

Testimony of the Rev. Richard Maxwell
Rector, Grace Episcopal Church in Hartford
In support of An Act Concerning Marriage Equality

March 26, 2007



Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of an act concerning marriage equality. I'm Richard Maxwell, the rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Hartford. Sitting with me is my partner of more than seven years, Paul Kline.

We are here today to urge you to enact marriage equality for all people in Connecticut. And I urge this as a citizen of this state who happens to be an Episcopal priest.

One of the difficulties that many of us have with the subject of marriage equality is that marriage is one of the very few places where the interests of the state and those of the church appear to be woven together. But this need not be so; it's very important when considering this subject to separate the role of the state from that of the church.

Perhaps I can illustrate this by telling you a bit of our story. Paul and I met approximately eight years ago, fell in love, and eventually settled in New York City. We registered as domestic partners because the city allowed us to do so, but we didn't turn this into a big celebration for two reasons: first, the rights granted us were so limited, and second, there was no way for us to mark this event religiously . . . and our faith is very important to both of us.

We moved to Connecticut just over three years ago, when I received a call to Grace Church. Approximately a year after moving here, Paul was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Near the end of last year his diagnosis changed to a-typical Parkinson's with the possibility that he has a condition that destroys both physical and cognitive abilities, and is fast progressing and not treatable.

We dreamed for a long time of having a wedding. However, our bishop forbade the blessing of same-sex couples and, while this policy is changing, continues to forbid his priests from officiating at civil unions. The Legislature may have given me the right to officiate at a civil union, but my bishop has not given me his permission to do so. All of this is distressing to us . . . because what Paul and I want is what any straight couple can have: a celebration and legal recognition of our marriage.

You see in God's eyes, Paul and I ARE married. In the theology of the church, two people marry each other . . . the church may bless this and the state may grant certain privileges and obligations, but neither entity can create a marriage. Two people who commit themselves to each other create a marriage. It is this reality that Paul and I yearn be acknowledged by both the church and the state.

With Paul's shifting diagnosis, however, we could no longer wait for either the state OR the church to grant us the equality we so long for. I'm happy to tell you that last month we entered into a civil union here in Connecticut and several days later celebrated our union by being blessed by the community at Holy Cross Monastery in New York State. Paul's diagnosis continues to shift, and I'm even more delighted to let you know that there may be the possibility of treatment for him. Nevertheless, the future remains uncertain . . . for us all . . . and I urge you as strongly as I can to grant all the citizens of this state equality. NOW.

The church will sort out its policy and doctrine regarding the blessing of couples separately from any action you take . . . but please don't delay. I urge you to pass this bill. People are literally dying while waiting for their dreams of equality to come true.

Thank you.

The Rev. Richard Maxwell
Rector
Grace Episcopal Church
55 New Park Ave.
Hartford, CT 06106
860-233-0825

Contact information home:
Richard Maxwell and Paul Kline
42 Rumford St.
West Hartford, CT 06107
860-206-4788