



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry ♦ California

www.uulmca.org

September 28, 2009

Dear CA Unitarian Universalists and fellow travelers on the journey toward marriage equality,

As we approach the one year anniversary of the passage of Proposition 8, it is time for us to reflect on where we have been, assess the current landscape and thoughtfully consider our next steps.

Where we have been

When marriage for all became legal in 2008, joy was rampant in our congregations. From liberal urban centers to conservative rural outposts, our clergy were thrilled to finally be able to legally marry same-sex couples, many of whose religious weddings they had solemnized years before. What a whirlwind season of celebration!

When Proposition 8 qualified for the ballot, threatening both equal access to marriage and our CA Constitution, Unitarian Universalists from across the state organized in record numbers. Our congregations opened their doors to host phone banks, families provided home hospitality to traveling organizers and volunteers donated hundreds of hours to the cause. Children of same-sex couples who were experiencing an intense and public attack on the legitimacy of their families, found a safe haven in the supportive community of their church home.

When the need for dedicated interfaith organizers became clear, the UULM Action Network stepped into new territory and formed a PAC. We raised funds to hire and coordinate interfaith organizers and volunteers who served 13 regions across the state. Together we demonstrated that people of many different faiths *stand with* LGBT people, *stand for* marriage equality, and *stand up* for the distinction between church and state.

Thanks to all of you who stepped forward to help with faith-based efforts to support marriage equality and defeat Proposition 8. We know that many of you took significant time away from family and other work responsibilities in order to serve the cause of equality. You provided an amazing witness to the power of our principles, and it was an honor to work with you.

Despite all of our best efforts, we did not change the world in all the ways we had hoped. While California voters moved dramatically in the direction of marriage equality since they last addressed the issue (Prop 22) in 2000, marriage equality still lost the November 2008 election (52.3% to 47.7%). Post Prop 8, massive rallies, created largely by on-line organizing, captured public attention and brought a new wave of passion, grassroots leadership, analysis, and energy.

The current landscape

Almost a year later, there is a debate among organizations and people of good will about whether or not it is a wise investment of community resources to go back to the ballot to overturn Prop 8 in

2010. Many of our congregations are receiving calls from a multitude of groups who are pursuing different strategies for organizing on behalf of marriage equality, and who are seeking the active engagement of Unitarian Universalists.

In our desire to quickly redress the injury of Prop 8, we must remember that restoring equal marriage rights in California and removing this injustice from our constitution is not an issue that stands alone. As we examine options for action, we recognize that:

- Families, non-profit organizations and communities are facing a financial crisis that has ripped holes in the fabric of essential human services.
- Many media outlets, feeling dependent on conflict and spectacle for ad revenue, are utilizing more sensational, disrespectful, and hostile formats for “public discourse” on the important social, economic and environmental issues of our day.
- National efforts to overturn DOMA, end Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, and pass an inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act are seeking the engagement of supportive people of faith.
- Our clergy and congregations in Maine and Washington, whose states are facing their own ballot measures to revoke same-sex marriage and domestic partnerships, need our support.

With all that cries out to be healed and all the work to be done, what are we called to do at this time?

Our next steps: a time for every purpose under heaven.

While we do not speak for every Unitarian Universalist in California, the Boards of the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry and our UULM Action Network have come to the unanimous opinion that our next leg on this journey toward restoring marriage equality is best travelled with deliberation rather than speed and with an eye toward the long term goal of a world where the diversity of family makeup, orientation and gender is simply part of the ordinary fabric of life.

While it is helpful in any social movement to have external deadlines around which to create urgency and structured actions, and while a ballot measure is surely an effective strategy through which to raise funds and keep an issue in the public eye, we do not believe that “education by ballot measure” is currently the most effective strategy through which to address the deeper issues that can lead to the change in hearts and minds that is necessary to protect access to same-sex marriage for generations to come.

At this time, we believe that our time and resources will be better spent on education, organizing and communication that:

- fosters deeper dialogue with those not yet comfortable at the table of LGBT equality,
- builds bridges of understanding and networks of collaboration between allies of LGBT rights and other traditionally marginalized communities, and
- addresses the root causes of why many good-hearted people were influenced by the less than true statements from the Yes on 8 campaign.

Some of the root-causes that need to be addressed include:

- Faith-based homophobia
- Profound confusion about the difference between civil and religious marriage, the nature of religious freedom and equal protection under the law
- Anxiety, for some parents, about how to talk to their children about LGBT people and the fact that some same-sex couples are married

- Financial, social, and culture stresses on marriage and family life.

It is not easy to change one's heart and mind about a divisive social issue. We believe that it is easier for people who have felt conflicted about same-sex marriage to mature in their thinking and move toward the welcome table of equality if they are not asked to vote again in 2010.

A coalition of proponents recently submitted language for a ballot measure to overturn Prop 8. The language clarifies for the voting public that no clergy will be required to perform same-sex marriages against the tenets of their faith. They are asking for volunteers to circulate the petition, seeking to gather 1 million signatures to place it on the 2010 ballot.

We recognize that each Unitarian Universalist will need to follow the dictates of his or her own conscience when deciding whether or not to sign this petition. However, we ask you to keep in mind that gathering 1 million signatures to qualify a measure for the ballot takes only a fraction of the volunteer energy and money required for a successful campaign. Over \$40 million and untold hours of volunteer time were spent in the effort to defeat Proposition 8.

While we believe that returning to the ballot in 2010 would be less expensive, we still conclude that at this moment, our time and resources are better spent fostering deeper dialogue, building networks, and addressing root causes. Therefore, we respectfully recommend to California Unitarian Universalists that we refrain from signing petitions and supporting efforts to place the measure on the ballot to overturn Prop 8 in 2010.

That said, regardless of when a measure to overturn Prop 8 gathers enough signatures to qualify for the ballot, whether in 2010, 2012, or 2014, the UULM Action Network will take our place among the ever growing network of people of faith who will work to fully engage our members in a campaign to reestablish marriage equality in California.

Until such time as we are back in campaign mode, we are working in close collaboration with our excellent partners at CA Faith for Equality to create educational and organizing resources to equip our congregations and clergy for these next steps on the journey. We welcome your continued engagement and look forward to deepening our ministry and our capacity to serve.

Our Unitarian ancestor Francis David taught that "We need not think alike to love alike". Regardless of the conclusion that individuals and organizations reach on the question of priorities and the 2010 ballot, we do believe that each is working with positive intention toward our shared goals. No one can fully predict the future, and we remain open to new insights and new opportunities to serve.

Above all, we seek to remain in loving and collegial relationships with you and the community partners who are giving so much of themselves. We are honored to be with you all on this journey toward love and justice.

In faith,

Rev. Lindi Ramsden, Executive Director
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry, CA & UULM Action Network, CA