

**HONORARY SECRETARIES AND ARCHBISHOPS OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND
CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMISSION OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND**

**RESPONSE: MARRIAGE (SAME SEX COUPLES) BILL
TO : DEPT OF FINANCE & PERSONNEL
DATE: 31 May 2013**

The Church of Ireland thanks the Department for the opportunity to respond to the consultation in respect of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.

The Church's understanding of marriage is not impinged on by the proposals in the document and we therefore submit for your attention the most recent resolution on this subject passed at the General Synod of 2012.

Church of Ireland General Synod, May 2012

HUMAN SEXUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

The General Synod affirms that:

The Church of Ireland, mindful of the Preamble and Declaration [*of the Book of Common Prayer*], believes and accepts the Holy Scriptures as revealing all things necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ;

The Church of Ireland continues to uphold its teaching that marriage is part of God's creation and a holy mystery in which one man and one woman become one flesh, as provided for in Canon 31:

'The Church of Ireland affirms, according to our Lord's teaching that marriage is in its purpose a union permanent and lifelong, for better or worse, till death do them part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity'.

The Church of Ireland recognises for itself and of itself, no other understanding of marriage than that provided for in the totality of Canon 31. The Church of Ireland teaches therefore that faithfulness within marriage is the only normative context for sexual intercourse. Members of the Church of Ireland are required by the Catechism to keep their bodies in 'temperance, soberness and chastity'. Clergy are called in the Ordinal to be 'wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Jesus Christ'.

The Church of Ireland welcomes all people to be members of the Church. It is acknowledged, however, that members of the Church have at times hurt and wounded people by words and actions, in relation to human sexuality.

Therefore, in order that the Church of Ireland is experienced as a 'safe place' and enabled in its reflection, the Church of Ireland affirms:

A continuing commitment to love our neighbour, and opposition to all unbiblical and uncharitable actions and attitudes in respect of human sexuality from whatever perspective, including bigotry, hurtful words or actions, and demeaning or damaging language;

A willingness to increase our awareness of the complex issues regarding human sexuality;

A determination to welcome and to make disciples of all people.

The Church of Ireland is mindful that for all who believe 'there is no distinction' and that 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (*Romans 3:22 - 23*) and are in need of God's grace and mercy. We seek to be a community modeled on God's love for the world as revealed in Jesus Christ. We wish that all members of the Church, through the teaching of the scriptures, the nourishment of the sacraments, and the prayerful and pastoral support of a Christian community will fulfill their unique contribution to God's purposes for our world.

Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod

Revd George Davison

Ven Robin Bantry White

Mrs Ethne Harkness

Mr Samuel Harper

Archbishops of the Church of Ireland

Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh

Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin

Chairman of the Church and Society Commission of the Church of Ireland

The Revd Adrian Dorrian