

April 14, 2009

To those Considering LD1020:

I am the Reverend Becky Gunn, ordained and fellowshipped minister in the Unitarian Universalist faith, serving the Unitarian Universalist Society of Bangor and living in Hamden, ME.

I am offering this testimony in support of LD1020. I fully support extending the civil rights and protections of civil marriage to same-sex couples.

As a person of faith and as a minister of faith, I believe that when two people love each other and wish to make a covenant to honor and respect and be committed to each other, that God is with them and wishes them well.

Many faith traditions believe in the worth and dignity of each and every one of God's children. In First Timothy, Chapter 2, Verses 1 -4 it states clearly that prayers be made for ALL men (language is not inclusive in the Bible), that all may lead a peaceable life in godliness and that all will be saved. This is one of the verses used by my Universalist foreparents to verify that we all are worthy of respect, that we are all deserving of equal protection of our civil and religious laws. This is also one of the foundations for my belief that those wishing to express their love through marriage should have that opportunity.

I look at civil marriage as a civil right. Using our Declaration of Independence we are all allowed to pursue happiness. Marriage for many is that pursuit. There are some who would say that the rights that have been allowed by the Domestic Partners provision of the law is sufficient for happiness. I disagree. One woman in my congregation (I will call her Mary) relayed a story to me recently about how she and her partner of 20 years did everything they could legally to establish a partnership that would be recognized by everyone. Her partner became ill; she was in ICU and Mary was not allowed to visit her because she didn't have the paperwork with her to prove her partnership. Mary's partner died alone because of paperwork. My question is – if a married, heterosexual couple were in the same circumstances, would anyone have questioned the right of a partner to be in ICU? My answer is NO. This is and was a travesty of love and justice. My understanding is that this is not a unique situation.

I have a young male couple in my congregation who came to me several months ago asking about a commitment ceremony – a religious ceremony to celebrate their commitment to each other for life. They love each other and wanted to make a visual, community-based, faith-oriented covenant that they would stay together as long as they both lived. They have the domestic partner agreement; but they knew that was not an open covenant. They have since decided that they are going to wait until LD1020 is passed and then they will be *married* in the eyes of God and in the eyes of society.

There is little new that can be said about this topic – marriage has an image and connotation that is both civil and religious. I happen to support same-sex marriage both from a civil rights perspective (after all – don't most heterosexual couples think of marriage as a civil right?) and from a religious perspective. To me they are not quite one and the same, but I believe that basic civil rights are based on 'natural law' which to me is God's law. God is love. God loves all regardless of ethnicity, regardless of economic status, regardless of what religion they are, and regardless of sexual orientation.

Please give serious consideration to supporting LD1020 and give ALL who want to pursue happiness through marriage their civil right to do so.

In Faith,

Rev. Becky Gunn  
UU Society of Bangor