

A Conservative Case for Marriage Equality

Rev. Mark Worth

Castine, Maine

Recently, more than 120 religious leaders from across the state issued a statement urging Mainers to end marriage discrimination against same-sex couples.

Why would clergy like myself support equal marriage? Because it is good, right and fair. I believe in the value of marriage. Good marriages benefit the entire community. The legal institution of marriage promotes family stability and cohesiveness. Marriage promotes financial security, long-term commitment and faithfulness. I believe these are good things. They are good for straight families and they are good for gay families.

And so this is a very conservative case for marriage equality. Marriage promotes family values that should be available to all families, not just straight families.

These are our family values: in our family everyone is valued.

One of Maine's religious leaders has recently declared that "the ability and obligation to procreate" is an essential part of marriage, and without this component marriage is "meaningless." I strongly disagree. My wife and I have been married for twenty-nine years. Our marriage has produced no children, and we are now beyond our child-bearing years. Yet our marriage is not meaningless, despite those insensitive words. My marriage and my relationship with my wife are the most meaningful part of my life. And hundreds of other childless couples in Maine have meaningful marriages, too.

There are those who say we should not redefine marriage. But we have redefined marriage before, and I say thank God we have done so!

According to the Bible, King Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. That was a traditional marriage, but we don't do that anymore. Not so long ago it was legal for a man to beat his wife. That was traditional marriage, too.

In 1967 the laws prohibiting interracial marriage were overturned in by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia*. In that case, the Court stated that "Marriage is one of the basic civil rights of man..." Until that time there were seventeen states in which it was illegal for a black person to marry a white person. Yes, the marriage of the parents of the president of the United States was illegal in seventeen states.

Moreover, before the American Civil War, marriages between slaves were not recognized under the laws of the United States. That allowed the slave-owner to sell the husband to one person, sell the wife to another, and sell the children to someone else. We did not recognize slave marriages because we did not value the people we enslaved.

Thank God we have redefined marriage!

There will be some who say that the Bible condemns homosexuality. There are 35,526 verses in the Bible. By my count only about eight are about homosexuality, making this one of the very smallest issues in the Bible. So if you are prejudiced against lesbians and gays and go looking for Bible verses that, when taken out of context, confirm your prejudice, you will be able to find a few.

But according to the biblical record, Jesus himself never criticized homosexuals. He did, however, criticize self-righteous religious people who judged and condemned others. He said, "Judge not, so you will not be judged." He said, "He that is without sin should cast the first stone." And he said, "Remove the log from your own eye before you try to remove the speck from your neighbor's eye."

My faith teaches me to love my neighbor, and to treat others the way I wish to be treated. Under current Maine law, gay and lesbian citizens are not treated as I am treated, because I have the right to marry and they don't. My marriage brings great meaning and joy to my life, and I believe that others should have the same benefits available to them.

The Rev. Mark Worth is minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Castine. He lives in Penobscot.