

Catholics open new front in same-sex fight

RICK MORTON THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 24, 2015 12:00AM

The Catholic Church in Sydney has launched an extraordinary attack on corporations that publicly support marriage equality, calling an advertising drive a “cashed-up, activist-driven media campaign” and using veiled threats about the church’s purchasing power.

Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney business manager Michael Digges wrote to at least some of the companies that supported marriage equality in newspaper ads and accused them of “overstepping their purpose”.

In one letter, sent to law firm Maurice Blackburn, Mr Digges writes: “You may be aware that the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney is a significant user of goods and services from many corporations, both local and international.

“Undoubtedly, many of the Catholic population of Sydney would be your employees, customers, partners and suppliers. It is therefore with grave concern that I write to you about the Marriage Equality for Australians campaign.

“You are publicly supporting a strategic, political and well-funded campaign designed to pressure the federal government into changing the Marriage Act.

“I wonder whether you have questioned whether it is the role of a corporation such as yours to be participating in such an important matter that impacts all of Australian society now and into the future. For corporations to speak on such issues on behalf of shareholders, employees, clients/customers, suppliers and other stakeholders is indeed overstepping their purpose and is to be strongly resisted.”

Maurice Blackburn principal Liberty Sanger said the response was heavy-handed. “Our motivation for being involved is very simply, it’s the same we have had in getting involved in any campaign or legal case over 100 years and that is to ensure everyone is treated equally before the law,” she said.

“No one is trying to persuade the Catholic Church to alter their definition of marriage. I take it (the letter) with a grain of salt; obviously they are very agitated with the issue, but it is not helpful to engage with this level of emotion.”

Mr Digges wrote it was “totally misleading” to characterise those in favour of the traditional definition of marriage as bigoted and discriminatory.

“Many people who support the traditional definition of marriage have loved ones with same-sex attraction and, of course, object strongly to them being discriminated against,” he writes.

Earlier this month, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference sent a 15-page pamphlet called “don’t mess with marriage” home with schoolchildren at Catholic schools across the country.

A private member’s bill to legalise same-sex marriage was introduced by Opposition Leader Bill Shorten this month.

The bill will need a total of 76 votes to pass, but it is not clear whether Coalition party members

will be granted a free vote on the matter.

Mr Digges could not be reached for comment.

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