

New Zealand's Anglican Church to bless same-sex marriages



Paul Richardson, one of the three archbishops of the province, admitted the motion would cause pain for opponents.

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New Zealand's Anglican Church will bless same-sex relationships after a landmark vote yesterday morning.

The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia stopped short of permitting gay marriages in church but will allow ministers to bless couples in same-sex civil marriages or civil unions.

The motion, debated at the biannual synod in New Plymouth this week, means bishops can either allow or deny priests in their diocese permission to bless gay couples in committed relationships.

The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia consists of three tikanga, or partners; Maori, Pasifika (Polynesian) and Pakeha (European). The issues has been

debated among all three for almost 50 years.

Wednesday's motion was strongly opposed by the Pasifika, or Polynesian, group which said the move would not be accepted in the Pacific islands.

However they abstained from the vote and did not vote against it so as not to restrict their Tikanga Māori and Tikanga Pākehā partners. The motion easily passed.

The Pasifika churches, along with other conservative churches, will opt out of the change with the motion designed to appease conservative opponents. Rather than forming official liturgy, and so part of the church's teaching, the blessings will not be written and instead will be given more informally, the motion said. This was designed to try and hold together the opposing sides.

However the result prompted immediate resignations from two prominent conservatives.

Rev Jay Behan, chair of the traditionalist Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans New Zealand group and member of the ruling synod, wrote to the three archbishops and other members to announce he would quit.

'The passing of this report finds us left behind and unable to move forward with you in good conscience as we seek to honour the Lord and love His people,' he said in a letter also signed by another conservative, Rev Al Drye.

"We leave with no anger or bitterness in our hearts and we wish you the best as you seek to serve the Lord Jesus Christ."

In a statement the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans New Zealand said: "While we are thankful for the gracious spirit in which the debate was held, we disagree with the final outcome. We believe the General Synod has acted in a way which leaves behind biblical authority, the apostolic tradition, and

the doctrine and practice our church has always held.”

It added that it was ready to welcome other conservatives who opposed the decision.

“FCANZ believes that God loves all people, from all walks of life, calling each of us to repent and have faith in Jesus Christ. Sometimes speaking of this love involves saying difficult things that run counter to the culture of today. However we remain convinced that it is good for all humanity and the only place for the church to stand.”

But Very Rev Ian Render, who is dean of Waiapu Cathedral and also gay and married, said in the debate: “I’m standing to remind you of all the people we have lost along the way. The people who were candidates for ordination – but who were turned down because of their relationships, or their declared sexuality.

“The people who have been left in limbo, for year, after year, after year. I would like, in this late stage of my stipended ministry life, to feel as though I – and everyone else like me – finally will have a place to stand in this church.

“Thank you for the graciousness that I have experienced in these past couple of days. Please give me, and others, a place to stand.”

New Zealand Christians to ask parliament to put Jesus back

into prayer



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New Zealand Christians plan to rally their parliament to call for Jesus' name to be reinstated in the parliamentary opening prayer, after it was omitted last month.

They've started campaigning online and, on January 30, they will gather, urging the speaker of the house, Trevor Mallard, to change the 'Te Reo karakia', or prayer, back to how it was before.

The pastor of Celebration Church in Wellington, Pastor Ross Smith is encouraging Christians to speak out.

The movement, called Jesus for NZ released a statement, in which Pastor Ross Smith said: "We feel that the Church does not have a voice in this change and we are here to change that."

"Numbers speak to parliament and this rally may be the only way to keep Jesus in the prayer; that is why we are calling for all Christians to be a part of this movement."

Rally organisers met with the speaker late last year, when he advised he would consider the matter over the holidays.

Mentions of the Queen have also been removed.

Many have got behind the movement on Facebook, with support

from New Zealand radio stations and plans to release social media videos.

Australian churches vandalised by marriage supporters

churches same-sex



The graffiti was daubed across Waverley Baptist Church in Melbourne (PHOTO: [The Christian Institute](#)).

Originally published in [The Christian Institute](#)

Christians who hold a biblical view of marriage are “bigots” and should be ‘crucified’, according to same-sex marriage supporters who vandalised churches in Australia.

Last week, two churches in Melbourne were daubed with graffiti including a Nazi swastika.

It is the latest in a string of reports of abuse suffered by marriage supporters in the country. In recent weeks, a mother received [death threats](#) and a Christian [lost her job](#) simply for

expressing opposition to the redefinition of marriage.

'Disturbing and concerning'

Pastor Drew Mellor of Glen Waverley Anglican Church said the graffiti left older parishioners fearing for their safety. Following the incident, the church released a lengthy statement outlining their belief in a biblical view on marriage – that it is the union of one man and one woman. And David O' Brien, Senior Pastor of Waverley Baptist Church (the other church that was vandalised), said the incident was "disturbing and concerning".

Intolerance

Coalition for Marriage (Australia) said both incidents exposed the intolerant attitude of same-sex marriage supporters.

Speaking for the group, Monica Doumit said: "One thing that this process has revealed is that, despite the rhetoric, 'Yes' campaigners do not actually believe in a tolerant society, where people are allowed to 'live and let live'.

"Rather, they will target those who disagree for abuse, for boycott, or for some other type of punishment."

Abuse

Mother Cella White received "relentless" abuse online after appearing in an Australian TV advert encouraging people to vote against redefining marriage.

"I knew it was a touchy subject so I was well aware of the backlash to likely come my way by taking part in the ad, but it's hostile out there."

But despite the abuse, the mother-of-four said it has not stopped her from voicing her opinion on the issue.

'It's OK to vote no'

And an 18-year-old was dismissed for publicly sharing her opposition to same-sex marriage on Facebook, after she changed

her profile picture to say “It’s OK to vote no”.

Madeline, who is a Christian, was working as a contractor for Capital Kids’ Parties in Canberra.

Her employer, Madlin Sims, said this was “homophobic” and could not be tolerated.

The country is currently holding a postal vote answering the question: “Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?”

Sydney diocese donates R13.5m to No campaign in same-sex marriage poll



Glenn Davies is the Archbishop of Sydney in the Anglican

Church of Australia (PHOTO: The Australian).

Originally published in [Virtue Online](#)

The Anglican Diocese of Sydney has donated roughly R13.5-million to fund the campaign against same-sex marriage in Australia.

The Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies, confirmed on Monday his heavily conservative diocese, the largest in the country, had backed the No campaign in Australia's forthcoming postal survey on gay marriage.

'The stakes are high and the cost is high,' he told a meeting of all the churches in Sydney on Monday. 'Yet the cause is just and it is a consequence of our discipleship to uphold the gift of marriage as God has designed it – a creation ordinance for all people.'

He added he would make no apology for urging Australians to vote No in the poll, which was commissioned by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to advise parliament but is not legally binding.

'I consider the consequences of removing gender from the marriage construct will have irreparable consequences for our society, for our freedom of speech, our freedom of conscience and freedom of religion,' he told the synod. 'It is disingenuous to think otherwise.'

He added: 'We find ourselves being moved in a more libertarian direction under the influence of those who want to abandon the mores of the past.'

'These permissive forces who espouse the virtue of tolerance are seeking to impose restrictions upon those who wish to maintain the values on which our nation has been founded,' he said according to The Australian.

“This has become nowhere more apparent than in the current debate surrounding the postal survey on same-sex marriage.”

Moving on to discuss abortion and assisted suicide, Davies said he had written to the area’s parliamentarians on behalf of all the churches to oppose any attempts at liberalisation.

But the Anglican Church of Australia is split on the issue with the newly elected first female Anglican Archbishop, Kay Goldsworthy, strongly hinting that she personally backs same-sex marriage. She said she has an inclusive approach to the issue but respects the wider position of the Church.

Both sides in Australia’s increasingly toxic debate over gay marriage claim to have been outspent by their opponents.

Executive director of the Equality Campaign, Tiernan Brady, said the donation was evidence that opponents of equality have radically outspent the Yes side.

He told [The Australian](#): “But what they have in buckets of cash, we make up with in hundreds of thousands of Australians making the case for a fairer, more just and inclusive society.”

However despite repeated claims from the Yes side they were being outspent, it emerged last month Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce also personally donated R13.5-million to the campaign in support of same sex marriage.

Hillsong pastor urges

Christians not to be' silent majority' in same-sex marriage vote



Hillson senior pastor Brian Houston
(PHOTO: CBN News).

Originally published in [CBN News](#)

Hillsong senior pastor Brian Houston is telling Christians to take action and not be a silent majority during Australia's upcoming same-sex marriage vote in September.

"Whatever your view on this issue, it is undeniably one that is important to the fabric of our social structure. Changing the definition of marriage has wide-reaching ramifications and should not be taken lightly by any society," Houston wrote in a press release.

"All Australians should be a part of this process, not just a select few," he added.

More than \$122 million (R1.6-billion) worth of paper ballots will be sent to Australians asking them whether gay marriage

should be legal.

It comes after the country's ruling party refused to vote on a gay marriage bill. This vote will serve as public feedback only.

However, if the majority of the country says they are in favor of same-sex marriage, a bill could pass through parliament rather quickly.

"Of all the concerns one might have about this issue, the least one to be concerned about is what will happen in the parliament if the plebiscite is approved by the Australian people," Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said last year. "It will sail through, absolutely sail through."

The prime minister told CNN the vote will give all Australians a say in the matter.

"I'll be voting yes, I'm very open about that but the Australian people are never wrong when they vote, whether it's for governments or on matters like this, their vote will be respected," he said.

Houston tells Christians to be a part of the conversation and not waste the opportunity to take a stand for their beliefs.

"I believe that many Australians who are often referred to as the silent majority feel strongly on this subject but allow louder and often more aggressive voices to control the public dialogue," Houston wrote.

Houston said that believers should not allow the fear of being labeled a 'bigot' stop them from casting a vote.

"For Christians, the issue is also a matter of faith and biblical teaching, something that should never be mocked or downplayed by those with opposing views," he said.

"Some of those advocating for change to the definition of

marriage have confused faith convictions with bigotry however they must understand that Christian – and other religious beliefs – are extremely important to those who hold them and in fact are vital to a tolerant and free society,” he added.

Jesus, Christmas cards could soon be banned in Australian schools



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[Christian Today](#)

School kids who talk about Jesus or exchange Christmas cards with classmates could find themselves penalised under new proposals that would clamp down on references to Christianity on school campuses.

The Australian reports that an unofficial policy is being floated among Queensland education officials to ban references

to Jesus in primary school yards.

The proposals come off the back of a review into religious instruction by the state's education department that could see the end of primary school kids being able to talk about Jesus with their peers or give them Christmas cards with Christian references.

According to the report in *The Australian*, young students may face consequences if they break the rules.

It quotes an advisory note from the education department that says, 'While not explicitly prohibited by the (legislation), nor referenced in the Religious Instruction (RI) policy, the department expects schools to take appropriate action if aware that students participating in RI are evangelising to students who do not.'

The report adds, 'This could adversely affect the school's ability to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment.'

Specific actions of concern to education officials include sharing Christmas cards that reference the birth of Jesus and giving home-made beaded bracelets to friends 'as a way of sharing the good news about Jesus.'

Not everyone agrees with the proposals, with Newcastle University's religion and law professor Neil Foster saying they were 'possibly illegal.'

Centre for Independent Studies senior research fellow Peter Kurti said it was a 'massive assault on freedom of speech and freedom of religion.'

'I don't think people are on the whole affronted by the handing out of Christmas cards,' he said.

It's not only in the school grounds that expressing faith is at risk in Australia. One teacher last year found himself

facing disciplinary action after voicing opposition to same-sex marriage on a Facebook forum outside of school hours.

According to The Australian, Ian Shepherd, a teacher in Alice Springs, was presented with a notice to show cause over his comments. However, the Northern Territory Education Department decided later that it wouldn't take any action.

Hostile tribe's chief died, was raised long enough to testify about Jesus



Dick Eastman in a Malaita village with some of the village children.

Originally published in [God Reports](#)

The interior of Malaita in the Solomon Island chain had a long history of opposition to missionaries and other outsiders – sometimes violent resistance by the Kwaio tribal group.

In 1927, 13 government officials from the UK were massacred by the Kwaio as they attempted to survey the area for taxation purposes. The British government responded by sending a warship to shell that part of the island, which resulted in the deaths of 200 Kwaio.

Later, several Roman Catholic priests were killed by the group. In 1965 a Protestant missionary from New Zealand was martyred as he attempted to evangelise the Kwaio. Ten years later, a medical missionary and his son were also killed.

Look what God is doing

But God had a plan to reach the Kwaio using missionaries from Fiji in 1990, as told in the compelling book, *Look What God is Doing*, by Dick Eastman, president of [Every Home for Christ](#) (EHC).

It seems several Fijian evangelists affiliated with EHC who had been part of a campaign to reach Fiji's 106 islands turned their attention to the 100 islands of the Solomon chain, 1 000 miles away.

They reached the island of Malaita and spent time evangelising the coastal areas. One night as their team sat around a campfire, a team member pointed to the rugged interior of the island and asked, "Are there people there who have yet to hear about Jesus?"

"Yes," one replied. "It's one of the most difficult areas in all of the islands to evangelise because of the rugged terrain and the hostile people."

An argument ensued within the team as they heard more about the history of the people group. Some were intimidated and urged caution. Cannibalism had been practiced until the end of

the last century; who could be sure it had not ceased?



Men in traditional Malaitan dress.

Praying and fasting

The team finally agreed they would pray and fast for seven days before attempting to send a team to reach the Kwaios.

With the help of two witch doctors who had become believers, a list of 87 different evil spirits were identified that were said to hold sway in the region. They pointedly confronted each demonic entity with focused warfare prayer over the seven-day period, according to Eastman's book.

On the eighth day, Jack and Japta joined 10 other Christian workers on a day-long journey into the rugged interior of the island.

About five o'clock in the afternoon Jack and Japta reached one village where there was a large assembly of people, indicating something unusual might be going on. The two men were quickly surrounded by several large warriors, wanting to know where they were from and why they had come.

Bringing the Good News

"Jack explained as quickly as he could in the Kwaio language that they were bringing the Kwaio people Good News," Eastman noted. "But the burly guardians led them away to be questioned

by five village priests or elders. These were elders who had gathered in anticipation of the impending death of their chief.

“The strangers had arrived at a sacred moment and might be infringing on the customs of the Kwaio – a taboo of taboos that could meet with dire consequences.”

As the Christians were questioned, they could not help but notice some of the large warriors standing near them had 24-inch machetes and some carried bows with poison-tipped arrows.

“Why are you here?” one of the elders demanded.

“We have come to share Good News,” they repeated once more, as they went on to describe the one true God who created everything in the heavens and on earth – including the Kwaio. “Our eternal God sent His only Son to be like us, a man, and to sacrifice His own life willingly on our behalf.”

The elders said they had never heard a message like this. They understood the concept of a blood sacrifice, however. After a few moments of heated discussion one said, “We cannot believe anything you say unless our chief believes.”

Jack and Japta requested permission to see the chief, knowing it was customary in many villages to seek approval from the chief. Once granted, that would open up opportunities for their message to be heard.

The chief was dying

The elders refused because their chief, Haribo, was dying. Seeing him was out of the question.

Then one of the Christians had an idea. “When Jesus Christ came as the Son of God, He came not only to deliver men from their sins, but to heal sick people, too. God is quite capable of healing your chief.” In response, the elders began to argue among themselves.

Jack and Japta spent the night locked in a hut, but at seven the next morning the elders returned with surprising news. They were granted permission to pray for Chief Haribo!

When they entered the chief's hut, they could see he was very old and weak, struggling for breath, near death.

"Jack shared with him quickly God's plan of salvation, explaining that Jesus was the only way to eternal life," Eastman recounted.



Kwaio girls reading the New Testament.

An amazing response

The chief had a most amazing response. "I have waited my entire lifetime to hear this story," he told them. "I have always felt there was some sacred message like this. But no one ever came to bring us such words. How can I receive this Jesus into my life?"

Jack and Japta led Chief Haribo in the sinner's prayer. A few moments later a profound peace transformed the countenance of the chief.

But two hours later the chief died. For the rest of the day, his body was prepared for a traditional Kwaio burial.

Meanwhile, Jack and Japta left the village and headed back to the coast.

But as dusk descended on the village something shocking happened. Chief Haribo sat up and began to speak!

“Let the elders gather,” he said to his startled hearers, “and let someone go and find the boys who came earlier to tell me about Jesus.”

Seeing heaven

When they gathered, the chief related an amazing story about seeing heaven. “A being dressed in glorious white had taken him a great distance to the most beautiful place he had ever seen,” Eastman recounted.

“A person called Jesus Christ, the Son of God the young men had told him about, was being worshiped by a huge crowd of people. The glorious being explained to him that this beautiful place was where people who believed in Jesus would go for all eternity to worship Him. So everything the boys said was true.”

“Peace had come to his life, Haribo said, and he had no more pain, nor had he seen any suffering among the people who worshiped Jesus.”

Chief Haribo also gave the names of several Old Testament prophets he met in heaven.

“Then the being in white showed him another place – a place of great torment where people go who reject the message of Jesus.”

The being in white told the chief he had to go back for a short time to tell the elders of the village that the message about Jesus was true. “This Jesus is the only way to experience eternal life,” he said.

Brought back to preach to the village

When the chief learned that Jack and Japta had left, he ordered runners to go after them and bring them back so they could preach to the rest of the village.

When Jack and Japta returned they were astounded by what had happened. They presented the message of salvation again, this time to the entire village.

“Every person, including Chief Haribo’s immediate family of 21 members, received Christ as their Saviour. And soon more than 300 villagers throughout the area (in 10 nearby villages) had surrendered their lives to Christ.”

“Haribo remained alive all that night and into the next morning. Then he lay back down quietly in his earth bed and went to be forever with Jesus.”

By 2012, more than 8 000 Kwaios became followers of Jesus, including 1 000 in the most remote areas.

Israeli backpacker finds Yeshua in far-off New Zealand



Omri Jaakobovich founder of Host Israeli Travellers (HIT).

An Israeli backpacker had to travel to the other side of the world before finding the Jewish Messiah no-one had told him about at home.

Born and raised in a secular kibbutz (and knowing almost nothing about Jesus), Omri Jaakobovich was taken aback when the Dutch-born host of his hostel in Paihia, Bay of Islands, New Zealand, kept referring to him as one of God's 'chosen people'.

Like most Israelis, he had been horrified by the relatively recent assassination of then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by an Orthodox Jew in the name of God.

What's so chosen about Jews

So he challenged his host: "What's so chosen or so much better about us Jews?" adding that for the first time in history a Jew had killed the chosen leader of the Jewish nation.

But he was shocked by her reply: "It's not the first time that

the Jews have killed the chosen leader of the Jewish nation.”

“What are you talking about?” he wondered.

“This is what you did to Yeshua,” was her response.

Realising that Yeshua (Hebrew for Jesus) was a Jew like himself, Omri’s interest was piqued: “Were they trying to hide something from me?” he pondered. “How come they told me absolutely nothing about him in Israel?”

Having wrestled since he was a kid with the question, ‘Why was I born if one day I have to die?’ it now seemed logical to him that, ‘if Yeshua has been raised from the dead, maybe I too can be resurrected.’

Conviction through Old Testament prophecies

A chance meeting with another Israeli backpacker who had a Tenach (what Christians call an Old Testament) among his belongings led Omri to start reading its prophecies.

And seeing Yeshua in every one of them, he became convinced beyond any doubt that He was indeed the promised Messiah – at which stage he thought he was the only Jewish believer in Jesus as he didn’t know of any others.

A Christian he met then read 2 Corinthians 3:14 to him, which says that only when Jews turn to Christ will the veil (of understanding) be lifted from their eyes.

There was no voice from heaven, he recalls, but he realised right then and there that he needed to start telling his people about it. So he began sharing his faith with every Israeli who came to the hostel. And within just four months, the man who gave him the Bible also came to faith.

Omri subsequently founded a unique travel programme aimed at offering cheap accommodation for young Israeli backpackers and at the same time giving an opportunity for Christians to express their indebtedness to Israel for the Bible, salvation

and, above all, their Saviour.

Host Israeli Travellers

Host Israeli Travellers (HIT) has since provided inexpensive rooms in a friendly home environment to more than 15 000 youngsters touring the world after their demanding stints in the Israeli Defence Forces.

Beginning in New Zealand, which has become a favourite destination for young Israelis, it has now also spread to Australia, Fiji, Hong Kong and the UK.

HIT membership cards are available for a nominal fee and most hosts make only a small charge of up to £5 a night to cover overheads, though many still prefer to offer rooms free.

“One of the most significant developments over the years has been the ever-increasing openness of these young people to spiritual matters,” a spokeswoman said.

And Omri is now encouraging the Church to take up its calling to provoke the Jews to jealousy by sharing the gospel with them (Romans 11:11, 14; also Romans 10:14).

To learn more, or to sign up, visit www.hitinternational.net

Same-sex marriage bill struck down in Australia



Same-sex marriage Bill was rejected on Monday in the Senate by 33 votes to 29. (PHOTO: [The Christian Institute.](#))

Originally published in [The Christian Institute.](#)

A Bill proposing a public vote to decide on same-sex marriage has been blocked in Australia. The Bill was rejected on Monday in the Senate by 33 votes to 29. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had intended to hold a public vote on the issue in February 2017.

Move on

Managing Director of the Australian Christian Lobby, Lyle Shelton, responded to the decision by calling on politicians to now consider other issues. "Australians have had enough of the same-sex marriage debate. After six years of relentless activism in the Parliament, it should be time to move on." Shelton added that politicians "may have unwittingly done the nation a favour by allowing more time for people to understand the consequences" of redefining marriage.

Excessive preoccupation

Australian political analyst Nick Economou also said that the Government can now shift its focus. Economou said: "There has been an excessive preoccupation with a small number of social-policy issues. Maybe the government can now get on with what

the voters want them to do”.

Illiberal

Last year a prominent opponent of same-sex marriage, who is an atheist, stressed that redefining marriage affects society at large, in a discussion on Australian TV. Brendan O’Neill, the Editor of online magazine Spiked, detailed the “illiberal” attitude of same-sex marriage advocates and how they have targeted Christians. He argued that homosexual marriage presents itself as a liberal civil-rights issue, but that in reality, “it has this really ugly, intolerant streak to it”.

Harassed

O’Neill said: “Anyone who opposes gay marriage is demonised, harassed. We’ve seen people thrown out of their jobs because they criticise gay marriage.”

He continued: “Within the space of a decade, something that humanity believed for thousands of years has suddenly become a form of bigotry, a form of hate”.

**Convicts face Indonesia
firing squad praising God,
singing hymns**



Vigils have been held all of the world in response to the Indonesian executions. (PHOTO: Reuters).

Originally published in [Christian Today](#)

The eight men executed in Indonesia overnight recited the Lord's Prayer and worshipped God in the moments before their deaths, witnesses say.

Pastor Karina de Vega, who was assigned to counsel Nigerian prisoner Okwudili Oyatanze – dubbed “The Death Row Gospel Singer” and one of those executed on Nusakambangan Island in the early hours of Wednesday morning – told the [Sydney Morning Herald](#) that the prisoners sang ‘Bless the Lord O My Soul’ and ‘Amazing Grace’ as they were lined up, bound to crosses, to face the firing squad.

All eight refused blindfolds; choosing to look their executioners in the eyes. Their worship was cut short by gunfire.

“They were praising their God,” Vega said of the prisoners’ final moments. “It was breath-taking. This was the first time I witnessed someone so excited to meet their God.”

She added that the eight bonded together, like brothers, and sang “one song after another...like in a choir.

“The non-Christian, I believe, also sang from his heart. It was such an experience,” she said.

Irish-born priest Father Charlie Burrows, who was also present on Nusakambangan Island, has told reporters that he and other spiritual advisors were told to wait in a nearby tent while the executions took place. He said they joined the inmates – all of whom were convicted of drug trafficking – in song.

“The good thing is all prisoners were executed together while praying and singing. Before that they hugged each other, saying goodbye,” Christina Widiyantarti, a lawyer for the Brazilian convict – Rodrigo Muxfeldt Gularte – and a witness to the execution, told Reuters.

An official confirmed that the men were shot at 12.35am local time, as their families prayed and recited the Lord’s Prayer outside. “We didn’t think it would happen,” Father Burrows told the Sydney Morning Herald. “It is finished. It’s all done.”

The Indonesian government has defended its decision to go through with the executions, despite international pressure to grant clemency. “We are fighting a war against horrible drug crimes that threaten our nation’s survival,” Attorney General Muhammad Prasetyo told reporters.

“I would like to say that an execution is not a pleasant thing. It is not a fun job, but we must do it in order to save the nation from the danger of drugs. We are not making enemies of countries from where those executed came. What we are fighting against is drug-related crimes.”

Two of those executed, Australians Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, gained particular media attention in the days leading up to their deaths. They were given just 72 hours’ notice of their impending sentence on Saturday and the Australian government intervened, warning Indonesian president Joko Widodo about the diplomatic repercussions of the

execution. The World Council of Churches also urged Widodo to reconsider.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has now branded the executions “cruel and unnecessary” and withdrawn Australia’s ambassador from Indonesia.

“We respect Indonesia’s sovereignty but we do deplore what’s been done and this cannot be simply business as usual,” he told reporters in Canberra.

“I want to stress that this is a very important relationship between Australia and Indonesia but it has suffered as a result of what’s been done over the last few hours.”

The hashtag #boycottIndonesia began trending in Australia as news of the deaths spread.

Religious leaders have also spoken out against the death penalty in the lead up to the executions. Brian Houston, senior pastor of Hillsong Church, was in almost daily contact with Chan before his death. Chan was convicted of co-leading a heroin smuggling operation known as the ‘Bali Nine’ along with Sukumaran but converted to Christianity while in prison. He studied theology, and was ordained a minister earlier this year. He married his fiancée, Febyanti Herewila, two days before his execution.

[In a post online yesterday](#), Houston said it had been a great privilege to get to know Chan and Sukumaran in recent months. “By all accounts, these two young men...have not only accepted the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, but have also rehabilitated themselves to be upstanding members of the prison system,” Houston wrote.

“Even in jail they have made a positive contribution to the lives of other prisoners, and sought to pay their debt to society. I have had the pleasure of speaking with Andrew Chan almost every day and his faith and strength under extreme

duress, have inspired me.”

He included a screenshot of a message from Chan, in which the prisoner refers to Matthew 6:7, which encourages Christians not to worry, and says: “It’s not easy to love our enemies and those who persecute us but what good is a testimony without the test in it?”

“Drugs are a destructive social weapon, and their prevalence in this day and age must be a focus of our efforts for change. Trafficking of drugs must be a condemned behaviour – something that both Andrew and Myuran understand more than ever – but not one with such absolute and irreversible consequences,” Houston continued.

“In the world, power is understood as a show of authority, irrespective of opposing views – yet, Jesus model of power was one of humility and grace. God has pardoned us all, he has and continues to extend grace to our wrongdoings. Extending grace is not a sign of weakness, but of believing in life and in people.”

In a post on his Facebook page, Australian activist Jarrod McKenna said he was deeply moved by Chan’s message to Houston.

“This is the power of the Gospel. The power to transform drug dealers into pastors of inmates. The power to show mercy to those who are offering no mercy. The power to love your enemies even while they are planning to execute you,” he wrote.

“In Australia tonight, I can think of no more poignant witness to the way of the Cross, the way of enemy-love, the way of trusting in Resurrection. Let’s continue to make a stand against the death penalty and pray for Andrew and Mayuran.”

The bodies of the Australians will be flown back to their home country for burial. Sukumaran’s sister, Brin, posted on Facebook: Bless the lord o my soul . Myu likes this song . He

sang it today . Please sing it for him