



Communications Toolkit

Talking About Marriage in Latina/o Communities

September 2008

TALKING POINTS

Whether you're conducting a media interview or talking with friends and family, the themes of family, love, courage and not judging others unfairly will connect with the beliefs and values of fellow Latinos and help establish common ground. Bringing the conversation back to these themes will encourage them to hear your ideas with an open mind.

Strong Commitments; Strong Families

- "Marriage is a bond that strengthens couples, families and communities. When lesbian and gay couples are allowed to marry, we strengthen not only their relationship, but their families and our community as a whole."

Welcoming Couples into the Family

- "Family is everything to me, so I'm delighted to see how happy my (relative) and his (her) partner are together."

Love and Commitment

- "Couples in committed and loving relationships should be able to have the honor, dignity and support that come with civil marriage."

Worth Fighting For; Courage

- "Many gay and lesbian couples stay together for years in the face of daily discrimination, and sometimes even violence. In spite of these challenges, these couples have the courage to face the opposition and build happy lives together. Government shouldn't pile on."

Judge Not

- "Regardless of my personal feelings about gay couples getting married, it doesn't mean it should be illegal. It is not for me to judge other people."

Protecting Individual and Religious Freedom

- "Deciding who you want to marry is an intensely personal decision. Government has no business saying who you can and can't marry."
- "No church will ever be forced to marry or bless any couple. Baptist churches don't have to marry Catholics. Catholics don't have to marry Muslims. And no priest, minister, rabbi or imam will ever be forced to officiate at weddings for lesbian and gay couples."

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Latinos sometimes have strong views about marriage, so it can be hard to know how to broach the subject. The following tips can help you break the ice when talking with people close to you about why marriage is so important.

Before you begin:

- **Remember, too much information is hard to digest.** Before you start a conversation, think about the one thing you want your friend, family member or co-worker to know or understand about why marriage is important to you.
- **Stories stick.** Personal stories are memorable, so tell a story — either about you or someone you know — that illustrates why it's so important that everyone be able to marry the person they love.
- **Speak from your heart.** No matter how they feel about marriage, if you're speaking with someone close to you, you have an important piece of common ground as you start the conversation: you. They care about you. So if you start the conversation by talking about why marriage is important to *you*, you greatly increase the chance they'll hear you out, simply because it's something you care deeply about.

Starting the conversation:

- "I need to talk with you about something that's really important to me."

Or refer to a common experience, for example, a non-gay family member's recent wedding:

- "When we were at _____'s wedding last weekend, it really made me start to think about everything that's been in the news lately about gay and lesbian couples getting married for the first time. Can you imagine what it would have been like if she and _____ hadn't been allowed to get married?"

RESPONSES TO TOUGH QUESTIONS

Below are examples of tough questions and how to use the talking points to steer the conversation in a positive direction.

Q #1: Why is the marriage issue so important to you?

A: Marriage is a bond that strengthens couples, families and communities. When lesbian and gay couples are allowed to marry, we strengthen not only their relationship, but their families and our community as a whole.

Q #2: Latino communities are facing so many challenges these days. Why dedicate yourself to an issue like marriage?

A: The principle that we are fighting for is fairness and the right of all Californians to be treated equally. When the basic value of fairness is eroded, it affects us all.

I think we can also identify with the courage that lesbian and gay couples have shown. Many gay and lesbian couples stay together for years in the face of daily discrimination, and sometimes even violence. In spite of these challenges, these couples have the courage to face the opposition and build happy lives together.

Q #3: Do you think the initiative will pass in November?

Or

Do you think Latinos will vote for the marriage amendment in November?

A: I'm no pollster, but what I do know is that more and more of my friends and family members are realizing that when gay and lesbian couples decide to get married, it is because they share the same values of love, commitment and family that we all hold dear.

Q #4: Many people agree that gay and lesbian couples deserve equal legal rights but feel strongly that marriage is between a man and a woman. Why not support the compromise solution of domestic partnerships, which satisfies both concerns?

A: Because no matter how many rights and legal benefits get linked to domestic partnership — and they aren't the same — marriage still means something special. Compared with marriage, which everyone understands, who even knows what civil union or domestic partnership means exactly? Who would trade their marriage for a civil union? Why should gay and lesbian couples have to?

Or, for people of faith:

A: I believe that we are all children of God, and that the love of every couple — gay or straight — is a blessing. But the most important thing to understand is the difference between religious marriage and civil marriage. Every church can choose which couples they will or will not marry in accordance with their faith. That's religious marriage, and it's protected by our freedom of religion. But our government, which is responsible for civil marriage, is by and for *all* the people. Our government should not treat people differently.

The Bible also teaches us to “judge not, lest you be judged.” So, even if some people aren't comfortable with civil marriage for lesbian and gay couples, it does not mean that it should be illegal.

Q #5: Are you worried that this issue will create dissent or divisiveness within your congregation or church?

A: No. This is about the law, not what our church chooses to do. I actually see it as an opportunity for our congregation to come together around the belief that we are all children of God who deserve love and compassion, including gays and lesbians.

Q #6: How will California's new law affect churches, synagogues and mosques that oppose gay marriage?

A: While our congregation has chosen to celebrate these marriages, other congregations have the right to choose not to — just as Baptist churches don't have to marry Catholics, Catholic churches don't have to marry Muslims, and so on. Because of freedom of religion, no priest, minister, rabbi or imam can ever be forced to recognize or officiate at ceremonies for lesbian and gay couples.

Couples and Their Families

For couples:

Q #7: Was your family uncomfortable at first with having your partner join in family celebrations?

A: Once my family met my partner, a huge weight was lifted for all of us. And it didn't take long for them to see what I see in him.

Family is the most important thing to me. The only difference now is that our family got bigger. And when my mom does the cooking there's always more than enough to go around, so all we need is an extra seat at the dinner table!

Q #8: Are you concerned that voters will take away your right to marry in November?

A: Of course I'm concerned, but I am also very happy because after X years together, I was finally able to marry (I can finally marry) the person I love (and I'm looking forward to doing so on *WEDDING DATE*).

Follow-up, if needed:

Friends, relatives, neighbors — and even strangers — have been absolutely positive about us getting married. People who have never

even brought the subject up before have offered their congratulations. And that gives me hope that other Californians, too, will agree that everyone should have the opportunity to marry the person they love.

For couples/families featured in the ads:

Q #9: What made you decide to be portrayed in this ad?

A: My family is stronger because we've all chosen to celebrate my son's marriage. We have seen how it has made our own family traditions more meaningful. Now we want to share our joy with the rest of our community.

For family members:

Q #10: Clearly you stand in support of your daughter now. But how did you feel the first time she brought her partner home? How does the rest of the family feel?

A: There is nothing more important to me than family. Like every mother, I want my children to be happy. When I first met my daughter's partner, I could see how happy they are together, and that's what I cared about most. Now I've grown to love her partner like my own daughter.

NEWSLETTER/WEB SITE TEMPLATE

This template can be customized for print or e-mail newsletters, organizational Web sites or event programs to put the conversation about marriage in context.

Template:

There is nothing more important than family. Now that all of our sons, daughters, nieces and nephews are able to get married, we are welcoming new loved ones into our families.

For some of us, this may feel like a struggle. Some people may be uncomfortable with lesbian and gay couples getting married. But just because you disagree with something does not mean it should be illegal. It is not for us to judge who another person loves.

Many gay and lesbian couples have been together for years, showing enduring love, commitment and courage in the face of discrimination and violence.

If we welcome them with open, loving arms, the love and commitment of gay and lesbian couples in our midst can only add strength and joy to our community.

We invite you to [*join in a dialogue / read more on our Web site / etc.*].

TIPS ON WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor — also known as LTEs — are an important way to communicate and reinforce positive messages about marriage.

The LTE section is a popular part of the newspaper. If we let those with opposing viewpoints dominate this section, it could appear that their opinion is the prevailing point of view. Therefore, we need as many people as possible to submit supportive letters to their local newspapers.

To maximize the likelihood that your letter gets printed, follow these guidelines:

Timing is Everything

Don't procrastinate. Write your LTE as soon as you see a story you want to respond to. If you wait to start writing your letter until after those with opposing points of view have had their letters published, you are too late.

Short is Sweet

LTE editors will always choose a short, pithy letter over a lengthy, rambling treatise. So make your letter short, punchy and to the point. Focus on keeping your letter to 100 to 150 words, and use the "Word Count" function on your word-processing program to check the length. For example, this paragraph is already 55 words long.

Short Sentences, Short Paragraphs

If you write like a journalist, with short sentences and short paragraphs, editors will be more likely to choose your letter. Pick up any newspaper and you'll notice that most paragraphs are about two sentences long, sometimes only one sentence. Long, wordy sentences send one clear message to the reader's brain: "Don't read this: It's way too long!"

Make It Personal

Personal stories beat out statistics nine times out of 10. That's why Americans rush to movie theatres — and not to college statistics courses. Our inclination is to use statistics to support our argument because we assume readers will make decisions based on facts. That is not the case. People form opinions based on emotions and values. And the best way to communicate values and emotions is by telling a (short!) personal story.

Repeat Key Messages

Use every opportunity — every sentence — to communicate your most important message. Ultimately, the LTE editor has final say over which sentences stay and which of them go. Don't risk the chance that your key message will be left on the editing room floor.

Don't Repeat Your Opponent's Message

Use your letter to respond with your key messages rather than to react to the messages of those with opposing viewpoints. If you repeat the language of those with opposing viewpoints, you are giving their voice one more opportunity to be heard. A letter that begins, "People who say marriage can only be between one man and one woman are missing the point about the real meaning of marriage," will reinforce the idea that marriage *is* defined as being between one man and one woman. You wouldn't give those with opposing viewpoints money to run a commercial against us; don't give them a voice in your letter, either.

Include Your Full Name, City and Phone Number

Your letter should always include your complete name, phone number and the city you live in. Your phone number will not be published, but many newspapers will call to verify that you actually wrote the letter.

Send by E-mail, If Possible

Although newspapers usually accept letters by fax and snail mail, many editors prefer e-mail. Why? Because it means the difference between an editor spending five to ten seconds to cut and paste your

letter, compared with five to ten minutes to retype it. E-mail also arrives faster than snail mail. When sending by e-mail, paste your letter into the body of an e-mail. Never send attachments.

Example

Dear Editor:

Thanks for your insightful editorial about why it's so important for lesbian and gay couples to be able to marry ("Editorial Title," Date).

I can't describe how happy I am that this is now the case in California. After seven years as a couple, I can finally marry the man that I love. California's promise of fairness and opportunity now applies to me and my partner!

Robert Pérez
Santa Barbara, CA
805.555.1212