



**Standing on the Side of Love 2008:
No Discrimination in our Constitutions**

**Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Washington Office for Advocacy**



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Washington, DC 20001

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About the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy

The mission of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Washington Office for Advocacy is to influence public policy decisions made by the US Congress and Administration on issues of concern to the Unitarian Universalist Association. The Office also provides support and resources to congregations and individuals seeking to create change in their communities and states. For more information, please see www.uua.org/socialjustice.

INTRODUCTION

California, Florida and Arizona are currently battling amendments that would create a constitutional ban on marriage equality. The amendments will be on the November 2008 ballot.

The California Supreme Court recently granted full legal marriage rights to same gender couples. The proposed amendment would change the Constitution to only recognize “marriage between a man and a woman.” The amendment would nullify the California Supreme Court decision and prevent the California legislature from passing legislation in favor of gay marriage as they did in 2005 and 2007.

In Florida, it is currently illegal for same gender couples to marry. The proposed Florida Marriage Protection Act states that "Inasmuch as a marriage is the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife, no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof shall be valid or recognized." This amendment would not only affect same gender couples but heterosexual couples as well who are in long term relationships that do not include marriage.

Arizona is facing a similar battle. Currently there is a ban on same sex marriage in Arizona. Proposition 102 would amend the Arizona state constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman. It is also being called the “Marriage Protection Amendment.” Arizona defeated a similar proposition in 2006 and is the only state to have done so.

IRS RESTRICTIONS

Congregations are allowed to do an unlimited amount of issue advocacy but may not participate in partisan activities, such as explicitly supporting one candidate. For complete information about the legal restrictions on congregations participating in election work, visit the UUA’s election resource “Faithful Democracy” at http://www.uua.org/documents/aw/08_elections_resources.pdf.

Or for a more extensive explanation of IRS restrictions on political involvement, view the UUA’s IRS guidelines resource, “The Real Rules” <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/realrules/index.shtml>

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

- California: Volunteer with the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-CA www.uulmcaaction.org or Equality for All, CA www.equalityforall.com.
- Florida: Volunteer with the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry, FL www.floridadistrict.org or get involved with the Vote No on Florida amendment campaign www.fairnessforallfamilies.org.
- Arizona: Volunteer with the No on 102 campaign <http://www.votenoprop102.com/> or organize members of your church to do volunteer work.
- Rally your congregation to participate in events happening in your area and campaign to defeat the discrimination amendment! Have a *Standing on the Side of Love* Sunday in late September or early October (October 11th is National Coming Out Day) with a letter-writing table.
- Generate media! Write letters to editor using personal stories and the suggested talking points.
- Speak out publicly as family—partners, mothers and/or fathers and children, grandparents with children and grandchildren. Tell your stories of hardship, and what this amendment would mean for you.
- Educate your relatives, friends, and co-workers about the effects of the marriage amendments using the suggested talking points.
- Visit www.uua.org/socialjustice to find additional resources and to sign up for action alerts. You can also contact Grace Garner, Legislative Assistant for Women’s Issues, ggarner@uua.org (202) 393-2255 x12.

SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

Note: The Florida Amendment is officially called the “Florida Marriage Protection Amendment,” but we recommend never using the word “protection” because it gives the misperception that this amendment actually does something to protect marriage, when it really just discriminates against deserving families.

First and foremost, make it clear that this amendment means that real people (“my family,” “my sister Wanda’s family,” “Bill and Bob in my congregation,” etc.) will be denied important rights. In fact, this amendment would not only refuse these families access to the more than 1,000 state benefits of marriage—including health care coverage, hospital visitation rights, and family medical leave—but would likely result in many families losing benefits they now have. In Florida this would affect the large senior population that often chooses to enter into domestic partnerships rather than re-marry. Denying and removing these benefits will have only negative consequences, for both straight and same-sex couples. Here are some common stories of people denied important rights:

- A woman from church who couldn’t see her partner in the hospital, or discuss her condition with the doctors because she wasn’t “family”
- A neighbor who can’t be covered under his partner’s health insurance
- A friend who wasn’t allowed to take family medical leave to take care of their partner’s ailing parents
- A couple from your church who moved to a different state because of harsh laws against marriage equality, as did Barbara Kenny and Tibby Middleton. These two Unitarian Universalist women were featured in an extensive *Washington Post Magazine* story from Sunday, December 18, 2005, entitled “*Paradise Lost*,” which is available on-line at <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.

Second, emphasize that this amendment does not protect religious liberty, but in fact creates religious discrimination. Religious marriage and civil marriage are different, and each religious group is free to define marriage in its own way. This right to religious freedom is protected by the Constitution and will not be affected by any state or federal court decisions on marriage. People of faith and goodwill can and do disagree about what constitutes marriage. However, this amendment would ensure that a single, religiously-biased definition of marriage would become the law of the land. In doing so, the Constitution would itself become an instrument of religious discrimination rather than a protection against it. Any federal definition of marriage should be based on public interest, not divisive political maneuvering that favors only one religious viewpoint. Again, the real issue here is which families have access to the economic and legal benefits of civil marriage.

Third, this amendment would eviscerate one of America’s core Constitutional principles—the right to equal protection. Amending the Constitution solely to discriminate against a particular group of Americans is unethical, unfair, and wrong—especially at a time when public opinion on marriage is changing rapidly. We should continue our proud national tradition of expanding rights through the Constitution—not creating categories of second-class citizenship.

Finally, we believe in equality and love, not division and fear. We know from our religious experience of worshipping and being together that what unites us as families and as people is much greater than what divides us. We do believe that families need more support in this country, but it cannot be accomplished by writing discrimination into our Constitution. We need policies that will help create as many stable, healthy families as possible—not impose definitions of what constitutes a family.

DO NOT USE THE OPPOSITION'S WORDS

The work of George Lakoff, a cognitive linguist and author of multiple books on framing and metaphors, including the recent "Don't Think of an Elephant," is particularly helpful here. According to Lakoff, every person has a mental "frame" for a given issue through which information about that issue is processed. When facts come along that don't fit that frame, they tend not to get absorbed—regardless of how "rational" they may be. When it comes to marriage and family issues, conservative fundamentalists have done an excellent job of framing the debate on their terms. As a result, we must be careful in our language and messaging to offer up our own frame—or at least not reinforce frames with which we disagree.

For example, the Florida amendment is officially called the "Florida Marriage Protection Amendment," but we recommend never using the word "protection" because it gives the misperception that this amendment actually does something to protect marriage, rather than simply discriminating against deserving families. Lakoff writes that "negating a frame reinforces the frame," meaning that if you say "The marriage protection amendment does nothing to actually protect marriage," you're still reinforcing the linkage of "marriage amendment" with "protection." Instead you can talk about the "proposed amendment that would write discrimination into the constitution," call it the "marriage amendment," or just use it by its proposition number.

USE YOUR OWN POSITIVE CONCEPTS AND FRAMES

Start from the idea of commitment. As Lakoff says, "Marriage, as an ideal, is defined as 'the realization of love through a lifelong public commitment'. Love is sacred in America. So is commitment. There is sanctity in marriage: It is the sanctity of love and commitment." For this reason, start by talking about the sanctity of love and commitment: "Sanctity is a higher value than economic fairness. Talking about benefits is beside the point when the sanctity of marriage is in dispute. Talk sanctity first. With love and commitment, you have the very definition of the marital ideal—of what marriage is fundamentally about." ¹

Make it personal. Evan Wolfson, the founder and Executive Director of *Freedom to Marry*, a national organization working for marriage equality, advises, "Before talking about economic fairness, frame this as a personal issue. This is about people who have made a personal commitment to each other, who are doing the hard work of marriage in their lives, caring for one another and caring for their kids, if any. Tell a personal story-- talk about your family, about families you know and care about, couples you have counseled or worked with. Now, having made that personal commitment to each other, they are still denied the opportunity to make a legal commitment"²

Talk about fairness. Wolfson continues, "Once you've done that, talk about this as an issue of fairness: it is discrimination, it is wrong, and it is unfair, to deny these couples and families important tangible and intangible protections and responsibilities. Our constitution should not be about denying Americans equality under the law."

Separate church and state. Wolfson reminds us: "It is also important to clearly highlight that the freedom to marry movement is challenging discrimination in legal or "civil" marriage. Actions that blur the distinction between the right to marry and religious marriage rights step on our message. Religious leaders and people of faith can play a crucial role in helping make the distinction clear."

¹ Lakoff, George. *don't think of an elephant: Know your values and frame the debate* "What's in a word? Plenty if it's marriage" pp 46-51 White River Green, VT. Chelsea Green Publishing: 2004

² Wolfson, Evan "Advancing toward Equality in Marriage: Strategic Advice from Evan Wolfson, April 2004." <http://www.uua.org/programs/ministry/wolfson.html>

EXAMPLES OF REFRAMING

General Statement: “This amendment is necessary to protect traditional marriage!”

Reinforcing the opposition’s frame with your response:

- “This amendment isn’t about protecting traditional marriage, it’s about discrimination!”

Using your own frame:

- “I agree that marriages and families in this country need help, but I think there’s a better way. Why not focus our efforts on creating better health care and better schools for everyone, rather than singling out a group of families for discrimination?”

Religious Liberty Statement: “Our founding fathers intended this to be a Christian nation!”

Reinforcing the opposition’s frame with your response:

- “That’s absurd. This is not a Christian nation, and never has been.”

Using your own frame:

- “The wise people who founded this country gave us a wonderful Constitution and a Bill of Rights which affirms the rights of all people. These, not any religion, provide the covenant which is our basis for living together in peace in the United States.”

Discerning Position: “Do you support gay marriage?”³

Reinforcing the opposition’s frame:

- Asking the same question, “Do you support gay marriage?”

Using your own frame:

- “Do you believe the government should tell people whom they can and can’t marry?”
- “Do you see marriage as a realization of love in a lifetime commitment?”
- “Does it benefit society when two people who are in love want to make a public lifetime commitment to each other?”⁴

Equal Rights Statement:⁵ “Do you think gays should be allowed to get married?”

Reinforcing the opposition’s frame with your response:

- “Yes, I think gay couples should be allowed to get married.”

Using your own frame:

- “I believe in equal rights, period. I don’t think the state should be in the business of telling people who they can and can’t marry. Marriage is about love and commitment, and denying a couple the right to marry is a violation of human dignity”.⁶

³ Lakoff, 50

⁴ Lakoff, 50

⁵ Lakoff, 50

⁶ Lakoff, 50

CONGREGATIONAL MEDIA KIT

If your congregation is planning a major action, such as a rally, vigil, or interfaith worship service consider putting out a press release. Attracting media increases the visibility and effectiveness of your public witness. In order to defeat these constitutional amendments our religious message must reach the broader public.

Press Release Check List:

- Use congregational letterhead
- Print “PRESS RELEASE” in caps once or more across the top of the page
- Include contact name and information
- Release date (or FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)
- **Headline** in boldface
- Dateline (date/city and state)
- 1st paragraph (who, what, when, where)
- Exciting or Provocative quote
- “Hook” and additional details about event
- The symbol “####” or “-30-“ at the end

Releases are usually sent one to two weeks before an event, leaving time for follow-up email notices and phone calls. In some instances a phone call or a media alert might be more effective than a general press release. If you are promoting an event that you think is perfect for a particular reporter or paper, then a phone pitch might work well. Alternately, if you want to spread the word about an event like a rally or peace vigil, but you don't have many details to convey, then a media alert might be more effective. The standard media alert is just one very short page, without quotes or detailed background information. It is printed on letterhead and includes the words “MEDIA ALERT,” a headline, date, contact information, but instead of body paragraphs, it contains only pithy, one-line information chunks following the “Who, What, When, Where” formula. If there are good photo opportunities at the event, that information can be added at the end.

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of South Somewhere



PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Local UU Church Protests California Marriage Amendment

(Somewhere, State—July 10, 2008) In response to the proposed California marriage amendment scheduled to be voted on in the November election, the UU Church of South Somewhere is joining the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-CA campaign **Vow to Vote No on the Marriage Ban**. The fifty year-old congregation is holding a worship special service on Sunday May 28th to speak out against what it views as a punitive and discriminatory proposal.

The service will feature testimonials from long-time couples who are currently denied the rights and responsibilities of full legal marriage. The Gay Men’s Chorus from North Somewhere will perform outdoors after the service, during the raising of a 20-foot long banner along the Elm Street side of the church building. The banner will read, “We Stand on the Side of Love. South Somewhere UU Fellowship.” The service starts at 10:30 and is open to the public. Members of the media are warmly invited, and interviews with the minister and couples will be arranged upon request.

The Rev. Jane Doe has joined dozens of couples in private services on union during her ten years serving as senior minister. Rev. Doe said, “While the California constitution has been amended in the past, it has never been altered with the express intent to deny equal protection to an entire class of citizens. If this happens it will be a direct attack on hundreds of thousands of Americans and their families.” She added, “The deep love that South Somewhere’s couples share with one another and the commitment they bring to our congregation are blessings to us all.”

South Somewhere is one of more than a thousand Unitarian Universalist congregations across the country. The Unitarian Universalist Association has officially opposed discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people since 1970, and the organization has called for full, legal Marriage Equality for same-sex couples since 1996.

The UUA’s campaign is part of a growing movement of faith-based advocacy on behalf of Marriage Equality. Many progressive and mainline faiths are offering a counter argument to the position put forward

by other religious groups (see “A Religious Push Against Gay Unions” by David D. Kirkpatrick in *The New York Times*, April 24, 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/04/24/washington/24catholic.html_r=1&oref=slogin).

For more information on the South Somewhere UU Fellowship, please visit our web site at www.southsomewhereuu.org. Details on the UUA’s long history of support for the rights of same-sex couples are at www.uua.org/bglt.

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Contact:

Rev. Jane Doe
Sr. Minister, South Somewhere UU Fellowship
(555) 555-5555, revdoe@uusomewhere.org

TIPS ON WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR AND OP-EDS

Another way to gather media is to write letters to the editors and Op-eds. A letter to the editor is a briefly stated opinion generally written in response to a current issue or a previously published article. "Op-ed" articles, as they are commonly referred to, are opinion articles published opposite the editorial page. They are longer and more influential than letters to the editor, and are therefore more difficult to publish.

Letters to the Editor

Tips on Content

- If a publication receives multiple letters on the same subject, the editor will choose one that says something in a new way or takes a unique angle.
- Focus your letter on one point on one subject. If you can, comment on a specific story in the paper, do so, mentioning the headline and date. Cite the specific reference and sum it up in a sentence to refresh readers' memories. Then point out facts that were left out, or refute or support facts that were stated.
- Be clear and concise. Shorter is better. Most papers want letters of 250 words or less. Magazines such as Time want even less.
- State your point early in the letter and support your point with facts.
- Know the audience of the publication. Technical information and long, multi-syllable words are often not appropriate for a general audience.
- If appropriate, mention your motivation or expertise in writing. For example, "As a Unitarian Universalist, I believe... and therefore x," or "I direct a social service agency. Here's what my experience has been ... That's why I believe y."

General Logistical Tips

- Know and follow the policies and specifications of the publication to which you are submitting your letter. Except as noted, it is OK to send the same or similar letters to more than one publication. But don't submit the same or similar letters to multiple papers in the same media market.
- Always include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Include exactly one e-mail address in the To: field. Don't send to editors via Cc: or Bcc:. Send your letter in the body of the e-mail message, not as an attachment.
- Don't submit a letter to a paper that has already run another of your letters in the past month or two.
- Don't send specifically local letters to other localities.
- If your letter ran, get a print version of the letter with the front page banner of the paper's name.
- Send your letter to your legislators. Keep copies for future lobbying visits.
- Send a copy of the printed letter to the group that encouraged you to write or to the group that is working on your topic so that the organization can follow the bigger picture.

Op-eds - General Tips

- Timing is key, make sure you submit an op-ed when the issue is hot.
- In general an op-ed is written in 500-800 words or less, double-spaced. Keep it short.
- Read other op-eds to get a feel for how they are constructed. Generally they are written in the 5 paragraph with three talking points format:
 1. The first paragraph should include a news-hook (i.e. referring to a recent event in the news), and your theses statement. Make sure your point is well stated and concise.
 2. The three "body" paragraphs should pinpoint the three most important parts of your argument.
 3. The conclusion should be captivating and brief, make the last paragraph powerful.
- It is a good idea to have the main points of your op-ed already drafted, before a news break on your issue. This way, when your issue comes up in the news, all your article needs is the news-hook in the first paragraph, and it is ready to be sent to the editor.
- The more unique and fresh your facts are, the more likely your article is to be published; however, more obscure facts need to be well documented, and names should be double checked. Use facts, reputable quotes, and examples to support your opinion.
- Avoid clichés, tangents, name-calling, and repetition.
- Make sure you have a sort of "expertise" on the subject, and include a brief (one sentence) bio-line at the end of the article.
- Do not make the article too poetic, simple short sentences are best; and steer clear of long complex words and slang.
- Check your article for grammar and fluidity, read it out loud to make sure the thoughts flow well.
- Give it a catchy title.
- Have another person read your article before sending it in to make sure your point is clearly expressed.
- Learn where to send an op-ed before a newsbreak occurs. Check out MediaCircus.org to find out how to get in touch with papers in your targeted areas.
- Include a cover letter when submitting it to an editor, and assure him or her that the article has not been sent to a competing newspaper or if it was sent to them exclusively.

SAMPLE PROGRAM/NEWSLETTER ANNOUNCEMENT

When organizing your marriage equality events be sure to put an announcement in the church bulletin. There may be many people looking to work with you who are unaware that anyone is organizing. It will also be helpful information for visitors to the church who may have the same values.

Make sure your message is clear and gets people excited about working on the issue. Also, provide other information that will be helpful for those who are not able to commit to a large amount of work but would like to know more. Below is a sample announcement that you may use or can help you to create your own.

If you're concerned about supporting marriage equality, then this announcement is for you. This November an amendment that would change the state constitution to ban gay marriage will be on the ballot. The amendment states that "Marriage in [California, Florida, Arizona] shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman," and includes language that would restrict the legal and economic benefits of marriage to only heterosexual couples. Currently, many conservative religious groups are working to get the amendment passed. As a liberal religious faith it is important for us to let our voice be heard as well.

Please visit the _____ table during coffee hour to learn about how to get involved and read the resolution entitled "Oppose Federal Marriage Amendment" that was passed by the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly in 2004.

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Oppose Federal Marriage Amendment

2004 Action of Immediate Witness

WHEREAS the Unitarian Universalist Association has made strong public announcements that “Civil Marriage is a Civil Right” ;

WHEREAS several prominent national political leaders have proposed an amendment to the United States Constitution that would deny the rights and privileges of civil marriage to same-gender couples;

WHEREAS The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) of 1996 stipulates that marriage is between a man and a woman;

WHEREAS the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled that same-sex and opposite-sex couples must be given equal civil marriage rights, effective May 17, 2004;

WHEREAS half of the plaintiffs in the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruling were Unitarian Universalists;

WHEREAS a coalition of twenty religious groups is opposed to this amendment, including the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Episcopal Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Union for Reform Judaism;

WHEREAS the amendment denying marriage equality for same-gender couples is currently being considered by the Congress of the United States and is scheduled for consideration by the Senate during the week of July 12, 2004; and

WHEREAS this would be the only amendment to the Constitution that denies rights to any group and therefore undermines the intent of that great document;

BE IT RESOLVED that the members and congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association urge their legislators to vote against the proposed “Federal Marriage Amendment” (H.R. Res. 56); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UUA Office of Advocacy and Witness take appropriate action to advocate against any attempt to deny civil marriage rights to same-gender couples.



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

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Rob Keithan

Director

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April 25, 2006

Dear Senator,

On behalf of more than 1,050 congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association, I urge you to oppose S.J. Res. 1 (the Marriage Amendment), and any similar proposals that would define marriage in our founding document. As a religious tradition dedicated to promoting democracy and justice, we believe that such an amendment would hurt thousands of families and children, turn the Constitution into an instrument of religious discrimination, and eviscerate the principle of equal protection.

First, S.J. Res. 1 would hurt thousands of deserving families and children, many of whom we Unitarian Universalists know as fellow congregants, co-workers, friends, and family. This amendment would not only refuse these families access to the more than 1,000 federal benefits of marriage—including health care coverage, hospital visitation rights, and family medical leave—but would likely result in many families losing benefits they now have when state and local laws are overturned to comply with the federally-mandated definition. We believe that denying and removing these benefits will have only negative consequences, both for those directly affected and for the country.

Second, we believe that this amendment does not protect religious liberty, but in fact creates religious discrimination. Religious marriage and civil marriage are different, and each religious group is free to define marriage in its own way. This right to religious freedom is protected by the Constitution and will not be affected by any state or federal court decisions on marriage. People of faith and goodwill can and do disagree about what constitutes marriage. However, this amendment would ensure that a single, religiously-biased definition of marriage would become the law of the land. In doing so, the Constitution would itself become an instrument of religious discrimination rather than a protection against it. Public policy should be based on public interest, not divisive political maneuvering that favors only one religious viewpoint. Again, the real issue here is which families have access to the economic and legal benefits of civil marriage.

Third, this amendment would eviscerate one of America's core Constitutional principles—the right to equal protection. Amending the Constitution solely to discriminate against a particular group of Americans is unethical, unfair, and wrong—especially at a time when public opinion on marriage is changing rapidly. We should continue our proud national tradition of expanding rights through the Constitution—not creating categories of second-class citizenship.

The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations has opposed discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people since 1970. We know from our religious experience of worshipping and being together that what unites us as families and as people is much greater than what divides us. We do believe that families need more support in this country, but it cannot be accomplished by writing discrimination into our Constitution. We need policies that will help create as many stable, healthy families as possible—not impose definitions of what constitutes a family. **Please stand on the side of love, religious liberty, and equal protection under the law: oppose S.J. Resolution 1 and any similar proposals that would define marriage in the Constitution.**

In Faith,

Robert C. Keithan, Director

**SAMPLE PRESS BRIEFING STATEMENT OPPOSING PRESIDENT BUSH'S
SUPPORT OF THE FEDERAL MARRIAGE AMENDMENT**

By: the Reverend Robert M. Hardies
Senior Minister, All Souls Church, Unitarian, Washington, DC
National Press Club
June 5, 2006

My name is Robert Hardies and I'm the senior minister of All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, DC. The Unitarian Universalist Association unequivocally supports same sex marriage, and for many years, now, our ministers have blessed same sex unions with the same rituals as heterosexual marriages.

It is our belief that the church's calling is to bless ALL that is holy. And what is more holy than the mutual love between two human beings? We affirm that the nurturing and fulfilling love that same sex couples find in their relationships is, indeed, one of the innumerable expressions of God's love.

Today, I'd like to issue an invitation to the President of the United States. I'd like to invite him and the First Lady to come worship with us at All Souls Church on a Sunday morning. Because there are families in my church I'd like to introduce him to. I'd like him to meet Steve and Barbara.

A few years ago, Steve and Barbara celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary with a party at our church. Forty years was an important milestone for them. You see, Steve is white and Barbara is black and when they tried to get married 40-some years ago in the state of Virginia they were told, "No!" They were told that a white person marrying a black person violated not only the state's anti-miscegenation laws, but the sanctity of marriage itself. Like so many couples back then, Steve and Barbara had to cross over the Potomac into the District of Columbia to get married. Pretty soon they moved here so as not to be rousted out of bed and arrested like other interracial couples in Virginia.

I'm hoping that Steve and Barbara can remind the President that the struggle for marriage equality has a longer history than some are willing to admit.

Then I'd introduce him to Kevin and Paul. They've celebrated a milestone, too. Not too long ago we held a blessing in church for their adopted daughter. You should've seen the crowd after the service. Dozens of would-be aunts and uncles gathered around the family, clamoring to hold the little girl. Kevin and Paul are thankful for the love and support they find at church, because the state still doesn't recognize their family as legitimate. I'd like to give Kevin and Paul the opportunity to ask the President why their family shouldn't receive the same legal benefits as other families.

In his press conference today, the President has used the language of values to justify his support of the Federal Marriage Amendment. And I want to acknowledge that people of good faith do differ on the issue of gay marriage. But I'd like to use some values language, too, and discuss for a moment the politics behind the Federal Marriage Amendment.

Let's be honest with ourselves. There isn't anyone in Washington who is naïve enough to believe that the introduction of this legislation now in two consecutive election cycles is *anything* but a politically motivated effort to win votes by demonizing a class of citizens.

There are those who say to me, "Hey, that's politics. In an election year you can't blame us for tossing a little red meat to our base." I say to them, "When your red meat are my parishioners—people I love and

whom I'm responsible to God for caring for—then you'd better believe I'm going to blame you and point out your hypocrisy.”

For the President of the United States to write discrimination into the Constitution in order to boost his poll numbers is shameful, and a violation of his stewardship of the Constitution. But it's worse than that. To use another human being for one's own political gain is beyond shameful, it's a sin. If the President were to go back and read the Book of Genesis he would be reminded that there it says all human beings are created in the image of God, and that they therefore possess sacred worth and dignity. You don't use another human being this way. You don't demonize them for your own political gain. That's the very definition of sin.

In closing, let me make two predictions. First, this legislation will almost undoubtedly fail. It wasn't ever intended to pass; it was only intended to mobilize conservative voters. And second, I predict that we'll all be here again two years from now in 2008 when someone else thinks its good politics and again introduces the Federal Marriage Amendment into the national debate.

But I will work and pray for the day when the leadership of this country rises above the politics of demonization and instead sees fit to shower the blessings of this nation on all of our families. Thank you.

RELIGIOUS BRIEFING FOR STAFF FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

By the Reverend William G. Sinkford
President, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
July 2006

Good morning. I am the Rev. Bill Sinkford, and I serve as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. As a faith community we have a long-standing commitment to supporting families, civil rights, and religious liberty, and we are strongly opposed to the federal marriage amendment.

Within Unitarian Universalism, we know from our own experience the many blessings that gay and lesbian people bring to our congregations and communities. We know from our lived experience in religious community that differences of faith, of race and of sexual orientation need not divide us, that diversity within the human family can be a blessing and not a curse. Unitarian Universalists affirm that it is the presence of love and commitment that we value. For Unitarian Universalists, it is homophobia that is the sin, not homosexuality. Unitarian Universalists Stand on the Side of Love.

Indeed, in my years in ministry, I have yet to counsel a single couple struggling with marital problems, or even hear of one, in which the availability of marriage to same-sex couples played any role whatsoever.

I ask you: what does this amendment do to help couples that are struggling, more likely than not with financial problems? What does this amendment do to help families who can't find housing or health insurance, for people struggling with addiction? Would this amendment do anything—any single thing—other than discriminate against a group of deserving families, singling them out as worthy of less support than other families? No. The result of passing this amendment would be discrimination. It would be the creation of second-class citizenship, which is something I know a little about.

You see, as an African American living in the United States, I know all too well what second-class citizenship can feel like. It was not so long ago that Congress and the Courts were deciding what rights I should have. Without the just application of law to all people, regardless of race, I might still be drinking from segregated fountains rather than serving as the first black President of a historically white denomination. Without the Supreme Court's decision in *Loving v. Virginia*—which came at a time when the public overwhelmingly opposed interracial marriage—I might not have been able to marry my wife, who is white. Imagine what would have happened if, later in 1967, the US had approved a Constitutional Amendment banning interracial marriage? Imagine how destructive that would have been for our nation, if, rather than accepting the Court's decision, we had written a whole group of people out of our Constitution, simply for loving people of a different skin color? Simply because of our prejudice?

The marriage amendment we face now is also about prejudice, including religious prejudice. The first amendment of the Constitution ensures for Americans that they can profess any religion they choose, or no religion at all. And it guarantees that the government will not privilege one religion over another. In our society, religious pluralism is a reality. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Ba'hais, Buddhists, Taoists, agnostics, and atheists are all citizens of this nation. The task of our government and elected representatives is not to enshrine the religious point of view of any one faith in our laws; the role of our government is to dedicate itself to protecting the rights of all citizens. It is important to understand the distinction between civil marriage and religious marriage. Allowing gay and lesbian couples to unite in civil marriage will in no way affect the religious practices of any faith community.

The federal marriage amendment, on the other hand, would write a single, religiously-biased definition of marriage into the Constitution. Once the Constitution defines marriage throughout the United States, will it

be unconstitutional for Unitarian Universalists and other religious groups to join same-sex couples and call them marriages, once the Constitution includes a definition of marriage for the whole United States? Where were the hearings to consider this and other paramount legal questions? Why do the supporters of this amendment—people and groups who claim to support religious liberty—disappear when it's not their own religious liberty that's in question?

The answer is simple: because no one expects this amendment to pass, because its consideration is not about what the amendment says, but what it does: scape-goat a group of American families in the service of electoral politics. And while some Representatives may see this as a free vote, without consequences, I see it differently. I see it not as a free vote, but a vote about freedom. A vote about morality and religious liberty. A vote that requires Representatives to choose which side to stand on—the side of rashly amending the Constitution for electoral gain, or the side of upholding the integrity of the Constitution and the dignity of all Americans.

I urge you to oppose the federal marriage amendment. Thank you.

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