

Is now really the right time to fight for the freedom to marry?

By EVAN WOLFSON
Freedom to Marry

In 2004 we ended the exclusion of committed same-sex couples from marriage here in the United States by winning the freedom to marry in Massachusetts. Thousands of U.S. couples have gotten married in Canada as well as in Massachusetts, and the sky has not fallen. We have shown non-gay people we can do this, and we are also showing that families are strengthened and no one harmed when the exclusion comes to an end. All across the country, hearts and minds are opening as the fair-minded majority of Americans get the information and time they need to embrace fairness.



But it does take information, and it does take time.

Our opponents are trying to stampede people into making hasty, ill-informed decisions out of prejudice, ignorance, anxiety, discomfort or fear. History tells us that in the early stages of a civil rights struggle such as ours, opponents will have some successes.

*"You have to believe in total equality."
-Clint Eastwood*

The classic American pattern is that civil rights advances

come in what I call "patchwork." As described in my book, *Why Marriage Matters*, during patchwork periods, we see some states move toward equality faster, while others resist and regress, pressured by pandering politicians into adding additional layers of discrimination before — eventually — buyer's remorse sets in and a national resolution comes.

We cannot move the middle — we cannot end this exclusion — if we collude with our opponents in depriving those who are reachable (but not yet reached) of the time and information they need and deserve. This means we must not take "no" or "not now" or "not so fast" for an answer — any more than others in our nation's past who sought to end discrimination did. We must not fail to push past discomfort to give people the real stories and the time to absorb them.

Nor is it our job to make it easy for politicians to do what they want. Rather, it is our job to make it easier for politicians to do what we want — and what many of them in their hearts know is the right thing to do. We should not expect them to do all our heavy lifting, but we must get in and enlist allies, stiffen the spine of our friends, help those whose causes we share to see that our common success depends on articulating a position of authenticity and shared values that lead to the right results. Most of all, we must raise our diverse voices to

explain how the unjust exclusion from marriage and its responsibilities and protections harms us, our kids and our country itself.

In a shorter period of time than most people imagined, we have won the freedom to marry in America. We have made it real, which is the most important step in helping people to live with it (or realize they don't care). Yes, we face a moment of peril as the opponents of equality assault us in fulfillment of their own anti-gay and broader ideological agendas, and we will take hits. But we have also seen the majority of Americans move toward accepting marriage equality, with a solid majority of young people supporting it.



In November 2004, voters in Massachusetts had a chance to live with marriage as a reality for even a few months rejected anti-equality candidates and re-elected every pro-marriage legislator who ran. The key is making it real, not running away.

Democrats, progressives, fair-minded Republicans, and our other friends and potential allies will never be anti-gay enough to satisfy our opponents. We must help them find the authentic moral case for ending discrimination in marriage — well-expressed by yet another court in February 2005: "Marriage, as it is understood today, is both a partnership of two loving equals who choose to commit themselves to each other and a state institution designed to promote

THE MARRIAGE RESOLUTION

Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual choice, RESOLVED, the State should not interfere with same-sex couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of legal marriage.

I/We endorse the marriage resolution. Please feel free to include me/us as a voice in educating the public:

Signature*: _____

Name: _____
(please print legibly)

Title: Mr. ___ Ms. ___ Miss. ___ Dr. ___ Mrs. ___

Organization (if any): _____

Address: _____

Apt/Suite: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail Address: _____

May we add your name and contact information to the Freedom to Marry mailing list? Yes ___ No ___

*** By agreeing to endorse the statement, I understand that I am agreeing to my name being used with this statement in public releases, press materials, brochures, advertisements, and other public formats.**

PLEASE DETACH AT FOLD AND FAX OR MAIL IT IN TODAY!

Freedom to Marry
116 West 23rd Street, Suite 500
New York, NY 10011
Tel: 212-851-8418
Fax: 646-375-2069

RELIGIOUS ENDORSEMENT OF THE FREEDOM TO MARRY

“An Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Marriage Equality” was developed at a colloquium of theologians sponsored by the Religious Institute, an ecumenical, interfaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society, and funded by Freedom to Marry.

Endorsements are only accepted from ordained clergy, professional religious educators, theologians, and staff of religious institutions. Not clergy? You can still help! Sign our Marriage Resolution on the other side of this card and send it in today!

Yes, please list me as endorsing An Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Marriage Equality.* (Please fill out all fields.)

Name: _____

Title:
Rabbi__ Rev. __ Rev. Dr. __ Rt. Rev. __ Father__ Sister__ Dr. __

Organization: _____

Degree: _____ Denomination: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

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stability for the couple and their children. ... Similar to opposite-sex couples, same-sex couples are entitled to the same fundamental right to follow their hearts and commit to a lifetime partnership with the person of their choosing ... [which] cannot legitimately be said to harm anyone.”



Equality under the law. Fairness. Commitment. Love. We must not doubt that we can reach most Americans on these values with patience and persistence — but we cannot reach them if we do not do the reaching. We must not shortchange them or ourselves.

Time and information are what they need, and now is the time.

“America needs to know that many faith leaders and theologians from diverse religious traditions strongly believe that all people have a God-given right to lead lives which fully express love, mutuality and commitment—including the right to marry.”

*-Reverend Debra W. Haffner
Director of the Religious Institute*

You can download the complete “Open Letter” at
www.religioustheology.org.

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“I do feel different now that my parents are married and I am beginning to feel like a regular kid and I feel like my parents are just a little more like other parents and now other kids can't say that I don't have a real family.”

*-Robbie Barnett-Kemper, 12,
about his mothers' marrying in Canada.*



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