

March 26, 2007
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing on Raised Bill No. 7395
“An Act Concerning Marriage Equality”
Testimony of the Rev. Harlon L. Dalton

Good afternoon. Although I have been a professor of law at Yale for the past 25 years, and been admitted to the bar since 1974, I speak to you today in my capacity as an ordained minister. For it is as the Associate Rector of the Episcopal Church of St. Paul & St. James, in New Haven, that I have come to fully comprehend what marriage is and is not, and to understand why the church has a huge stake in extending the sacrament of marriage to all who seek to be bound in life-long, faith-filled, committed relationships. My testimony today is theological rather than legal or policy-driven, because I want to make it plain that despite received wisdom and the flashcard protestations of many, the truth is that marriage equality actually furthers the mission of the church.

The entire sweep of salvation history – starting with God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah, and continuing all the way through to the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth – is an account of God’s repeated attempts to love us human beings into righteousness. You know, there are a lot of religious folk out there who seem to think that you can *scare* people into living right; that if you can manage to threaten them with enough hellfire and brimstone they will amend their sinful ways. But that’s not what Scripture says, not when you pay attention to all of it rather than cherry pick this verse here and that verse there. Scripture tells us that each and every one of us is created in the image of God, and that each and every one of us is loved by God with a fierceness and a passion and steadfastness that is almost beyond our capacity to fathom, and certainly way more than we deserve.

And this, my friends, is where marriage comes in. You see, if we are lucky, at some point

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in our lives we will stumble into a relationship with another human being that provides a window onto *divine* love. If we are lucky, we will enter into a relationship that is marked by such tenderness, such respect, such shared vulnerability, and such commitment that we begin to grasp what God's love for us is like. Such relationships are a gift from God, and they are a gift *of* God, for they put us in touch with our true selves, the part of us that is made in God's image.

So, then, the church has a deep and abiding interest in lifting up and celebrating faithful, committed, loving, spirit-filled unions wherever they arise, without regard for such spiritually insignificant matters as gender or sexual orientation. For such unions enable us to see God in ourselves and in one another, and to draw closer to the One who loves us so dearly. As a parish priest I have seen first hand, over and over, the power of a marriage celebration that is good and true to put the entire community of the faithful in mind of that even greater love that knows no limitation, and that carries with it the promise of salvation. We need more, rather than fewer occasions that provide an outward and visible manifestation of God's spiritual and inward grace.

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