



The Anglican Church of Australia

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The Rt. Reverend Clarence E Bester  
Bishop of Wangaratta

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## **Statement regarding the determination and opinion of the Appellate Tribunal with reference to the Service of Blessing**

On 31 August last year, a substantial majority of the Synod representatives of the Diocese agreed to a service of blessing for persons married according to the Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961. This was assented to by the then President of Synod, The Right Rev'd A John Parkes, which brought the regulation into law. Soon after, the matter was referred to the Appellate Tribunal by the former Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. In response to that and as was agreed then, I, as Vicar General asked all our clergy to respect the processes of the National Church and, even though we were not obliged to, we agreed that we would pause all services until a determination and opinion was delivered. I want to thank our Clergy for respecting my wishes.

Yesterday at 4pm, we received the determination and opinion from the Appellate Tribunal, which is the Anglican Church's highest legal authority. It released a 5-1 majority opinion that there is no contraindication for using the **service of blessing** for civil marriages, including that of same sex couples, as authorised at last year's Synod. Importantly, the Tribunal stated that the Diocese of Wangaratta has not gone against the teaching of the Church on any question of faith. We remain faithful adherents of the teachings of Christ and committed members of the Anglican Church. It also re-iterated that this is not a service of marriage, but of blessing for those married under the Marriage Act as amended.

This, in summary, means that the regulation which came into effect last year can now be used for its intended purpose. What I need to state is that this provides for all those who are married under the Commonwealth Marriage Act as amended.

In this opinion and determination, I do not believe that we have any winners or losers. This matter will continue to be a bone of contention within the Anglican Church, as certainly within our Diocese, as some do not hold the same position.

When this regulation came before the Synod of the Diocese of Wangaratta last year, it was explicitly stated by the former Bishop that no clergy person should feel compelled to do anything against their own belief and I would want to emphasise that again. What I do hope is that all viewpoints will be respected

and that we will hold together as members of the Anglican Church even when we do not agree.

As Bishop I am the focus of unity for all within the Diocese, whether they agree or disagree with this ruling. Our next Synod occurs in the next two weeks. In the meantime I will be talking to our legal team, the Bishop's Leadership team, Bishop-in-Council, Clergy of the Diocese and then have more to say at Synod, where we will have all our Lay representatives present with us. Even as we are able to start using the service, as the Diocese's representative to the national Church, I will continue in conversations within and beyond the Diocese, taking time to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and attend to all those who are hurting in any way.

Last year I issued a statement that, even when we do not always agree on issues, it is amazing how we have still been able to hold together as a Church. I know that this determination and opinion might deeply affect our unity as a Church, but is also affirming to the many who have felt excluded over a long period of time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clarence E Bester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

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**Clarence E Bester**  
**Bishop of Wangaratta**