

Sunday, 15 July 2018

## Pastoral Letter from the President on Marriage and same-gender relationships

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To all congregations and faith communities

### Marriage and same-gender relationships

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Assembly, the national council of the Uniting Church, has been considering the issue of marriage and same-gender relationships.

This long conversation over almost 30 years in our Church has been a difficult one, as it has been for many people of faith.

This week members of the 15th Assembly meeting in Melbourne have voiced a wide range of strongly and faithfully held views, from different theological and cultural perspectives.

Assembly members have taken the opportunity to speak for and against a range of different proposals. In doing so, I am proud to say they have modelled a loving Christian community, holding together and caring for each other.

God's grace has been abundant... and together we have reached a decision on a way forward for our Church.

To honour the diversity of Christian belief among our members, we will hold two equal and distinct statements of belief on marriage.

This decision will allow ministers and celebrants in the Uniting Church the freedom to conduct or to refuse to conduct same-gender marriages.

The existing statement of belief that "marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life" has been retained.

A new additional statement of belief has also been adopted.

That statement reads "marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of two people to live together for life."

What this means is that ministers who, in good conscience, are willing to conduct same-gender marriages are able to do so. This does not compromise the rights of those ministers who, in good conscience, cannot conduct same-gender marriages. They will continue to be able to teach their belief that marriage may only be between a man and a woman, and can continue to use a marriage liturgy that reflects that conviction.

I want to acknowledge the ministry and struggle of LGBTIQ people in the Uniting Church over many years. I know that this conversation is painful and difficult for you. At the same time I also acknowledge those who are not able to support this change – and your pain and difficulty in this space.

I offer my prayers that God grants you comfort and healing as we move ahead.

I want to reassure all members of the Uniting Church - your rights to follow your beliefs on marriage will be respected and protected.

Church councils will have the right to determine whether marriage services take place on their premises.

Grace and peace to you all as we continue to witness to God's abundant grace, the liberating hope of Christ, and the wondrous movement of the Holy Spirit in our beloved Church.

**Dr Deidre Palmer**  
President  
Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

14 July 2018

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