

HopeNET



Response to marriage Consultation: Coromandel Valley

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Preamble

Colossians 1:28-29 English Standard Version (ESV)

²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

This paper is a summary of responses received from individual members of Coromandel Valley Uniting Church via email and from three discussion groups that met on the 22nd of September, 2014. The varied responses are limited to the proposed questions in the marriage discussion guide and response form. While the author's views are included in the paper he has sought to provide an honest summary of all the answers given to each question.

It should be recognised that the respondents to this questionnaire are fundamentally convinced of the grace of God for all humanity and that every human relationship is in someway broken and awaiting maturity and redemption in the grace of God. However, it must also be noted that in the light of God's redeeming grace the respondents were unanimously against the church normalising or blessing any relationship, which is opposed to the will of God and articulated as such in the scripture. This includes fornication, adulterous heterosexual relationships and homosexual behaviour.

Question one

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

- It was helpful to see the marriage service set in the framework of creation, the fall and redemption.
- While none of the respondents wished to change the definition of marriage, some affirmed the Assembly's desire to listen to the challenges posed by society. They acknowledge that such listening calls the church to re-visit the scriptures to test our interpretation. However, they were looking for a clearer distinction in the report between the changing cultural practice and the unchanging theological substance of marriage.
- Some of our members are exasperated that the Uniting Church is even considering its definition of marriage. For some, changing its definition to include same sex partnerships would be a 'line in the sand' that would prevent them from being a member in good faith.
- The overarching concern about the document was the inadequate weight given to scriptural authority. (e.g. 1 Tim 2:10 "homosexuality...contrary to sound doctrine"). To base the church's doctrine on opinion and practice was putting the cart before the horse. Many felt it contradicted the church's foundational premise in the Basis of Union, paragraph 5 (regarding with authority of the biblical witness).
- One group noted "The commentary shifted the marriage relationship from "man with woman" to "two individuals" sharing a commitment of love. This contradicts the biblical view of marriage as between two genders.
- The marriage relationship in scripture is intimately tied to the creation and the foundation of human society. This nexus appears to be broken in the commentary by its shift of emphasis towards companionship as the role of marriage.

Question two

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

- We recognise that the views of marriage held by the state and the church are different. Only the church is led by the Word of God and should remain steadfast in God's revelation of marriage. Only one respondent stated that in the light of the mission of the church that he would be willing to vote for the government to change its definition of marriage however he stressed that the church should not change its theology. He was concerned that the debate on marriage has been an unhelpful distraction to the church's call in proclaiming the gospel.
- Others felt that it was important to stand up for the traditional view of marriage in the secular sphere stating that the one flesh union between a man and woman is not just marriage in name but substance. Any other union is not marriage.
- The welfare of children. If non-physiological union is accepted by the State, this union could not naturally produce children. If children are supplied by unnatural means, then such children would be denied natural paternal and maternal parents. Many trials and reviews over decades have reported measurable disadvantage to these children compared with those if a natural family. Could this not be regarded as "state-sanctioned child abuse"?
- What legal difficulties would this create for the Uniting Church Ministers who refuse to marry same sex couples?
- If we were to promote an unbiblical view of marriage would this undermine everything else we preach from the scriptures? The authority of the Word would be ignored by our doctrine and practice. How would this affect our witness to God in the world?

Question three

What would you see as appropriate responses of the Uniting Church?

1. Pastorally for its members and the wider community

- We are called to love those battling broken sexuality with the gospel, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. The church is called to look forward in hope to its 'now and not yet' reality as a new humanity in Christ. To sanction broken sexuality, by ordaining it (either by seeking to bless same sex unions or other forms of sexual brokenness) would be to lose the transforming power of the gospel. In our desire to love the broken we must not hold a "too accepting" view that calls evil good and good evil (Isa 5:20) and fall into idolatry.
- With this in mind, many were pastorally concerned that we do not hold a too militant view that equally denies the gospel and the love and acceptance of Christ to sinners.

1. b) In the church practices concerning marriage

- The church should re-affirm by its doctrine and practice that marriage is between a man and woman as stated in the Marriage discussion paper under Scriptural language.
- The practices should change to respond to the cultural sensitivities only where such changes do not contradict the Bible's teaching on human relationships (e.g. the practice of a father giving away the bride away is open to change, but not the practice of marrying one man and one woman).

1. In relation to the government and the church's role in conducting marriage

- It would be a shame if the church cannot conduct marriages on behalf of the Government, as true marriage is a wonderful proclamation of the gospel. While the government may formalise same sex unions, in our view this is not legitimate marriage and therefore cannot be blessed by the church (even if the church wanted to).

1. d) In any celebration or blessing of same gender marriage

The blessing the church gives is only valid as it reflects the will of God. Given that God's Word articulates that such behaviour is an abomination to God, we cannot bless the behaviour.

Question four

Should the Uniting Church reconsider its understanding of marriage? Why or why not?

No. Cultural moves must inform but ultimately take a back seat to the authority of the Word of God. If we were to change the definition we would become apostate and an anathema to wider body of Christ. For the sake of the gospel and for unity we cannot support a change in the church's current understanding of marriage.

Question five

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

- In what ways can we be culturally appropriate and a blessing to the society without compromising what we believe? May we never live in a Christian ghetto but God forbid that we drift without an anchor on the sea of cultural change.
- If the church changes its definition of marriage will there be a negative impact on successive generations of the church as confusion grows about human society and marriage.
- How well does the Christian community already respond to those with sexual brokenness? g. homosexuality, adultery, pornography addiction. We need to re-examine how we pastorally support these people rather than consider changing our theology.
- Why should the church feel it has to change its teaching and practices in order to show love to people who are hurting? We are called to speak the truth in love. If we remove the truth would that be truly loving? We should not water down the substance of our faith.

Question 6

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

- One respondent stated “Indigenous, African and Asian Christian communities are largely opposed to changing the definition of marriage. Do we want to divide the church?”
- The Iranian community in our congregation is fundamentally opposed to formalising and blessing of homosexual practice as the scriptures call it as a detestable sin (Lev 18:22). A leader in the Iranian community in our congregation texted me this comment when asked for his opinion. “Hi Brother, I have not answered your question because I was sad. You know why? Because of the question itself. Where are the churches going? I think people could still not recognise the difference between grace and command. God has mercy for everyone and also has commands for those who believe in him. Jesus said, when I come some will call me God but I will say to them ‘I don’t know you!’ God came for everyone but those everyone have to obey”.

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