

HopeNET



Response to marriage consultation: Glenunga Church Council

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Response to the Discussion Paper on Marriage

Glenunga Uniting Church Council

1. Identify any challenges or new insights raised for members of the group by the commentary on the theological dimensions of marriage service.

In reviewing the document, there are a few issues we note in our reading:

1. The paper refers to the marriage service being a service of worship. This is something that we would affirm. In fact, all of life is to be a form of worship for the members of the worshipping community (Romans 12:1-2). However, what is equally clear from Scripture is that God is someone who reveals in himself the way in which we may approach him – not as we see fit but as God's allows us in His holiness (see for example Genesis 12:7, Exodus 23 and 25; John 1:1-14, and Hebrews 1:1-3). As such, we believe it appropriate that our approach to worship be shaped by God's character and revelation through Scripture and in other ways consistent with Scripture in a consistent manner.
2. In addition, the marriage service involves both vowing commitment to a relationship to God, and asking God to bless that union.
3. We affirm the restoration and healing that the God of reconciliation can bring to individuals and relationships. We agree that marriage is not something to be entered into lightly, however we also believe that a person who has experienced a marriage relationship breakdown may establish a new relationship as a gift from God, from whom proceeds that gift of marriage.
4. We are concerned that any change to the basic structure of family is to challenge a framework that has been given by God for a reason. Families, the foundational building block of society, are already struggling in our country. Our concern should not be with how to challenge the construct that God gifted to us, but to reaffirm their importance and help them to grow as places of nurture of wholeness and faith (Exodus 12:24-27).

5. We believe that temptation to sin is a part of the Christian experience. We understand that it is tempting to take something that is not ours, and yet this is still recognised as stealing. We understand that some people make us angry, and yet Jesus makes it clear that sustaining anger and hatred is equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21-22). We understand that some men find women attractive, and vice versa, however to even look at someone lustfully is against God's good will for us (Matthew 5:27-28). As such, we do not believe that the fact that people desire things is a 'hard-wired' reason for us to blindly follow those desires. We are not redeemed into a life that is unchanged, but a life that is shaped by the author of life.
6. We agree that incorporation of same-gender union as marriage relationships does not simply add to the definition but fundamentally changes it. Lasting relationships between same-gender couples are not new, nor have they always been covert. In fact, in the New Testament times in the Roman Empire, there was tacit acceptance. However, it has always been accepted that they are not part of the marriage definition. While aspects such as the place of romantic love have changed in position in the marriage process (from after the commitment to before the proposal in the West), they have not been fundamentally changed to differ from principles espoused by Scripture.
7. There have been a number of references to the word of God being revealed through the Bible as well as through Christ's work in the Church. We uphold that there is only one eternal God who has remained faithful and steadfast, and who does not change. Therefore, to build a tradition in the Church which would depart from Scripture makes it no longer Christ's body.

2. If the government were to legislate to enable same-gender couples to marry, what issues or questions would this raise for you?

1. Same-gender marriage has been on the agenda in Western countries for some time. There may be a sense of inevitability regarding such legislation but that must not be condoned by God's Church.
2. This is a departure from, and ignorance by, the government, of the fact that our nation's notion of marriage has stemmed from Christian tradition.
3. This having been said, we do not accept that it is God's will for us to accept a dilution or even evolution of the marriage relationship as being between a woman and a man, particularly to be extended to same-gender unions, since Scripture is consistent in its view on same-gender sexual relationships (eg. Genesis 19 and Romans 1:24-27).
4. We would be concerned that this decision would create a situation that would eventually find that Churches would be compelled to conduct same-gender marriage services or be subject to legal proceedings on the basis of discrimination, making biblical adherence, effectively, illegal.

3. What would you see as appropriate responses by the Uniting Church?

– pastorally for its members and the wider community?

We would suggest that members of the church should be enabled to understand God's perspective on marriage in ways that are firstly, based on all of Scripture and secondly, reflect what God is doing in our community through biblically constructed worldview, consistent with all Scripture. It is difficult to substantiate a stance in support of same-gender marriage in that light.

We should maintain a stance of welcoming people in grace regardless of their marital status, gender bias, or any other point of differentiation (Matthew 11:28-30).

We would recommend that the Uniting Church articulate a stance that is both Scriptural in principle and practice, outlining the biblical perspective on same-gender marriage, as well as the gracious and generous acceptance of all people into the church community. We see it as being critical that the congregation not see themselves as judges of others, nor other areas of sinfulness, but treat others in truth and love.

– in the church's practices concerning Christian marriage?

To own the Scripturally-upheld view of marriage as being between a woman and a man, and ensure that no other form of marriage is endorsed.

– in relation to the government and the church's role in conducting marriages?

We believe that the church's theological position on this should be clear, and that political process should not influence that theology. Recent history of places such as South Africa and Rwanda has borne out that the best outcomes are achieved when the Christian voice is truly heard by governments.

– in any celebration or blessing of same-gender relationships?

We do not see how this is consistent with Scripture as it requires a vow before God in, and plea for, support of a relationship that the same God rejects in Scripture.

4. Should the Uniting Church reconsider its understanding of marriage at this time? Why or why not?

1. The current definition of marriage should stand. While the Church's views on many topics has varied over time and with education and experience, it should never do so to the extent that it is contrary to God's previous specific revelation, renewed and re-stated by Jesus.
2. We would also argue that altering the views of the Church to stay 'relevant' with worldly views and to grant people simply their heart's desires contrary to Scriptural principles is to lose the Church's basis and integrity (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

5. What other issues are important to you in relation to these matters?

A. The current debate is not about that which the Government decides as much as it is that which Assembly endorses. It is our firm view that only a decision by Assembly that is consistent with all of Scripture understood in context is appropriate for the church. Anything less lacks integrity. If those who are prepared to endorse the motion can provide comprehensive Biblical backing to do so, we must all have the opportunity to consider that. If not, it is the Assembly's obligation to clearly and emphatically reject any suggestion for a new definition of marriage.

1. In terms of our community, we see many issues in family structures. We acknowledge that there is research that both supports and criticises the outcomes for children of same-gender couples. There should be more done to determine the impact on children of this decision, given that they are the most vulnerable in any family, before determining a stance by the Church. We must uphold the rights of the child. We do not believe that the solution to improving families in our nation to be a question of accepting a broader definition of marriage, but to find ways of resourcing families and strengthening families regardless of their shape.

1. As we have earlier stated, we believe that the acceptance and endorsement of same gender unions within the definition of marriage is unscriptural and so falls outside of Christ's designs for his body, the Church. Scripture does not just provide us with instructions on how to live life as Christ's body and the world, but it also provides us with the very hope of life itself. If we undermine the relevance of the principles of marriage espoused in Scripture, we open the door to undermining the validity of salvation itself, or remain inconsistent.

1. If the Assembly accepts same-gender marriage, it is our view that it would cease to be Christ's body, the Church. The primacy of Scripture over temporal culture as the basis of our life and witness as the Church corporately and individually is fundamental to us, and cannot be compromised. Changing doctrine to break alignment with Scripture (which is the effect of the church recognising same gender unions) would therefore place Glenunga (presumably along with other evangelical congregations and individuals) in an untenable position. We would be forced to consider our way forward, in line with Joshua 24:15: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," with whatever action that entailed.

6. Are there particular questions or insights into these issues that you want to share from your ethno-cultural community?

1. We are also concerned that people from more conservative cultures will find that this debate undermines the basis on which they came to faith. We do not find this process of whole community engagement to be a helpful process for those who have come to faith based on the revelation of God in Scripture. Those who have been made aware of the debate have often been dismayed by the mere asking of the question.

1. The Spanish-speaking service of our congregation are quite affronted, not only by the idea of the inclusion of same-gender unions into the definition of marriage, but also by the fact that this question is being considered at all. Their view, as is ours is strongly that it should not be entertained.

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