Canvasser's Handbook



Yes Equality Cork

2nd Edition April 25, 2015

CAMPAIGNING FOR CIVIL MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Yes Equality Cork is an umbrella body for civil society organisations and individuals in Cork campaigning for marriage equality

What is this Referendum about?

The Referendum is to decide whether to add this sentence to our Constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann:

"Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex".

The Irish text is:

"Feadfaidh beirt, gan beann ar a ngnéas, conradh pósta a dhéanamh de réir dlí"

If approved by the people on May 22 that text will be added on to Article 41 as a new sub-article to be numbered Article 41.4.

Nothing is being amended or removed otherwise. **And of course heterosexual marriage remains unchanged.**

If the proposal is passed, people who are currently legally prohibited from marrying will have the option of marrying if they wish to do so. This will benefit citizens and other Irish residents who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender – LGBT. It will also benefit Irish society as a whole.

Barnardos

No child gets left behind

At Barnardos, we believe in equality - and so, as members of BelongTo Yes, we are supporting a Yes vote in the upcoming Marriage Referendum. It's so important for LGBT young people to know they will enjoy the same right to marry their future partner as their heterosexual friends.

Who can vote?

All Irish citizens normally resident in the State who are aged 18 years or up and who are on the Register of Electors may vote. On the same day there is a second referendum - on whether to reduce the age for a candidate running for President of Ireland from 35 to 21. People can check if they are on the Register of Electors at www.checktheregister.ie.

If not on the Register, people can apply to be added to the Supplementary Register. They must do this as soon as possible and in any event no later than 5th May. If they leave it that late they risk not being added in time however. More information at www.citizensinformation.ie. Use search term "Register of Electors".

Top tip on hard YES voters when canvassing!

We've developed a line which does a double job for us without making the voter feel like they're being lectured to about turning up to vote. This works particularly well for very rushed YES voters who don't want a leaflet:

VOTER: Don't worry, I'm a yes!
CANVASSER: That's great news! Can I give you this leaflet and ask you to use it to talk to family and friends about how important it is to turn up and vote on 22 May?

By deflecting to other people they know, who might not turn up to vote, you are not insulting them on suggesting they'll fail in their civic duty and you also turn them into a mini-canvasser. If they'll allow you the time you can also suggest they join the campaign!

Why canvass?

It makes a huge difference to the result. People love to be asked for their vote. Electoral research has shown that in elections people vote for candidate they've met in person, and the same is true in referendums: a high number of people vote for the side that asked them in person for their support. A canvass chat is short and simple. It is not like hearing TV or Radio debates, with angry speakers making contradictory claims all of which causes confusion. Canvassing is an opportunity to answer any questions and reassure people. Remember, canvassing in person is more direct and more effective in swaying a voter than the traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio) or social media.

In this referendum, many people will need extra encouragement to go out and vote on the day. Otherwise they simply will not make that journey. Motivation is essential. They need to be reminded that this is about doing the right thing by people and about the kind of country we want to live in. Even if they think the issue itself does not directly affect them, it will be vitally important to people they know, friends, or extended family members. That includes people they do not even realise will be affected by their vote. They also need to know the result will be far closer than opinion polls suggest now.

The Divorce Referendum was carried by just 9,000 votes. There are about that many polling boxes in the polling stations around the country. That vote was carried by the last Yes vote in each box. The person you encourage to vote may be the decisive vote on May 22nd.

Opinion Polls

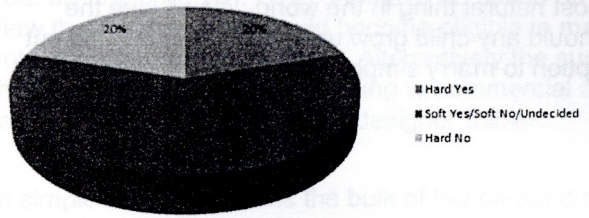
Recent opinion polls indicate a strong support for a Yes vote. Those polls however decide nothing and they may even lead to complacency on the Yes side. If all of the declared No voters turn out on polling day and if some declared Yes voters stay at home, there is a real prospect of a No majority.

Referendums often see low turnouts. If the 22% who say they will vote No actually turn out to vote, we will need to have 22% plus one voting Yes. That is a total turnout of over 44%, which is a challenging turnout goal in a referendum.

Primary objectives of canvassing:

- To encourage firm Yes voters to go and vote
- Turn soft Yeses into firm Yeses
- Turn soft Nos into soft Yeses

There is a committed No base of about 20 percent most of which will vote on the day. The committed Yes vote that is sure to vote is probably similar. There is a large section of the electorate who are 'soft' in their view. How they plump will decide the result.



Reasons for voting Yes

- It is the right, fair and decent thing to do. What is more natural than love? Every young person growing up should know that if they wish, they will have the chance to marry the one they love.
- LGBT people are seeking the recognition and protection for their committed relationships that everyone else enjoys. No more than equality.
- Irish people are fair minded, welcoming and open – this is about making the law on civil marriage reflect that reality. It helps build a better Ireland.
- Mothers and fathers aspire for their children to find love and to have the option to marry if that is what they want to do. The parents of gay or lesbian children want just the same for their children. Nobody wants second best for their child.
- This is about ensuring gay or lesbian couples may marry and importantly it is also about giving their families - their mothers and fathers, their sisters and brothers, their uncles and aunts - the same right to see their gay or lesbian family members secure and happy in a relationship that has the protection of law and recognition of the State.
- Love is the most natural thing in the world. We all love the same. Why should any child grow up knowing they will be cut off from the option to marry simply because of their sexual orientation?

Possible question - what about the children?

A Yes vote is vitally important for children. It will hugely benefit the children and young people who are growing up gay and lesbian in Ireland today. A Yes vote will show they are respected as equals, it will be a support to them, and will mean that they can look forward to the possibility of marriage in the future, in common with their straight siblings and friends.

A Yes vote will promote the welfare of children who are already being raised by same sex couples. A Yes vote will give couples who are rearing children and who do not now have the right to marry, the option of marriage. Marriage brings stability to many relationships and is seen by many as a stabilising factor in a relationship. It is a form of support and social recognition which positively benefits the family and society.

A Yes vote shows that we value *all* children. Children who may be gay or lesbian are acutely aware of the referendum debate. Care should be taken not to hurt them by any thoughtless or inconsiderate words. Their sense of how society values them now and as they grow into adulthood can only be enhanced by a Yes vote.

Some sections of the No campaign have an openly declared strategy of sowing what they call doubt about the effect of the Yes vote on "the children". This seems to be based on an unspoken view that couples who would become eligible to marry after a Yes vote pose a threat to children. Alternatively the suggestion is made that the newly-weds will be turning to commercial assisted human reproduction services to make designer babies.

In simple numerical terms the bulk of the demand for assisted human reproduction and surrogacy services comes from heterosexual couples. A Yes in the referendum changes nothing about surrogacy. Like it changes nothing about the weather. The Supreme Court wants the Oireachtas to write a law on surrogacy –

it is a distinct and different subject from the question being asked on May 22: may all our citizens have equal rights to marry in accordance with law?

On adoption, single people can already apply to be approved as eligible to adopt regardless of their sexual orientation. However with a couple seeking to apply for eligibility, only married couples can apply to be eligible to adopt. Adoption of non-related children (so-called 'non-family adoption') in Ireland in recent years is relatively rare, at around 20 a year. No one of course has the right to adopt – a child is placed with adoptive parents if those parents have been assessed as suitable. Adoption is a slow careful balanced process done on a case by case basis, it is not a contest.

On fathers and mothers in the home - over 30% of Irish households with children are without either a father or a mother in the home. That is something that will not be affected by the vote on May 22nd.

The Oireachtas has passed the Children and Family Relationships Act. That updates the law on families and especially on children, for example by widening the range of people who may be recognised as guardians or as prospective adoptive parents. Those changes take effect regardless of the outcome of the referendum vote, but only a Yes vote will enable couples who are now excluded from forming a family based on marriage from having that option.

Common NO argument: Civil Partnership is enough for *"them"*

There should be no '*them*' in a Republic. Every citizen should have the same civil rights. Freedom to marry the person you love and want to spend your life with, regardless of colour or creed, is seen as a basic right. Yet LGBT people do not have the right to marry the person of their choice.

Civil Partnership was introduced into law in 2010 to deal with financial, property and taxation arrangements between partners of the same sex who are in committed relationships. Civil partnership is confined to same sex partners and is not applicable to other couples. It is not equivalent to marriage nor does it have the same legal or social status. At present there are still various legal benefits and protections for example regarding the family home which are enjoyed by married people that are not enjoyed by civil partners – and while many of the old disadvantages have been addressed, others remain. So marriage and civil partnership are not the same, either legally or socially. Only marriage is a constitutional right. Try the swap test: Would a married person swap marriage for civil partnership? (If you find one who says they would, let us know!)

Limiting gay or lesbian couples to Civil Partnership is, by definition, a restriction on their rights and it is a restriction that is based solely on their sexual orientation. It is thus unequal treatment. Think about this by way of comparison: no one would consider suggesting that people from one specific County in Ireland should only be able to have a Civil Partnership rather than a marriage. That would be seen immediately as discrimination and simply wrong. Yet LGBT citizens live in that notional County, free only to enter a Civil Partnership but locked away from the right to marry. In a Republic all citizens should have equal right to marry in accordance with the law of the land, the civil law.

Civil marriage is different from religious marriage and does not affect it

This is a vote on changing our Constitution to allow more people to marry under the civil law, the law of the land. It does not affect religious rules or practices governing religious marriage.

Civil marriage is a marriage two people make under the civil law. This marriage happens at a State Registry Office or another venue approved by the State.

A religious marriage typically takes place during a ceremony at a place of worship. That occasion may also have a distinct and separate component at the end after the religious marriage has taken place, where a couple sign a State Register to confirm that they are also marrying under State law.

The referendum only affects citizens who are marrying under the State's civil law. It does not affect religious marriage conducted under the rules of any faith organisation or Church. Church rules on religious marriage are not affected in any way.

No Church will be compelled to marry couples of the same sex or to change any part of its teachings on religious marriage as a result of a Yes vote.

Ireland's divorce legislation did not force Churches or other religious institutions to remarry divorced people. In the same way, allowing marriage equality under the law of the land will not oblige Churches to marry same sex couples. **Religious autonomy is respected and preserved.**

The picture in other countries

As of 1 January 2015, 17 countries allow equal marriage - Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom (except Northern Ireland) and Uruguay. It is also available in 37 States of the United States of America.

General Canvass Pointers

Broadly there may be two distinct forms of canvass, door to door or static. Canvassing takes place anytime we discuss the issue with someone we know or with someone we meet. Every conversation matters.

A door to door canvass is best conducted at a time when people are more likely to be free to talk for a moment at the door. This may be in the early evening during the working week or on weekend days. Of course many people are at home during week-days so there is no time during the day when a canvass cannot be organised. As a general rule late evening should be avoided. Solo canvassing is possible but generally two people canvassing together is preferable.

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headstrong
The National Centre for Youth Mental Health

"I fully support getting involved. I fully support … this because I believe it to be an equality and human rights issue. Everyone should have the same opportunity to marry and have the legality that goes with marriage. I think a No vote in this referendum will be very upsetting for all young people regardless of orientation. What kind of a reflection will a No vote be on the society we live in? I want to live in a Ireland of equals and I believe this is an equality and human rights issue. I think it's important for Headstrong to take a stance on this".
– Headstrong Youth Advisory Panel member.

Some Canvass Do's and Don'ts:

Do smile and say Hello. '*May I ask you to vote Yes for marriage equality next month?*' is a useful opening line or you could say *"Hi. Sorry for disturbing you. I'm canvassing for a Yes vote in the marriage equality referendum. Have you thought about it yet?"* A warm open presentation is important. Yet keep a respectful physical distance. Do not step into the doorway.

Positivity beats negativity every time. So accentuate the positive – this can be saying why a Yes vote feels right in your view, or why sharing the option of marriage can be good for families. Be friendly and positive, set the tone for the interaction by smiling and being friendly when they open the door. Explain why you are there. Create space for the other person to talk and ask questions (don't speak for them). Try to gauge if they are a Yes, a No or a Maybe and adapt accordingly. You will only have an opportunity for a couple of sentences, in most cases, so see what you are comfortable with saying yourself. Thank them for their time as you leave.

There are genuine heart-felt views on the No side, and they deserve respect at all times. Even extreme views that are hard to accept or understand should not trigger an angry response from a canvasser. Politely thank them for their time and move on to the next house where your smile will be appreciated.

Assume any young person who answers the door is on the Register or is eligible to be on the Register. Give the benefit of the doubt even they appear to be under 18. That is better than erring in the opposite direction. You could ask if they are registered and explain to them how to become registered if they are not.

Simple things mean a lot to householders such as closing the garden gate if there is one behind you. That is so even if it was open when you arrived.

Be careful not to have your time wasted by people who will vote No no matter what you say.

Similarly, be careful with your time with enthusiastic Yes voters who would love a long conversation with you. That can take place after 22nd May. If they're very enthusiastic ask them to get involved in the campaign as a volunteer. With all definite Yes voters emphasise the importance of them voting on the day as the margin could be very tight. Also with definite yes voters tell them it would be great if they could talk to as many family and friends as possible and to convince them to vote Yes.

If people have questions, try to answer them and reassure them (especially important for don't know, soft yes or soft No) and if you are unable to answer them make a note and see if they can be responded to by Campaign HQ. Language is important when reassuring or answering queries a good approach to use is *"I can understand why you might be worried about that but the reality is….."* Above all do not give an answer to a question which you are not sure is accurate and truthful. It is better to say you do not know, if you do not know.

***Sample door to door canvassers communication:**
"Hi, we're campaigning for a Yes vote in the marriage equality referendum on May 22nd. Do you have any questions about the referendum"
(Answer any questions), then…
"Are you leaning towards a Yes or a No?"

*That line about "leaning Yes or No" really makes people think about it, rather than fobbing you off, and they generally will commit. Some people still keep it to themselves which is when you stop pushing.

A few final tips:

- Dress appropriately – comfortable smart casual clothes and flat shoes. Canvassing is like a sales job. Rain gear is vital!
- Don't let one negative interaction get you down.
- Stay positive and you'll meet so many nice people that you'll forget about the rare unpleasant ones.

'The ISPCC exists to ensure that children are afforded equal rights as citizens, to bring about a society in which all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential and to assert the rights of children as equal citizens. The referendum provides an opportunity to send a strong message to children and young people across Ireland that they are valued equally- irrespective of their sexual orientation.

The ISPCC is strongly of the view that marriage equality is a children's issue and is in the best interests of children. Last year we saw Childline receive over 29,000 calls in relation to issues of sexuality.
Our experience of listening to and providing services to young people has demonstrated that those who are LGBT are directly and adversely impacted by a family law system in which rights to marry are restricted to heterosexual couples. Our practice shows that that children who are LGBT often feel excluded, isolated and under-valued; some are affected by bullying because of their sexuality. The Referendum gives us an opportunity to send a clear message to all children that they are valued and that treating them differently because of their sexuality, or the sexuality of someone in their household, is unacceptable. Children's ability to grow up, form relationships and have those relationships recognised equally by the state is a vital factor in enabling all children to feel valued, and to feel comfortable talking about their sexuality. The ISPCC is pleased to be part of BeLonGTo YES and work with other national organisations to support a Yes Vote.'-ISPCC Chief Executive Grainia Long

Key Facts

1. Civil Partnership and Marriage
2. Civil Marriage and Religious Marriage
3. Children's Rights
4. Marriage as an institution
5. Strengthening our society
6. Constitutional Protection of Families
7. Referendum Commission

1. Civil Partnership and Marriage

Civil partnership is not the same as marriage.

- Civil partnership has no constitutional protection. Marriage does.
- The Civil Partnership Act could be repealed at any time by the Oireachtas, ending future civil partnerships.
- Civil partnership does not have the same social status as marriage. Neither does it carry the same legal protection.

Marriage is a constitutional right. Civil partnership is not. Constitutional rights are protected from interference by governments and can only be changed by the people in a referendum.

2. Civil Marriage and Religious Marriage

By voting Yes we will recognise the permanent intimate relationships of lesbian and gay couples as marriage.

- By voting Yes we will give these couples the same right as other couples to marry in a Registry Office, the same right to a civil marriage.

- A Yes vote won't give anyone the right to a religious marriage, or to marry in a church or in any other religious venue.
- This referendum does not affect the right of any church or religion to govern religious marriages and to decide who may marry in a religious venue.

3. Children's Rights

People who care for children know that a Yes vote is important to many children living in Ireland today.

- The ISPCC and Barnardos support a Yes vote. So do Foróige and the Children's Rights Alliance.
- The ISPCC reports that many LGBT children growing up in Ireland feel excluded, isolated or undervalued and they suffer as a result.
- A Yes vote will help show these children and adolescents that they are respected and valued equally and that they too can dream of marrying one day. As former President Mary McAleese says:

"... we believe it to be about Ireland's gay children and about their future and about the kind of future we want for Ireland. We want, in the words of the proclamation, the children of a nation to be cherished equally. The adult children, the children yet unborn, the gay children yet unborn – we want them to be born into a world where if they fall in love with someone they can express that love fully"

- The other children who stand to benefit from a Yes vote are children who have a gay or lesbian parent or grandparent. All of these children deserve to see that their parents and grandparents are respected and valued equally.

Every parent wants to be a good parent.

We want this regardless of whether we are straight or LGBT. The Psychological Society of Ireland says that "lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children". Allowing LGBT parents to marry can only enhance the stability that is essential for children in the home. LGBT parents should be able to share in the supports surrounding marriage in our society.

There is nothing in the referendum that denies or removes any children's rights.

The No campaign claim a Yes vote will deprive children of 'the right to a father and a mother'. This is not correct.

- The State's rules on adoption and assisted human reproduction are already written down in laws passed by the Oireachtas. This referendum will not change these.
- The State has had adoption laws since the 1950s.
- The State has now begun to legislate for assisted human reproduction, as more couples (mainly straight married couples) turn to this in order to have children.
- Some people in the No campaign are unhappy with the new Children & Family Relationships Act 2015. The Act is not affected by this referendum. The No campaign's efforts to confuse this referendum on marriage equality with the Act are regrettable.

4. Marriage as an institution

Marriage is an institution that both changes and endures. Not so long ago in Ireland some marriages were traditionally arranged to provide financial security. There was less focus on romantic love

and the happiness and fulfilment of the couple. Now we see things differently.

The rules on civil marriage have changed over the years. Two recent examples include the introduction of the right to divorce in 1996 and legal separation in 1989. Older examples were rules brought in to give married women control over their own property, as well as rules to prevent a spouse from disinheriting the other spouse or children.

5. Strengthening our society

By sharing the right to Civil Marriage with LGBT couples we will broaden the base of couples who can marry. LGBT couples now and in the future who embrace the concept of a lifelong union should have access to marriage. Valuing inclusiveness and diversity strengthens our society.

6. Constitutional Protection of Families

Marriage is a constitutional right. No government can pass a law or adopt a policy to undermine marriage or take away the right to marry. A Yes vote will give LGBT families the right to the constitutional protection of marriage.

7. Referendum Commission

For more information on any aspect of the Marriage Equality Referendum that Ireland will be voting on on May 22nd have a look at the Referendum Commission's webpage.



Every vote counts.

The last voter you persuade to go out to their local polling station on May 22nd to vote Yes may be the person who decides the result. Thank you.

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