



## ***Cottage Conversations on Marriage Equality*** Overview

Many older Californians are regular voters who take their civic responsibilities seriously. Some are also part of moderate or liberal faith communities that teach respect for diversity. While they may identify as open minded individuals, many may still be unsure about the word “marriage” as it applies to same-sex couples.

*Cottage Conversations* are an attempt to foster an open dialogue, so that those in the “moveable middle” can understand the impact of marriage discrimination on real couples and their families. *Cottage Conversations* also offer an opportunity for participants to reflect on the impact on our democracy of denying access to civil marriage to one sector of society.

### Cottage Conversation Goals

- To open up honest and respectful conversation with friends, neighbors, associates, congregants, colleagues, and/or family around the issue of marriage equality for same-sex couples. While our primary target audience is older Californians, we are happy to host *Cottage Conversations* with any age group.
- To touch hearts and minds, by “putting a face” on the issue and showing the real damage that is done to families who are denied the legal protections and benefits of civil marriage.
- To win their support for future efforts to bring fair and equitable treatment to same-sex couples and their families
- To collect the names of those pledging to support civil marriage equality (may be used for local “get out the vote” efforts to support marriage equality if needed)
- To host 1000 Cottage Conversations in California, by inspiring some guests at each Cottage Conversation to host a Cottage Conversation of their own.
- To connect those who may be interested to other marriage equality volunteer opportunities in their region.

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## What does a Cottage Conversation Look Like?

- Relatively small and intimate -- from 8 – 25 people -- with a social and personal flavor and an atmosphere conducive to a respectful exchange of ideas and feelings.
- Hosted in your home, or by using space in a more public setting such as a church, senior center, college dorm, or condo complex
- Two hours in length: socializing with light refreshments, powerful 25 minute DVD, reflection questions & discussion, wrap up, sign-ups, and closing (more detailed outline attached)

## What happens in California will have a profound impact on the whole nation!

Massachusetts has taken the lead, but it is essential for other states to permit equal civil marriage for same-sex couples **before** a case challenging the Defense of Marriage Act comes before the US Supreme Court. California, with 36 million people, is critical to our success.

Anti-gay extremists have been circulating ballot measures to amend the CA state constitution to limit marriage to opposite sex couples, and to take away all existing Domestic Partnership rights and responsibilities.

Anti-gay groups did not fully fund the gathering of signatures to get on the 2006 ballot, and their initiatives did not qualify. This is GREAT news! However, we must be prepared.

Once marriage for same-sex couples becomes legal through a CA Supreme Court decision or through legislation signed by a new Governor (hopefully by 2008), we will undoubtedly face a statewide election attempting to repeal marriage equality and enshrine anti-gay discrimination in our state constitution. **We must and we can have public opinion with us to survive that challenge.**

## Polling shows public opinion is moving in the direction of equality!

A non-partisan, state-wide Field Poll of Californians already shows a BIG shift in attitudes in a short period of time:

- 1997 Field Poll: 38% approved and 56% opposed marriage for same-sex couples.
- 2006 Field Poll: 43% approve and only 51% oppose civil marriage for same-sex couples

Throughout the poll, **those who most opposed** legal protections for same-sex couples **were the least likely to personally know a LGBT person.**

## Thank you for helping us to organize and host Cottage Conversations!

It is by facing the issue of marriage equality head-on, and by giving people time to reflect, that the “moveable middle” will continue to move toward support of full civil marriage equality for same-sex couples.