

Press review of Irish government commitment to hold referendum in 2015 on same-sex marriage

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The Independent - Response of the Roman Catholic bishops

The Independent reports this morning that Taoiseach Enda Kenny has declared his support for gay marriage and promised to campaign for it in a referendum. The Government has decided an historic vote on same-sex marriage will be held by mid- 2015.

The report continues - The decision puts Mr Kenny on a collision course once again with the Catholic Church and conservatives following the bruising encounter over abortion.

Up until now, Mr Kenny had avoided giving a view on gay marriage.

He asked Tanaiste Eamon Gilmore last week for more time before making a decision on whether to hold a referendum.

But he told ministers at Cabinet yesterday that he was in favour of gay marriage and agreed to hold a referendum by mid-2015 at the latest.

He made his position public last night by telling business people at a function in Dublin that he was going to hold a referendum on the "equality issue of gay marriage" in 18 months.

"I support that very strongly and we'll campaign for that when it comes," he said.

In a swift response, the Catholic Church indicated it would oppose the referendum, saying that any change to the nature of marriage would "undermine" it as the fundamental building block of society.

expected to be held in the spring of 2015 with up to six other referendums on changes to the Constitution on the same day.

In a further Independent report -

Bishop Denis Nulty said the Catholic Church would continue to hold that the differences between a man and woman



The Church of Ireland's LGBT group welcomed the decision

were "not accidental to marriage but fundamental to it".

He said that children had a "natural right to a mother and a father" and that this was the best environment for them, where it was possible.

"The church will participate fully in the democratic debate leading up to the referendum and will seek with others to

reaffirm the rational basis for holding that marriage should be reserved for the unique and complimentary relationship between a woman and a man from which the generation and upbringing of children is uniquely possible," he said.

The Government was damaged by the defeat of the Seanad abolition referendum, with one minister saying privately that a new approach needed to be taken to avoid a repeat.

A government spokesman said there was a need to have a significant lead-in period to explain the issues around the vote to the public.

"The Government is very anxious that this should be won," he said.

But the Government is set to face an early test in the run up to the gay marriage referendum. The Cabinet has agreed that the laws on family and adoption rights for gay people will be voted through the Dail in advance of the gay-marriage referendum in 2015 to prevent them from overshadowing it or becoming an issue in the campaign.

CONSTITUTION

There will be a family rights bill published before Christmas to give the guardianship and custody rights to gay people, as well as the ability to become surrogate parents.

And Children's Minister Frances Fitzgerald is going to bring forward legislation to allow for children to be adopted by gay people.

Fine Gael sources have acknowledged that passing these laws will bring up "sensitive issues" which could pose problems for some of their backbenchers.

However, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) chairman Kieran Rose said the groups were "delighted" with the decision to hold a referendum to provide equal access to civil marriage for lesbian and gay people in 2015.

And he said Mr Kenny's backing for it was a momentous and proud moment.

"The Taoiseach's support for the full and equal citizenship of lesbian and gay people is deeply heartening and encouraging both for lesbian and gay people and for the families of gay and lesbian people all over Ireland," he said.

There have already been 1,500 civil partnerships between gay and lesbian people since the legislation was introduced three years ago.

But the Government was forced to act on holding a gay marriage referendum after the Constitutional Convention voted by a 79pc majority in favour of it. The deadline for the Government to either accept or reject the referendum recommendation expired this month.

The State is still awaiting the result of a Supreme Court challenge by Senator Katherine Zappone and her partner Ann Louise Gilligan, to the ban on gay marriage. The decision to hold a gay marriage referendum was strongly welcomed by Tanaiste Eamon Gilmore.

A spokesman for him said it was an important day. It was only 20 years since homosexuality had been decriminalised and the announcement of a referendum on gay marriage was a sign of how much things had changed.

"This is probably the last significant legal change (in this area)," he said.

The Guardian - Yesterday The Guardian reported that this development was underway....

There was response from Changing Attitudes Ireland which seeks to influence church of Ireland policy in this area.

The decision by the Irish Government to hold a referendum on civil marriage for lesbian and gay couples has been welcomed by a Church of Ireland pro-LGBT group, Changing Attitude Ireland (CAI).

Dr Richard O'Leary, CAI Chair said "The Government's intention to hold a referendum to extend civil marriage to same-sex couples will facilitate discussion and challenge the ignorance, especially in the Churches, of the positive experiences of same-sex relationships.

"We hope that the Irish Churches will embrace the message of inclusion, which is shared by many Christians, and will not oppose the extension of full civil rights to gay and lesbian persons. In particular we hope that the minority Protestant churches in Ireland will empathise with the minority gay community and support legal equality for all the people of Ireland".

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Irish Examiner

The Irish Examiner states - The referendum on the major social reform will come five years after same-sex couples were given the right to civil partnership.

It also comes as details emerge of the unprecedented Vatican worldwide consultation on the new realities of family

life including gay marriage and divorce as part of Pope Francis's efforts to reform the Catholic Church.

The questionnaire has been sent to bishops around the world asking them for detailed information about the "many new situations requiring the Church's attention and pastoral care".

The 39 questions are unusual because of their non-judgmental, practical nature.

The Irish Times - Catholic bishops to campaign against proposal

Irish Times report - While the announcement of a referendum of same-sex marriage was welcomed by gender rights campaigners, the Irish Catholic Bishops said the church would be mounting a campaign of opposition.

"The debate at the heart of the referendum announced by the Government is not about equality," said Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty said, in a statement on behalf of the

bishops. "It is about the very nature of marriage itself and the importance society places on the role of mothers and fathers in bringing up children."

Marriage Equality chairwoman Gráinne Healy yesterday said the importance of cross-party support for the referendum could "not be underestimated".

"It has been seen [in other jurisdictions] as a brave move and a leadership move – and leadership is something that we really

require in Ireland at the moment,” she said.

Speaking before Taoiseach Enda Kenny had outlined his position on the referendum, she said: “I would be hopeful he himself would feel he is able to speak on the issue. I’m also particularly interested in Fine Gael being able to say they are supporting this referendum.”

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network chairman Kieran Rose said yesterday’s decision by the Government was “landmark” and “historic” in the context of the evolution of gay rights in Ireland.

Minority group

Equality Authority chief executive Renee Dempsey said it was important the wording of the referendum be chosen carefully. “It is important the referendum does not place a minority group in the position where they must ask permission of their peers to marry the person of their choice,” she said.

Irish Council for Civil Liberties director Mark Kelly said he had “absolutely no compunction” in calling for Mr Kenny to declare his support for the referendum.

“This is a moment for the Taoiseach and the leader of the Government to show leadership,” he said. “He should say clearly that he’s calling on everybody to vote for equality.”

In his statement, however, Bishop Nulty said: “The church regards the family based on marriage between a woman and a man as the single most important institution in any society. To change the nature of marriage would be to undermine it as the fundamental building block of our society.

“The church will therefore participate fully in the democratic debate leading up to the referendum and will seek with others to reaffirm the rational basis for holding that

marriage should be reserved for the unique and complementary relationship between a woman and a man from which the generation and upbringing of children is uniquely possible.”

Children

David Quinn, the director of the Iona Institute, which is a Catholic lobby group, said any party that supports the referendum would be “attacking the natural rights of children”.

“It is no breach of the equality principle to treat different situations differently,” he said. “The sexual union of a man and a woman is unique and warrants a unique social institution . . . It now seems clear that virtually all of the political parties in Ireland are prepared to radically change for the worse the most important child-centred social institution we have.

“They no longer see any reason why we should have a social institution dedicated above all to encouraging men and women to raise their children together.

“To this extent, they are attacking the natural rights of children.”