



We proclaim a crucified Christ

1Cor.23

16 December 2021

Dear People and Clergy of the Archdiocese,

Religious Discrimination Bill 2021

My prayerful greetings to you in the Lord.

I recently wrote to you about a bill before our State Parliament – the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill 2021* – that sought to restrict the freedom of religious organisations in Victoria. Regrettably, the bill passed earlier this month after being rushed through our Parliament.

This unbalanced law imposed on people of faith, only adds to a steady decline of religious freedom in Victoria. It unfairly targets and undermines the ability of faith organisations to confidently manage employment matters according to their mission. More about the bill and our concerns can be found at: www.melbournecatholic.org.au/religiousfreedom

On a national level, we have also had the introduction of the *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021* in our federal Parliament. While not perfect, I welcome the bill because it will provide basic human rights protections for Australians of all faiths to express their beliefs.

All Australian citizens, regardless of their religious belief or activity, should be able to participate fully in our society. They must be entitled to the equal and effective protection of the law and should not be discriminated against on the basis of their religious belief or activities in public life.

Significantly, given our situation in Victoria, the federal bill includes provisions to protect the ability of religious organisations to hire people who share their faith and values. Because what is being tabled is a modest and positive proposal for protection from religious discrimination, I hope both houses of Parliament will offer it safe passage without reduction. It is important that the federal bill attracts bipartisan support to ensure an enduring legacy for laws that help prevent discrimination against people because of their religious faith.

The bill has been referred to two federal Parliamentary committees, who will be consulting with organisations and individuals over the coming weeks. Conscious of the time of year, with the Christmas feast approaching, may I encourage you to do whatever you can to express your support of the federal *Religious Discrimination Bill* and also your concerns about the diminishment of religious freedom more locally in the State of Victoria – with our federal representatives in Parliament. Now, more than ever, there is a need to provide people of faith with protection under the law.

We are fortunate to live in a democratic society where we have the right and responsibility to advocate for fair and just laws. I encourage you to exercise this freedom. Information about how to take action on this issue is attached on page three.

I would also like to take the opportunity to express my prayerful unity with you this Christmas Season. It has been a challenging and difficult year, and I have been saddened that I have not had the opportunity to meet with you more, had normal circumstances allowed.

I pray that the peace of the Christ-child may renew you with his boundless love this Christmas and that the coming year be full of many blessings and a renewal of hope and faith.

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter A. Comensoli', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne



Standing up for religious freedom

In light of the passage of the Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill in Victoria and the consideration of a Religious Discrimination Bill federally.

1. **Contact your federal Members of Parliament:**

Writing to federal Members of Parliament is vitally important, because religious freedom legislation is being considered on a federal level. You can write to them over the coming weeks to share your concerns about the restrictions on religious freedom in Victoria and ask them to act to protect the religious freedom of all Australians by supporting the *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021*. If you are unable to write, you may like to call to express your views.

Each Victorian has one local MP representing their geographic area and twelve Senators who represent their state.

Details of your local federal Member of Parliament can be found here:

www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members

Simply scroll down to 'Search Members' and type in your postcode to find your MP.

Details of Victorian Senators can be found here: www.bit.ly/3BNVYAI

2. **Fill out this survey:**

One of the committees looking at the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 is seeking responses from members of the public in the form of a short online survey. Responses can be made up until Friday 21 December, 5pm.

The survey can be found here: www.surveymonkey.com/r/ReligiousDiscrimination

3. **Share your concerns with others:**

You are also encouraged to tell your family, friends and those in your local community about your concerns and ask them to become active too.

4. **Be active on social media:**

You may also like to share your concerns with federal Members of Parliament via their Social Media pages.

5. **Find out more:**

Keep up to date about this issue at: www.melbournecatholic.org/religiousfreedom

6. **Pray:**

As people of faith, we know that we can entrust all things to the Lord and trust in his mercy. You can pray for the passage of the *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021* and for religious freedom to be respected and upheld here in Australia and all across the world.