

NER-CCAR PASSES RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF MARRIAGE RULING; OPPOSES EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE EQUALITY FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES.

(January 20, 2004) On January 14, 2004, the Northeast Region of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (NER-CCAR) unanimously passed a resolution supporting equal marriage rights for same-sex couples. The resolution voices support for the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's ruling in *Goodridge v. Dep't of Public Health* that excluding gay and lesbian couples from marriage violates the state Constitution. The resolution further affirms equal access to civil marriage regardless of sexual orientation, opposes legislative efforts to create a separate and unequal legal status solely for same-sex couples, and opposes attempts to enshrine discrimination against same-sex couples into either state or federal constitutions.

NER-CCAR is a regional organization of over 100 Reform rabbis serving congregations, schools and organizations in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island and upstate New York. Rabbi Mark Dov Shapiro, Regional President, stated, "Our tradition teaches us to pursue justice. We believe that the Court's ruling is an important step towards that goal of justice, and call upon elected officials to make real the promise of equality for same-sex couples by removing all legal impediments to their marriage."

Additionally, Rabbi David Wolfman, Director of the Union for Reform Judaism Northeast Council stated "The Reform Movement has long been on record as standing by the Gay and Lesbian members of our communities by advocating full and equal inclusion in our congregations and communities. As a Reform rabbi, I am proud that the reform rabbinate has spoken with one voice to call for full legal status of same gender marriage. We have long stood by the sanctity of same sex marriage: now we call for its legalization. May this be the first step to full equality in marriage."

The resolution reads as follows:

Background

The Reform Jewish Movement has long been committed to welcoming gay and lesbian Jews and their children into our synagogues and communal life. For too long, much of the world has treated them as 'strangers.' Our Scriptures teach us: 'You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of a stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.' (Exodus 23:9). The Central Conference of American Rabbis has thus consistently supported full equality for lesbians and gays in society, adopting resolutions in 1977 encouraging the decriminalization of same-sex intimacy between consenting adults and prohibiting discrimination against gays and lesbians as persons, and in 1996 supporting the right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage.

As rabbis, we believe it is our obligation as people of faith to defend vigorously the dignity of every human being, consistent with the principle that each of us is created in the Divine image. (Genesis 1:27). While we respect those who may be single, we uphold the values of marriage and family. Marriage, imbued with the values of exclusivity, permanence, intimate companionship, and love, provides fulfillment for each partner and adds to the common good of the community. We affirm that every human being has an absolute right to such fulfillment, and that the loving, committed relationships of same-sex couples have the same potential for holiness as those of heterosexual couples.

At the same time, we recognize that not all people of faith and not all clergy share our affirmation. We respect their right to hold opposing views. Still, we contend that the civil rights of some should not be denied because of the religious beliefs of others. Government should treat all people equally and fairly under the law.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Northeast Region of the Central Conference of American Rabbis applauds and supports the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's ruling in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* -- that denying same-sex couples access to civil marriage violates the constitutional guarantees of liberty and equality -- as a step toward ensuring the right of gay and lesbian Americans to share in the joys, privileges, and responsibilities of marriage afforded in law to heterosexuals, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, as citizens, we call upon the legislators of all states to affirm civil marriage rights of every person regardless of sexual orientation, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we oppose legislative efforts to substitute a separate and lesser legal status, such as civil unions, for the full marriage equality same-sex couples deserve, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we unequivocally oppose attempts to amend the constitution of any state or the Constitution of the United States in order to discriminate against same-sex couples and their families."

ON GAY AND LESBIAN MARRIAGE

**Adopted by the 107th Annual Convention of the
Central Conference of American Rabbis
March, 1996**

Background:

Consistent with our Jewish commitment to the fundamental principle that we are all created in the divine image, the Reform Movement has "been in the vanguard of the support for the full recognition of equality for lesbians and gays in society." In 1977, the CCAR adopted a resolution encouraging legislation which decriminalizes homosexual acts between consenting adults, and prohibits discrimination against them as persons, followed by its adoption in 1990 of a substantial position paper on homosexuality and the rabbinate. Then, in 1993, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations observed that "committed lesbian and gay couples are denied the benefits routinely accorded to married heterosexual couples." The UAHC resolved that full equality under the law for lesbian and gay people requires legal recognition of lesbian and gay relationships.

In light of this background,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis support the right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the CCAR oppose governmental efforts to ban gay and lesbian marriage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this is a matter of civil law, and is separate from the question of rabbinic officiation at such marriages.