



Testimony of Obadiah Ballinger and Javen Swanson
Judiciary Committee, March 6, 2009

**PLEASE SUPPORT: SB 899, An Act Implementing the Guarantee of Equal Protections
Under the Constitution of the State for Same-Sex Couples**

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee: Our names are Obadiah Ballinger and Javen Swanson. We live in New Haven and are engaged to be married. We strongly urge your support of Senate Bill 899, implementing marriage equality for same-sex couples.

We met at Yale Divinity School in 2006 and discovered that we have much in common. Both of us grew up in rural Minnesota communities, attended church-affiliated colleges, and went to seminary with the full support of our families and faith communities. We are both pursuing ordination and ministry in Christian congregations. Our life together reflects this pastoral preparation: we first met while studying biblical Greek, we practice our sermons with each other on Saturday nights, and we plan for a big church wedding this May in the divinity school chapel.

As people of faith, we believe in the importance of marriage and family life. We understand marriage to be a sacred covenant between two people, blessed by God and recognized by the community. We know also that marriage has a secular dimension; it is supported with special benefits according to civil law. These are designed to weave together a social network that supports a couple and whatever

children grow up in their care. These governmental privileges and responsibilities, which you oversee as legislators, help to hold families together.

Though we happen to be gay, we ask to be treated like every heterosexual couple also preparing for their wedding day. We are delighted to know that our marriage will have true equality in Connecticut. Civil unions have been a helpful attempt to extend governmental benefits and responsibilities to same-sex couples, but they have at the same time denied true equality. "Civil unions" cannot hope to capture the centuries of culture and tradition wrapped up in the word "marriage," however identical the legislative provisions might be. We are pleased that this bill will end the division between the two categories and consider "married" all loving couples that enter into covenant together.

We have been called by God into relationship with each other, and will marry before God and a supportive community. Recognizing that some religious communities will choose not to lend their support to full marriage equality, we appreciate the freedom of religion recognized in the bill, permitting some faith communities to dissent. With this legislation, which treats us as full and equal citizens, our religious covenant will carry with it the complete rights and responsibilities of the law. We ask you to support this bill to implement equal protections, and make our joy complete.

Thank you.