truth teller and grace giver (John 1:14).

I, like most CRC pastors and leaders, don't use our church platforms to ask people to vote for a particular political party in general elections. This would be divisive as people have legitimate, but differing positions on a host of matters. I'm not blindly committed to one political party and have voted for the Liberals, Nationals, Labor, Family First and some independents over the decades.

This issue however, that will alter the most basic, fundamental, and important structure of our society is beyond a normal political issue, which is why most political parties usually allow a conscience vote on these controversial issues.

I'd like us all to remember the importance of compassion and love for our neighbours in this debate. While we have strong biblical convictions, we must always respect the right of others to disagree with us and we need to model the radical kindness of Jesus to people we disagree with. This is the essence of civility. Let's remember this not just in our interpersonal relationships, but also from our pulpits and social media platforms. We should be mindful there is a world watching the way we engage in these conversations and the Gospel of Jesus should always be central.

Finally, I encourage all members and friends of CRC Churches International to sincerely pray to our loving Heavenly Father that this social pillar that he has created, that Jesus strongly reaffirmed, and which has provided security and stability for thousands of years in an ever changing world, will not be altered.

Yours Sincerely



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