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GUEST COLUMN

A committed marriage is a worthy aspiration

By Pamela Starbird Beliveau

At every juncture of the conversation and debate about protecting same-sex marriage in Maine, we must remind ourselves that we are talking about heart and soul, flesh and blood human beings. We are dealing with people's lives: people who are in love.

We are all wired for relationship, and that includes intimate relationship. When any person finds that special someone, we aspire to marriage. It is a noble and honorable way to live out our lives. It breaks my heart to deny any loving couple the opportunity to experience married life.

As a practicing Catholic contemplating the issues presented by both sides of referendum Question 1, it seems to me that agitated people are oddly warning Mainers about speculative outcomes should gay and lesbian people be allowed to choose marriage.

Mainers need to be reminded that being afraid is not a desirable quality. Commentary that springs from fear should be critiqued for credibility. I experience these fear-based arguments as quite hard-hearted.

I urge Maine people to recognize the harshness of the words coming from people afraid of same-sex marriage.

Let's not treat our gay and lesbian relatives, friends and neighbors as if they are not in the room with us as we debate their lives. No matter how said, those words are a form of rejection. I imagine they penetrate like daggers into the hearts of gay and lesbian people, their families and their friends.

I am particularly perplexed by people insisting they genuinely want gays and lesbians "to be happy," but then deny married happiness as an option for them. The terms are contradictory. It is as if to say, "You are special, but you are not special enough to live out your life in this deeply loving way"; or, "You are special, but you are far too different to aspire to the honor of marriage."

It is a paradoxical statement and must be exposed for what it is: Minimizing human beings who desire to love one another deeply within a marriage.

Using questionable interpretations of legal and educational events from other states and generalizing them to Maine in an effort to scare people is quite troubling to me. This

fuels the fire of discrimination. When linked with commentary offered by overtly fearful people among us, the result forms the basis for alarming discrimination.

Demeaning and hate-filled vocabulary in letters to the editor have associated gay and lesbian life with "war," "carnage," "aberration," "deviation" and "abomination" (just to name a few from recent letters). Those are undeniably hate-filled words.

We do not need to protect our children from gays and lesbians seeking the honor of marriage to live out their lives. Rather, we must protect our children from people spreading questionable, fearful and outright hurtful rhetoric about gays and lesbians who live, work and love in our state.

Quite frankly, I believe most Maine citizens are not afraid. I believe most Maine citizens can discern who is speaking from love and who is speaking from rejection and fear. More commentary on the facts can be viewed at www.religiouscoalition.org, a Web site offered to us by informed, educated, prayerful, and open-minded Maine clergy and lay leaders who have recognized that same-sex marriage must be spoken to in truthful and loving terms and without useless anxiety.

Love, monogamy, commitment, integrity and morality are family values offered by the No on 1 campaign. To be around any couple (gay, straight, or lesbian) who advocates for loving, life-long, married commitment, can only enhance my life, my 20-year marriage, and our daughters' lives.

It is a privilege for me and my family to know other couples (gay, straight, or lesbian) who are committed to married life and who raise their children with integrity, love and compassion. I encourage all Mainers to have a tender heart toward gay and lesbian neighbors.

The bottom line is: No on 1 is advocating for committed marriages as a means to express the depth of loving relationships, and that is a beautiful and worthy aspiration for all human beings.

As Mainers, let's take the high road. Blessings come in abundance to those who choose love over fear.

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