



There is some urgency to the Uniting Church acting to support marriage equality. Significant numbers of same-sex couples are ageing, and some would wish to spend their final years married, with the blessing of God and their faith community. Growing numbers of same-sex couples now have children. Again, it seems unjust to deny the couple (and children) marriage if that is what they seek. A further area of urgency relates to transgender couples who may or may not be legally married at the moment, and may even be required to divorce. *The suicide rates for LGBTIQ people are significantly higher than the general population. Marriage equality would be one way to give positive support and affirmation for LGBTIQ people.*

Marriage and other relationships

Not all individuals and couples decide to get married. The church has never taught that marriage is necessary for human fulfilment, though sometimes single people have not been fully welcomed in congregations. The reasons why some people might choose to not get married vary. For some same-sex couples, they have already been in a relationship for a number of years and so the “need” to get married, when it becomes possible in Australia, is not important for them. Some others might regard marriage as still being associated with patriarchal ideas about property and ownership, and thus seek relationships of mutuality, love and fidelity other than marriage. The Uniting Church should also bless these relationships.

Resources

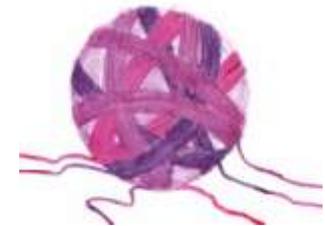
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Marriage Equality and the Uniting Church



**Uniting Network
NSW/ACT**

*welcoming and celebrating
lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender, intersex and queer
(LGBTIQ) people
in the Uniting Church*





Marriage equality in Australia

There have been many changes in Australian society in recent years, both in attitudes to homosexuality and same sex marriage. The majority of Australians, and the majority of Australian Christians support marriage equality. It would seem to only be a matter of time before the Australian parliament legislates for marriage equality. The Revd Dr Margaret Mayman, Minister at the Pitt Street Uniting Church, has recently argued in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that civil marriage equality poses no threat to those Christians who do not support same-sex marriage.

Christian support for marriage equality

Support for marriage equality is based on the grounds of both pastoral care and justice. This is not only a matter of responding to changes in society, but being faithful to the love and grace of God seen in the person of Jesus.

The fundamental imperative for change arises from:

- an understanding of the Gospel which upholds a ethic of mutual relations built on compassion, grace, and respect for the dignity and participation of all.
- the example and recorded teachings of Jesus. The Gospels record Jesus' ministry as being concerned for the poor, the outcast, and those rejected by society.

- the overwhelming weight of Jesus' ministry was towards inclusion rather than exclusion.
- values in the early Christian communities, exemplified by Paul when writing to the Galatians ("In Christ there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female", 3:28).
- deep respect for the many LGBTIQ people who are members of the Uniting Church. This has included learning about the lived experience and particular journeys of LGBTIQ people.

Marriage in the Uniting Church

Following six years of work by the Assembly Task Group on Sexuality, the 1997 Assembly resolved its support for marriage, with the following four structural components, comparable to the Declaration of Purpose in Uniting In Worship (UIW): one male and one female person; lifelong; mutually faithful; and possibility of having children.

A blessing ceremony for a same-sex couple was celebrated at the Pitt Street Uniting Church in 1990. The Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) ruled that clergy shall not perform ceremonies which "resemble" the marriage service. But this does not prohibit pastoral services of blessing for same-sex couples. The Assembly has never precisely defined what it might mean to "resemble" the marriage service.

Quite a number of clergy already lead services of blessing and commitment for same-sex couples, and some couples might see that as the equivalent of becoming married. In 2010 Uniting Network Australia developed a Service of "Sacred Union" and four couples entered such a union in a public ceremony celebrated at the Brunswick Uniting Church in Melbourne.

In 2013 the Assembly issued a *Discussion Paper on Marriage*. This did not result in any change in the Assembly policy or doctrine in 2015.

Marriage and Uniting Network Australia

The approach of Uniting Network Australia is summarised in a 2010 publication called *Sacred Union Ceremony* (see below). In the words of the editors:

"...for the Church to not bless those whom God has called to be together in a relationship of mutual love and unity is a serious dereliction in the Church's call to worship, witness and serve all people in the name of the One who died for all."

In June 2015 Uniting Network Australia issued a "Call for Marriage Equality" to the wider Uniting Church (see website below).

