

April 20, 2009

To the Members of the Judicial Committee:

My name is Michael Gray and I am the pastor of the Old Orchard Beach United Methodist Church where I also live. I am writing today to show my support for LD 1020, the Marriage Equality bill. This bill allows for the creation of marital equality in the State of Maine while at the same time protecting the freedom of religious communities within the state. Allowing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people the legal ability to marry will in no way harm the religious institutions of this state, but will also give much needed legal protections to a group of people that want nothing more than the ability to live out who they are completely and without fear of unjust and unethical treatment in the eyes of the law.

Sadly, I have been on the other side of this issue. As a young, evangelical lay person, I found myself fighting against extending basic civil rights to people based on sexual orientation. It was at this point in my life that I was challenged by a friend. He ended up leaving a church where he was going because of their position on homosexuality. His former church, where he was a Trustee, became active in the fight against gay rights. They started a series of lectures and sermons that taught that gay and lesbian people needed to "repent of their sins" and renounce their "wickedness" or be "cast off to Hell". My friend had a daughter who was a lesbian. The day that sermon series started was the day that he left that church. I asked him what he believed. Did he feel that his daughter was going to Hell? He told me that he didn't know. What he did know was that it was his daughter, and he loved her.

It suddenly became clear to me that this issue was about human beings with human emotions and stories to tell. I later became aware that several members of my church were gay. I found out that I had several friends that were gay. And then I even learned that there were gay and lesbian members of clergy in my own denomination that had to stay silent for fear of losing their ordination and their position.

The fact is that passage of LD 1020 does not mean that the fight for equal rights for members of the GLBT community will be over. My own church, the United Methodist Church, will not allow me to bless same-sex unions. We still do not ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals. But these battles are for the future. Today, I implore you to vote for passage of LD 1020. I could come up with theological and historical evidence of why this would be okay. But instead, I ask will ask you to consider this bill in the same way that I was asked by one of my professors back in seminary.

One day after New Testament Greek, I started talking to my professor about the gay rights movement. As a lesbian and an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister, she had challenged us all to get involved in the fight for equal rights for the GLBT community. I told her that it wasn't my fight. After all, I was a heterosexual white guy with a wife and two kids from a previous marriage. Why in the world would anyone want to listen to me? And she told me that the power was mine to give. I all ready had the power because of my position. It was my responsibility to share that with those less fortunate. After all, with great power comes great responsibility.

I pray that you all with use this moment in time to live up to your responsibility and do the right thing.

Respectfully submitted,

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