

Statement by the Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane
Episcopal Bishop of Maine

My name is Stephen Lane, and I am the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Today, as a member of the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry in Maine, I join my brothers and sisters - tens of thousands of Mainers from all over of our state – in supporting the No on 1 campaign. In the past Mainers of every creed and stripe have said proudly and faithfully that “Maine Won’t Discriminate,” and it is time to say it again, clearly and without equivocation.

The Episcopal Church – through its principle legislative body, the General Convention, representing 110 dioceses in 14 countries around the world – has a long history of publicly proclaiming and defending the civil rights of all people. Since 1976, we have specifically and repeatedly held that gay and lesbian persons are entitled to equal protection under the law. It is my belief that the right to marry is a crucial civil right, establishing both protections and obligations that safeguard gay and lesbian couples and their families.

It is core to our Christian belief that we are all children of God, created in God’s image, and, in baptism, we are all full members of the church. In the Episcopal Church, we have also determined that sexual orientation, in and of itself, is no bar to holding any office or ministry in the church, as long as the particular requirements of that office or ministry are met. In many of our congregations, both here in Maine and around the country, faithful same-gender couples and their families are sharing in their local church’s life and ministry and in service to their communities. As full members of our churches and contributing citizens of Maine, these families are as entitled to the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage as any couple.

I believe that faithful, lifelong monogamous relationships are among the building blocks of a healthy and stable society. With the passage of L.D. 1020 last spring, the rights and obligations of civil marriage were extended to all Maine citizens. The passage of Question 1 would deny those rights to certain persons on the basis of sexual orientation, and it would create two classes of citizens and deny one group what we believe is best for them and for society. Domestic partnerships, which Maine allows, and civil unions, which it does not, are not – when measured by the way they are regarded by society or by the legal and financial benefits they bestow – the same as civil marriage.

Although we are not of one mind regarding same gender marriage in The Episcopal Church, we continue to search for ways to honor the varied viewpoints on this issue and to provide a place of dignity and respect for each of them. Therefore, I affirm the portion of the law – passed by both houses of our legislature and signed by Governor Baldacci - that affirms that there will be

no effort to compel or coerce any minister to act in a way contrary to his or her belief and conscience. There will certainly never be any requirement in the Episcopal Diocese of Maine to act in contravention of conscience or of church doctrine.

In July the Episcopal Church, during its 76th General Convention, meeting in Anaheim, California, voted to allow Bishops in the six states – including Maine – where civil marriage is legal a measure of pastoral generosity in serving the pastoral needs of same-gender couples who come to our clergy seeking to marry in our churches. In consultation with Maine clergy who represent a wide spectrum of belief, I have developed guidelines to help our clergy minister to same-gender couples when this referendum is defeated in November. Such couples will get no special treatment. They will be required to go through the same pre-marital counseling as any other couple. I believe the fear that same gender marriage will in some way undermine other marriages or damage society is unfounded. To the contrary, same gender marriage will encourage all of us to work together to strengthen long held commitments to monogamy and faithfulness in relationships.

Our tagline of many years, The Episcopal Church Welcomes You, has never seemed more important. I hope and pray the welcome and pastoral care that same-gender couples receive in many of the Episcopal congregations across Maine will open doors to renewed participation in the lives of our congregations and communities.