

# Religious Organizations and Leaders Who Support Marriage Equality:

## *You Can Help Educate The California Court Of Appeal On Progressive Religious Views Regarding Marriage Equality For Same-Sex Couples*

In April 2005, San Francisco Superior Court Judge Richard Kramer held that California's exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage violates equal protection and the fundamental right to marry. The State of California appealed Judge Kramer's decision to the California Court of Appeal. As part of its consideration of this case, the Court will examine a limited number of amicus ("friend of the court") briefs submitted by those whose viewpoints will assist the Court in coming to an informed and fair decision.

In early January, 2006, many religious leaders and organizations will present a brief to the Court to accomplish the following three objectives:

- First, we want to support the positions presented in the brief to be filed before the Court of Appeal on behalf of the parties who brought the lawsuit before Judge Kramer. The parties' brief, called the "Respondents' Brief" will most likely state that, in order to safeguard religious freedom and equal protection under the law, the State may not rely on the views of particular religious sects as a basis for denying civil marriage licenses to same-sex couples.
- Second, we want to demonstrate that there are a variety of existing and evolving religious viewpoints on this issue. Thus, denying civil marriage to same-sex couples favors particular religious viewpoints over others in violation of Title 1, section 4 of the California Constitution, which requires government neutrality among religions.
- Finally, we want to present examples to the Court of the real-world impact of its decision on religious communities and those who have been married in a religious ceremony but denied legal recognition of their marriages.

In order to present the most effective brief to the Court, we need the assistance of religious leaders, congregations, synagogues, ashrams, temples, mosques, lay organizations, conferences and others whose religious tenets support marriage between same sex couples on the same terms as different-sex couples. There are several ways in which you can help:

- First, your organization, its spiritual leaders, or other representatives can agree to "sign on" to the brief. This means that your organization will be listed as one of the organizations on whose behalf the amicus brief is presented.
- Second, you can share with us the views and practices of your faith with respect to marriage between same-sex couples. Below is an example of a portion of the draft brief that focuses on the traditions of the Unitarian Universalist Association:

The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, comprising more than a thousand Unitarian Universalist churches and fellowships – some of them among North America's oldest Protestant congregations – strongly supports the right of same-sex couples to wed. In 1996, the Association's General Assembly resolved overwhelmingly to “adopt[] a Position in support of legal recognition for marriage between members of the same sex,” to “make this position known through the media,” and to urge “member congregations to proclaim the worth of marriage between any two committed persons and to make this position known in their home communities.”

Unitarian Universalist churches include First Parish Church of Plymouth, the congregation that the Pilgrims brought to the New World on the Mayflower in 1620, as well as the First Church in Salem (founded 1629) and First Church in Boston (founded 1630). Marriages between same-sex couples performed in these churches are now recognized by the State of Massachusetts. Unitarian Universalist clergy in California have been performing marriages/unions for same-sex couples for over thirty years and hope soon to have these marriages legally recognized by the State of California.

The brief will have similar sections focused on a representative sample of other religious traditions. Since you know your faith far better than we do, we need to hear from you about your tradition.

- Third, you can share your stories. We are looking for anecdotal stories of same-sex couples and religious leaders to put a face on this issue. We want to highlight the many same sex couples who have been married in the religious tradition, but have been denied a marriage license by the State. We also want to show the struggles of religious leaders who are faced with the dilemma of wanting to minister equally to all who wish to marry, but are required by the State to treat heterosexual couples differently than same-sex couples. Please help us find these stories, or tell us your own.

You may be receiving a call in the near future asking for your help. Please take the time to respond to the call. If you are ready to jump in right now, please contact one of the following people who are contributing to this effort:

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