

Thinking about 'The Voice'

I have always been cautious, when those who have authority and influence in the church use it as their personal platform to urge their congregations to vote a particular way or for a particular party – so please do not hear or read this document as a means by which I seek to influence your own vote at the upcoming referendum. At the same time, I am conscious that it is important to recognise that as Australians we must exercise our democratic responsibilities thoughtfully, and that as followers of Christ, those who live as 'strangers and aliens' in this world as we await the fullness of his Kingdom, we exercise these responsibilities through a different lens. In this regard, I have found the article from John Dickson linked here (<https://tinyurl.com/mpduysvs>) to be helpful in shaping my own considerations.

Whilst this article is directed more towards our normal election process, there are good principles to consider in our thinking about the upcoming referendum, in terms of 'a Christian vote' (and I commend the whole article to you!):

1. Vote for others

In humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4).

2. Vote for the moral health of the community

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people (Proverbs 14:34).

3. Vote for the poor and weak

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Proverbs 14:31)

4. Vote prayerfully

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

When it comes to this referendum, there are good-hearted, Christian people on both sides of the debate, just as there are indigenous leaders (and not just those in political parties) who are on both sides of the debate. There are those who consider voting 'yes' the best way to vote for the poor, and marginalized, and those who are equally convinced that voting 'yes' would have the exact opposite effect in its practical out workings. Many people remain undecided, and others are confused by the various claims and counter-claims that are being made through the media.

If you have made your own mind up, whichever side of the debate that you support, I would certainly encourage you to share resources that people might find helpful in making their own decisions and engage in gentle and winsome conversation. In doing so, I exhort you to be respectful of those who haven't yet made a decision, or who hold a different view to your own – because regardless of how we will vote individually, our corporate identity as a people united in Christ, should not be the cost of 'being right'.

If you are uncertain of how you will vote, I encourage you to read widely, listen openly to both sides of the debate, listen especially to the voices of the aboriginal people, and pray. There are some resources that you might find helpful linked below, including Bishop Richard's comments in his Presidential address at the 2023 Synod.

<https://anglicantas.org.au/2023-synod-presidential-address/>

<https://anglican.org.au/our-work/indigenous-ministry/the-voice-of-parliament/>

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-voice-a-christian-consideration/>

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-christian-perspective-on-the-voice-debate-4-key-takeaways/>

<https://murraycampbell.net/2023/08/28/the-voice-and-what-we-prayed-at-church-yesterday/>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/yes-or-no-here-are-the-main-arguments-for-and-against-the-voice/2h82rx9tj>

If you are interested in specific discussion relating to the 'Yes' or 'No' campaigns, I would suggest starting with:

YES:

<https://www.tearfund.org.au/action/voice>

<http://www.commongrace.com.au>

NO:

Senator Jacinta Price addressing the Press Club: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrinfhtFDIc>

<https://ipa.org.au/ipa-digital/race-has-no-place-in-the-australian-constitution>

The following is a prayer that we will pray at our Sunday worship gatherings between now and the referendum, that I commend it to you for your own personal use as well.

Rev. Josh Skeat

Gracious Lord,

the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, we pray for our nation. We lament the damage done to the original inhabitants of this land, since European settlement, including the loss of life, land and language.

We recognise sins committed and harm done.

We praise you that you have built your church among the First Peoples of this land and we rejoice to be brothers and sisters in Christ with them.

Hear our prayer as together we consider the referendum on recognition and the Voice to Parliament.

Preserve us in love, respect and mutual service.

Give us a spirit of wisdom and discernment as we cast our votes.

Father, whatever is decided, we beg you for clear and lasting progress in addressing inequality and closing the gap for First Nations peoples.

Bless Australia, we pray, as the gospel is proclaimed, that we may be reconciled to you and to each other through him who died for all, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, in whose name we pray, Amen