



let it shine

Marriage Equality

“Well Jan, are we civilized or are we unionized?” I asked the question of my partner after our Service of Sacred Covenant and Civil Union a year ago. Although we joke about being civilized and unionized, what we want to be is married.

We are blessed to live in Connecticut where as a lesbian couple we now have the same state rights as straight married couples.

- We cannot be forced to testify against each other in a court of law, *as long as it isn't a federal court.*
- We can visit each other in hospitals and make medical decisions for each other if necessary, *as long as we get sick or injured in Connecticut or Vermont or New Jersey or other states that pass civil union legislation.* (It isn't clear whether our relationship has any legal standing in Massachusetts, which has, not civil unions but equal marriage rights.)
- If we need nursing home care – a growing concern for a 60-ish couple – we cannot be forced to spend the rest of lives separated in different rooms, or different nursing homes, or even different towns, *as long as we continue to live in one of those few states that honor our relationship.*

But after almost 20 years together we still cannot file a joint tax return, or share in Social Security benefits, or retire to most states without fear of becoming “legal strangers.” So while Jan and I are blessed to live in Connecticut, a state that recognizes our relationship and allows us to legally celebrate it, we still need to work for the civil right to be married to the one we love.

While we are blessed to live in Connecticut, we are even more blessed to be a part of the United Church of Christ. For us, the spiritual validation of our relationship is even more important than the legal one. We want the civil rights that we need to legally live together and care for each other. But even more, we need the Christian community that welcomes us and embraces us and values us and our relationship.

We are blessed by a Christian community that celebrates that God is still speaking. We are blessed by a Christian community that is not afraid to listen

Our Mission and Ministry Legacy

to what God is still saying. We are blessed by a Christian community that hears God's call for love and for justice and acts to live out that call.

On our UCC website, www.ucc.org, in an article titled “God Is Still Speaking About Marriage,” the Rev. Dr. James B. Nelson states, “It is God's good pleasure to take on human flesh. And a special way many of us know that is in relationship. Every blessed relationship will bless each partner, will bless the community of life around them, and will gladden the universe. Some day the whole church will know that. And the heart of the incarnate God will sing for joy.”

We don't want “gay marriage.” We need equal marriage rights for gay and lesbian people. We don't want to be civilized or unionized. We need to be married. And we know that with every act of love and justice “the heart of the incarnate God will sing for joy.”

Reflection:

- In the article cited above, James B. Nelson notes that in the Book of Acts (Acts 8:34-40) “Philip set aside even the prejudices of the Bible in favor of the Gospel of Christ.” Where in recent history have the prejudices of the Bible been set aside by the Gospel of Christ?
- What civil rights do gay and lesbian couples receive when they are joined in Civil Union? What are the rights that are available only through marriage?
- What can members of Christian communities do to better understand the legal protections of marriage needed by gay and lesbian couples?

Resources:

- Resources, including the 2005 General Synod Resolution, “Equal Marriage Rights for All,” are available at: www.ucc.org/justice/marriage.htm
- A bibliography of resources is at: www.ctucc.org/resources/pdfs/same-gender_marriage_bibliography.pdf
- Marvin Ellison, *Same-Sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis*. Pilgrim Press, 2004.
- Melanie Morrison, *The Grace of Coming Home*. Pilgrim Press, 1995.
- James B. Nelson, *Embodiment*. Pilgrim Press 1978

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