

March 25, 2009

Greetings Legislators;

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in open session. My name is Reverend Greg Chute. I am the Minister at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Newark, and would like to speak in opposition to SB 27, the Act to Amend Article XV of the Delaware Constitution. It is one more effort by one group of citizens and legislators to impose their will and religious perspective on another; a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. We all are guaranteed equal standing and access under the law. To arbitrarily decide to define 'marriage' as being necessarily heterosexual is to deprive gays and lesbians of a fundamental human right: to have the state recognize their life commitment and bond of love, with all its rights and privileges. I don't believe individuals or the government itself has the right or authority to place such restrictions on marriage, or to dictate to me whose marriage I am free to celebrate.

I have helped to celebrate many marriages over the years, gay and straight. It is a great honor to meet with couples and help them plan their own unique event. Everyone brings their own story, their own tradition, their own values, styles, expectations and priorities. I invite each couple to reflect on the unique meaning and moment of their particular celebration, and to create meaningful vows of love and understanding. No one formula fits for all people. And yet I find there are shared themes: love, respect, devotion, responsibility, commitment, support. Consider your own relationships, and the things which bind you and nurture you, which sustain and comfort you. We all seek these same human ties, regardless of our sexual identity or orientation. The vows exchanged in same sex marriages are the same exchanged in legally recognized marriages. The bonds of matrimony are the same for any couple who love each other and dedicate themselves to each other before their family and friends. Why would we have a problem with that? Why would we feel the need to interfere in their lives? Why would we decline to acknowledge publicly and legally their devotion, or somehow to discount it as less important, less compelling, less worthy, or less legally binding?

I agree that marriage is a sacred bond. A healthy marriage is often a significant component of a healthy family. And we now know that families take many forms: blended, adopted, inherited, single-parent, multi-generational, functional and dysfunctional. Being in a family or raising a family is a difficult and challenging calling. The thing that healthy families share is love, commitment, honor, and supportive relationships. Families don't have to, and already don't, fit a particular mold. Neither does marriage. Let us not presume that by defining families and marriages in one narrow form is to somehow save them, or make them more successful. What families and individuals need is love, more love; and commitment.

Recognizing the right of everyone to marry in no way threatens or challenges the rights and opportunities of heterosexuals to marry, or their families. They may continue as always, unopposed. Attempting to deny that right to others is, however, suspiciously unconstitutional, and surely ungenerous. It certainly contradicts my religious tradition which celebrates the dignity and worth of every individual. So I ask you to join me in ensuring that all our citizens have the right and privilege to marry who they will, and that our government respects that right.