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19 December 2017

Director, Legal Policy
Department of the Attorney-General and Justice
GPO Box 1722
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To whom it may concern,

We are writing on behalf of the Parish Council of St Peter's Anglican church Nightcliff. Our church has met each week for over 53 years. At our two Sunday services over 200 members of the community meet each week to hear the Bible taught so we might grow in Jesus Christ and live for him each day.

We have a number of small groups who meet throughout the week in various locations around Darwin, and also run a playgroup, kids church and youth group ministry during school term.

We are thankful to be invited to give feedback on the discussion paper to modernise the anti-discrimination act. We are glad that our laws get reviewed and updated to "keep pace with contemporary standards and expectations".

However, as a local church, we would like to raise a few concerns about some of the proposed changes.

4. Should vilification provisions be included in the Act? Should vilification be prohibited for attributes other than on the basis of race, such as disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, gender identity or intersex status?

We are very supportive of the desire to prevent "extreme or pervasive vilification". However the definition of vilification to include "offend" and "insult" seems like a very low bar. A few years ago in the UK, actor Rowan Atkinson attacked the "creeping culture of censoriousness" and argued that the right to free speech is second only to food to eat and more important than a roof over our heads. He said this as part of a campaign called, "Feel free to insult me". (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gciogyLYtY>)

We are concerned that this might result in people worrying about whether they can say something on a particular topic, or if there will always be the threat of a discrimination charge as soon as someone is offended or feels insulted.

In particular, our Sunday services are public meetings that anyone is welcome to come to. We actively encourage people to join us, and expect our regular members to invite friends too. We also know that as the preacher teaches from the Bible, there are some things which are offensive to contemporary standards and expectations. They will be the "genuine belief held by the person making the comment". We hope this scenario will be considered a reasonable exemption, rather than an opportunity for someone who is offended to bring a charge of vilification.

14. *Should any exemptions for religious or cultural bodies be removed?*

Our church community includes 85 children and youth who attend many different schools throughout Darwin. There are also at least 12 adults working at various schools throughout Darwin. Some are at independent schools. Some are at government schools. Some are at Christian schools. Some are at Catholic schools.

We have no formal or implied position or policy towards any category of school.

However, as Christian teachers and families, we are concerned about the proposed changes to religious exemptions in religious educational institutions.

For those who choose to send their children to a Christian school, can they continue to expect that teachers and staff will share the Christian ethos of the school?

For those who competently work at Christian schools, will their employer have to apply for an exemption before renewing their contracts because they are Christian? Together with the proposed changes about vilification, what is to stop a situation like the St John's Church of England school in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, that felt pressured to stop inviting the local Church of England minister to be involved in their assemblies? (<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/oct/17/kent-school-cuts-ties-with-christian-group-after-parents-complaints>)

For those who choose to send their children to government schools, will there be a push to censor them from discussing their faith in the schoolyard?

We hope Christian schools will continue to have the freedom and opportunity to proactively encourage, support, and teach Christian truths by Christian people.

21. *Should the term "parenthood" be replaced with "carer responsibilities"?*

One of the great strengths of our church is the care shown by members of the church community. We take seriously Jesus' words, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35) This is done in many ways as we care for newcomers to Darwin, those who have recently joined our church, the elderly, the sick and frail, some who face financial hardship, others experiencing relational difficulties. It is seen in the giving of time, resources, energy, and care.

So we are glad and would encourage you as you recognise that, "Carers perform an important role for the community and it is important that they are protected under the Act."

However, as we have already stated, there are many children and youth who are part of our church community. We have had a part time youth minister for 10 years and in 2017 we employed in a new position a Children and Families Minister. We love having children and youth as a vibrant part of our church family and want to help them grow and mature just as much as the adults. We try to be very clear that as a church we want to help parents help their children, not take over from parents. It is because we see a special role that parental responsibility plays, distinct from other carer responsibilities for children and youth.

Therefore, we want to encourage you not to replace "parenthood" with "carer responsibilities" but acknowledge them both. We think this will preserve the current paradigm of parenthood as well as address the concern that carers currently don't get appropriate recognition or protection.

We would like to thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the Anti-Discrimination Act. As you can see there are a number of ways these proposed changes will impact us as a church community, both corporately and individually. We trust you will take these comments into account as you prepare draft legislation moving forward.

Regards,



Joshua Kuswadi
Senior Minister



Michael Tong
Rector's warden

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Gareth Briggs
People's warden



Leigh Pleiter
People's warden