



Jews for Marriage Equality



Clergy Statement

The most fundamental human right, after the necessities of food, clothing and shelter, is the right to affection and the supportive love of other human beings.

Efforts to prevent civil marriage for gays and lesbians through legal means, such as state or federal Constitutional amendments that deprive them of the benefits and dreams others enjoy, are unjust and discriminatory. Denial of the status of marriage to those who accept its rights and responsibilities creates legal and economic inequities in addition to social injustice. Although California's domestic partnership law provides limited protections, it does not provide equality.

Just like their heterosexual counterparts, gay and lesbian couples form loving bonds, establish shared households, and raise children together - all contributions to social stability and collective welfare. All credible scientific studies find that sexual orientation is irrelevant to raising a happy, healthy child. What matters in any family is the security and quality of the relationship children have with their parents. Indeed, what puts children of gay and lesbian parents at risk is the lack of permanence, stability, serenity and safety that other children of legally recognized families enjoy. And for children who are gay and lesbian, the denial of the precious right to marry when they become adults undermines their sense of self-worth and their dreams of a life together with a cherished partner. Society is strengthened by allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally formalize both their bond with one another and their mutual responsibility for their household and children. Society should not only permit but also encourage civil marriage for such couples.

We as rabbis, cantors and community leaders committed to Jewish tradition urge all Jews to remember our heritage of justice and to recommit ourselves to not wavering on this holy principle. We take heed of our historic mission to bring all Jews into the community and to bring peace to all persons. We join together as brothers and sisters in faith and call for an end to the shameful and hurtful idea that some families are less worthy and less human than others. All are created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of God. We acknowledge that gays and lesbians have too often been excluded, and we pledge to correct this inequality – both by fighting any and all legislative efforts to deprive gays and lesbians of their human and civil rights, including the right to marry – and by continuing to redouble our efforts to make every gay and lesbian family member, friend, colleague and congregant feel welcome in our synagogues and community as equals to their heterosexual neighbors.

As concerned citizens, we affirm the liberty of adults of the same gender to love and marry. We insist that no one, especially the state, may either coerce people into marriage, or bar two consenting adults of the same gender from forming the family unit that lets them be more fully loving and thus more fully human. We respect the fact that debate and discussion continue in many of our religious communities as to the theological and liturgical issues involved. However, we draw on our tradition to arrive at a common conviction: we are resolved that the state should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitments of civil marriage. Further we are resolved that the state should not interfere with any adult couple, same-sex or heterosexual, who choose to create a domestic partnership.

We affirm the right to freedom of conscience in this matter: we strongly believe that the state should not require religious groups to officiate at, or bless, same-gender marriages. By the same token, a denial of civil recognition dishonors the religious convictions of those communities and clergy who do officiate at, and bless, same-gender marriages. The state may not favor the convictions of one religious group over another to deny individuals their fundamental right to marry and have those marriages recognized by civil law. As Jewish leaders, we commit ourselves to public action, visibility, education, and mutual support of the right and freedom to marry.

Signed: