

6 September 2021

**Submission**  
of the  
**NZ Catholic Bishops Conference**  
**Te Huinga o ngā Pīhopa Katorika o Aotearoa**  
to the  
**Justice Committee**  
on the  
**Conversion Practices Prohibition Legislation Bill**

*“If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him? The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this in a beautiful way. It says: ‘No one should marginalise these people for this, they must be integrated into society’.”*

– Pope Francis, media conference, 28 July 2013: <https://tinyurl.com/4jzsx649>

**Summary of main points:**

- We support the aims of the bill in line with the Catholic Social Teaching principles of human dignity and common good.
- We support the proposal to require the consent of the Attorney General before any prosecution under sections 8 or 9.
- The Catholic Church in Aotearoa NZ provides comprehensive and wide-ranging teaching material at all levels to Catholic Schools, teachers and parents which reflects the Church position that diversity should be respected and appreciated.
- We would not wish to see parents and advisers to young people restricted in giving advice consistent with both Moral Theology and Catholic Social Teaching out of fear of being seen to be breaking the law.

**Introduction:**

1. Te Huinga o ngā Pīhopa Katorika o Aotearoa, the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC) is the national body for the Catholic bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand. The Conference has a secretariat located in Wellington, and a number of agencies and offices to assist the bishops in carrying out national level functions.

2. This submission is based on the current Catechism, beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church, including both Moral Theology and Catholic Social Teaching which reinforces the human dignity and common good of each and every person, with their rights and responsibilities, inclusive of culture, ethnicity, gender and religion.

### **Key Catholic positions on the Bill and young people**

- 1 The Catholic Church in Aotearoa NZ does not support, provide or participate in any kind of 'conversion therapy', by which we understand to be any programme that seeks by medical, psychological and/or spiritual means to 'convert' people from a homosexual or transgender orientation or identification towards a heterosexual one. Evidence shows that such programmes cause harm and suffering. Any harmful, coercive or abusive practice under any name is abhorrent to the Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 2 Discovering one's sexual identity is a journey. In terms of human sexuality education in New Zealand Catholic schools, the emphasis is always on young people being made in the image of God and being made 'very good'. We want young people to come to a full acceptance of who they are created to be, including their sexuality, and to reach the fullness of their potential.
- 3 For some, the exploration of sexual identity may take time and require a psychological space free from any judgements and free from internal and external pressures. For believers or members of the Church, this exploration frequently includes a religious/spiritual dimension. It is important to offer affirming spiritual support to people should they seek it as part of their journey. An important part of the role of Catholic schools and parishes here is to help in the formation and exercise of a young person's personal conscience.
- 4 While some who are on the journey to fully understanding and embracing their sexuality will require and seek support from a qualified professional, some will wish to talk about their sexuality with others whom they trust, including a teacher, priest, chaplain, youth leader, counsellor, spiritual director or similar adviser. We would not wish this need to be restricted out of fear that such a person could be seen to be breaking the law. We want to ensure that the legislation prohibiting conversion therapy protects the ability of people to have these important conversations without fear.
- 5 At the same time, we accept and endorse that the adviser being approached must be careful not to coerce the inquirer towards the adviser's own point of view, whatever that might be. Advice may include some level of persuasion, for example suggesting someone take a little more time. A neutral, open

stance, that simultaneously conveys God's unconditional love and acceptance and that creates the space for a person to wonder, inquire, explore and be open to other points of view, is important for anyone growing in understanding of who they are.

- 6 The Catholic Church in Aotearoa NZ provides comprehensive and wide-ranging teaching material to Catholic Schools and teachers at all levels. These include:
  - *Framing Document –Human Sexuality Education: A guide for Catholic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2019)  
<https://tinyurl.com/yt5x zr55>
  - *Gender Complexity in Schools: Some guidance for Principals, BOTs, Staff, Students and Whānau of Catholic Primary and Secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2018)  
<https://tinyurl.com/4ctx8vx6>
- 7 The *Framing Document* makes clear that “education in human sexuality should be positive, open and enable children and young people to see and seek their true potential as made in the image and likeness of God. Our differences should be respected and appreciated.”
- 8 The *Gender Complexity Statement* notes that “we live in a time when some young people are particularly vulnerable as they discover that their own gender and sexuality does not fit traditional binary categories. The number of children who report their gender does not match their biological sex is significant. Gender dysphoria is real.”
- 9 Both documents positively affirm support for children and young people to be who they are. Teachers in Catholic schools attend a four-day course *Having Life to the Full* which prepares them for this work. All these programmes incorporate the relevant Ministry of Education requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission. We would appreciate the opportunity to provide an oral submission to the Justice Committee on this matter.

Signed:

- ✠ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington, Apostolic Administrator of Palmerston North and NZCBC President
- ✠ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin
- ✠ Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland
- ✠ Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland
- ✠ Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary
- ✠ Paul Martin SM, Coadjutor Archbishop of Wellington and Apostolic Administrator of Christchurch.